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# The West African food security storage system

Summary of lessons learnt and prospects



This synthesis of the experience of the implementation of the regional food security storage strategy was carried out within the framework of the implementation of the ECOWAS agricultural policy, ECOWAP. It is part of the context of the International Conference on the West African Food Security Storage System organized by ECOWAS and its partners from 28 April to 10 May 2021. It is a summary of the in-depth capitalization of the West Africa Food Security Storage Support Project, funded by the European Union and implemented by the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) and the ECOWAS Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

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**W**EST AFRICA is a region of the world with one of the most worrying structural food and nutritional insecurity, to which are added cyclical shocks. Historically, these shocks were mainly linked to production hazards induced by climatic variability and/or locust attacks, particularly in the Sahel.

Since the mid-2000s, the vulnerability of West African populations has increased sharply due to a combination of two dynamics:

- Rapid changes in societies, in particular: (i) strong demographic growth leading to increasing pressure on natural resources and the multiplication of conflicts over the use of these resources; (ii) the growing impoverishment of rural populations with little productive capital (land, livestock) and whose livelihoods are based on a fragile combination of multiple activities; (iii) the amplification of pastoral crises; (iv) rapid urbanization based mainly on an informal sector offering very low incomes;
- The multiplication and diversification of external shocks, with the amplification of exceptional climatic phenomena induced by global warming, the growth of insecurity (terrorism, political crises and inter-ethnic conflicts), health crises (Ebola, Covid-19), the development of epizootics, parasites and crop diseases (army worm, etc.), etc.

A significant proportion of urban and rural populations depend on the market for their food supply. Volatility, and in particular local, regional and international

price spikes, exacerbate the difficulties of access to food and contribute to the impoverishment of dietary diversity, and consequently to malnutrition. This volatility is also detrimental to producers.

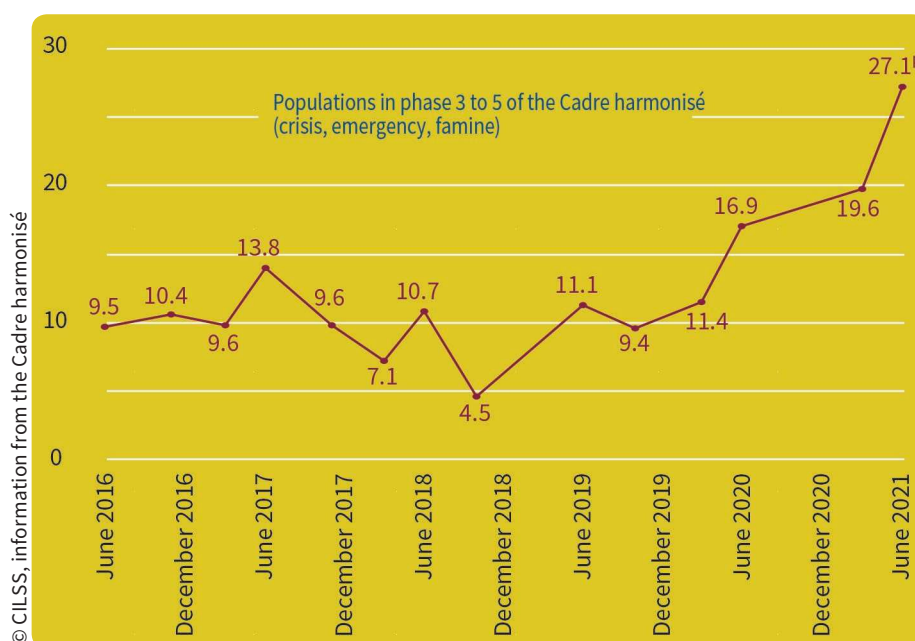
Crises linked to cyclical factors are now recurrent. Each year, between 5 and 25 million people find themselves unable to cover their food and nutritional needs for several months.

These crises, which are linked to a variety of factors and types of shocks, now affect all the countries in the region, not just the historically more fragile Sahelian countries. They primarily affect those who are already structurally the most vulnerable. The evolution of risk factors is causing massive population displacements, placing them in a very precarious situation (displaced persons and climate and security refugees). They suddenly find themselves unable to cover all their essential needs, not just food.

This context led the Ministers of Agriculture of the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as part of the implementation of the regional agricultural policy, ECOWAP/CAADP, to adopt in 2012 the regional food security storage strategy. It has two major dimensions: (i) food security storage to cope with shocks; and (ii) commercial storage for the structuring of agricultural value chains and the regulation of food markets.

With political support from the G20, financial support from the European Union, and technical support from

**Illustration 1 : Evolution of populations in food crisis from 2016 to 2021 (millions)**







## 1. The regional storage strategy

THE REGIONAL STORAGE STRATEGY is in line with the ECOWAP/CAADP vision of addressing production, markets and price volatility, and is based on the following pillars:

- Food security storage to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in the event of a short-term food crisis;
- Interventions (broader than just storage) to improve the functioning of markets and reduce price volatility; and
- Social food security nets for populations with structural livelihood deficits.

The West African storage system combines physical stocks and financial reserves. It is organized around four complementary lines of defense:

- *The first line of defense: local stocks*, set up and managed by producer organisations (POs) or decentralised authorities;
- *The second line of defense: national security stocks*, managed by states or co-managed by states and a pool of financial partners;
- *The third line of defense: the Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR)*, set up and managed by the ECOWAS Commission, as well as national pooled stocks;
- *The fourth line of defense: mechanisms for solidarity and international assistance* (UN humanitarian agencies, development partners, international NGOs), when no solution could be found in the first three lines of defense.

Illustration 2 : The West African food security storage system





## 2. Local storage: the first line of defense

**C**OMMUNITY STOCKS are the first line of defense in the strategy and are therefore of major importance for food security. They are based on local organizations that are able to respond quickly to shocks, pending the intervention of other lines of defense in the event of a serious crisis.

The three types of organization in this system are (i) *grouped supply systems* (cereal banks, food security granaries) that facilitate food supply during the lean season and exceptional crises, mainly deployed in Sahelian deficit areas; (ii) *grouped marketing systems* (collection, storage, standardization and external marketing cooperatives) that have an impact on the value of family production; (iii) *livestock feed supply systems* (livestock feed banks) that promote the availability of feed for livestock and thus prevent food crises for the households concerned by protecting their livelihoods, mainly in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.

Local stocks play a dual role in the regional storage strategy. On one hand, they contribute to the food security of populations in a food crisis situation, and on the other hand, they supply the other lines of defense — national and regional public stocks — through institutional purchases. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of this line of defense are still insufficiently known and the information needed to assess its real contribution in the event of a food crisis remains partial. In the Sahel, despite the long experience of producers' organizations (POs) in this area, capitalization processes are very ad hoc and still not sufficiently developed to serve as references for all organizations involved in local storage. In surplus areas (mainly coastal countries), the geographical network, types and volumes of local stocks, as well as the actors and their organizations, are still poorly documented.

Considering the importance of grassroots POs implementing community stocks, ECOWAS initiated a participatory process with their regional networks (ROPPA<sup>1</sup>, APESS<sup>2</sup> and RBM<sup>3</sup>), as well as the regional cereal inter-professional organization, ROAC<sup>4</sup>, to identify their capacity building and networking priorities. The discussions resulted in the following dynamics:

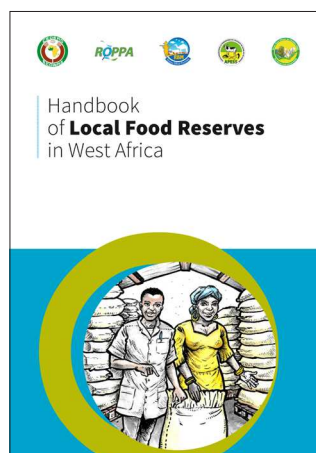
### The production of regional reference documents on local storage

Based on the experiences and good practices of POs, three major materials were produced in this framework: (i) The handbook of local storage in West Africa, which capitalizes on the administrative, technical, economic and financial management tools of grassroots organizations; (ii) The charter of good practices of local storage operators; and (iii) The regional intervention framework for local storage and its budgeted action plan, which is intended to be a consensual framework common to POs, national and regional public authorities, private actors and technical and financial partners (TFPs). Based on extensive capitalization work carried out by the POs, the handbook is structured around seven thematic areas (see below).



### The handbook of local food reserves in West Africa

<https://bit.ly/32EeYCy>



| Handbook of Local Food Reserves in West Africa                                                              |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
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1. Network of Farmers' and Producers' Organizations of West Africa.

2. Association for the Promotion of Livestock in the Sahel and Savannah.

3. Billital Maroobé Network.

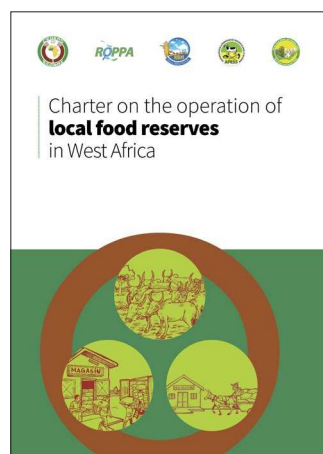
4. West African Cereal Network.





## The charter of good practices for local operators

<https://bit.ly/32EeP1Y>

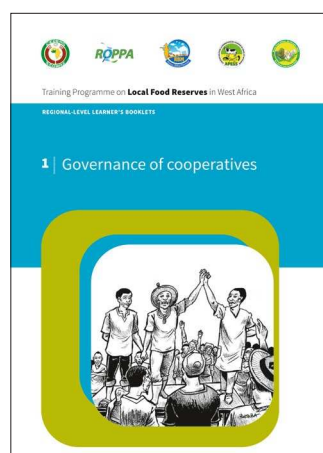


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| 18       | Chapter VIII: Resolving conflict of rights                                                                    |
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| 21       | A. External conditions preconditions to application of the Charter                                            |
| 22       | B. Monitoring, evaluation system                                                                              |
| 23       | C. Incentives for PICs to sign and apply the Charter                                                          |

## The establishment of a regional training capacity for local stock managers

In order to structure a sustainable continuous training offer derived from the production of regional reference, the approach consisted in identifying and strengthening a regional training structure for PO leaders and technicians, INADES Formation, in order to design and provide training for trainers at the regional level and to support the replication of trainings in the countries for elected officials and local stock managers. An online training platform has been designed to provide distance training. It is structured in the form of a training course organized around eight specialized thematic modules.

## The learner's booklets on local storage (booklet 1)



| Sommaire |                                                                                                                              |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1        | Présentation générale du livre                                                                                               |
| 2        | A - Comprendre la notion de gouvernance, ses rôles, ses finalités et ses principes                                           |
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| 16       | C.1 Conditions de la bonne gouvernance                                                                                       |
| 17       | C.2 Bonnes pratiques d'organisation et d'administration                                                                      |
| 18       | C.3 Bonnes pratiques de gestion du personnel                                                                                 |
| 19       | C.4 Les principes des services et des produits à la gouvernance de l'OP                                                      |
| 20       | D - Que retenir de ce livre ?                                                                                                |
| 21       | E - Pour aller plus loin                                                                                                     |
| 22       | F - Liste des règles                                                                                                         |
| 23       | G - Glossaire                                                                                                                |

## Structuring support to regional networks of POs

This involved subsidising capacity-building activities for these networks and their members so that they could play their role as the system's first line of defense more effectively (training, technical support, consultation, information, etc.). This support has helped to strengthen the networking and structuring of the often fragmented grassroots organizations involved in local storage.

## Reflections on the methodology for mapping and monitoring local stocks

On the basis of mapping work and experimentation with POs' internal information systems, the option chosen was to strengthen the mechanism for monitoring local stocks developed by the ROAC so that it could better take into account the dynamics of coastal countries (collection of information on POs involved in local storage, mapping of storage infrastructures, regular monitoring of stock levels).

## The design of an innovative mechanism for financing storage, marketing and for risk management at the level of POs and the private sector

In order to address the difficulties of access to financial services adapted to the needs of POs and the low development of third party holding with private professional operators, ECOWAS intends to design innovative financing instruments for storage and marketing targeted at POs but also the private sector, within the framework of the implementation of its Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food (RFAF).

The primary role given to POs in the conduct of these processes was a major asset for the production of tools that were truly adapted to their needs. The process made it possible to develop an in-depth dialogue between the different categories of local storage operators, between organizations in coastal and Sahelian countries and to compare the practices of these different organizations, particularly between farmers and pastoralists. It will ensure better use of the references and tools developed on local storage.

### 3. National security storage: the second line of defense

NATIONAL SECURITY STOCKS, which constitute the second line of defense, are a key component of the regional food reserve system. The initial work of categorizing countries revealed a wide range of situations in terms of:

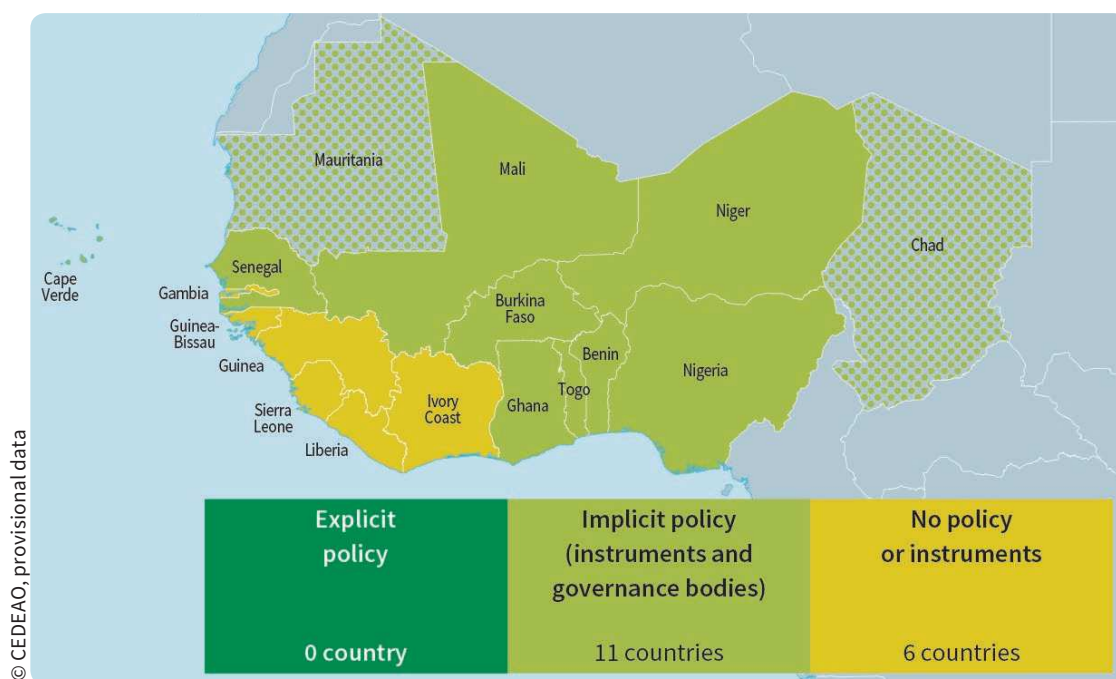
- The existence or not of national storage policies as a reference for government action;
- The governance scheme, even for those with the most developed and stabilized storage instruments;
- The types of intervention instruments implemented by the countries: physical stock, financial reserve, TFP financial reserve, State regulation stock;
- The definition and vision in the purpose of stocks: food security stocks, intervention stocks or market regulation, or a combination of both functions;
- The level of sovereignty of the country over the operations concerning the stock.

Generally speaking, the Sahelian countries, especially

the landlocked countries, which are frequently faced with production shocks, have a great deal of experience in food security storage. However, the 2007–08 crisis had led Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Togo to also deploy storage instruments.

These disparities, as well as other methodological difficulties, have made it difficult to take stock of the categories of stocks and volumes held by each country, and have revealed the need to adopt a common nomenclature at the regional level in order to establish regional monitoring of stocks. Harmonization at the regional level was based on a work of capitalization of best practices deployed by national mechanisms for the prevention and management of food and nutrition crises, which led in 2018 to the adoption by all ECOWAS countries of a reference framework of good practices for the management of public stocks, translated into a code of conduct.

**Map 1 : Status of national policies in 2016**





## Best practice guidelines for public stock management

<https://bit.ly/3exg3Sg>



| Summary                                                                            |    |
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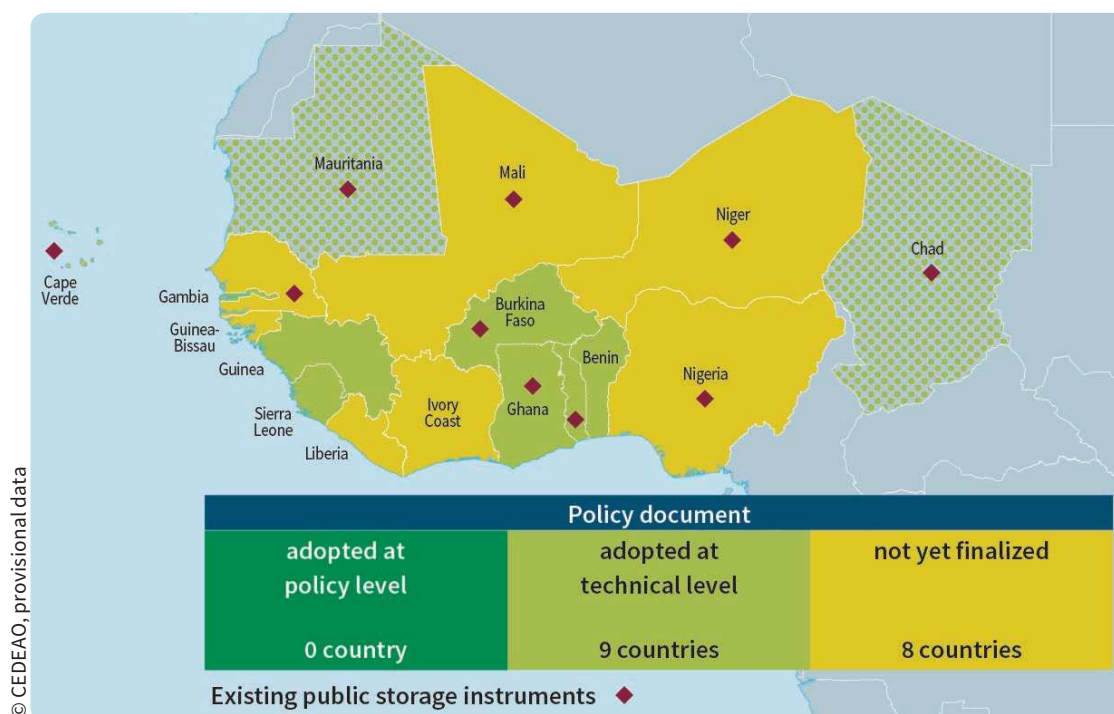
ECOWAS adopted a differentiated country support approach that has enabled them to engage in a coordinated and harmonized process for the design or revision of their national stockage policies and strategies as well as their governance and stockage management system,

their national contingency plan, and other tools needed to trigger the Regional Food Security Reserve. Most have developed the storage management procedures manual. Initially, no country in the region had an explicit national storage policy document, although 12 of the 17 countries in the ECOWAS region + Chad and Mauritania had at least one type of storage intervention instrument (see map 1). With the support of ECOWAS, all countries are engaged in the revision-definition of an explicit national storage policy or strategy (see map 2). The vast majority of countries are planning to deploy physical stocks and financial reserves simultaneously. Aspects relating to governance (institutional anchoring and arrangements) and financing have been systematically addressed in these national processes.

As part of this process, several countries have already deployed training for public stock managers to improve technical stock management.

The national structures in charge of managing food security stocks in the countries cooperate at the regional level through RESOGEST, the Network of Societies and Offices in charge of National Stock Management, formalized

**Map 2 : Status of national policy development-review in April 2021**





in 2012. With the support of ECOWAS, significant progress has been achieved since 2016 in the institutional aspects of the network (statute, procedures manual), the pooling of skills (study tours, capacity building workshops) but also in the pooling of stocks. Indeed, one of the key commitments of the RESOGEST cooperation framework is the pooling of 5% of national stocks to meet the needs of countries facing a food crisis for which their national stocks are insufficient. In the light of the disparate situation of stocks between countries, different pooling options have been discussed and adopted by the countries:

- Option 1: Pooling of 5% of the national physical food security reserve and/or the national financial food

security reserve;

- Option 2: Voluntary mobilization of national food security stocks and financial assistance to other countries in case of food crisis; and
- Option 3: Combination of the first two options.

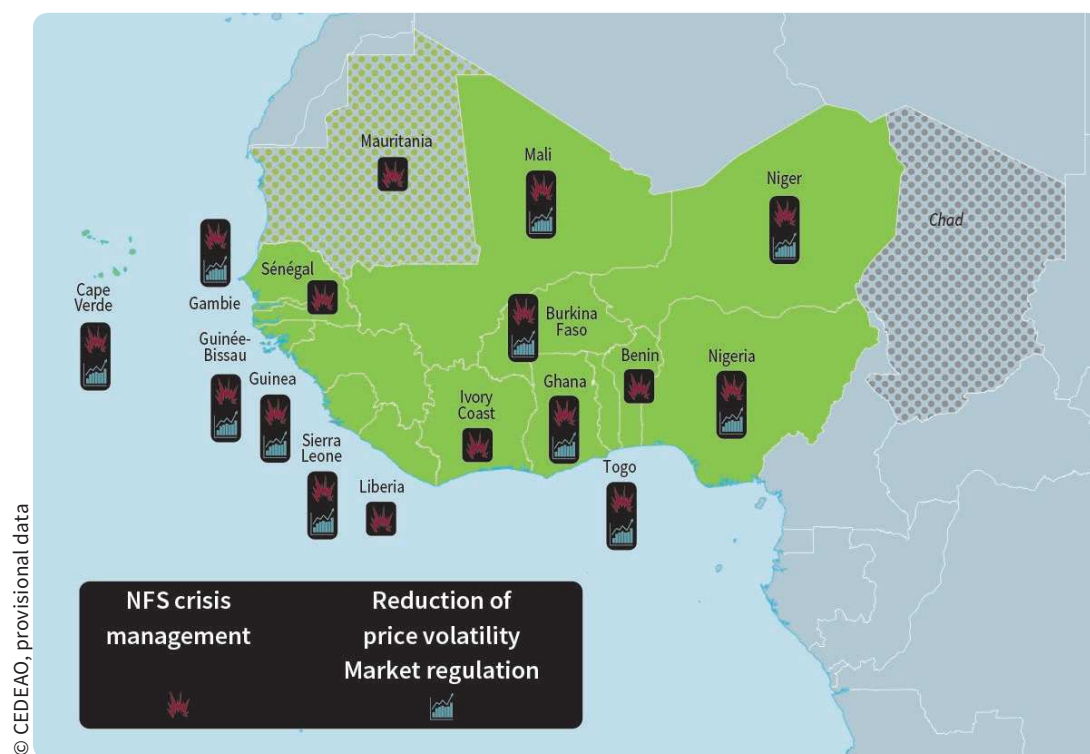
Each country is sovereign in the choice of its mutualisation option.

Nevertheless, in the absence of a dedicated technical secretariat and increased support from CILSS and ECOWAS, RESOGEST is struggling to carry out its programme of activities, in particular the pooling of human resources qualified in stock management and their mobilization for the benefit of other countries.

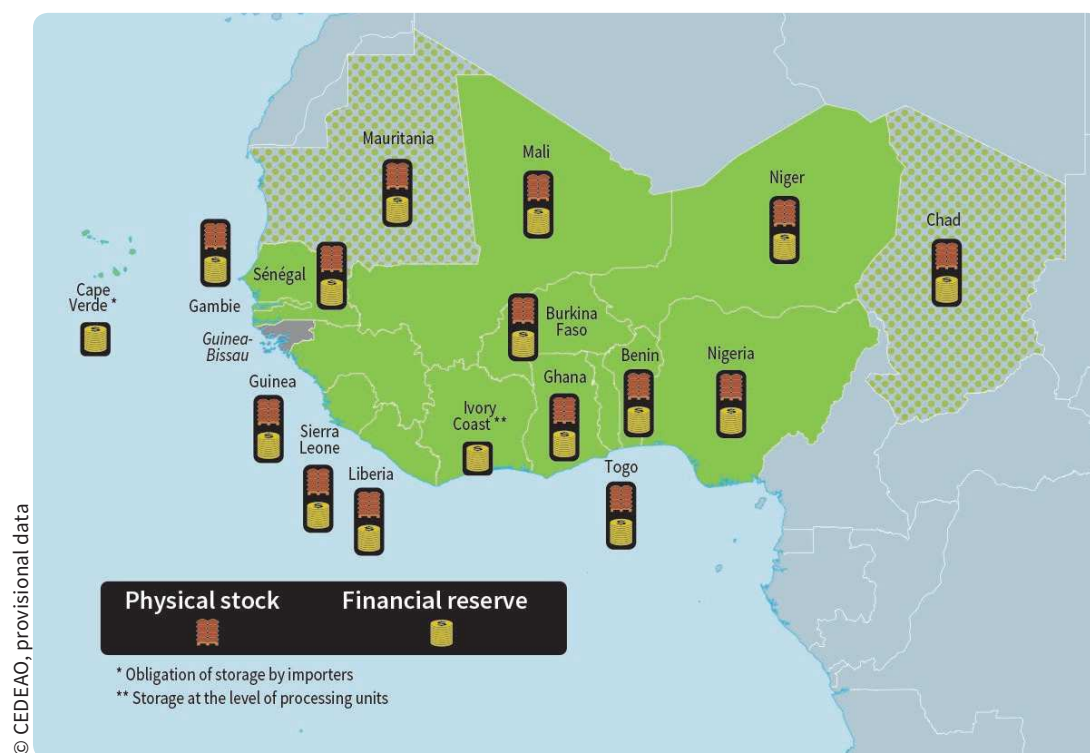




**Map 3 : Objectives pursued by the national storage strategy**



**Map 4 : Intervention instruments programmed in the national storage strategy**



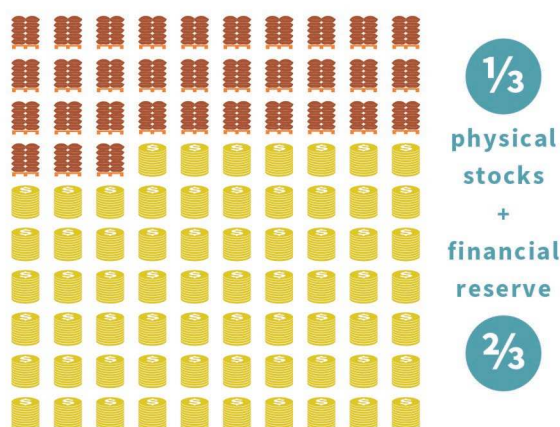
## 4. The Regional Food Security Reserve: the third line of defense

THE ECOWAS CONFERENCE of Heads of State and Government adopted in 2013 a Supplementary Act to the ECOWAS Treaty establishing the Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR). Constituting the third line of defense of the regional food security storage strategy in West Africa, the RFSR aims to respond effectively to food crises in the region alongside States and stakeholders, and has three specific objectives: (i) to complement the efforts of Member States to provide rapid and diversified food and nutritional assistance; (ii) to express regional solidarity with affected Member States and populations through transparent, equitable and predictable mechanisms; and (iii) to contribute to food sovereignty and the political, economic and trade integration of West Africa.

### 4.1. The main technical characteristics of the Regional Reserve

Based on a retrospective analysis of crises and demographic prospects, the RFSR's cruising phase calibration has been set at 411,000 metric tons. In order to ensure responsiveness and flexibility in the choice of crisis response instruments, the RFSR is composed of two instruments with complementary purposes and uses: a physical stock and a financial reserve.

**The Regional Reserve = 411,000 metric tons**



The physical stock (see map 5, next page) is stored within sub-areas of countries grouped according to diets (staple foods), the main production basins in the region and the intensity of food risk, namely:

- Eastern sub-area: Nigeria, Niger and Benin;
- Central sub-area: Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo;
- West Atlantic sub-area: Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde;
- Gulf Atlantic sub-area: Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Within these sub-areas, the storage countries are chosen according to the production areas and crisis-prone areas in order to optimize logistics costs. Products destined for the West Atlantic and Gulf Atlantic sub-areas are stored in Mali due to the non-contractualization of storage space in the West Atlantic sub-area and the inexistence of national storage structures in the Gulf Atlantic sub-area.

### 4.2. Governance of the Regional Reserve

The operation of the Regional Reserve is based on transparent, equitable and predictable management. To this end, it has legal and regulatory instruments as well as governance bodies with specific roles (see illustration 3, next page).

The Reserve's procedures manual is in line with the general administrative and financial procedures of ECOWAS, but deals with all the technical procedures for each of the Reserve's operations in different modules: procurement, reception and quality control, food conservation, destocking, interventions, etc. Four additional modules relating to (i) procurement from POs, (ii) procurement of nutritional products, (iii) procurement of livestock feed, and (iv) technical rotation, are being finalized and will complete the arsenal of procedures. The Management Committee with its Executive Bureau is the key element of the Reserve's governance. It decides on all the operations surrounding its functioning: purchases, technical rotations and interventions in response to a crisis. It is chaired by the Member State that presides over ECOWAS and involves all the Member States, Chad and Mauritania, regional institutions (ECOWAS, WAEMU, CILSS, RESOGEST), civil society and the private sector. Technical and financial partners may participate as observers.

Map 5 : Prepositioning of the Regional Reserve stocks

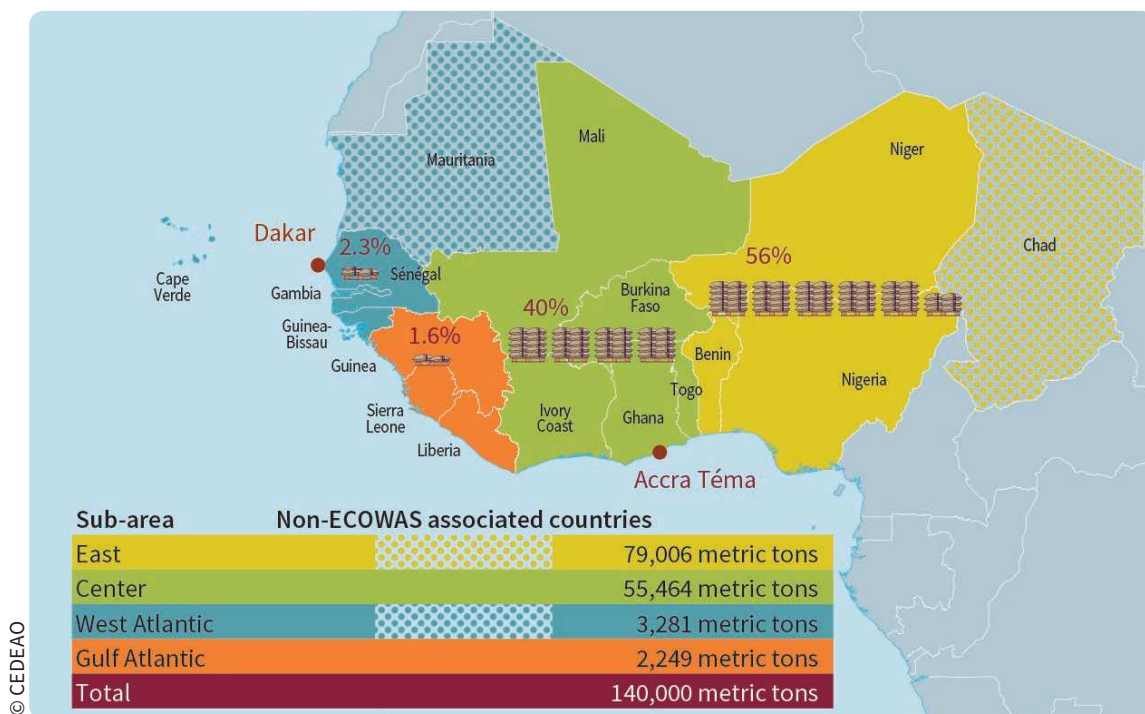
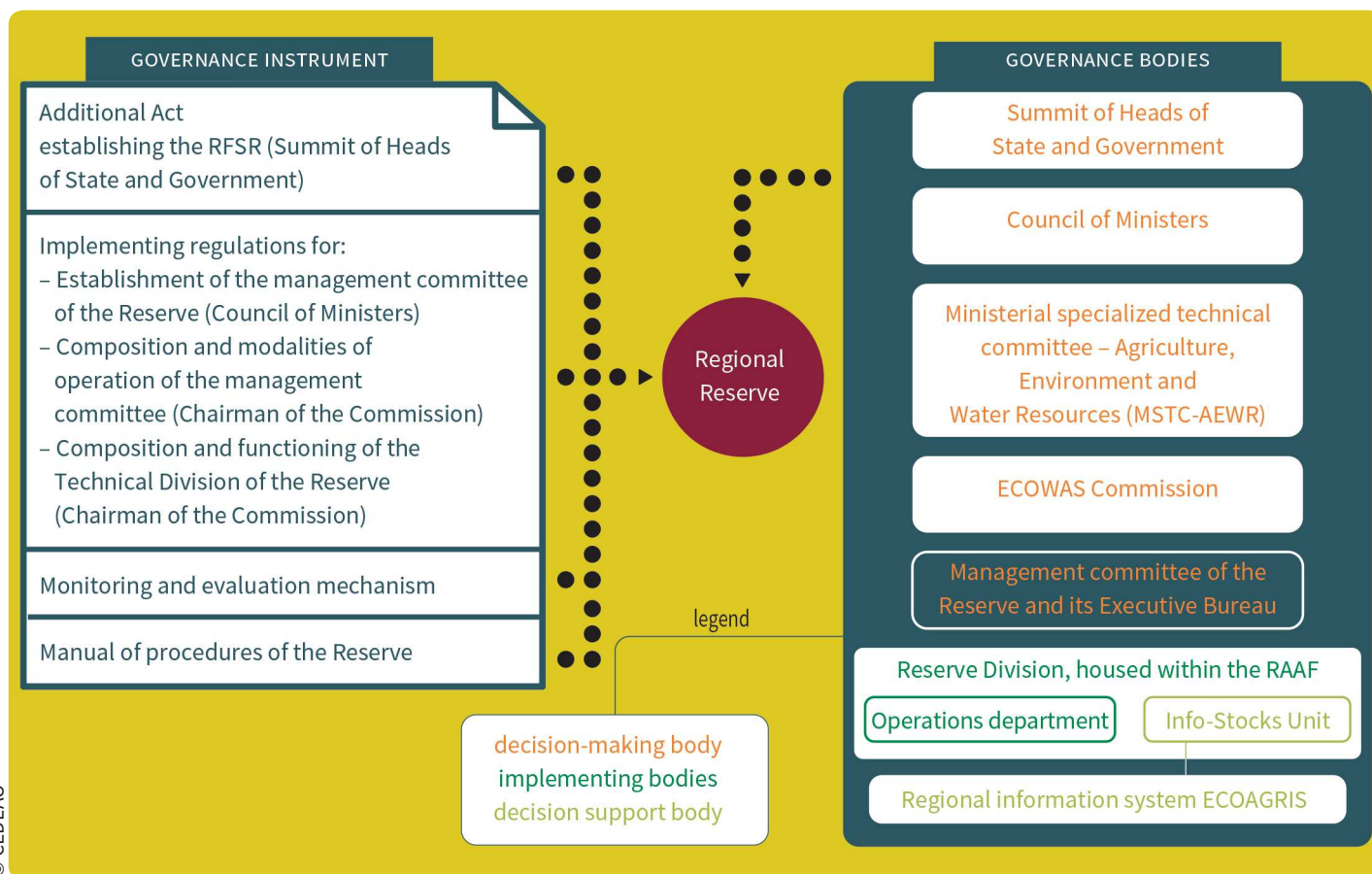
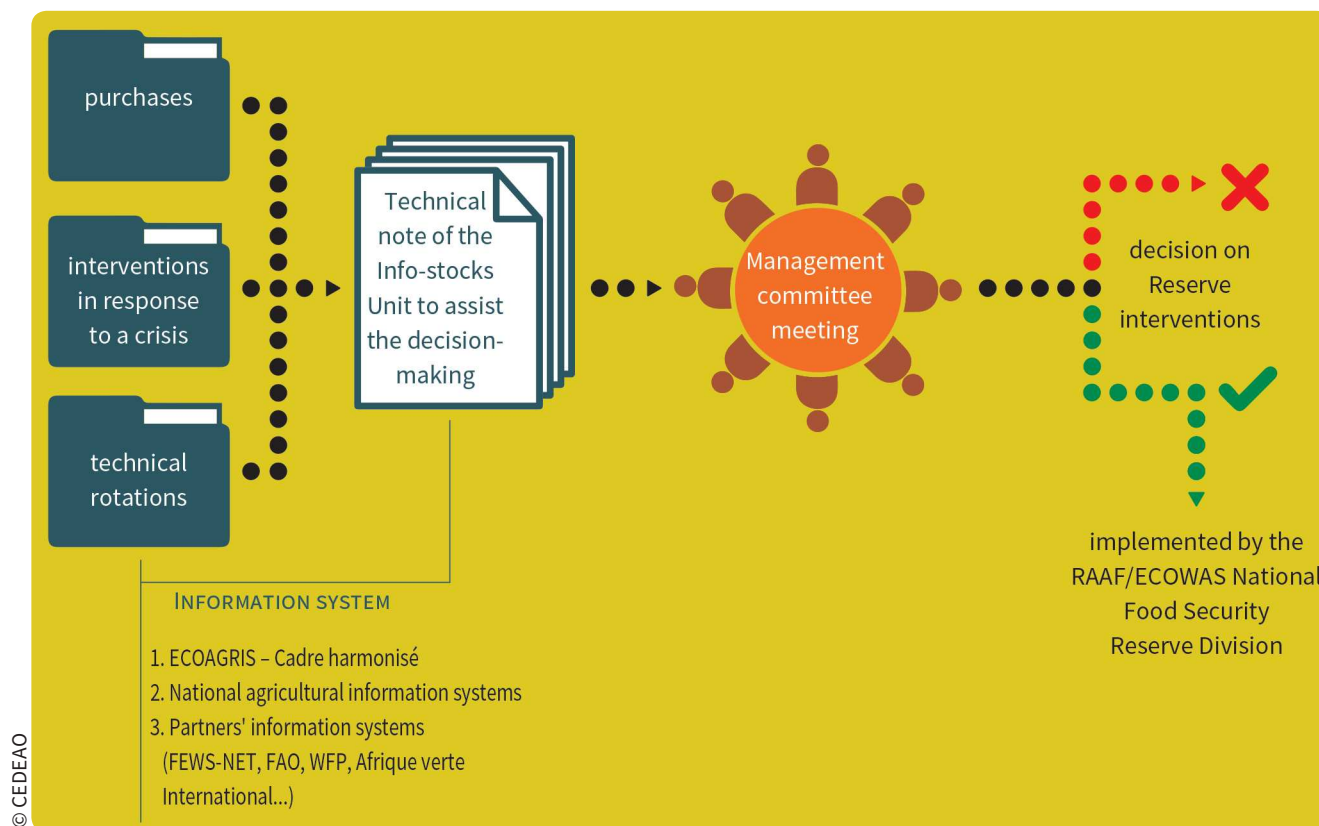


Illustration 3 : Governance of the Regional Reserve





**Illustration 4 : Prerogatives of the Management Committee**



The Technical Division of the Reserve, housed within the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF), is the technical management body of the RFSR, comprising an operations department and a decision support unit (Info-stocks Unit). The latter plays a crucial role in supporting the Management Committee. To this end, it relies on the regional agricultural information platform (ECOAGRIS), supported by ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS, which allows for the analysis of the current and projected food situation through the consensual methodology of the Cadre harmonisé (CH).

The Info-stocks Unit's analyses of the Reserve's interventions essentially use the information provided by the regional ECOAGRIS system, which aggregates the data produced by the countries, but also relies on the other information systems operational in the region, run by partner institutions (FEWS NET, FAO, WFP, Afrique Verte

International, etc.) However, there are still major capacity problems in these national and regional information systems that can affect the availability, regularity and reliability of the information. Insecurity in some Sahelian areas also affects data collection and leads to the exploration of new methods and technologies (drones). This issue is all the more crucial as it concerns areas with high food and nutritional insecurity.

#### 4.3. The operation of the physical reserve

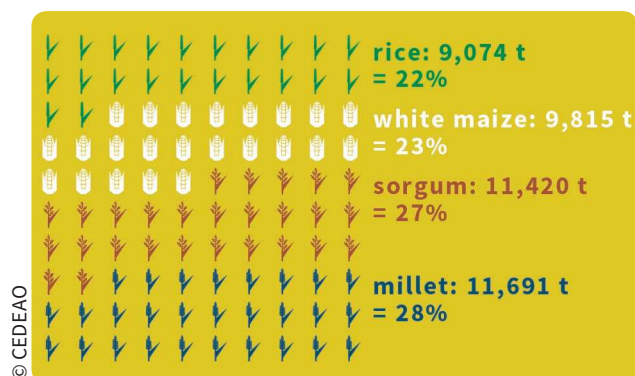
The operation of the physical reserve includes the supply, reception and quality control of foodstuffs, storage and grain conservation protocols, technical rotation and, finally, the supply of nutritional products and livestock feed.

### Supply of physical stock

Given the financial amounts involved, it relies on systematic international tendering procedures. However, the procedures ensure a preference for regional purchases and purchases from POs. Of all RFSR purchases, only 13% of cereals were imported (Asian rice). However, despite the information and capacity building efforts made by ECOWAS to involve POs, only 10% of the stock was supplied by them, the rest being supplied by private traders. This poor performance reflects (i) the administrative difficulties of the procedures (complex bidding documents), (ii) the limited supply capacity of POs in standardized products; (iii) shortcomings in the financing of collection, storage and standardization of POs; and finally, (iv) problems of competitiveness.

Since its inception, the RFSR has built up a stock of nearly 42,000 metric tons of cereals (including a purchase in the process of being delivered) broken down as follows in accordance with the basic diets in the region:

**Illustration 6 : Composition of the physical stocks in the Regional Reserve in April 2021**



### Food storage

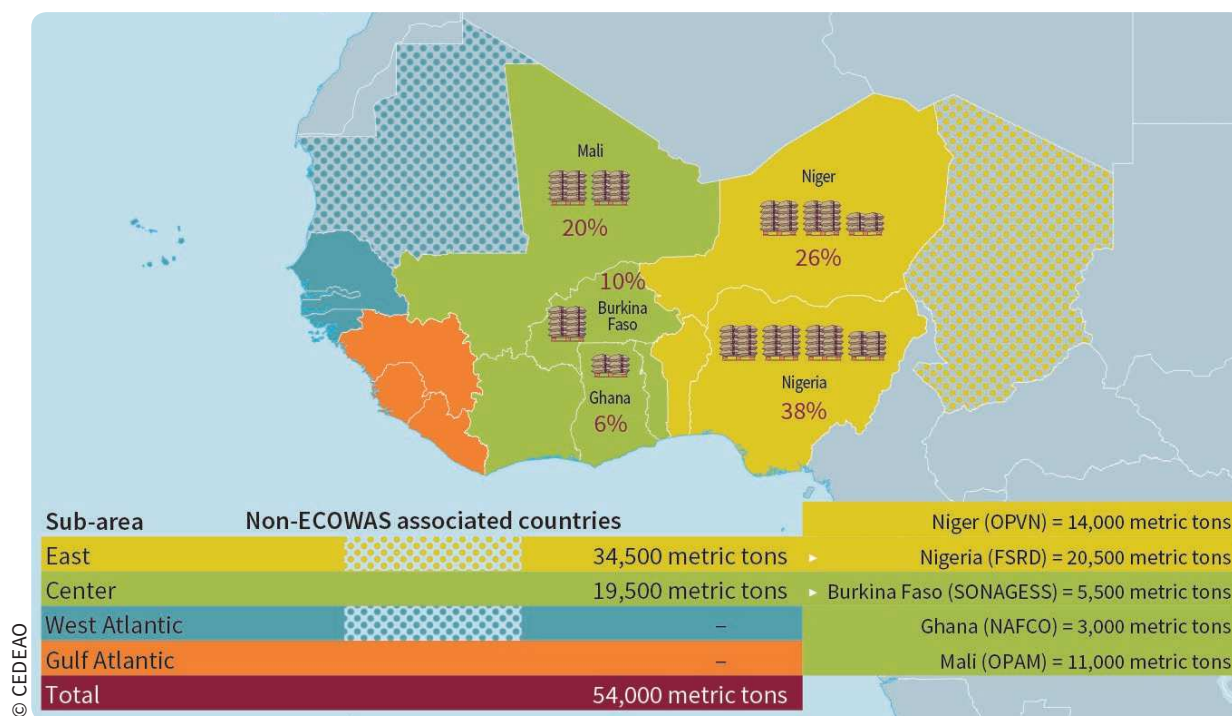
The RFSR storage space has been directly contracted with national storage companies in order to exploit available storage capacity and reduce investment costs. However, it is not excluded that private storage spaces or those held by the United Nations System (UNS) or certain NGOs may be used in the future, particularly in countries that do not have a dedicated public institution and public storage infrastructure. The storage capacity contracted with national structures is currently 54,000

**Illustration 5 : Purchases by type of suppliers and geographical origin**



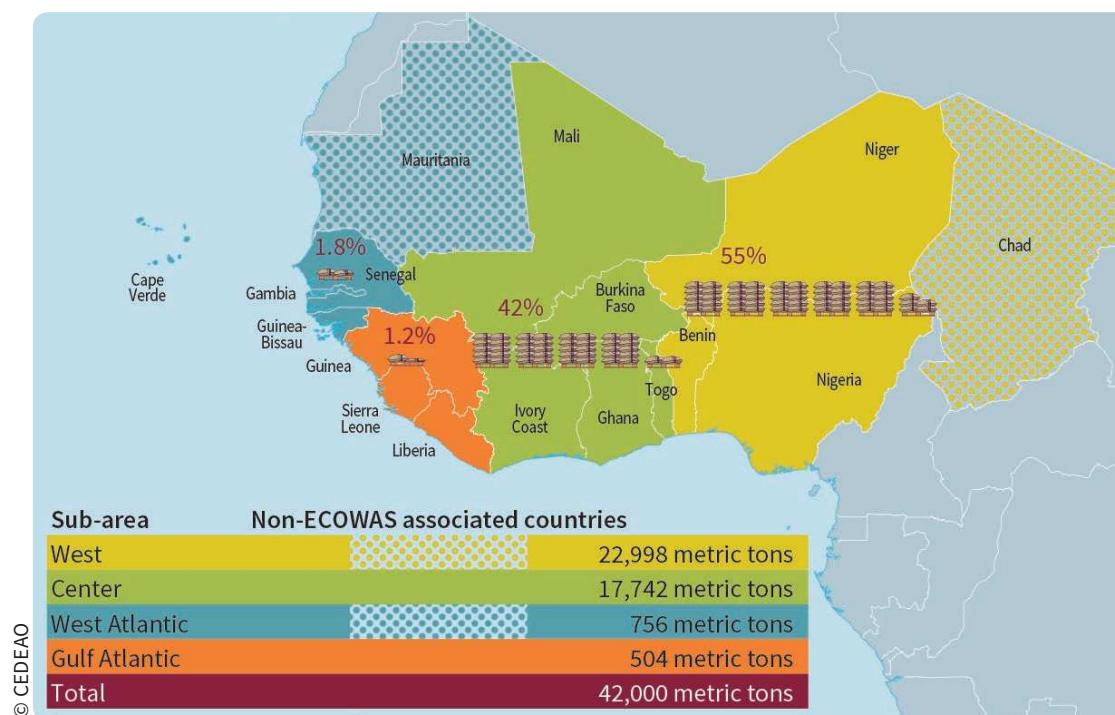
metric tons, distributed according to the storage sub-areas as follows:

**Map 6 : Warehouse capacity leased from national storage companies**



In 2021, the RFSR uses 42,000 metric tons of contracted capacity (78%).

**Map 7 : Distribution of stocks constituted by the Regional Reserve**



### Receiving, quality control and stock monitoring

Quality and quantity controls are carried out at all stages of stock supply by the national storage struc-

ture and an independent control office, in accordance with the Codex Alimentarius standards defined by the FAO and WHO, which are often more rigorous than the



standards used by the national storage bodies themselves. Stock monitoring is carried out on a quarterly basis by the national storage structure, ECOWAS and an independent firm.

### Grain preservation

The service contracts concluded with the national storage companies include a precise protocol for stock maintenance: routine inspections, regular fumigation and spraying operations, exceptional operations in the event of detection of attacks by pests, security and surveillance of warehouses.

### Technical rotation

The principle of technical rotation of RFSR stocks from the second year of constitution was validated by the Reserve Management Committee, so as to reduce as much as possible the losses of nutritional and organoleptic quality of cereals. Three modalities of technical rotation of the stock are foreseen: (i) contribution to food crisis management programmes; (ii) multi-year contracts with national social safety net schemes; and (iii) sales on the regional market by public offer of sale, when the volumes destocked under the first two modalities are not sufficient to ensure rotation within the timeframe. The first technical rotation operation concerned stocks stored in Ghana (2,750 metric tons) to supply the government's school canteen programme. This operation is a good experience that ECOWAS is currently capitalizing on to define a stock rotation strategy that determines the best rotation periods so as not to erode the RFSR's capital. The countries' practices in the field of technical rotation have also been capitalized for this purpose.

### Supply of nutritional products

Nutritional products are specific products that make it possible to respond to the problems of malnutrition, particularly among young children. Taking into account the difficulties related to the supply and storage of these products (conservation, stability of the products) and the uncertainty on the needs, ECOWAS decided not to store this type of products but to equip itself with tools facilitating the supply in case of need, through framework contracts with the main producers of nutritional products in the region. To date, five West African companies have been pre-qualified after a competitive process and on-site inspections. They have been consulted in the framework of interventions to assist vulnerable populations in Niger in 2020. These tools can be better

exploited as soon as the financial reserve is in place and in a position to finance support in nutritional products.

### Feed supply

The response to pastoral crises is an important issue at two levels: (i) to avoid decapitalization of the herd (at least of the reproductive and productive core) and the loss of livelihoods of pastoralists and herders; (ii) to control cross-border transhumance flows and limit the conflicts that may arise from them. The prepositioning of concentrated feeds for livestock is difficult to envisage because of the variability of transhumance flows, the incentive they could represent and consequently the risks of livestock concentration, and finally because of the difficulties of conservation over a long period. Therefore, similar to nutritional products, ECOWAS has favoured the design of a rapid procurement procedure and has initiated a pre-qualification procedure for regional suppliers.



#### 4.4. The Regional Reserve's response to food crises

The RFSR is triggered in response to a food crisis on the basis of a request from an ECOWAS member country to the RFSR Management Committee (see illustration 7, next page). The country request must contain all the following elements:

- Information on the food and nutrition situation in the country based on the Cadre harmonisé (CH) analyses;
- Information on assistance needs, and the level of coverage of needs at the national level (1st and 2nd lines of defense) and the food deficit, including the country's National crisis response plan (NRP);
- The updated status of the country's national stocks and stock purchase projections;
- The modalities of replenishment of the Reserve retained by the country (grain for grain or monetary reimbursement by the country, third party payment, regional solidarity); and
- The national implementation and monitoring system (food distribution).

The country's request is then the subject of a technical note produced by the Info-stocks Unit to assist decision-making, based on the RFSR trigger criteria and other analysis factors, such as the availability of regional stocks in the storage sub-area to which the requesting country belongs to.

The *four triggers criteria* for mobilizing the RFSR are as follows:

- The area for which the country requested assistance is classified as Phase 3 or higher on the Cadre harmonisé scale;
- National capacities (local and national stocks) cover less than 66% of the consumption needs of the affected populations;
- The requesting country has a NRP; and
- The applicant country undertakes to replenish the mobilised stocks, depending on the reimbursement method chosen.

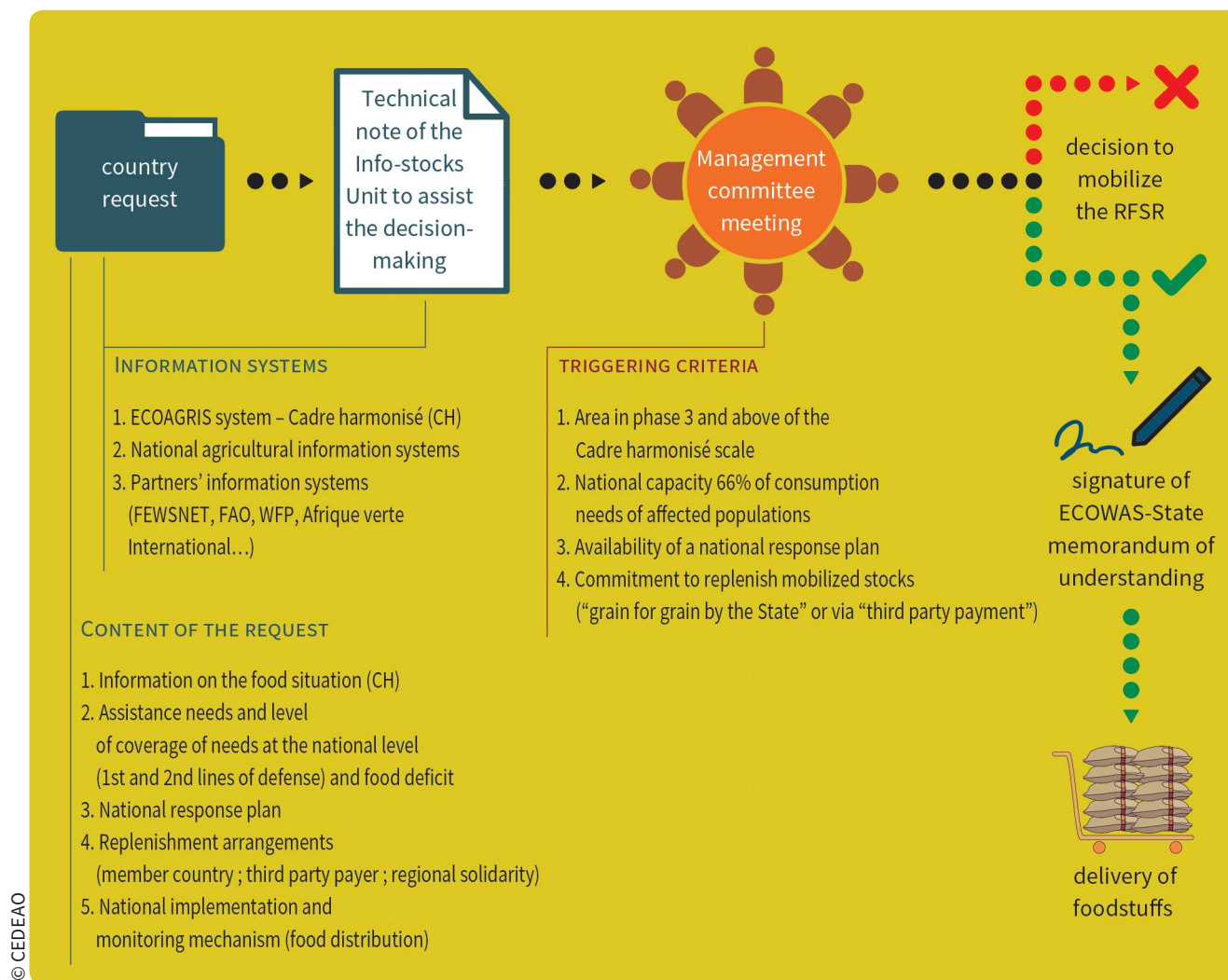
Based on the technical notes produced by the Info-stocks Unit, the Reserve Management Committee decides on the mobilization of the RFSR for the benefit of eligible countries in the light of the triggering criteria. A Memorandum of Understanding is then signed between the Government and the ECOWAS Commission, specifying the modalities for (i) the delivery of RFSR products, (ii) intervention (including monitoring and evaluation and the visibility of stakeholders) and (iii) the replenishment of stocks.

The main difficulties encountered in the analysis of States' requests concern the unavailability of data on national response capacities and the non-harmonization of the formats of countries' response plans, which makes it difficult to fairly apply certain trigger criteria to all countries.





**Illustration 7 : Process of triggering the Regional Crisis Response Reserve**



Since 2017, the RFSR has intervened in support of national response plans with four countries in food crisis situations (Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali) for a total volume of 26,036 metric tons of food. This corresponds to the food ration of 1,734,000 people for one month. This food was used by the countries in the form of free distribution to the population or sale at moderate prices in vulnerable areas, depending on the countries' targeting methods (self-targeting, administrative or geographical targeting). The technical rotation of stocks in Ghana was used to supply the government's school feeding programme for 104,680 children.

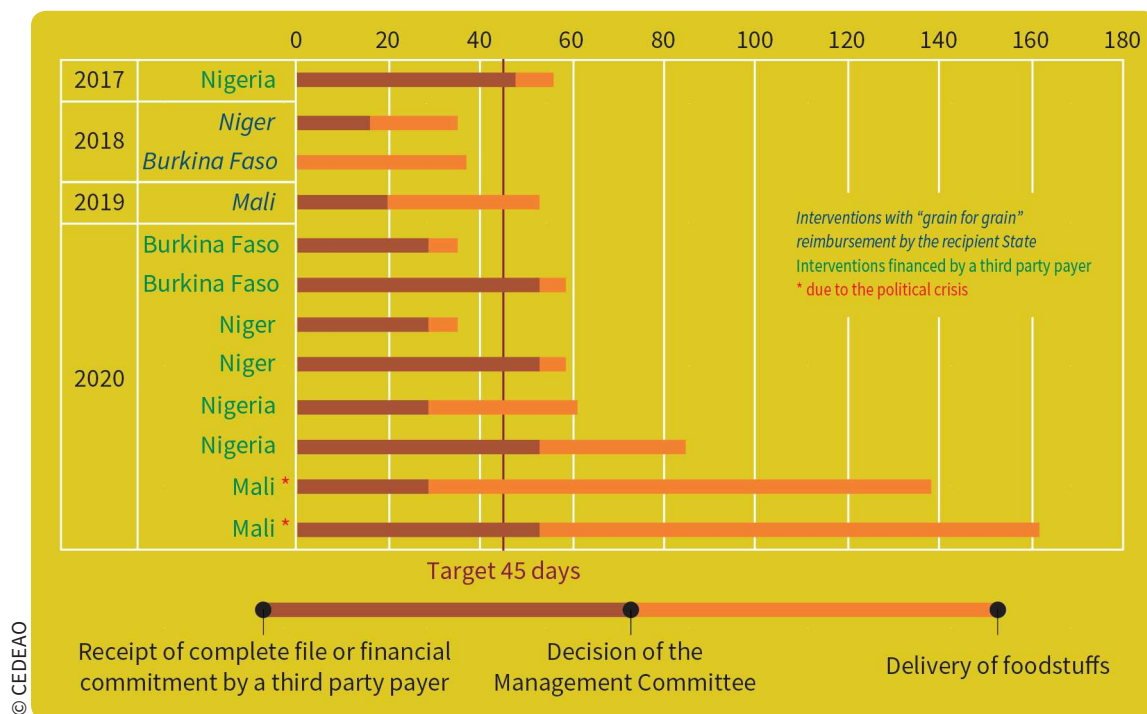
In terms of the time taken to process requests and implement interventions, which is an important indicator of RFSR's effectiveness given its emergency response role, the first intervention in 2017 in response

to the humanitarian crisis in Northern Nigeria proved to be underperforming. Nevertheless, subsequent operations were conducted much more efficiently, with lead times ranging from 37 to less than 60 days from receipt of the complete country request to the delivery of food, in 2018, 2019 and partly in 2020 despite the difficulties induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter, combined with the insecurity problems in Nigeria and the temporary sanctions imposed on Mali by ECOWAS following the coup, explain the response times well beyond the target in 2021, the target being 45 days (see illustration 8, next page).

Efforts still need to be made at the country level to improve ownership of the procedures to trigger the RFSR and to send complete requests quickly, thereby reducing the time required for intervention.



**Illustration 8 : Regional Reserve response times vs. target (days)**



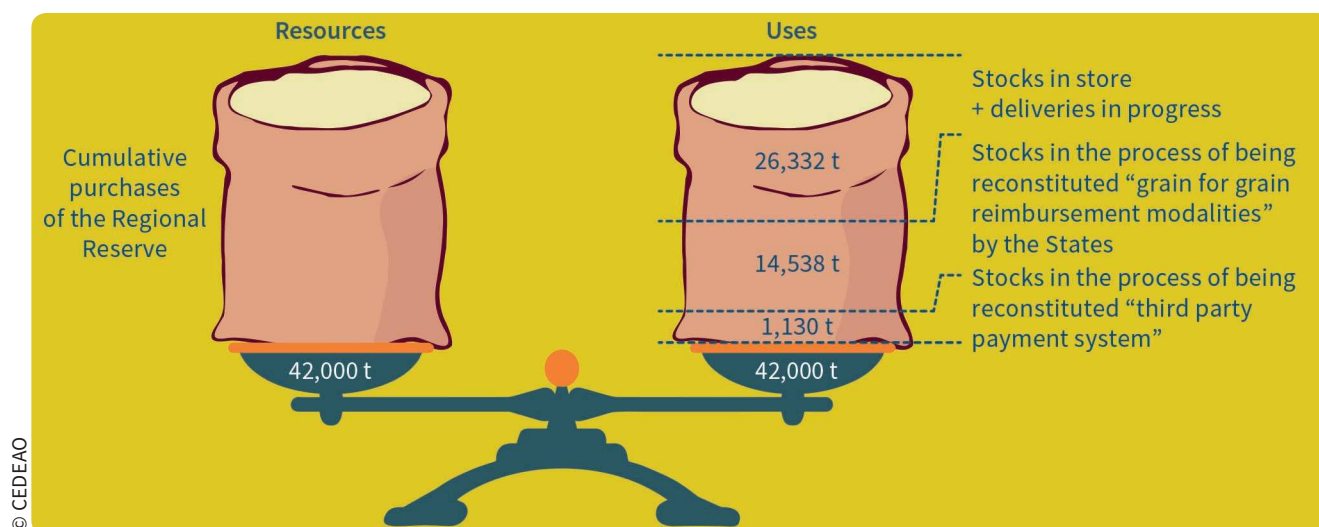
#### 4.5. Rebuilding the Regional Reserve

The replenishment of stocks, which is necessary in order not to erode the capital of the RFSR, is reflected in a commitment at the highest level of the country's authorities. For the physical stock, the replenishment is based on three modalities: (i) "grain for grain" reimbursement (physical or monetary, financial equivalent of the RFSR stock); (ii) third party payment; or (iii) regional

solidarity (ECOWAS or WAEMU budget, or mobilization of national pooled stocks).

Nevertheless, the contractual deadlines for replenishment could not be met by the States. However, significant progress has been made since the end of 2020 in the replenishment of stocks borrowed in 2018 and 2019 from the RFSR. These difficulties raise the issue of financing interventions in countries facing significant food difficulties each year.

**Illustration 9 : Capital of the Regional Reserve**



## 4.6. Operation of the financial reserve

The financial reserve is the second component of the RFSR. It is housed within the “food and nutrition security window” of the ECOWAS Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food (RFAF). It is more flexible than the physical stock, and will allow to deploy diversified responses to food crises (nutritional products, livestock feed, etc.) according to the specific needs of the affected populations and to ensure the logistical costs of interventions.

In 2018, the Ministers of Agriculture adopted the main guidelines for the implementation modalities of the financial component of the RFSR, as well as the overall financial mechanism of the RFSR, in accordance with the principles adopted in the ECOWAP/CAADP financing mechanism. The discussions held on the allocation of a significant share of the Community Levy resources to

the financial reserve and the ongoing consultations with African Risk Capacity (ARC) on insurance mechanisms for financing the RFSR interventions reflect ECOWAS’ commitment to operationalizing this important pillar of the Reserve.

In order to pave the way for the institutionalization of the financial reserve mechanism, ECOWAS has given a strong impetus to the effective establishment of the RFAF, through the signing of the Agreement with the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) on the management of the Fund in February 2019. The RFSR has also received initial allocations from the ECOWAS Commission budget in 2020 and 2021.

ECOWAS and the EBID, as administrator of the RFAF, are currently refining the procedures for replenishing and mobilizing the financial reserve.





## 5. The regional storage strategy: achievements and challenges

SINCE 2015, the operationalization of the regional storage strategy, with support at the local, national and regional levels, has resulted in major achievements and important lessons learned. The difficulties encountered highlight the aspects on which the next phase of deployment of the regional storage system will have to focus its attention.

### 5.1. Major achievements...

At the end of these five years of implementation of the regional strategy, significant achievements have been made:

- The establishment of the RFSR, its physical capitalization and the adoption of its governance instruments (regulatory texts and procedures manual) and its governance bodies (decision-making, decision-support and implementation bodies);
- Experimentation of the different operation mechanisms of the Reserve: supply, reception and quality control, conservation of food, triggering in response to crises (12 interventions since its creation), technical rotations, etc.
- The definition of specific rapid supply modalities for nutritional products and livestock feed, in response to nutritional and pastoral crises respectively (pre-qualification of suppliers in the region);
- Strengthening of agricultural information systems for better monitoring of stocks at the regional level, and the establishment of information systems on local stocks, private stocks and national public stocks;
- Definition of the management arrangements for the financial reserve;
- The contractualization of storage spaces with the national stock management structures, allowing a reduction in storage costs, the development of their skills and their strong involvement in the animation of the regional storage system;
- A better knowledge of the practices and mechanisms of countries and POs in terms of storage and the geographical networking of national and local stocks;
- The adoption-revision of the countries' national storage policies, through a differentiated support approach according to the specific situation of each country, in coherence with the regional storage system and based on a capitalization work of the good practices of public stocks management;

- Improvement in the governance system of national stocks, in particular through: (i) clarification of institutional arrangements; (ii) the design of “Food Security and Nutritional Contingency Plans” (FSN/CP); and (iii) the training of managers;
- Institutional strengthening and pooling of skills of the regional network of national storage structures (RESOGEST);
- Improving the governance, structuring and networking of local storage organizations, in particular through the development of regional reference systems on local storage based on their experiences in the region;
- The establishment of a sustainable regional training capacity for local stock managers and officers;
- The development of interactions between the three lines of defense of the storage system, opening up two fundamental areas of work: (i) contractualisation between storage lines of defense to optimize complementarities; and (ii) the development of financing mechanisms adapted to the needs of local storage organizations, and the promotion of third-party ownership;
- Unlike slow-onset food and nutrition crises, sudden shocks cause “global humanitarian crises”, affecting populations whose basic needs are no longer covered. This has led to the development of dialogue and operational cooperation within ECOWAS between the Department of Agriculture, which oversees the Regional Reserve, and the Department of Social and Gender Affairs, which is responsible for humanitarian action. This synergy is bound to develop and also concerns the dialogue initiated with the international humanitarian community.

### 5.2. But also difficulties...

Difficulties encountered during the implementation of the system indicate the need to change some approaches. These difficulties include:

- The non-sequential mobilization of the various lines of defense, contrary to the theoretical scheme of the regional system based on the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity. This calls for much more sustained dialogue and coordination, particularly with the international humanitarian community;
- The low intervention capacities of the Regional Re-



serve, compared to the magnitude of the crises and food needs in the region;

- The difficulty of POs to supply the Regional Reserve for reasons both internal to them: (i) limited supply capacities in standardized products; (ii) competitiveness of offers compared to those of private traders; (iii) weak administrative capacity; and for external reasons: (i) shortcomings in the financing of collection, storage and standardization; (ii) complexity of tendering procedures; (iii) cumbersome export procedures when they have to deliver to another country;
- Difficulties in monitoring the delivery of RFSR food to final beneficiaries in the countries as well as the evaluation of interventions' impacts on the populations, due to the choice to support NRPs and thus to be part of their monitoring and evaluation system;
- The diversity of situations and problems between countries, which makes it difficult to harmonize storage purposes and practices at the regional level;
- The difficulty of implementing the commitments to pool 5% of national stocks (under RESOGEST) and to reconstitute mobilized stocks of the RFSR for countries facing new crises every year;
- The probable limits of the model of contracting RFSR storage space to national structures, linked to: (i) the disparity in storage modes between countries (silo, flat store); (ii) the increase in national stocks and the concomitant reduction in storage capacity available for the regional stock; (iii) the lack of infrastructures in some countries; and (iv) the assumption by some countries that RFSR stocks should be supplied by na-

tional suppliers and intended solely for intervention needs in the country;

- The weakness of national and regional information systems, which can affect the availability of data, the regularity and reliability of the information used for the analysis of the Cadre harmonisé, and more specifically the difficulty of maintaining a permanent watch on the level of local and private stocks;
- Difficulties related to the operationalization of the financial reserve, inserted in the RFAF: limited financial capacities of ECOWAS, reluctance of international financial partners to pool resources within a “common pot”, difficulties of replenishment due to the magnitude of the costs of humanitarian interventions;
- The complexity of the regional storage system, based on subsidiarity and solidarity, involving 17 States and a large number of socio-professional and private sector actors, and requiring constant efforts to raise awareness and inform the stakeholders in order to progress towards a common vision and convergent approaches;
- The rapid evolution of the nature and triggering modes of crises due to climate change, the rise in insecurity and health crises (transition from predictable, slow-onset crises to rapid-onset crises that are difficult to anticipate in terms of zones and scales), making it difficult to calibrate the interventions of the various lines of defense and in particular the location of the regional stocks pre-positioned in the storage sub-areas.



## 6. Prospects for the regional storage system

IN VIEW of the growing risks that the region will have to face, the innovative storage system set up by ECOWAS with the support of its partners must be strengthened and deployed simultaneously at the three levels that make up this original system, which is a vector of regional integration and solidarity. It must also be better integrated into social protection policies and the promotion of social safety nets for vulnerable households. Its contribution to the promotion of sustainable food systems, the improvement of producers' incomes and the reduction of price volatility on the regional market must be consolidated. Finally, and this is the key to everything, the system must strengthen its institutional foundations, be systematically based on good management principles and develop innovative and sustainable financing mechanisms.

**Ensure the increase in regional storage and intervention capacity at the level of the three lines of defense, to deal with the consequences of growing economic shocks**

Faced with the consequences of cyclical shocks, with diversifying causes, increasing scale, and with the interactions between cyclical and structural factors becoming more complex, the regional storage system must simultaneously: (i) adapt to cope with the diversity of shocks and modes of triggering crises; (ii) develop its institutional capacities; (iii) increase its intervention capacities; and finally, (iv) evolve towards a sustainable and durable economic model and financing mechanism to enable the region to better assume its sovereignty in crisis management. The regional physical and financial





storage system as a whole, with its three levels, should be able to have an intervention capacity of nearly 2 million metric tons, exclusive of private storage: 1.5 million metric tons at the national storage level and 411,000 metric tons at the regional storage level, as provided for in the feasibility study (conventional level), a reference for the Supplementary Act establishing the Regional Reserve. The replenishment of the regional financial reserve should make it possible to increase interventions targeted at nutritional and pastoral crises and to better adapt crisis response modalities and tools to the specific contexts of the crises.

The regional physical stock, apart from the national stocks pooled to support the Regional Reserve, should be rapidly increased to 150,000 metric tons. The mechanisms for financing interventions, and consequently for reconstituting and protecting the capital of the RFSR, should give priority to the third-party payment procedure in the context of designing the national response plan and negotiating its financing.

Finally, the evolution of the Regional Reserve's procedures, based on the capitalization of experience and in the light of the evolution of the modes of triggering food crises (sudden shocks), will have to be carefully examined by ECOWAS and its partners in order to adjust the governance of the RFSR and its capacity to respond to shocks. This will allow for better coverage of the diversity of crisis forms.

#### **Ensure strong integration and coherence between food security storage policy, social protection policies for the most vulnerable households and resilience building**

Local storage is one of the major tools for strengthening the resilience of populations and the social protection of households. It constitute a lever, managed directly by the populations themselves. Consequently, the second stage of building the regional strategy will have to pay particular attention to these issues, by ensuring the deployment of initiatives such as the supply of school canteens, public institutions (army, prisons, hospitals...) and social food security net programmes that link the fight against food and nutritional insecurity, the reduction of vulnerability and development.

In this respect, encouraging the deployment, structuring and professionalization of local storage organizations, which are both the first line of defense against shocks and a major instrument for strengthening the resilience of local communities, is a key priority.

Contractualisation between national and regional stocks on the one hand and local stocks on the other should be encouraged to avoid the *distorting effects* of public intervention in the event of a crisis and the economic jeopardy of grassroots organisations (fall in local prices linked to food donations or heavily subsidised sales) and to strengthen the latter in their role of managing food security.

Finally, the integration of local, national and regional reserves into social safety net programmes geared towards social protection and socio-economic inclusion should be strongly supported. This implies strong cooperation between the ministries in charge of agriculture, food security and social protection.

#### **Include the food reserve system in the promotion of sustainable and more resilient food systems, with a view to building an integrated regional market**

Food security stocks are not independent of local, national, regional and international food markets. Over the past 25 years, the food market in West Africa has expanded considerably, driven by population growth and urbanization. The deployment of sustainable and efficient food systems is therefore an issue of prime importance. The structuring of national and regional agri-food chains including production, processing, storage and distribution of standardized products, respecting sanitary quality standards, etc., is fundamental to prevent coastal cities, which concentrate a large part of the regional population, from favouring supplies from the international market.

Local stocks play a dual role in integrating households into the market and combating price volatility, on the one hand, and as a precautionary strategy or food risk management, on the other.

National stocks and the regional food security reserve are also fully integrated into the market, both to ensure their supply (from private operators and producers' co-operatives) according to various modalities, and to limit price surges by influencing the market through interventions in the form of free distribution or subsidized and targeted sales.

Consequently, there are many links between the different categories of stocks: (i) food security stocks; (ii) public or public/private stocks targeted at managing price volatility; (iii) warrantage and third-party holding, where the pledging of products facilitates access to credit for producers; (iv) stocks held by professional organizations; and finally, (v) stocks held by private op-



erators (traders and processors).

The development of storage policies must therefore be linked to strategies for structuring value chains, including aspects related to the reduction of post-harvest losses, quality management and, in particular, the fight against aflatoxins, and product processing and distribution.

In addition to food security storage, which has a very specific purpose, the promotion of storage with good technical control at the level of producers' organizations and private operators is one of the essential means of reducing losses and consequently of reducing imports, and of progressing towards regional food sovereignty.

Market price volatility is one of the major factors of food risk. They affect both producers and consumers.

Thus, whatever the purpose of storage, considerable investments must be made to improve the quality of products, reduce losses and health risks for consumers (training, construction of suitable warehouses and equipment, etc.). The banking sector, which has important forms of collateral through the practice of pledging stocks, is particularly invited to develop financial servic-

es that meet the various types of needs, from the plot to the distribution of food products.

Numerous programmes, including the ones at the ECOWAS level, are being deployed to support producers in transforming their production systems in order to improve their resilience to climate change. The promotion of agroecology is part of this perspective. The same applies to the promotion of local food systems that better and more directly link producers, processors and distributors to local demand. Certification of agricultural and food products is being promoted. Public stocks, by favouring purchases based on sustainable production systems, can play an important role in driving and encouraging producers to change their agricultural practices.

Given their major role in promoting food systems, private operators, professional organisations, national and regional public authorities, the financial and banking sector and insurance systems must be encouraged to deploy contractualisation approaches that make it possible to articulate the various storage methods, increase the predictability of markets and prices and design appropriate risk management tools.





### Ensure that the specificities of the regional storage system are taken into account in international arrangements and the resulting trade rules, in particular in the context of WTO negotiations and G20 initiatives

The integration of agricultural products into the field of world trade regulations in 1986 signaled a form of armistice in the battle over subsidies, which had become very difficult to bear for the public budgets of the major OECD exporting countries. The reduction in public support for agriculture decided by the international community within the framework of the Uruguay Round thus called into question storage strategies, because of the risks of distorting market prices. These questions of countries or regions' sovereignty and their room for manoeuvre in terms of storage are still under discussion at the WTO (see the Doha Declaration).

In West Africa, liberalization policies have banished any idea of public intervention in the markets. Cereal offices, which were deemed to be inefficient in terms of collection and marketing, were restructured and re-focused on the management of a food security stock of limited size, intended to make up for supply shortages while waiting for the arrival of imports and food aid (in the case of the Sahel countries).

The global food and energy crisis of 2007-08 has brought storage issues back to the centre of the global village. The G20 (Cannes, 2011) took the initiative to support a pilot project of regional reserve and selected West Africa for this purpose.

Public and private storage policies are essential policy tools for securing sustainable food systems, regulating the market and managing food crises. However, they should not be used as instruments of dumping on external markets. In this respect, a balanced multilateral international agreement, taking fully into account the specific challenges of African countries and more generally of developing countries, is essential.

West Africa should play an active role in these international negotiations, in particular by: (i) coordinating the positions of ECOWAS Member States; (ii) developing consultations with other regional economic communities within the African Union; (iii) developing common approaches within the G33.

### Deploying innovative partnerships and financing mechanisms for physical and financial food reserves

The issue of structural funding of reserve systems is central to their sustainability and their ability to respond

to emergency needs. Given the pressure on national and regional public resources, the prospect of financial autonomy cannot be achieved in the short or medium term. Funding will necessarily have to be based on an arrangement and commitments between the region and the international community, between national and regional public institutions, financial or banking institutions and insurance and risk management systems.

Reserves may appear costly, like any preventive system. However, given the occurrence of food crises in the region and the cost of emergency response, the deployment and maintenance of a well-managed regional reserve system is of simultaneous benefit to the regional and international community.





In addition to increasing physical stocks to come closer to the conventional levels decided by the regional community, the deployment of the financial reserve within the framework of the operationalization of the ECOWAS Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food (RFAF) is a priority insofar as it makes it possible to diversify interventions and respond to the specificities of nutritional and pastoral crises.

Financing needs can be classified into different categories, which are themselves covered by distinct and complementary financing and risk management instruments. A distinction can be made between: (i) the financing required to build up the capital (physical stock); (ii) the financing related to the technical management of these stocks (storage costs, control, maintenance); (iii) the operating costs of the system; (iv) the costs of interventions and the reconstitution of the capital; (v) the costs of interventions mobilizing other modalities than the mobilization of the physical stocks (nutrition, livestock feed, contributions to cash transfer programs, etc.) within the framework of the financial reserves; and (vi) financing of storage and marketing by producer organizations and the private sector.

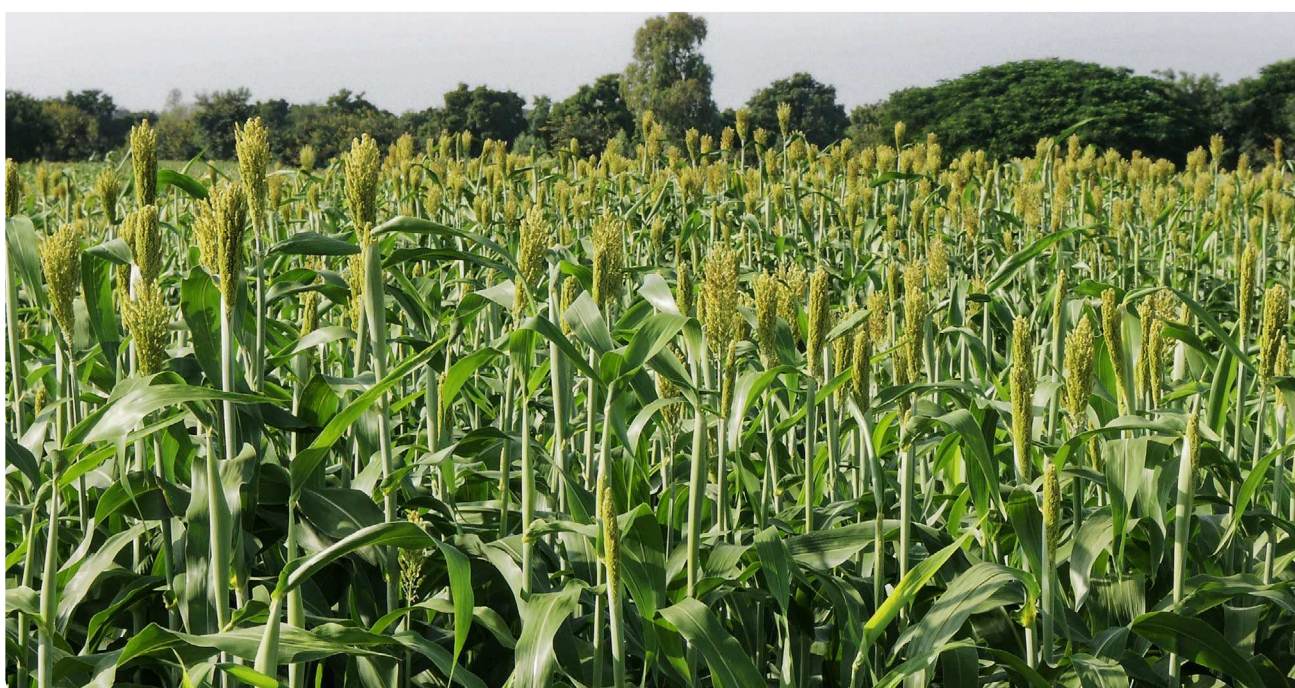
ECOWAS will also have to deepen dialogue with financial and banking institutions, financial partners and insurance systems to define sustainable financial mechanisms for deploying the regional financial reserve and, more generally, to meet the diversity and specificity

of the financing needs for food storage and marketing, on the one hand, and for solidarity interventions in the face of food, nutrition and pastoral crises, on the other.

In this context, the international humanitarian community is invited to become part of national and regional coordination mechanisms for programming and responding to humanitarian crises, and to align their interventions with national and regional response plans. It should make full use of endogenous mechanisms, in particular local, national and regional reserves. This coordination concerns: (i) the assessment of needs; (ii) the choice of response instruments according to the characteristics of the crises and the specific needs of the populations; (iii) the strengthening of the capacities of the region's mechanisms (in particular the stocks); (iv) the modalities of intervention to avoid inconsistencies; and (v) the financing of food and nutritional assistance.

More generally, the international humanitarian community should become more involved in the crisis response coordination mechanism at both national and regional levels under the leadership of ECOWAS.

In the context of the financing of national and regional response plans, the international humanitarian community and financial partners will necessarily have to move towards a stronger integration of the costs related to the mobilization and replenishment of local, national and regional reserves.





## 7. List of acronyms

**AECID:** Spanish Agency for International Cooperation  
**AFD:** French Development Agency  
**APESS:** Association for the Promotion of Livestock in the Sahel and Savannah  
**ARC:** African Risk Capacity  
**CH:** Cadre harmonisé  
**CILSS:** Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel  
**STC-AEWR:** Ministerial Specialized Technical Committee – Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources  
**DARD:** Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development  
**EBID:** ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development  
**ECOWAP/CAADP:** ECOWAS Agricultural Policy/Detailed Programme for the Development of African Agriculture  
**ECOWAS:** Economic Community of West African States  
**EU:** European Union  
**FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
**FEWS NET:** Famine Early Warning Systems Network  
**INADES Formation:** African Institute for Economic and Social Development – African Training Centre  
**NFS:** Nutrition and Food Security  
**NRP:** National Response Plan  
**OECD:** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
**PO:** Producer organization  
**RAAF:** Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food  
**RBM:** Billital Maroobe Network  
**RESOGEST:** Network of Societies and Offices in charge of National Stock Management  
**RFAF:** ECOWAS Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food  
**RFSR:** Regional Food Security Reserve  
**ROAC:** West African Cereal Network  
**ROPFA:** Network of Farmers’ and Producers’ Organizations of West Africa  
**TFP:** Technical and financial partners  
**UNS:** United Nations system  
**WAEMU:** West African Economic and Monetary Union  
**WFP:** World Food Programme  
**WHO:** World Health Organization  
**WTO:** World Trade Organization



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