Developments in Regional Integration in West Africa in 2012

Sectoral Policies: Agriculture

Agriculture is generally considered to be one of the best performing motors of growth for national and global economies. The increase in investments in African agriculture in order to promote its development forms part of the priorities of the NEPAD and of the African Union. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union who met in Maputo, Mozambique, in July 2003 and the subsequent adoption of the Declaration of Maputo on agriculture and food security in Africa, posed the first step towards increasing investment in regional agriculture. On this occasion, African leaders committed to increasing budgets for agriculture to 10 per cent over five years (2003-2008), a significant increase compared to the 4 to 5 per cent recorded beforehand.

In West Africa, the CAADP was broken down into the ECOWAS Common Agriculture Policy (ECOWAP), and the UEMOA Agricultural Policy (PAU).

The adoption of the ECOWAP in West Africa in 2005, addressing the priorities of the CAADP, shows the commitment of the States of the Community to deal with the challenges of the agriculture sector. The ECOWAS intends to re-launch agricultural productivity and the exports of food commodities and to eliminate poverty and hunger in the sub-region through the improvement of living conditions in the rural areas (ECOWAS, 2011). The food security objective of the common policy shows the importance that the sub-region grants to the elimination of hunger and the achievement of food self-sufficiency. The operationalization of the common policy is centered on six areas: the control of water, the shared management of natural resources, the promotion of sustainable agricultural holdings, the development of markets and the value chain approach, the prevention and management of food crises and other natural disasters, and institutional strengthening.

The adoption of a regional initiative for food production and the reduction of hunger in 2008 made it possible for them to set three priorities: increase food production, promote trade, and reduce vulnerability to food crises by strengthening the sustainable and sustained availability of food. Several actions have been implemented in the execution of the agriculture policy of the ECOWAS in West Africa. Among these actions was the establishment of the Regional Programme of Agricultural Investment, which was integrated into the national agricultural programmes of member countries.

UEMOA has four sectoral policies, adopted between 2000 and 2008: the Common Policy for Environmental Improvement (PCAE), the Agriculture Policy of the Union (PAU), the Common Mining Policy (PMC), and the Common Energy Policy (PEC), in particular the component relating to renewable energies.

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In the areas of rural development, natural resources, and environment, the Commission was granted broad powers by the Member States in the following areas: agriculture and herding; fishing and fish culture; food security; control of water resources; reforestation and desertification control and coastal erosion; protection of natural resources and biodiversity; improvement of the environment in rural and urban areas; monitoring of the implementation of the community mining policy; promotion of the research and exploitation of mineral resources, petroleum and gas; and promotion of new and renewable energies. The Commission adopted between 2000 and 2008 common sectoral policies, each including sub-policies and/or programmes.

The PAU, adopted in 2001, has the overall objective to contribute sustainably to the satisfaction of the food needs of the people, to the economic and social development of Member States and the reduction of poverty. The PAU was organized around three main areas of intervention: the adaptation of production systems and the improvement of the production environment; the development of the common market in the agriculture sector and the management of shared resources; and the inclusion of Union agricultural products in sub-regional and global markets. The programme has three implementation instruments, notably the multi-year programming of activities, the Regional Agriculture Development Fund (FRDA) and the Regional Agricultural Information System (SIAR). In practice, its implementation takes into account the actions of other actors and institutions in charge of agricultural development in the sub-region. As a result, it is based on seven guiding principles: subsidiarity, proportionality, regionality, complementarity, solidarity, progress, and partnership. The Conference of Heads of State and Government of the UEMOA, assembled in June 2012 in Lomé, proposed the development of structural reforms. The Conference adopted the results of the work of the High Level Committee on food security, and also recalled the necessity for Member States to apply the recommendation of the African Union Summit at Maputo in July 2003. Member States were invited to conduct appropriate actions to mobilize resources and lift the constraints on the acceleration of the implementation of the projects identified within the framework of the Regional Economic Programme (REP 2012-2016) and the Special Food Security Programme (PSSA).

In the countries of the sub-region, this has provided the inspiration for most recent national strategies for agricultural development. The majority of countries have granted during these last few years special attention to agricultural development. The results have not however, measured up to hopes, and countries still depend largely on the import of certain food commodities. However, it has been observed that in recent years national agricultural production has steadily increased, especially for rice and other traditional cereals, vegetables, pulses, and fruits. Nevertheless, in spite of the efforts made, West African agriculture remains very far from the level of development that can drastically reduce poverty and food insecurity and promote economic expansion. In addition, it exploits very little of the potential of the cultivable lands of the sub-region.

In spite of these efforts at national as well as sub-regional levels, the achievement of food security remains a major challenge for West Africa, which reminds us of the aggravation of the food situation in 2011-2012. Food insecurity tends to worsen from year to year in a context exacerbated by the effects of climate change, conflicts and various upheavals in different countries, energy deficits in the sub-region, and the global economic and financial crisis. Food shortages have therefore become chronic, and the heavy dependence of the agricultural sector reinforces the loss of livelihoods and increases the prevalence of poverty.