



ECOWAS Commission consults West African cross-border agri-food inter-professional organizations with a view to the emergence of inclusive regional trade

Forty representatives of cross-border agri-food inter-professional organizations met from 31 October to 3 November 2023 in Dakar/Senegal to reflect on the promotion of an inclusive regional trade in agri-food products generated by local enterprises.

The consultation, organized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, provided a framework for an institutional and organizational self-diagnosis of existing and emerging cross-border agri-food inter-professional Institutions in West Africa, including issues on gender and environmental and social safeguards.

During four days of discussions, stakeholders and partners in the intra-regional agri-food market used the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological and Legal (PESTEL) tools to identify the current challenges facing inter-professional organizations, which are hampering their operation and impacting on the achievement of their objectives.

The Dakar regional meeting, part of the implementation of the West Africa Food System Resilience Programme (FSRP) financed by the World Bank and coordinated by ECOWAS, CILSS and CORAF for the benefit of 7 countries at present (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo), was attended by the ECOWAS Agricultural Trade Programme (EAT).

Agricultural production in West Africa has increased significantly in recent years, but marketing is still weak.

The representative of the ECOWAS Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development at the meeting, Dr Bio Soulé GOURA, stressed the importance of agricultural markets in the West African economy: "The market ensures and facilitates access to food by transferring goods, products and services between producers, distributors, manufacturers and consumers. It is therefore the primary guarantor of food and nutritional security for populations".

In fact, in the sub-region, the functioning of the market, in particular trade in food products, both at national and cross-border level, is important, with enormous potential, but has many imperfections that prevent it from playing its role as a guarantor of economic coordination, and a guarantor of the food and nutritional security of populations.

This is why the results of the Dakar meeting are expected, as underlined by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Equipment and Food Sovereignty of Senegal, Mr. Malick N'DAO. "The results of this consultation will fill a gap and enable countries to strengthen intra-regional trade in our sub-region, especially as official statistics show that trade in agri-food products only accounts for around 20-25% of the value of intra-regional



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trade, which in turn accounts for no more than around 15% of the region's overall trade transactions.

The stakeholder partners present drew up priority action plans to consolidate achievements and correct weaknesses through key activities to be carried out in the short, medium and long terms. FSRP at regional and country levels will include a number of activities in its 2024 work plan and budget (PTBA) to help strengthen these key partners and boost intra-regional trade in West Africa.

The Dakar meeting is therefore a first step in helping to meet the numerous challenges involved in creating a genuine intra-regional market for the benefit of players and partners operating in the agri-food sector.

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