



Food Crises

A REGIONAL CHARTER FOR WEST AFRICA



BACKGROUND

The trouble with food aid

In the 70s and 80s, Sahelian countries on a huge scale resorted to food aid to cope with recurrent food emergencies due to drought.

Over time, the adverse side-effects of food aid emerged gradually, in particular:

- It tends to compete with local production;
- It has a negative impact on consumption habits;
- Co-ordination between aid suppliers and the region's political decision-makers was lacking.

A Network

In 1984, the *Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel* (CILSS), the *Club du Sahel* (renamed the Sahel and West Africa Club, SWAC/OECD) and their

partners founded the *Food Crisis Prevention Network* (RPCA), whose purpose is to foster co-ordination, policy dialogue and concerted action for improved food security.

A Charter

RPCA members quickly committed to draw up a Food Aid Charter. Following an extensive consultation process, the Charter was adopted in 1990 by the Heads of State and governments of the Sahel countries, together with their donors. Although this code of good conduct is not binding, the CILSS and SWAC/OECD conduct regular assessments to help the suppliers and beneficiaries of aid adapt their practices to its recommendations.

Its main strength lies in the shared motivation of all involved food security actors to minimise as much as possible the adverse side-effects of food aid so that it fosters development until aid can ultimately be phased out.

The Charter is a precursor to the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005) which upholds the same principles and also inspired the *Food Aid Convention* of 1999.

FROM MANAGING AID TO MANAGING CRISES

A changing world

Food crises are increasingly more complex and multidimensional today than in the past. The region's population has doubled since the early 80s and the proportion of urban dwellers has risen from 25% to nearly 50%. Free trade has generated a high degree of interdependence in the region's markets. While food security primarily depended upon a country's ability to produce its own food, it is now monetary income that largely determines access to food. World markets therefore have a powerful influence, and the current economic situation shows that prices can be high even where local output is abundant.

The institutional landscape has also greatly changed. Decentralisation unlocked a door which local actors have pushed open to make their voices heard. Farmers have become important discussion partners, supported by associations and NGOs that have become far more powerful. The regional organisations (ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS) also play an

important role in food security policy-making. New players such as Brazil, China and India, who did not sign the Charter, are now part of the new food aid system. Between 1988 and 2000, for example, food aid from China rose from 0.03% to 3.3% of the total food aid provided by donors.

The more complex nature of food crises has also created a need for a wider range of response tools and has prompted much thinking and discussion about food aid reform. Concepts are changing (from "food aid" to "food assistance"). New practices and some that were little used in the past are spreading (such as cash-oriented strategies, triangular purchases and local procurement) while others, such as direct transfers and monetised food aid, are used less and less.

The Charter is adapting

Considering the important changes in the food security landscape, all involved parties are convinced that the Food Aid Charter needs to be revised in order to adapt its goals, principles and methods as much as possible to the complexity and uncertainty of food supply problems in the Sahel and West Africa.

Renamed the **Charter for Food Crises Prevention and Management**, the revised Charter has been the subject of intensive discussions organised by CILSS under the auspices of ECOWAS, with support from the SWAC Secretariat. It is intended to reflect a new regional ambition to prevent food crises, while managing them effectively where they occur.

The Charter first addresses **prevention**: This includes early-warning and information systems to foster exchanges and facilitate the development of concerted action at the local, national, regional and international level. This is critical and determines the success of preventive actions and food crisis management.

The Charter also addresses **structural causes of food crises and the management of food crises**. It highlights the role of policy-makers, in particular regional economic organisations. To assess the impact of the Charter, it also proposes an evaluation mechanism and peer reviews.

The *Charter for Food Crisis Prevention and Management* translates into action the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, while evolving on two issues:

- It underlines that food aid can be more effective with regional-level planning (the new Charter covers ECOWAS member countries, Mauritania and Chad);
- It places special focus upon the structural dimension of food crises. In the long run, concerted, effective, and sustainable preventive actions should help enable the region to eliminate the need for food aid.



One process, two phases

Phase 1 (2007-2009) was conducted by an International Steering Committee involving stakeholders from West Africa, main donor countries, United Nations agencies and civil society organisations.

Phase 2 (2010-2011) consisted of a discussion cycle of national, regional and international dialogue meetings, and the adoption of the Charter under the auspices of ECOWAS in September 2011.

This dialogue involved many stakeholders:

- National/regional workshops involving government representatives, professionals, civil society.
- International consultations with main donors open to parties that did not sign the 1990 Food Aid Charter. The OECD's Development Aid Committee was also involved in the process.

Food Crises

National consultations within the 17 countries covered by the Charter

Mali	15-16 July 2010
Burkina Faso	22-23 July 2010
The Gambia	5-6 August 2010
Chad	30-31 August 2010
Benin	3-4 September 2010
Togo	6-7 September 2010
Niger	14-15 September 2010
Liberia	23-24 September 2010
Côte d'Ivoire	23-24 September 2010
Cape Verde	1 March 2011
Mauritania	7-8 March 2011
Guinea-Bissau	17-18 March 2011
Guinea	24-25 March 2011
Senegal	29 - 30 March 2011
Ghana	7-8 April 2011
Sierra Leone	11-12 April 2011
Nigeria	1-2 June 2011

International consultations with development partners

Consultations with traditional development partners and new donors	March 2010 - June 2011
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End of process and adoption of the new Charter

Production of a revised Charter text, taking into account proposals and outcomes from the dialogue meetings at the national, regional and international level.	June 2011
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Experts' meeting and Ministerial meeting of ECOWAS countries as well as Mauritania and Chad.	13-16 September 2011
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Contacts:

- ECOWAS: Mr. Rui Silva : sylva_rui@yahoo.com
- CILSS: El Hadj Dramane Coulibaly : dramane.coulibaly@cilss.bf
- SWAC/OECD: Mr. Sibiri Jean Zoundi : sibirijejan.zoundi@oecd.org

www.food-security.net

www.ecowas.int - www.cilss.bf - www.oecd.org/swac

