



CHEDE LTD

(Chede Agricultural Co-operative Union)

E-mail : chede@chede.org URL : www.chede.org

11 March 2005

COMMENTS ON THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

General comment

We applaud the Commission for Africa for its stirring and wide-ranging report and the powerful advocacy statement it conveys to the world on behalf of Africa. The report is so thoroughly researched and documented that it will remain for many years an invaluable reference tool for partners in the development of Africa. However, producing a brilliant report is, in today's African context, the easier part of the equation. The more difficult part is politically selling the report and its recommendations to the targeted primary constituency, namely African and donor governments. Let us wait and see how the report will be received and acted on by African governments and the international donor community.

Specific comments:

1. Probably because the Commission is composed mostly of government officials, its report is too romantically tilted towards the role of governments in the development process. Governments are also seen in the report as the main channel of external support for the region. This is all the more surprising as the report itself blames poor governance for much of Africa's past development failures. Surely the capacity of governments to foster development should be strengthened considerably in terms of transparency, efficiency, technocratic competence, and accountability to the African population. But the same capacity-building measures are needed by business and civil society organizations, which deliver development policies and outcomes on the ground. Thus the success of governments as development drivers is related, on the one hand, to their inherent technical capacities, and on the other, to the managerial and delivery capacities of their primary domestic development partners, namely the private sector and civil society organizations, including the media. This fact is pretty well illustrated in the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which emphasizes the role of "non-state" actors (meaning business and civil society agents) in Africa's development process and gives these actors the status of full parties in their own right to the Cotonou Agreement.
2. The issue of governments' capacity to absorb external development aid is directly linked to the above-mentioned emphasis in the report on the role of the public sector, to the near exclusion of the private sector and civil society. If these partners are also factored into the aid equation as development agents and therefore potential recipients of foreign aid in their own right, especially in the fostering of joint ventures and other twinning arrangements with external private-sector entities, the issue of a country's capacity to absorb aid would not arise. In other words, aid should not be channelled only through public sector structures but more prominently and directly to business and other non-governmental organizations.
3. We are especially pleased to note the emphasis the report gives to the cultural dimension of development in Africa, including its holistic definition of culture in the development process. Regrettably, however, the discussion on this topic stops short of the logical conclusion that since African culture has its birthplace and roots in African villages, the only viable way to revive that culture as a powerful development agent is to rebuild and revitalize African villages, through a "Village-First" development strategy described in our study entitled "*Agricultural Expansion for Poverty Eradication in Africa: Rethinking Strategy from a Village Perspective*", which is posted on the Commission's website. The report accurately points out that African clans are "the central units of administration with clear political structures", but fails to mention that clans are to be found in villages.
5. Emphasis is placed in the report on the need to manage Africa's rapid urbanisation and its resultant challenges, especially the adverse impact on agricultural production and food security. This phenomenon is in fact directly related to point 3 above regarding the place of African villages and cultures in the region's development strategies. If villages and rural development in general – and consequently the agriculture sector – were to receive priority in public investment allocations, there would be no urbanisation crisis in Africa. This is thoroughly explained in our study mentioned above, but it seems to have escaped your attention. The report bemoans the vast slums in African cities but omits to mention that villages in the majority of African countries today represent a vast landscape of slums with hardly any utilities or amenities. We must therefore reiterate our conviction, born of

empirical evidence, that a “Village-First” development strategy for Africa is the radical and ultimate therapy for levelling the development playing field for all components of African society, in the urban and rural sectors, while expanding agricultural production by motivated rural dwellers.

6. The report’s notes and references, spanning over 50 pages, are strangely unbalanced and even biased in the treatment of consultation submissions. Some contributors are cited repeatedly over ten times and others are not mentioned at all. It was clear on reading the report that ideas were extracted from our submission as well as from our 135-page study on your website. Surprisingly, however, we found hardly any attribution to our submissions in the final report. At the very least, we would have expected a thankful acknowledgment of all submissions to be listed in the report. It is hoped that the next edition of the report will address this unfortunate omission.

Dr Michael Njume-Ebong
