

# Echoes from Food Stocks

Quarterly Newsletter of the ECOWAS Regional Food Security Reserve

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## In this Issue

Editorial .....	02
Pilot Interventions Experiments of the Reserve.....	03
Why do the States have to replenish the stocks availed to them? .....	04
The Operationalization of the Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food, a major Step towards the implementation of the Financial Reserve .....	04
Some Significant Milestones in the Strengthening of National Food Security Stocks.....	05
Governance Instruments of the Regional Reserve are taking Shape .....	06
An Information System Operational at both National and Regional Level .....	07
Some Key Lessons learned from the Operationalization of the Reserve.....	08



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# E d i t o

Dear Partners,

**The operationalization of the Regional Reserve started at the end of 2015 with the financial support of the European Union made it possible to initiate the implementation of the Regional Strategy for Food Security Storage in West Africa with the simultaneous strengthening of the three lines of defense: (i) local stocks, (ii) national security stocks and (iii) the Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR). These first three components are complemented by (iv) a component on national and regional information systems with the deployment of Ecoagris and (v) a component for decision-support and capacity building of RAAF.**



Mr. **Ousseini Salifou**,  
Executive Director of RAAF

Since the third Steering Committee of the support project in 2018, the RFSR has experienced a conducive environment with (i) the adoption of the institutional reform of Ecowas which creates the conditions for its sustainability, (ii) the decisions of the statutory bodies of Ecowas on the governing bodies and operating rules of the RFSR, (iii) the operationalization of the Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food which paves the way for the establishment of the Financial Reserve, (iv) the

institutionalization of Resogest that will help strengthen cooperation between countries and develop regional solidarity and (v) the adoption of national agricultural and food security investment programs which provide a renewed framework for improving food and nutrition security and developing national security storage policies.

The conditions and levers for the sustainability of the RFSR are time consuming and all activities that are part of multi-country and multi-stakeholder processes cannot be finalized during the initially scheduled implementation period of the support project. The construction of this regional solidarity instrument being a first experience for Ecowas, it is necessarily an interactive, iterative and consultative process between countries and stakeholders with their specificities and disparities of situations and capabilities.

This means that Ecowas and its partners must continue to work together to consolidate and stabilize the achievements and the governance and management instruments/bodies to facilitate the take-off of the Reserve and its sustainability. Ecowas, with the support of its partners, will make everything possible for this unique experience of deploying a system of food reserves combining local storage, national security storage and the establishment of a regional food security reserve to be successful.

It is my singular pleasure to share with you, in the following lines, some highlights and challenges of the deployment of our Regional Food Security Reserve and more broadly, the deployment of our Regional Food Security Storage Strategy.

***I wish you all a happy reading !***

## Pilot Interventions Experiments of the Reserve

*The decisions of the Ad-hoc Management Committee have allowed to test its intervention procedures (requests from countries, examination / decision-support note by the Stocks-Info Unit, decision by a transitional governance body decided by the TSMC-AEWR. The implementation of the interventions and the experiences feedbacks have contributed to fine-tune the procedures under finalization in the Procedures Manual. The purchase, storage and destocking of food grains as part of the interventions clearly demonstrate that the regional Reserve is truly an instrument of regional solidarity to be consolidated and sustained, hence the importance of accompanying the States in the replenishment operations (deadlines, technical specifications and products quality, etc.).*



Partial view of the handover of food grains to Nigeria



Partial view of the handover of food grains to Ghana

Faced with the difficult food situation of 2018 in several West African countries, the Heads of State and Government of the Community instructed the Ecowas Commission in July 2018 on the necessary mobilization of the regional Reserve - they created in 2013 - to help vulnerable populations. This mobilization, at the highest level, has accelerated the establishment of Reserve governance bodies, particularly the adoption of the Regulation establishing the Management Committee. Statutory bodies have also validated the principle of the replenishment of the stocks "grain-for-grain" by beneficiary countries, and this because of the need to perpetuate the instrument.

Considering the operationalization deadline of the Management Committee put in place, the Technical Specialized Ministerial Committee - Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources of Ecowas (TSMC-AEWR) set up a transitional body - the Ad hoc Management Committee of the RFSR. The latter was able to examine requests and decide upon the interventions and stocks rotation of the RFSR in 2018.

Each national request was reviewed and a decision- support note by the Stocks-Info Unit based on the results of the Harmonized Framework provided by the regional alert system. This note was brought to the attention of the Ad hoc Management Committee.

The Committee met for the first time in Lomé on July 3, 2018 to examine requests submitted by Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Niger and Senegal. Later on, it considered the request and decided on the intervention in Nigeria and a stocks rotation in Ghana in December 2018. As of 31 December 2018, the Committee decided to mobilize 13,831 tons for Burkina Faso, Niger and Ghana, and later in January 2019, five thousand (5,000) tons for Nigeria with a commitment at the highest level of these

countries to replenish the stocks grain-for-grain. The following table summarizes the physical stock interventions decided by the Committee and implemented by Ecowas. It also takes into account the 2017 intervention made by Ecowas in Nigeria with the products of the Reserve.

Country	Quantity	Date
Nigeria	5,000 tons	31 January 2019
Ghana	2,750 tons	28 December 2018
Burkina Faso	4,303 tons	9 August 2018
Niger	6,528 tons	7 August 2018
Nigeria	1,130 tons	8 August 2017
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,711 tons</b>	

For Cape Verde whose request was for financial assistance, Ecowas decided to provide financial support of 150, 000 USD using its Humanitarian Emergency Fund. For Senegal, the request of the Government could not be satisfied because of the non-availability of stocks of the RFSR in the West Atlantic zone to which Senegal belongs. Mali's request for 504 tons of food grains could not also be processed because of the lack of the State's commitment to replenish the stock.

The Committee's decision to initiate the stocks rotation of products bought to warehouses in 2017 resulted in an operation in Ghana under an agreement between Ecowas and the Government for the supply of the Government's flagship of "Free Secondary Education Program". This operation made it possible to test the general rules for stocks rotation.

To recall, the Food Security Storage Support Project in West Africa has so far helped to build the physical stock up to 31,422.5 tons of food grains made up of maize, millet, sorghum and rice.

## Why do the States have to replenish the stocks availed to them?

*States benefiting from regional solidarity and stocks rotation are committed at the highest level to replenish the stocks grain-for-grain. For the first replenishment operations, close follow-up and support activities from Ecowas and RAAF are being conducted, including lessons learned to fine-tune the procedures.*



Partial view of the stocks of the Reserve

In June 2018, the TSMC-AEWR retained and validated the principle of an intervention by the RFSR provided that the beneficiary country (i) makes a formal request, (ii) meets the eligibility criteria, (iii) commits itself, at the highest level, to replenish the stocks mobilized for interventions for food insecure and nutrition-poor populations within a reasonable period of time. The different methods of replenishing the stocks mobilized by the requesting country or a third party (which should be specified in the request) are: replenishment grain for grain or an equivalent in financial resources. The stake here is to implement the principle of community solidarity and sustain the regional food reserve system. By this principle, the Reserve will permanently have stocks available to intervene at all time and can develop and diversify the interventions in favor of all populations of the region.

In addition to this sacred principle of governance, it must be considered that, for the time being, the purchases of the Reserve products and their use are made possible thanks to the financial support of the European Union. This support can purchase a total of 31,500 tons of food products as a contribution to the regional physical stock of the Reserve which, according to Ecowas, will have to progressively help constitute a total Reserve of 410,000 tons in the cruising year (year 8) made of two components: a physical stock of 140,000 tons (one third of the response capacity) and a financial reserve representing the equivalent of 270,000 tons (two thirds of the response capacity).

Pending the Community resources to cover the activities and interventions of the Reserve, Ecowas must maintain the level of the stocks currently acquired thanks to the food security storage support project in West Africa funded by the European Union with a total budget of € 56 million.

## The operationalization of the Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food, a major Step towards the implementation of the Financial Reserve

*The signing of this Convention on the Management of the Regional Fund between Ecowas and Ebid and the first allocation to the Fund decided by the Ecowas Administration-Finance Board in the Commission's 2019 budget paves the way to the financial mechanism of the regional Reserve under the "food security" window. Though resources remain limited for this first year of 2019, the process is now open.*



Partial view of the signing of the Convention by the two Presidents

Created in 2011, the same year as the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food, the Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food is one of the main pillars of the overall institutional and financial system of the regional agricultural Policy, Ecowap. It is designed to be fed with the Community's own resources, supplemented by the contributions of donors who plan to channel their resources towards regional agricultural programs that meet the Ecowap priorities.

The signing of the Convention on February 14, 2019 between the President of the Ecowas Commission, Dr. Jean Claude Kassi-Brou and the President of the Ecowas Bank for Investment and Development (Ebid), Mr. Bashir Ifo, will help to start, as soon as possible, the operationalization of this Regional Fund which will be located at Ebid. Ebid will propose a management mechanism for this Regional Fund with two major requirements: (i) respond to the specificities and diversity of the funding needs of the agricultural sector to complement national financing schemes and (ii) ensure sound management of funds and transparency in allocation and use according to internationally recognized management rules.

This Fund is a sovereignty instrument of the region. It will speed up the responses to the needs of vulnerable populations and help to undertake development programs based on the real needs of Member States.

# Some Significant Milestones in the Strengthening of National Food Security Stocks

*All these dynamics at the national level will particularly help to move forward in strengthening and pooling national security stocks, pooling human resources and the capacities of national companies as part of the networking of national food security storage companies within Resogest.*



Partial view of the Lomé workshops participants

The promotion of food security stocks is integrated into most of the national agricultural and food security investment programs. This is an opportunity for the development of the second line of defense, which is critical to ensure the coherence and overall efficiency of the regional food security strategy.

In addition, a series of workshops organized in February 2019 enabled stakeholders in the region to discuss on (i) the Status of Food Security Storage Policies in Member States, (ii) a Code of Good Management Practices of food security stocks and (iii) the Mechanism to operationalize the Commitment of Member States to pool 5% of national food security stocks. Participants technically validated the reports, summary notes or guide for their transmission for consideration and adoption by the Ecowas TSMC-AEWR scheduled for next June.

Thus, networking through the Network of public companies in charge of the management of national food security stocks in the Sahel and West Africa (Resogest), and the contracting

process between Ecowas and the States has allowed so far, ten (10) countries to engage in the definition or revision of their national food safety storage policies, within a harmonized regional framework, and / or the training of stock managers. Institutionalized as an international association under Burkina law, Resogest now has a Headquarters Agreement and its Procedures Manual is under development.

The region has an updated Inventory of policies, instruments and governance models of stocks in all countries. Countries have put storage back on their agenda with the common objective of ensuring food security for vulnerable populations and a set of objectives that vary according to national situations: the creation of emergency reserves, market regulation and securing profitable markets for producers, etc. The key objective of food security storage policies, namely the securing of supplies, particularly for vulnerable populations, is implemented through a variety of methods including physical stocks, financial reserves, the combination of cash transfers / transfers in kind, social safety nets, etc.



Partial view of the Lomé workshops participants



Partial view of the Lomé workshops participants

## Governance Instruments of the Regional Reserve are taking Shape

*The members of the Management Committee are being nominated. The first meeting of the Committee scheduled for the second quarter of 2019 will take charge of the effective management of the Reserve in accordance with the principles, rules and procedures adopted by the Community. They are all recorded in the various acts of the statutory bodies and in the Procedures Manual.*



Partial view of the ministerial meeting of Ouagadougou

The year 2018 was critical in the setting-up of the permanent governance instruments of the RFSR with the impetus of the Summit of Heads of State and Government. The TSMC-AEWR June 2018 meeting in Ouagadougou, entirely devoted to the Regional Food Security Reserve, validated the institutional management system of the Reserve.

The draft Regulation establishing and operating the Reserve Management Committee and its Executive Board validated by the TSMC-AEWR was validated by the Council of Ministers on 7 and 8 July 2018 in Lomé (Togo). This regulation was followed by an Implementing Regulation signed by the President of the Ecowas Commission, paving the way for the designation of the representatives of Member States and other stakeholders.

The TSMC-AEWR has retained the principle of an intervention by the RFSR provided that the beneficiary country (i) makes a formal request, (ii) meets the eligibility criteria, (iii) commits itself at the highest level, to replenish the stocks of the RFSR within a reasonable period of time.

Pending the formal establishment of the Management Committee and its Executive Body, the ministers decided to set

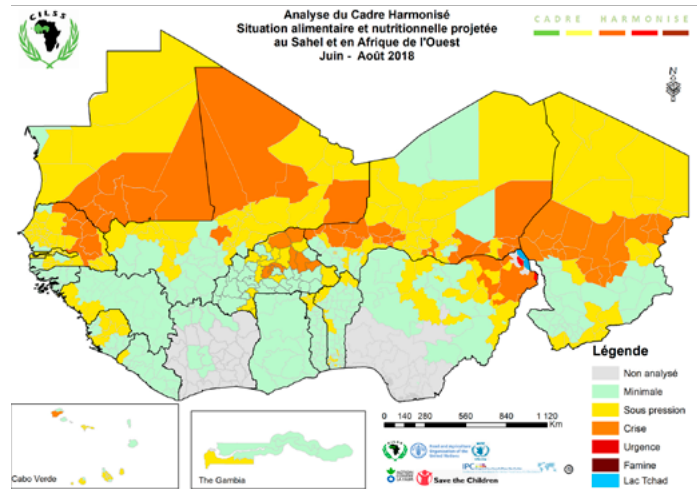
up a transitional body - the Ad hoc Management Committee - for the Reserve to intervene on secure legal and institutional bases and in accordance with the procedures adopted during the formal creation of the RFSR by Supplementary Act. Under the chairmanship of the Minister of Agriculture of the country holding the chairmanship of the Community and comprising the Ecowas Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources, the Uemoa Commissioner for Agriculture, Water Resources and Environment and the Executive Secretary of Cilss, this Committee was given the mandate to decide on the interventions of the RFSR in response to difficult food situations. The Committee's decisions have already led to interventions in Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and stocks rotation in Ghana.

As part of the Ecowas institutional reforms, the Reserve Management Technical Unit has been established as a Division within the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food.

It should also be added that the Reserve Procedures Manual was developed and technically validated at a restricted workshop held in Lomé from 11 to 13 February 2019. The internal validation within Ecowas, then by the Management Committee is scheduled for the coming weeks.

## An Information System Operational at both National and Regional Level

To date, it should be noted that in the context of the operationalization of the Ecoagris platform at both national and regional level, several actions have been carried out: i) updating of integrated country databases that have been secured (ii) support for primary data collection and standardization of statistical methods for data collection and processing, (iii) specialized training of national technical services managers and technicians, and (iv) capacity building analysis and intervention of regional actors in food and nutrition security on a common source of indicators and reliable data.



Partial view Analysis of the Harmonized Framework

Previous years organizational efforts of the Ecoagris Scheme enabled to reach the population of the platform in 2018 with historical data (2012-2017) in 15 countries.

The project particularly facilitated the use of the Harmonized Framework for food and nutrition analysis in the seventeen (17) countries of CILSS / Ecowas zone with an extension of the analysis to sixteen (16) States of northern Nigeria, the analysis of the HEA survey results in sixteen (16) countries with a significant extension of the methodology to the Gulf Guinea country, and the conduct of joint market assessments across the entire space. The various products (databases, cartography, e-learning platform on Ecoagris products) have been designed and are now available.

In addition, the Ecoagris website (<http://ecoagris.cilss.int>) is accessible to users. Yet, the completeness, updating and data quality remain strongly dependent on the capacities and performances of national information systems. The platform ([www.ecoagris.net](http://www.ecoagris.net)) has also been developed and relies on twelve (12) thematic information subsystems: early warning systems, agricultural production, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, agricultural market, agricultural input, research result, agro-hydro-meteo, macro-economy, nutrition, stock, natural resource and climate change.



Partial view of the Ecoagris Website

## Some Key Lessons learned from the Operationalization of the Reserve

***In short, the construction of the Regional Food Security Reserve as a regional solidarity instrument, is a first experience for Ecowas. It is a long-term process as the number of countries and stakeholders is important and disparities of situation and capacities strong. The conditions and levers for the sustainability of this Reserve are time consuming and all activities that are part of multi-country and multi-stakeholder processes cannot be finalized during the initially scheduled implementation period of the support project.***

The first pilot experiments interventions of the regional Reserve in its learning phase of the procedures bring about the following lessons:

- the examination, decision and implementation deadlines are in line with or even shorter than those set by the RFSR (45 days averagely), despite some delays caused by the project management procedures (no objection notice) and not because of the procedures of the RFSR.
- the availability of data to inform the various eligibility criteria, particularly (i) the exact status of national stocks and their capacity to cover the needs of the country, and (ii) the number of vulnerable people to whom to provide food assistance, constitute an obstacle to a faster treatment of the requests by the Reserve Management Technical Unit.
- the availability of a National Response Plan is no longer a problem in Sahelian countries but is lacking in coastal countries where it is often replaced by the humanitarian response plan designed under the auspices of the International Humanitarian Community.
- Twelve percent (12%) of supplies were sourced from producer organizations (POs). This performance is insufficient in view of the stakes for POs to supply institutional markets.
- The movement of the RFS products across borders remains a challenge.
- local storage organizations are very heterogeneous. Their role is key, but their promotion requires a lot of efforts, ability to differentiate supports, etc. For the second line of defense, the creation of Resogest as an important tool for cooperation and pooling of resources between Member States is also a complex process. Most countries do not yet have national companies dedicated to stocks management.
- the integration of the Reserve Management Technical Unit as a Division within RAAF as part of the institutional reform adopted in December 2018 by Ecowas now lays the foundation for the institutional sustainability of the technical tools of the RFSR. This institutional reform entails the progressive absorption of personnel costs and, more broadly, structural costs.
- the establishment of the management bodies of the RFSR (Management Committee and its Executive Body) under finalization with the nomination of representatives by the various members of these bodies.
- the level of completeness of the Ecoagris platform remains dependent on the robustness of the data collection mechanism of Member States with disparities observed between countries and between subsystems integrating the regional alert system.
- the institutional governance framework remains functional at the level of the Ecoagris Technical Committee and not very functional at the political level of the Strategic Orientation Committee, which undermines the sustainability of the framework for the internalization of the mechanism into national governance bodies and mechanisms.
- the sustainability of a regional Ecoagris Scheme based on comprehensive national and regional information systems and surveys, which themselves rely on robust and transparent data collection, monitoring and data processing methodologies that can regularly provide quality data.

Unlike other conventional development projects, the sustainability of the RFSR is strategic because it is a sustainable intervention instrument for Ecowas. Sustainability, therefore, relies on several pillars:

- the concomitant development of the first two lines of defense that limits the use of the RFSR is an essential element of the relevance and sustainability of the RFSR. The already expensive calibration of the RFSR has been limited by this approach of complementarity and subsidiarity.

With the financial support of the European Union



And technical support from implementing partners



Handover of a bag of maize to a vulnerable peasant in Burkina Faso