

CHEMRAWN XII

World Conference on Chemistry, Sustainable Agriculture, and Human Well-Being in Sub-Saharan Africa

by Ikenna Onyido

The problems facing the African continent, especially the sub-Saharan region, are enormous and demand urgent action in order to avert impending tragedy. With a population of well over half a billion, which is still growing rapidly, increasing poverty levels, food insecurity, health and human well-being problems of disturbing proportions, and crumbling economies, the region presents a picture of misery that is a blight on modern civilization. Yet it is a certain fact that the region is well endowed with human and natural resources, which if properly harnessed and managed, shall usher in an era of development and prosperity that will make the region less of a liability to the developed world.

Of particular concern is the food and agriculture situation in sub-Saharan Africa, where food production levels are critically low in relation to the population. It is a well-known fact that the specter of hunger and famine hangs over the region in the foreseeable future if drastic ameliorating actions and initiatives are not undertaken. Agricultural production has largely remained in the hands of peasant small-holder farmers, who use traditional slash-and-burn, low-yielding modes of production, with outputs that at best satisfy subsistence levels. In some cases, modern agricultural methods have been introduced by multilateral, donor



World Health Organization/P. Virnot

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and non-governmental agencies. However, short-term gains that are recorded often evaporate at the end of the intervention period because appropriate technologies have not been transferred to or understood by the local populations. The combined effects of traditional modes of production and ill-transferred technologies are manifested in continuing low productivity and environmental degradation. Thus, the cycle of poverty and hunger continues.

Chemistry, Sustainable Agriculture, and Human Well-Being

In light of the scenario described above, the CHEMRAWN Committee believes that an effort should be undertaken to transfer proven chemical and soil management technologies to Africans. The idea is to impart to African people the knowledge and dynamic approaches that will help them anticipate problems and evolve timely solutions for creating sustainable agriculture, thereby raising the standard of living, especially of the rural majority. Consequently, the committee has approved CHEMRAWN XII, a Conference on Chemistry, Sustainable Agriculture, and Human Well-Being. The conference is intended to motivate sustained action so that over time, indigenous capacity can be built among the African people to ensure food self-sufficiency and food security in the long run.

CHEMRAWN II, a forerunner to this conference held in 1982, addressed the issue of "Chemistry and World Food Supplies: The New Frontiers." CHEMRAWN XII shall integrate recent advances in increasing food production with careful and responsible care of the environment, especially as applied to Africa.

Overview of the CHEMRAWN XII Conference

Planned for 2005, the conference will focus on the following:

- creating awareness among African governments, the private sector and various stakeholders about the magnitude of the problem and the technological options available for enhancing food security and protecting the natural base in the region
- the transfer, adaptation, and application of the stock of available and affordable chemical knowledge and technology for addressing the problems of agricultural production and environmental management, especially in the areas of soil fertility, pest

Feature

management, post-harvest storage and processing, and biotechnology

- the installation of pilot development and research projects in the different sub-regions to provide for collaboration between scientists drawn from Africa and other parts of the world through the activities of the conference's Future Actions Committee

Distinguished scientists and professionals from Africa and beyond who have contributed to the development of sustainable agriculture and responsible natural resource management will present plenary and invited papers. Scheduled lecturers include Thomas Odhiambo (Kenya), Francis Idachaba (ISNAR, The Hague), Avilio Franco (Brazil), Rattan Lal (USA), Christopher Chetsanga (Zimbabwe), and Patrick Ngoddy (Nigeria).

A decision shall soon be made about whether South Africa or Senegal will be the conference venue. The First Circular shall then be distributed with all the necessary details.

Call for Papers and Appeal for Support


In order to plan effectively for the conference, we are asking scientists and professionals to become involved early enough to be ready to contribute papers for oral and poster presentation. We would also like to appeal to stakeholders and donor agencies for financial support to tackle this pressing issue. A number of international organizations have already given their endorsement for the proposed conference. Stakeholders, donor agencies, and scientists who



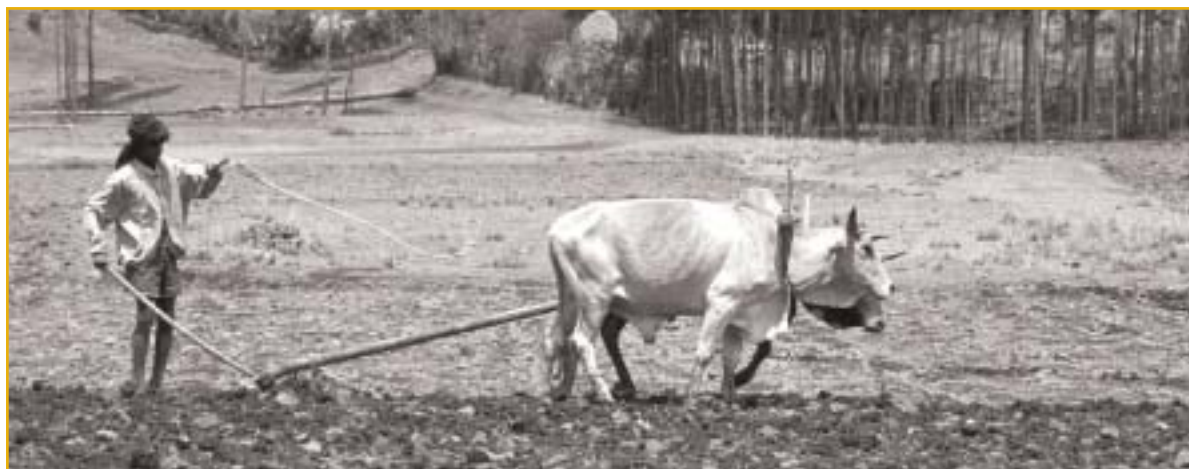
Source: UN World Food Programme

Africa's Hunger Crisis: at least 38 million people in the countries highlighted above are suffering exceptional food shortages.

would like to be part of this timely and worthwhile effort are invited to contact the chairman of the Conference Steering Committee at the following address:

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 www.iupac.org/projects/2001/2001-086-1-021.html



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A man plows a field in Ethiopia.