



WEST AFRICA – EUROPEAN UNION : HOW TO BUILD FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION AND TRADE

In view of the recent economic, health and geopolitical crises, the European Union (EU) needs to give itself the means to achieve food sovereignty, now more than ever. The United Nations and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predict that the number of food, economic and climate crises will grow in the future¹. In this respect, most of our public policies are now aimed at reaching this goal, and nearly all European leaders are advocating for stronger EU food sovereignty.

However, while this new orientation puts the spotlight on the weaknesses of EU agriculture and of food built on interdependencies, EU leaders often tend to forget that EU practices and policies have put the food sovereignty of its poorest neighbours in jeopardy for decades.

The situation in West Africa is a striking example. The region faces a surge in the number of people suffering from food insecurity and a growing demand for local jobs², with the result that food sovereignty is increasingly becoming a political priority.

As West Africa's top trading partner, the EU could support the region in this process. Yet the vast majority of its investments and public policies are hindering this search for West African autonomy.

Despite some positive headway and the setting up of initiatives by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), many challenges remain. Furthermore, the lack of coherence in relations between West Africa and the EU is undermining the achievements and efforts being made to promote the development of sustainable agri-food chains in the region.

To document and produce a report on this situation, a collective body was formed by the European NGOs SOL, CFSI, Oxfam Belgium, SOS Faim Luxembourg, Humundi (formerly SOS Faim Belgium) and by the West African producer organisations ROPPA and CNCR.

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The full study is based on existing literature, a detailed knowledge of European and West African issues, as well as several decades of field experience. It documents how EU and West African agricultural and food policies suffer from incoherence with regard to the region's food sovereignty. The report includes eight fact sheets and three case studies⁴, providing an unparalleled review of the situation. It also proposes concrete courses of action to remedy the latter.

¹ IPCC, IPCC Sixth Assessment Report: Climate Change, March 2023: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf

² FAO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022, June 2022: <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0639en/cc0639en.pdf>

³ West Africa – European Union

⁴ The milk, cereals, and cocoa value chains.



EU-WA TRADE AT THE EXPENSE OF LOCAL WEST AFRICAN VALUE CHAINS

Trade between the EU and West Africa amounted to €47 billion in 2020, making it a significant aspect of their economies. The texts regulating these trade relations seek to ensure solidarity, security, peace and sustainable economic development in Africa.

HOW EU EXPORTS DESTABILISE LOCAL ECONOMY

However, in practice, these trade relations are deeply unequal and counterproductive to building local agri-food chains in West Africa. EU exports are hardly designed to be on an equal footing: they are the result of highly subsidised agriculture (72% of the CAP⁵ budget) and are often put on the export market at prices below their production costs. These low-cost exports supported by aggressive marketing campaigns prevent any competing local sectors from developing. For example, West Africa imports much of the wheat it consumes from Europe, causing a kilo of bread to be 25% cheaper on average than a kilo of locally produced cassava couscous. ECOWAS is aware of this situation and is making the development of local value chains a priority. However, it is not providing the financing needed for local value chains, which it is moreover systematically jeopardising by imposing hardly any customs duties on cereals.

EUROPEAN IMPORTS OVERLOOK THEIR IMPACT ON WEST AFRICA

When it comes to trade relations, economic interests often take precedence over considerations of climate and equity.

Even though the EU and ECOWAS have made the sustainability of their citizens' food a top priority, the EU has little concern for how its agricultural imports are produced. The West African cocoa sector (which accounts for more than half of the world's cocoa production) is structured mainly for export to Europe. Despite some regulatory attempts by ECOWAS, this cocoa production is the cause of massive deforestation, which in turn generates pollution, degradation and depletion of fishery resources and soils. The West African cocoa sector is driven by an over-intensive mode of production and is blind to the fact that it is destroying the environment and keeping producers poor. In Côte d'Ivoire, the region's main cocoa-producing country, 80% of its natural forest area has been cleared since the 1960s, and 55% of cocoa producers live below the poverty line.

UNCONTROLLED EXPORTS OF PESTICIDES THAT ARE BANNED IN EUROPE

This mode of production is at odds with food sovereignty for the region, and it is also tacitly encouraged by the EU. The use of pesticides in the EU is on a downward trend. Nonetheless, it continues to export pesticide banned for health or environmental reasons on its own territory. In 2018, more than 81,000 tonnes of pesticides containing substances banned for use in Europe were sold for export to non-European countries. Eight West African countries are among the primary importers.

⁵ The EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

HOW EU EXPLOITS NATIONAL DIFFERENCES TO LIBERALISE THE WEST AFRICAN ECONOMY

LACK OF UNANIMITY ON THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Far from seeking to make this situation more equitable, the EU has taken a predatory approach to West Africa up to now. For example, negotiations, at the initiative of the EU, have been underway since 2003 to implement economic partnership agreements (EPAs) between the two regions. By seeking to eliminate most customs duties, they would put one of the world's richest economic zones in competition with one of the poorest. Some West African countries have spoken out against the EPAs as an obstacle to regional trade and the region's food sovereignty, yet the EU puts them forward as development agreements.

A CLAUSE ON SEEDS PUTTING THE FUTURE OF LOCAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AT RISK

One point of divergence is a clause the EU has introduced into the EU-WA EPA requiring future negotiations on the privatisation of West African seeds. West Africa has its own regulations on the subject, but farmer seed systems are still very active – a situation that seems to irritate European seed companies. Because the EU has been inflexible, 10 years have gone by without this EPA having been signed. Meanwhile, the EU has been disregarding trade realities on the ground and the divisions the EPA would generate, and it has signed interim agreements with two West African countries separately.

HOW AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS FALL SHORT IN FOSTERING LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

INVESTMENTS THAT NEGLECT AGROECOLOGY AND FAMILY FARMING

Trade issues aside, West Africa's food sovereignty is also at stake in policies to structure its value chains. Both ECOWAS and the EU are committed to this structuring and are increasing investment promises. However, the African countries have never met their repeated commitments to devote 10% of their GDP to agriculture, and even when this financing does occur, it often does not benefit the development of farming that is sustainable in both economic and agricultural terms.

Contrary to the commitments made, these investments focus mainly on export-oriented agro-industrial projects, such as Bagrèpôle⁶ in Burkina Faso. Agroecology benefited from less than 3% of European agricultural financing channelled through the United Nations between 2016 and 2018. Furthermore, investments by West African countries only rarely target support for their family farms.

WOMEN: THE BIG LOSERS IN AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENTS IN WEST AFRICA

This improper direction of agricultural funding often impoverishes local populations and worsens pre-existing inequalities. The primary victims are women, who produce nearly 70% of West Africa's food. With little access to loans and only 8% of land titles, they generally do not benefit from these investments, which are designed mainly for their impact on productivity rather than their social impacts on the ground.

⁶ ACF, CCFD, OXFAM, The dead-end of agricultural growth poles, juin 2017 : https://ccfd-terresolidaire.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/rapport_pcaa_exe_ok.pdf



PUBLIC POLICIES : NOT APPLIED OR INSUFFICIENT TO MEET THE CHALLENGES

Agricultural, food and trade policies are the cornerstone to exchanges and cooperation between ECOWAS and the EU. For this reason, both regions must evolve and take into account the reality of West African food sovereignty issues. Policies in the region are beginning to incorporate this dimension. The latest ECOWAS “Regional Agriculture Investment Plan and Food Security and Nutrition” (RAIP-FNS 2016–2020), for example, made food sovereignty its top objective. However, such policies are generally underfunded or poorly implemented. Moreover, they are in direct competition with EU policies and agreements (such as the CAP, proposed EPAs, and to a certain extent the EU’s development policy) that mix development issues and the search

for economic opportunities without seeking to understand the current dynamics and the specific interests of the people of West Africa.

West Africa faces population growth as well as climate, economic and security issues. For these reasons, the next five years will be crucial for redesigning existing policy frameworks and making them coherent with one another.

To this end, both the EU and ECOWAS will need to make a transparent inventory of their current practices and available funding, so that they can at last truly work together to build sustainable and equitable agricultural and food development in West Africa.



5 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE EU-WA AGRICULTURAL TRADE AND COOPERATION

1. LIMIT THE DESTABILISING EFFECTS OF EU EXPORTS ON WEST AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS:

It’s vital that West African decision-makers make protection of their agricultural and food markets a political priority. Against the backdrop of an ever-growing regional integration strategy, this protection must include an increase in the Common External Tariff (CET) to fight the often unfair competition from imported agricultural and food products. However, protection of West African food sovereignty is not just the prerogative of ECOWAS.

The EU must also become aware of the destabilising impact of its low-cost agri-food exports and introduce an export tax equivalent to the amounts of the subsidies received by EU farmers. The revenue generated by this tax can be used to finance

development support, among other programs.

2. ENSURE COHERENCE BETWEEN TRADE, AGRICULTURE, AND FOOD POLICIES AND PRACTICES :

It’s urgent for the EU to live up to its ambitions for policy coherence. While this principle was written into European legislation as early as 1992 and legally bolstered in 2009, it’s rarely applied in the agri-food sector. It’s essential that the EU at last take a serious look at the impacts – both positive and negative – that its public policies (including the CAP) can have on West African food sovereignty.

To this end, the EU should create an internal administrative office devoted specifically to this issue and systematically conduct ex-post and ex-ante studies on its public policies.

However, this coherence on the part of the EU will only make sense if it's in line with West African demands. Both ECOWAS and West African countries must work toward greater coherence regarding their own policies on trade, agriculture and food. Indeed, these policies are often contradictory and wind up representing a step backwards for each step forward.

To this end, political support from the pinnacle of governments and institutions will be systematically necessary. There will be both political and budgetary trade-offs.

3. DESIGN ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS SO THAT THEY BUILD LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD SECTORS IN WEST AFRICA :

The development of the West African agricultural economy must take precedence in any trade agreement involving the region. Both the EU and ECOWAS must put into question the existing EPAs. Any new economic agreement between the two parties must make the protection of West African agricultural and food sectors a priority. A complaints mechanism will have to be set up for agricultural communities, and mirror clauses will have to be systematically introduced in order to protect farmers from any aggressive trade practices (e.g. dumping, specific production aid, etc.).

4. PROVIDE THE FINANCING FOR THE WEST AFRICAN AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION :

It's crucial that the EU become aware of the current reality of West African food systems and massively redirect the public and private agricultural investments that it facilitates in the region. This redirection requires collaborative and transparent work between the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation and the European External Action Service.

It is imperative that these bodies assess the situation, redirect their funding and start to work jointly to facilitate West Africa's agro-ecological transition. Similarly, it is essential that West African decision-makers honor their commitments and revise their national

and regional agricultural investment and food and nutrition security plans to significantly increase their public funding for the agroecological transition.

5. PROVIDE EXPLICIT SUPPORT FOR WEST AFRICAN WOMEN, THE CORNERSTONES OF FUTURE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY FOR THE REGION :

West African countries must modify and then firmly apply their land and banking laws to ensure access for women to credit institutions and to the acquisition of land at the same terms and with the same rights and prerogatives as men. Only explicit support from the EU can make this change occur. The EU must be a driving force on the issue, facilitate campaigns for change, and promote training aimed at informing women of current legal developments. It's also crucial for the European Union to make systematic use of gender equality indicators and disaggregated data in all private and public agricultural and food financing that it facilitates in West Africa.

The networks and organisations behind the full version of this publication can be found at : www.sol-asso.fr

