



# **Regional Agricultural Policy for West Africa:**

**ECOWAP**



**Make agriculture the lever of regional integration**

**E**COWAP AT A GLANCE” is a short summary of the agricultural and food issues in West Africa and the agricultural policy for the region. ECOWAP is the acronym for the regional agricultural policy used in official languages across the Economic Community of West African States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape-Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo).

“ECOWAP at a glance” gives a brief overview of the context, challenges, vision, objectives and main orientations of regional and national programmes. It also includes a short presentation of the regional Offensive for food production and against hunger, deployed in response to the crisis sparked by the price rises of 2007-2008.

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the European Union and the presidency of the ECOWAS commission provided the impetus for high-level policy dialogue between regional actors and their technical and financial partners regarding the regional policy and its funding.

“ECOWAP at a glance” is based on several reference documents:

- Framework for the West African Agricultural Policy-ECOWAP. Reference document. ECOWAS, July 2004, p.166.
- Decision A/DEC.11/01/05 adopting an agricultural policy for the Economic Community of the West African States – ECOWAP and annex to the decision. ECOWAS, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005.
- Regional action plan for implementation of the ECOWAS agricultural policy and CAADP/NEPAD in West Africa between 2006 and 2010. ECOWAS, June 2005, p. 49.
- Memorandum on the increase in food prices: the situation, outlook, strategies and recommended measures. ECOWAS, May 2008, p.19.

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# Regional context in West Africa: the challenges and opportunities

## The importance of agriculture in the region

**T**HE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR plays a key role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As the backbone of the economy, it affects society at many levels since national economies and people's jobs, incomes and food security depend upon it. In economic terms, this sector accounts for up to 35% of the region's Gross Domestic Product. Agricultural exports constitute an important element of West Africa's foreign trade, generating around six billion dollars, or 16.3% of all the products and services exported from the region. This agricultural export capacity brings in some of the foreign currency governments need to pay for imported consumer goods, capital equipment and intermediate goods for industry and services.

In terms of jobs, it is still the biggest employer, with over 60% of the active population in the ECOWAS region engaged in agriculture, even though it pays less than other economic sec-

tors. Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce.

Agriculture is also a vital factor in efforts to combat poverty and food insecurity. Farming households build their strategies around internal consumption, while city dwellers (who now account for more than half of the region's population) obtain virtually all their food from local markets. At the moment, 80% of the regional population's food needs are met by regional produce, but over the next few years West African agriculture will have to meet a huge increase in demand generated by demographic growth. The population of the region currently stands at 290 million, and is set to exceed 400 million by 2020, and 500 million by 2030. Finally, agriculture plays a key role in land management, soil fertility, natural resource management and environmental protection.

## Major constraints...

**D**ESPITE its importance in the West African economy, agriculture in the region is characterised by low productivity and plagued by major environmental constraints. A 25% decline in rainfall over the last fifty years has had serious consequences for dryland areas. Per-hectare yields for most crops are among the lowest in the world, only increasing by an average of 42% between 1980 and 2005, and accounting for just 30% of the increase in agricultural and food production. The three most important factors of production – selected seed, fertiliser and agricultural machinery – barely feature in most producers' operations. Research on agronomic diversity has been of little help to them until now, often favouring vertical approaches that take insufficient account of the global nature and complexity of production and agrarian systems. Over the last twenty years increases in production have generally been obtained by putting more land under cultivation, with a 229% increase in farmland accounting for 70% of the growth in regional production.

The model of agricultural growth that the re-

gion has depended on for more than a generation is not sustainable in the long term, as production systems have not intensified in line with galloping urban development. The result has been a dramatic decline in soil productivity, increasingly degraded natural resources and more and more conflicts over land use, particularly between farmers and herders, as pressure on land intensifies and good land becomes progressively saturated.

Disinvestment by governments, international institutions and the donor community is also starting to bite. Liberalisation in the context of structural adjustment meant that the agricultural sector did not get the support that would have ensured food security for local populations and equipped it to resist unfair competition from abroad. Agricultural policy tools are primarily geared towards commercially profitable cash crops rather than the support needed to achieve its objectives of food security, rural employment and integration into the regional market. Several countries in the region have become accustomed to relying on cheap imported produce to feed

their people. In the meantime, exports fetch less on the international markets, while regional produce has to compete with cheap imports generated by the subsidies given to producers in developed countries as agricultural markets reached saturation point in the mid-2000s. The net result of all this is that this agricultural model, which is

largely dependent on natural resources and poorly paid labour, has become unviable. If it is to be sustainable in the long run, agriculture needs to be transformed so that it can provide a way out of the poverty endured by most of the rural people whose livelihoods depend upon it.



### ... but a highly adaptable sector

**D**ESPITE these problems, the last twenty years have seen some fundamental changes in the region's agricultural production. Huge increases in production have largely outstripped growth in demand, as cash crops rose from 19 million tonnes in 1980 to 38 million tonnes in 2006, and food crops soared from 59 million tonnes in 1980

to 212 million tonnes in 2006. Despite an unfavourable regional and international environment (with a poorly structured regional market and the distortions and shortcomings of the international market), production actually increased sufficiently to meet the growth in demand. And although the region imports large quantities of

foodstuffs (\$5.4 billion per year between 2002 and 2004), it is not overly reliant on imports to cover its food needs. Over the last twenty years, agri-food exports have risen by 95% while imports have only gone up by 64%. Thus, the region has seen its agri-foods trade balance shift from a \$267 million deficit to profits of over \$522 million. However, while dependence on imports may be low, it is still cause for concern in a region whose development strategy is built on its agricultural sector. On a more positive note, spectacular growth in regional offer have also seen a huge increase in both the range and volume of products coming into the region's markets: spectacular growth in fruit and vegetables and poultry farming.

Moreover, although there is a tendency to focus on the crisis in West African agriculture, closer analysis of what is happening in the supply chains and production basins of each country

reveals a less pessimistic picture. The major agricultural trends in West Africa are counteracted by the success of export crops like coffee, cotton and cocoa, as well as the market gardening belts around urban areas. The current cotton crisis is however a reminder that these productive areas are vulnerable.

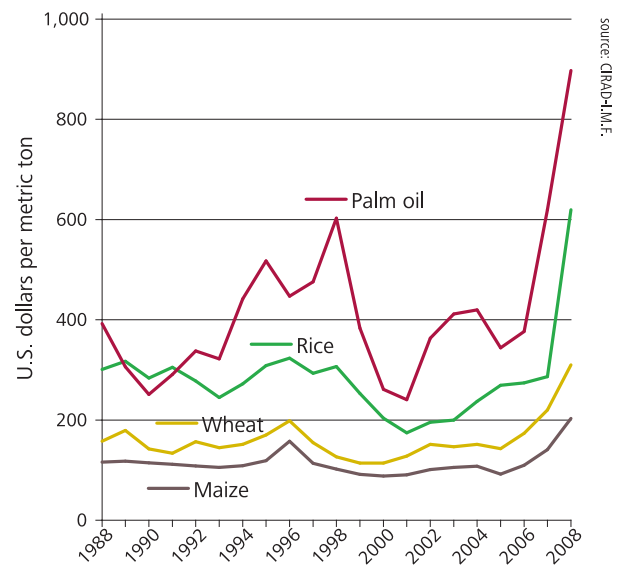
The ECOWAS region is an area of huge, under-exploited potential, with abundant natural resources (cultivable land and surface and underground water resources) and highly diverse ecosystems suitable for many different kinds of animal and plant production. There is around 236 million hectares of available cultivable land in the region, 119 million hectares of pasture, a large workforce (which includes a growing number of women) and, for the first time ever, a pool of urban consumers who constitute a rapidly expanding outlet that could prove invaluable in the modernisation of the agricultural sector.

### The impact of rising of food prices

**I**N LATE 2007 and early 2008, international prices highly increased all over the world. The price of petroleum has had a knock-on effect on the price of basic consumer goods. Foodstuffs prices exploded. West African economies with a foot in world markets have been hard hit by the repercussions of this global crisis. Its impact has been exacerbated by their weakness due to widespread poverty and still imperfect and partially isolated markets. In addition to this, certain countries are highly dependent on imports; the economies of several countries are severely weakened by ongoing or recent conflicts. With 60% of West Africans – some 175 million people – living on less than one dollar a day, the food crisis is hitting a large proportion of the population. It has had major repercussions on the accessibility and diversity of food supplies. International prices have recently gone down with a

great uncertainty concerning agricultural markets. Such volatility after a period of great stability becomes a matter of great concern for agricultural and commercial policies.

Agricultural products worldprices in dollars (constant value, base 2000)



# Why is a regional agricultural policy needed?

## The regional dimension of agriculture

THERE ARE VARIOUS REASONS why the countries and actors concerned believe that the region of West Africa is the right arena for a new agricultural development strategy:

- The strong complementarities between areas of production and consumption and the ecological diversity of the region, which is partly due to a rainfall gradient rising from 300 mm in the north to nearly 4,000 mm per annum in the south.
- Many natural resources, such as rivers, biodiversity reserves and underground aquifers

span several West African countries, which therefore need to cooperate over their management and develop a shared vision of how they can be exploited and protected. This will enable people across the region to access water for domestic use and irrigation, help avoid conflict over water resources (by developing river basins, dams, etc.) and facilitate the development of pastoral lands (taking account of pastoralists' wide-ranging movements) and the protection of areas of biodiversity (cross-border forests and water resources).

- As economies and trade become increasingly globalised, regional integration is seen as a key vector for positioning the region on the world stage. West Africa is in the process of building a space where people and goods can circulate freely, and is developing a single foreign trade policy through the common external tariff (CET).
- The new international context created by rising prices represents a historic opportunity to re-establish the bases of agricultural development in the region. This can only be taken forward through a regional approach that allows the various countries concerned to rise above their differing short-term interests.

The regional dimensions of West African agriculture give it certain comparative advantages at this level. With diverse ecosystems yielding a wide range of produce and creating valuable complementarities between different countries and production areas, the agricultural sector constitutes an important lever for and driver of the integration of agricultural economies across the region.

Furthermore, certain problems can be addressed more effectively at the regional level than by individual governments – such as regulating supply and demand for agricultural produce by opening up markets (developing market infrastructures, managing supply chains on a regional basis, etc.), and formulating an effective cross-border trade policy to promote the agricultural sector.

This is also the level at which proper supply chain policies can be defined, allowing products



like cotton and many of the foodcrops produced by different countries within the same region to find their place on the global market. The challenges presented by increasingly globalised trade are more easily met at the regional level, which is

both better able to propose clear and ambitious agricultural policies and the only way that African leaders can make their presence felt in international trade negotiations.

### Harmonising interventions

**I**N RECENT DECADES there have been numerous initiatives to address the many challenges to regional agriculture. The historical fragmentation of West Africa, particularly on the linguistic and financial fronts, has left its agricultural sector with a highly diversified institutional landscape. With two organisations for economic integration (ECOWAS and WAEMU for countries in the franc area), a multitude of specialised development institutions and numerous regional networks of socio-professional organisations, programmes and policy proposals have a tendency to multiply that reduces their overall coherence and effectiveness. The net result is a large number of organisations with overlapping mandates and very limited resources with which to pursue their aims.

In the present context, it is becoming increasingly important to define an overall framework for integrating and harmonising interventions by multiple sub-regional organisations. This will be crucial in enabling West African agriculture to meet regional demand and reposition itself on the international markets. It is some time now since heads of state and government from the region first mooted the idea of regional integration across the whole of West Africa. The initial impetus provided by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has seen African leaders resume control over development orientations and methods across the continent, especially in the agricultural sector (Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, CAADP). In 2002, heads of state gathered in

Yamoussoukro and gave ECOWAS the mandate to coordinate and monitor the implementation of NEPAD in West Africa, thereby contributing to the emergence of a single centre for planning regional development in the area.



The challenge is to ensure that these institutional initiatives coordinated at the continental level genuinely complement actions undertaken at the national and local levels, particularly at a time when countries across the region are putting agriculture back at the heart of the development agenda and promoting new agricultural policies. Harmonising and incorporating these into a regional vision is the key to making them effective in a context where institutional, human and financial resources are in short supply.

# ECOWAP: a response to agricultural and food issues in West Africa

## The process of formulating the regional agricultural policy

**D**IALOGUE about the creation of a framework for a regional agricultural policy designed to encompass West Africa's numerous sub-regional institutions began at the start of this decade. This process, which was set out in the revised ECOWAS treaty, culminated in the adoption of a regional agricultural policy (ECOWAP) by member heads of state and government on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005. This was the outcome of detailed assessments

of agriculture across the region, its development potential, the strengths and weaknesses of agriculture in different countries, and the agricultural and food security issues and challenges facing the region. Several agricultural policy scenarios based on different visions of regional integration and activity on the international market were formulated and discussed with governments and socio-professional actors in the agricultural and foodstuffs sector, facilitating the emergence of a shared vision → box 1.

### 1. Agricultural policy scenarios put forward for discussion

The ECOWAP is the outcome of a detailed assessment process. Four agricultural policy scenarios based on variable levels of regional integration and international openness were initially formulated and put forward for discussion. The first two scenarios, which see the agricultural sector competing at the international level, focus on opening regional agriculture up to international markets. Their main differences lie in the degree to which economies and trade within the ECOWAS area will be integrated: the first favours highly integrat-

ed regional agriculture, while the second is based on a much lesser degree of integration and greater fragmentation within the region, which would not be conducive to the emergence of a single internal regional market. The third and fourth scenarios differ in terms of their trade policy for areas outside the ECOWAS zone. They assume that the West African agricultural sector will not be able to tolerate direct international competition without protection from imports that compete with regional produce. The third scenario en-

visages a high level of generalised protection for the whole agricultural sector, in order to "compensate" for the lack of regional integration. In the fourth scenario, protection is envisaged on a case-by-case basis, according to the issues and specificities of regional supply chains (differentiated protection or openness), and is associated with a high degree of regional integration. This was the scenario retained by member states and actors as the basis for the regional agricultural policy.





## The vision embodied in ECOWAP

**T**HE REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY adopted by ECOWAS sets out a vision of “a modern and sustainable agriculture based on effective and efficient family farms and the promotion of agricultural enterprises through the involvement of the private sector. Once productivity and competitiveness on the intra-community and international markets are achieved, the policy should be able to guarantee food security and secure decent incomes for agricultural workers”. Its general objective is to “contribute in a sustainable way to meeting the food needs of the population, to economic and social development, to the reduction of poverty in the Member States, and thus to reduce existing inequalities among territories, zones and nations.” This global objective is broken down into seven specific objectives focusing on:

- Food security for people in the region;

- Reducing food dependence and achieving food sovereignty;
- Involving producers in markets;
- Creating jobs with guaranteed incomes in order to improve living conditions and services in rural areas;
- Intensifying production systems in a sustainable manner;
- Reducing the vulnerability of West African economies by limiting factors of instability and regional insecurity;
- Adopting appropriate funding mechanisms.

Thus, ECOWAP’s objectives affirm the principle of regional food sovereignty, primarily through high regional integration and appropriate levels of border protection, differentiated according to the specific needs of each supply chain.

## Main orientations of ECOWAP programmes

**E**COWAP sets out the principles and objectives for the agricultural sector, the direction that agricultural development is expected to take, and the main lines of intervention in the sub-region. These are designed to enable it to exploit its potential to achieve (i) sustainable food security in member countries; (ii) decent remuneration for those involved in the agricultural sector; and (iii) to expand trade on a sustainable basis, both within the sub-region and with the rest of the world. The three major themes of this policy are:

- Increasing the productivity and competitiveness of West African agriculture;
- Implementing a trade regime within West Africa;
- Adapting the trade regime vis-à-vis countries outside the region.

The first axis of intervention focuses on improving food security, increasing producer incomes and recognising their status, and reducing poverty. The second and third axes aim to facilitate access to regional and international markets to dispose of the increased volume of produce generated by the modernisation of the





region's production systems. A set of guidelines for putting this into practice were defined, primarily to discuss the scope and limitations of the regional level in relation to the national level (subsidiarity, complementarity, regionality, etc.), and to ensure that participatory approaches and the principles of consultation and shared responsibility are adopted by the actors concerned and enshrined in the policy itself.

Through the process of formulating ECOWAP, ECOWAS seeks to provide a common framework that will

promote effective and coherent action. The aim is to “harmonise and integrate target objectives through the various strategies and programmes undertaken by countries and other inter-governmental organisations in the sub-region”, particularly WAEMU’s agricultural policy (WAP) and the Strategic Framework for food security of ICDCS and the sub-regional programme of actions to combat desertification. This progressive integration is intended to avoid efforts being duplicated in the drive to achieve shared objectives, and extends right through the formulation of programmes to implement ECOWAP to the projects and programmes carried out by technical development institutions (agriculture, livestock rearing, input distribution, water and natural resource management, etc.).

The adoption of ECOWAP in 2005 raised the issue of how it would tie in with NEPAD’s agricultural programme. Therefore, in July 2005 ECOWAS drew up a regional action plan for the implementation of ECOWAP and CAADP/NEPAD in the period 2006-2010, based on six priority areas for a joint implementation → box 2.

Long-term regional agricultural investment

### 2. The six priority areas for ECOWAP-NEPAD

Six priority fields of action were retained on the basis of their capacity to help reduce poverty and food insecurity and contribute to regional integration, and their short- and medium-term feasibility. They are briefly summarised below:

- Improved water management, by (i) promoting irrigation and (ii) integrated water resource management;
- Improved management of other natural resources, through (i) organised transhumance and rangeland development; (ii) sustainable forest resources management; (iii) sustainable fishery resources management;
- Sustainable agricultural development at the farm level, through (i) integrated soil fertility management, (ii) better support services for producers, (iii) dissemination of improved technologies;
- Developing agricultural supply chains and promoting markets by (i) developing the different supply chains (foodcrops, peri-urban agriculture, export crops, short-cycle livestock rearing, agro-forestry food products, artisanal fishing and fish farming); (ii) developing processing operations, (iii) strengthening support services for operators, (iv) promoting national, international and regional trade;
- Preventing and managing food crises and other natural disasters by (i) promoting early warning systems, (ii) developing crisis management systems, (iii) assisting the recovery of crisis-hit areas, (iv) formulating mechanisms for disaster-related insurance and compensation;
- Institution building through (i) gender-sensitive approaches, (ii) support for capacity building in the formulation of agricultural and rural policies and strategies, (iii) long-term funding for agriculture, (iv) communication, (v) capacity building in steering and coordination, (vi) capacity building in monitoring and evaluation.

programmes (RAIP) and national agricultural investment programmes (NAIP) develop these six priority areas. The other regional integration or cooperation organizations and the private stakeholders and socio-professional organizations have collaborated in this programme. A first group of eight countries is formulating the programme while the seven other countries start working on national assessments and modelling investments. The first group of countries is due to hold national-level round tables by the end of March 2009. Numerous initiatives have been undertaken in this context including:

- Emergency actions to ensure that agricultural issues are taken into account by the ECOWAS common external tariff (CET) and plans to

liberalise trade with the EU within the framework of the EPA (products likely to be excluded from liberalisation);

- Putting in place regulatory frameworks for seeds, pesticides, agricultural biotechnologies, biosafety;
- Promoting food security and safety: avian flu, securing the pastoral economy, promoting fishing and fish farming, biotechnology, fertiliser use, combating fruit fly;
- Implementing regional thematic programmes: productive use of areas cleared of onchocerciasis, measures to control floating aquatic plants, irrigation, managing water catchment basins, adapting to climate change, forest resources, biosafety.



# The regional Offensive for food production and against hunger tackling the price rises

## A global and brutal shock...

COUNTRIES across the region have responded in different ways to the price rises seen in the first quarter of 2008. Most adopted a set of emergency measures intended to reduce the cost of food and maintain people's purchasing power (suspending customs duty, reducing or suspending VAT on certain basic food products; price fixing and controls; subsidized fuel and rice; operations targeting vulnerable groups, etc.). Many countries also introduced specific measures for the forthcoming 2008-2009 farming season (emergency programmes to increase rice production, out-of-season corn, etc.). In addition to these two main types of measures, some governments also banned exports to neighbouring countries, demonstrating that the regional arena is still not seen as a factor of security and stability at times of markets uncertainty, and that integration of the region's foodstuff markets should be dealt with as a matter of collective security

rather than just the free movement of goods. This will entail asking what it will take to get the regional arena seen as a vector of more stable markets and secure supplies.

The new price context throws up a fresh set of questions. ECOWAP was adopted at a time when most agricultural and food policies were still essentially free-market oriented, so relatively little government intervention was anticipated in terms of market regulation, curbing price volatility or providing safety nets for the poorest sectors of the population. The food crisis of 2008 highlights the need to provide structural responses to the issues raised by rising prices, by focusing on sustainable production, improving the functioning of markets and reduction of the vulnerability of the poor populations. The countries and actors concerned will need to define appropriate instruments enabling them to tackle these new challenges.

## ... which put the agriculture back on the charts

THE EXPLOSION in prices prompted ECOWAS to call an extraordinary meeting in May 2008. Ministers with responsibility for the economy, finance, agriculture and trade came together from fifteen countries to examine the situation and define a common strategy, which was swiftly adopted by their respective heads of state<sup>1</sup>. This three-pronged regional "Offensive for food production to combat hunger" revolves around:

- Increasing the productivity and competitiveness of West African agriculture;
- Implementing a trade regime within West Africa;
- Adapting the trade regime vis-à-vis countries outside the region.

As conceived by the heads of state of fifteen countries, the regional Offensive is a way of ac-

celerating implementation of ECOWAP. Its three-pronged approach is intended to provide an effective response to the emergency while offering sustainable solutions as ECOWAP is put into effect. Therefore, its approach is fairly similar to that of ECOWAP, with national- and regional-level emergency plans, so that emergency responses to the price crisis can dovetail into the structural interventions envisaged by the agricultural policy.

The food crisis of 2008 help build a form of international consensus on the need to provide structural answers to the issues raised by rising prices. In this context, member states of ECOWAS, aid and international organisations, socio-professional actors and NGOs are united in prioritising the implementation of ECOWAS and pushing for investment in the production sector and, more generally, agri-foodstuff supply chains.

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1. During the 34<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the conference for heads of state and government held in Abuja on 23 June 2008.