



# Food sovereignty in West Africa: *From Principles to Reality*

A document prepared by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)

*For the First Regional Forum on Food Sovereignty organised by ROPPA  
(Network of West African Peasant Organisations and Producers) in  
Niamey – November 2006*

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## 1. Executive summary

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1. Over the last forty years, three concepts have succeeded each other to describe planned or executed food policies. National food self-sufficiency was the watchword of the 1960s, while Nation States were being established. Food security came next, when economies – including agriculture-based economies – had to be adjusted and liberalised. Finally, the concept of food sovereignty emerged in recent years.
2. Food sovereignty was promoted at the World Food Summit (1996) by the farmers' movement Via Campesina and NGOs. It expresses "*the right of nations and governments to define their own agricultural and food policies.*"
3. The concept of food sovereignty arose at a time when the relevance of liberalising international trade in food products was strongly challenged. It also emerged in a context when the introduction of GMOs was being questioned, and therefore at a time when the autonomy of producers and their production technology was also being examined.
4. There are two immediate concerns about food sovereignty: (1) finding room to manoeuvre and the capacity to define policies which fulfil citizens' expectations as a priority; (2) how to reduce international interdependence and develop a form of agriculture focused on national or regional needs. We should also mention the issue of defining policies which do not involve dumping practices on other forms of agriculture.
5. Over the last two years, two national agricultural policies – those of Senegal and Mali – as well as the Community of West African States Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP/ECOWAS) have been drawn up explicitly aimed towards food sovereignty.
6. The social movements and producer organisations most in favour of food sovereignty are also those which are most strongly against the liberalisation of trade in agricultural and food products. Most of them are fighting the World Trade Organisation, which they consider to be illegitimate in dealing with agricultural and food products.
7. The States and the regional integration organisation (ECOWAS) who have accepted the concept of food sovereignty do not go that far. The policy consultation process may have allowed the producer organisations to promote this option, but the regional and national institutions concerned have not yet obtained results that are both clear and at odds with the past as regards the protection of their agricultural sector or international negotiations.
8. These differences of opinion illustrate that the "perimeter" of the food sovereignty concept remains unclear. It wavers between a fairly moderate version based essentially on the need to protect developing forms of agriculture adequately (the community's preference), and a version which advocates a very different alternative to the current model of agricultural development (production systems, integration in the international economy) combined with strong protection. The level of protection and the instruments used will vary considerably depending on the degree of community preference.
9. It is essential to clarify the different visions and positions regarding three major challenges: the first one is whether or not it is necessary to regulate international trade in food products and negotiate compatibility conditions for agricultural policies (this is a major challenge both for EU-West Africa negotiations for an economic partnership – EPA – and also for the possibility of re-launching a Doha round); the second one is how to take account of food access issues within the food sovereignty issue; and finally, the third challenge relates to the future of prevention and management strategies for food crises, including the role played by donors in schemes that are strongly supported by international cooperation.

10. As far as regulating international trade is concerned, it is clear that no protection policy will manage to neutralise the current aggressive export policies. At the international level, it seems that African countries would benefit from becoming strongly involved in negotiations focused on access to markets, special treatment of products relating to food security, and livelihood opportunities for rural populations. In doing this they should not limit themselves to solving the issue of dumping by means of export subsidies, but rather include all public interventions which impact conditions for competitiveness in agricultural and food products.
11. There should be a more thorough debate on the compatibility of food sovereignty with access to food or the right to food. Food sovereignty is often designed to be focused on the development of national availabilities. Urbanisation and endemic poverty, including within rural communities, are two key factors which invite strategic thinking on the policy instruments likely to reconcile the interests of producers (i.e. sufficiently encouraging and lucrative prices) and those of consumers, especially the poorest (i.e. accessible food).
12. Regarding the development of prevention and management strategies for food crises and the role of donors, West African countries are increasingly challenging what they consider as everyday interference in their national mechanisms. But these mechanisms, including information systems and security stock management schemes, are expensive and difficult to fully manage domestically. How can they develop these mechanism and the respective roles of States and donors while considering the autonomous decision-making and leadership aspects of food sovereignty?
13. West African countries are confronted with extremely diversified national situations in the area of agriculture and food. They have opted to organise themselves into regional economic areas. However, these free trade areas do not yet provide them with enough guarantees on food security. Consequently, countries with a severe deficit are still tempted to import at low prices from the world market to ensure the continuation of their food supply. Similarly, in times of crisis, countries turn their backs on free trade agreements and limit the circulation of cereals by closing the borders.
14. Regional trade policies are changing radically. The ECOWAS Customs Union is being developed with a common external tariff. This tariff remains fairly low for food products which are imported at low prices through the considerable support offered by developed exporting countries (dairy, cereal and meat products).
15. For the time-being, the various forces at stake seem to indicate that increasing protection at the borders is not the favoured option. The extension of the UEMOA's CET (Common External Tariff) into the ECOWAS zone was implemented without provoking any major crisis, despite objections from farmers' movements.
16. The future of such protection is very uncertain. The region is negotiating an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the European Union based on the establishment of a free trade area. Will this agreement exclude sensitive food products or not? Farmer institutions and actors are together trying to show the European Union the advantages of a pragmatic approach guaranteeing the region's food sovereignty and thus excluding agricultural and food products from negotiations on tariff exemptions.
17. But regardless of how sensitive products are handled within the EPA, the agricultural sector has already launched a liberalisation process linked to the implementation of a unified CET, with a relatively low level of protection (in line with the UEMOA's CET); the measures that are to complement customs duties (including a counterpart mechanism) are not yet operational. Nigeria in particular, which accounts for half of the regional economy, has had to or will have to carry out the most extensive tariff exemptions.



18. The Food Aid Charter adopted by the Sahelian States and major donors includes a set of food aid management principles. The key principles are in line with those principles advocated within the context of food sovereignty, i.e. respecting food customs, reducing external dependency, giving priority to local purchasing, refusing to use aid as a tool for dumping and winning markets, etc.
19. This Charter is more than 15 years old, and although many of its principles remain current, it is no longer used as a major benchmark by those in charge of food crisis management. Another reason is that food aid has become only a minor way of providing cereals in the Sahel. Some of its principles have become normal practice. But food aid donors have also changed over the years. Nowadays, traditional donors only supply half of the donations in kind. New donors have no code of conduct or charter to guide their operations, and integrating these actions in a dynamic of long-term development and food security is not a major concern. Beneficiary countries consider that this aid sometimes involves fewer conditions than aid from traditional donors, and gives them back some room to manoeuvre.
20. Finally, in a reversal of situation, the debate on market regulations to avoid sudden and severe price hikes has resumed. While the Food Aid Charter aimed to manage aid so as not to disrupt markets, the issue today relates to the way aid could be used to influence prices and facilitate food access for the most vulnerable, when market prices make basic staples inaccessible.
21. The Food Aid Charter was the tool used to regulate practices when food policy instruments were minimal. With food sovereignty in mind, the first issue is to find intervention tools to help lead genuine food security policies.
22. Regarding agricultural development, successful food sovereignty strategies require changes to be made (intensification, productivity improvement, product processing development) so that the regional agriculture's capacity to meet the growth in demand can be improved, on a sufficiently competitive basis, while avoiding too high a price for consumers, especially the most vulnerable.
23. Regarding access to food, these policies should consider new instruments providing safety nets for vulnerable populations affected by price escalation caused by higher duties at borders. This is one of the prerequisites for the feasibility and success of food sovereignty policies.
24. Food security issues have changed, whether in the context of economic or structural crises (see the emerging problem of nutrition in Sahelian countries, the increased, clearer role of regional markets in causing, alleviating or exacerbating food crises, etc.), and the actors' role is more complex. The risks of a weak collective efficiency are reinforced, linked with diverging analyses or responses which are inarticulated or incoherent with each other or with short-term and long-term responses.
25. The Charter serves as a useful reference for food sovereignty supporters to improve the governance of agriculture and food production. Firstly, it refers to a form of governance based on multiple actors, with aid agencies and humanitarian NGOs able to intervene autonomously without necessarily being part of a public policy (State too weak) or a consensus. Secondly, it expresses a state of mind: actors confronted with a common issue look for solutions together, and everyone contributes to part of the solution at their own level, reviewing their practices in the interest of the "common good." The Charter also expresses collective action: the actions of a certain actor have an impact on the effectiveness of others' actions as well as on the collective action. In consequence, all actors should review their practices according to shared principles and action methods. Finally, the Charter is based on the political will of each actor and on the "supervision" the community of actors carries out on each one of them.
26. The Charter is not binding and this lack of constraint is compensated by a monitoring and evaluation mechanism which is endorsed and implemented by everyone. In addition, the Charter has become a stake and an opportunity for dialogue, consultation and coordination between beneficiary and donor countries, although in recent years this has not been so true. "Code of

conduct” or “charter”-type tools have the advantage of bringing actors increasingly closer together in a common direction. Considering how diverse all approaches were initially, this aspect can be extremely useful to translate the objective of food sovereignty into policies and practices.

27. But food security is no longer the result of actions by these two major actors (States and donors). Producer organisations, NGOs and local authorities have become communicators within each country who want to enter into consultation processes, particularly in the planning and implementing of responses to crises, by using their legitimacy. From another point of view, the many new donors should be involved in measures designed to facilitate the progressive integration of their actions within collection action. The integration of all actors is essential if policy coherence and effectiveness are to be improved.
28. The main challenge in the coming years is to take into account the changing forms of crises, the diversifying responses and increasing numbers of actors, and to develop negotiations and consultations with the powers at hand, institutions and structured socio-professional organisations in the territories, making food crisis management an integral part of decentralised development initiatives. Such action should help to give substance to regional, national and local food sovereignty by strengthening the role of actors and elected representatives who obtain their legitimacy from the mandates they have been given by the people.

## 2. Introduction

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This document has been prepared by the Sahel and West Africa Club for the First Regional Forum on Food Sovereignty organised by ROPPA (Niamey, 7 – 10 November 2006).

Sahelian countries and the main donors drew up and adopted a Food Aid Charter in 1990, whose principles are in line with food sovereignty concerns. Food aid was an important cereal supply method for the region, and in that context, this Charter’s aim was to reduce the negative impacts food aid might have on the construction of structural food security based primarily on local production and regional markets. It also aimed to integrate aid with rural development policies and food security programmes.

The purpose of this contribution is to suggest a cross-analysis of trade, agriculture and cooperation policies in the area of food security. The idea is to understand how and to what extent these principles have been used, beyond the management of food aid, to design and implement the main public policies relating to the region’s food security and food sovereignty. The three objectives of the consultation were that it should result in:

- A thorough analysis of the extent to which the Food Aid Charter principles have been followed to develop trade and agricultural policies at a regional level;
- An analysis of the extent to which the Charter principles have actually been taken into account within the countries’ agricultural and food cooperation policies, including in terms of relations with Arab and Asian countries, etc.;
- Make relevant and practical recommendations, for the benefit of countries and the region, to improve food security and the taking into account of the Food Aid Charter principles in the West African countries’ national economic, agricultural and cooperation policies, and in regional trade policies.

The method consisted of interviewing the main actors – in particular public decision-makers, managers of food crisis prevention and management mechanisms, managers of producer organisations and certain NGOs – as well as producing documentary analysis of four countries and the entire CILSS area. The countries were chosen on the basis of their contrasting food issues: Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal. Niger’s case, which has been widely documented since the 2004-5 crisis, was also used as a reference.

Many hopes had been pinned on the use of successive charter evaluations carried out in the 15 years since its adoption. In fact, these evaluations were too limited (only 2 or 3 countries were covered by each evaluation) and generally very biased towards a review of data collection and analysis mechanisms as well as consultation processes. Data related to aid management itself and its integration into development and food security policies were treated in far less detail, in a more anecdotal way. Interviews also showed that the Food Aid Charter had been forgotten to some extent. Most of the people who were surveyed for the assignment were aware of its existence, but few were familiar with its contents. In addition, the Charter was designed to regulate food aid practices. Food aid became a minor method of cereal supply in the Sahel, and was never intended to inspire or direct agricultural or food policies, much less trade policies. However, analysis of the actors' behaviour towards the Charter's principles provides information in two areas: their capacity to adopt and comply with common disciplines, and their ability to manage conflicts of interests between countries, economic actors, etc.

The emergence of the concept of food sovereignty in the regional debate raised a lot of interest. In particular, it provided a base from which local decision-makers and professional organisations could regain leadership in defining and directing policies. Particularly after 20 years during which West African public and private actors had felt that they had to run the gauntlet of the international community of donors in general, and the Bretton Woods institutions in particular. However, numerous interviews showed that the scope of the concept needed clarifying urgently, in order to progress sensitively on policy content and to place the policy effectively within the context of food sovereignty. Many stakeholders questioned how best to position food sovereignty with respect to other concepts developed in recent years and which had been a source of inspiration for some policies: food security as it is usually accepted (particularly access to food), and the right to food. These two aspects are fundamental in addressing food sovereignty: access to food is not extensively covered by the "food sovereignty" approach although this aspect plays an important part in triggering both structural and circumstantial food crises; as for the question of the right to food, it is part of the increasingly important role played by human rights. This leads to the recognition of the key role played by States in its application. Yet, food sovereignty appears as more of an operational concept, relevant on a regional scale, rather than a strictly national vision, especially since countries are involved in integration processes, including in the area of agricultural and trade policies. These policies largely determine food security conditions.

Consequently, it was proposed that this report should contribute to the debate on the translation of the concept of food sovereignty into agricultural, food and trade policies, while taking on board the various levels of appreciation and sensitivity of actors and decision-makers who try to integrate the concept formally into policies and processes. This report mirrors the various positions and invites a more thorough debate so that relevant, effective and federative policies can be identified.

### **3. From self-sufficiency to food sovereignty**

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*"Food sovereignty describes the right of populations, their states or union of states, to define their own agricultural and food policies, whilst avoiding dumping products in any other country"*<sup>1</sup>. This is the approach that the peasant movement "La Via Campesina" introduced into public debate in 1996 during the World Food Summit organised by the FAO.

Presented from the start by its supporters as an "alternative to neo-liberal policies," this vision aims to restore sectoral policies and public intervention. While a growing section of international opinion questions the market deregulation of food and farm product markets, the emergence of the food sovereignty concept re-launches the debate on the role of the State and regional blocks in developing various types of agriculture, regulating agricultural trade and meeting the population's food needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Food Sovereignty; 4pp.; [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)

The concept “moves the goalposts” and shifts the divides, which are common within professional agricultural organisations and also with public decision-makers.

There are several definitions or levels of acceptance of food sovereignty, most of which refer to the following aspects:

- The sovereignty in defining agricultural and food policies, provided these do not lead to dumping practices on other forms of agriculture;
- The national or community preference for supplying food to populations;
- The autonomy (to varying degrees) and the sustainability of agricultural development models. This debate focuses on the question of whether or not GMOs should be introduced.

Our analysis focuses on the first two points, where there is greater consensus. The last point is subject to much opposition.

### ***3.1 1960-2006: concepts in transition, which go beyond the scope of food issues***

Food issues are raised and dealt with within a much wider political and socio-economic framework. Food sovereignty was the last to emerge; it was prompted by a farmers’ movement which uses food issues to focus decision-makers’ attention on trade liberalisation, but this trend has been more global rather than limited to the agricultural and food sector. Since the independence of West African countries, the concepts which led to the creation of agricultural and food policies have been rooted in a more fundamental political and economic perspective.

When independence was declared, the new African leaders and peoples were confronted with the issue of having to build States – viable Nations based on strong national economies. As regards food, this political vision was translated into national food self-sufficiency, considered as a key component of national sovereignty. In French-speaking countries, public offices<sup>2</sup> were to become the economic instrument for promoting food self-sufficiency (monopoly of cereal trading, controlled prices, etc.). But the fact was that public actions tended to focus on agricultural production for exportation, which prolonged colonial specialisation and the way trade had been organised so far. During this period, the legitimacy of public intervention and the supervision or control of the markets were not extensively challenged. Agricultural and cooperation policies prioritised the development of production through productive projects (see the 1974 World Food Conference recommendations).

#### ***The 1980s: self-sufficiency written off as a pipe-dream***

The 1980s sounded the death knell of food self-sufficiency ambitions on a national scale. This was a period of macro-economic and financial adjustments, including in the areas of agriculture and food. Once again, the food issue was to be addressed within a more comprehensive framework, and was subjected to the recommendations of the Washington Agreement which formed the basis for structural adjustments in general and ASAPs (Agricultural Sector Adjustment Programmes) in particular. Food self-sufficiency was then superseded by food security. The concept became technical rather than political, and emerged in the context of the liberalisation of economies, both externally (dismantling of border duties) and internally (State’s withdrawal from production and market management). The question as to who would produce the food required to feed the population became secondary.

Whereas self-sufficiency favoured a vision founded on national agricultural availabilities, food security prioritises four aspects: food availability, households’ and individuals’ access to food, market operation

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<sup>2</sup> Largely inspired by French tradition: the “Office du blé” (Wheat Office) set up in 1936, which later became the “Office des céréales” (Department of Cereals).

and stability, and food use (nutritional and health aspects). Food security is based on a common definition developed by international institutions (including FAO, WHO and the World Bank): “Food security is the access by all people at any time to sufficient food to lead a healthy and active life.” Variations on this definition were subsequently introduced to take account of socio-economic issues, food preferences, etc. (see Box 1).

#### **Box 1: The choice of words**

##### Food Security

The definition of food security adopted at the World Food Summit (Rome - 1996) was the following: “Food Security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs, as well as to culturally acceptable food preferences for an active and healthy life”.

Extract from the declaration adopted at the World Food Summit held in Rome from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 1996.

##### The Right to Food

The right to food is a fundamental right included in the universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations – 1948), under Article 25: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food...” This right was later clarified in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted in 1966 and which took effect in 1976: “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living... including adequate food,... The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right”. (Article 11)

In its General Comment 12, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights clarified this right: “The right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”

The Special Rapporteur on the right to Food, Jean Ziegler, clarified this definition with the following: “The right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and ensuring a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety.” (E/CN.4/2001/53, para. 14).

##### Food Sovereignty

In 2001, Via Campesina specified their definition of food sovereignty: “Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets”;

Food sovereignty requires:

- “- Placing priority on food production for domestic and local markets, based on peasant and family farmer diversified and agro-ecologically based production systems;
- Ensuring fair prices for farmers, which means the power to protect internal markets from low-priced, dumped imports;
- Access to land, water, forests, fishing areas and other productive resources through genuine redistribution;
- Recognition and promotion of women’s role in food production and equitable access and control over productive resources;

.../...

...

- Community control over productive resources, as opposed to corporate ownership of land, water, and genetic and other resources;
- Protecting seeds, the basis of food and life itself, for the free exchange and use of farmers, which means no patents on life and a moratorium on genetically modified crops; and
- Public investment in support for the productive activities of families, and communities, geared toward empowerment, local control and production of food for people and local markets..."

*Source: Priority to people's food sovereignty; 1<sup>st</sup> November 2001<sup>3</sup>*

Whereas food self-sufficiency focused on the means as opposed to the end, food security favours the end – access to food for all – rather than the ways it can be achieved. The idea was that food security could be reached by combining local production, imports and food aid.

Also during this period, most West African countries joined WTO and had to “get back to basics”, in other words to make their policies and practices compliant with multilateral rules. For example, this meant setting up protective measures (abolishing quotas and other non-tariff measures applied at borders and transforming them into customs duties) and consolidating rights, etc.

The context of these policies was already very different. Within twenty years, West African economies had already undergone a major transformation. At independence, West African populations were overwhelmingly rural (in 1960, only 14% of West African populations were urban, and 10% in all CILSS countries in 1960<sup>4</sup>). Their food was essentially produced in family fields. In 1980, West African populations had become much more urbanised (in 1980, 34% of West Africans – 21% of Sahelians – lived in urban areas) and relied increasingly on the markets for their food. This fundamentally modified food security conditions, and this situation became increasingly significant as the years went by.

Thus, in less than 20 years, the situation has gone from a strong State, responsible for food security, to a strong market. But this transition was only made possible by a weakening of developing economies. Various adjustments happened to try and respond to the imbalance of public finances and the public debt repayment crisis in general, and in particular the weak performance and financial crisis of food trade offices (and more generally the weak performances of States in the agricultural sector outside structured export sectors<sup>5</sup> such as cotton, coffee, cocoa, etc.). States had little room to manoeuvre in negotiating reforms as alternatives to privatisation processes – liberalisation was imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions, in return for a refinancing of the economy or partial debt forgiveness. These programmes, seen as imposed by external entities, bolstered demands for sovereignty.

### ***3.2 1996, the turning point***

The 1996 World Food Summit marked a new turning point. A new cycle of GATT multilateral trade negotiations, the Uruguay Round, started in 1986. It ended with the Marrakesh Agreement, which was endorsed by 123 countries on 15 April 2004. Two issues were crucial to the debate on food sovereignty: the first was the inclusion of agriculture in the negotiations. Up to then, agricultural and food trade had been kept separate from trade liberalisation. This would no longer be the case, and this major change in international trade regulation took place in the context of the subsidies war and at a time when the United States and EU practice of export dumping was at its peak. The second issue related to the creation of the WTO and the reinforcement of the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB). This was important to the debate on the capacity of countries to define their own agricultural and food policies, an integral part of the food

<sup>3</sup> Source: [www.peoplesfoodsovereignty.org](http://www.peoplesfoodsovereignty.org) click on statements

<sup>4</sup> Source: WALTIPS OECD/Sahel Club

<sup>5</sup> In the economic adjustment phase, these same networks continued to benefit from the greatest support, particularly from their role in obtaining the necessary finances for imports and debt repayment.

sovereignty concept, regardless of the orientation and contents of these policies (see below). The aim of becoming integrated into the WTO was to negotiate the compatibility of agricultural policies, which seemed to conflict with food sovereignty (see Box 4).

Via Campesina, subsequently joined by a large number of development NGOs, made the most of the world spotlight on the scandal of hunger to promote the concept of “food sovereignty”, which they immediately defined in opposition to neo-liberal policies. The role of trade in the achievement of food sovereignty was therefore one of the key topics during the World Food Summit debates. The NGOs used parallel forums to relay the concerns of producer organisations, and supported options in favour of food sovereignty, opposing the abolition of protective tariffs.

### **Box 2: Food security in the Treaty of Rome (European Communities)**

West African countries often refer to the European Union to justify the need for an interventionist or protectionist agricultural policy. Article 39 of the Treaty signed between the six founding Member States of the European Community expressed the objectives assigned to this Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the following terms:

#### **Article 39**

1. The objectives of the common agricultural policy shall be:

- a. to increase agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and by ensuring the rational development of agricultural production and the optimum utilisation of the factors of production, in particular labour;
- b. thus to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of persons engaged in agriculture;
- c. to stabilise markets;
- d. to assure the availability of supplies;
- e. to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices.

2. In working out the common agricultural policy and the special methods for its application, account shall be taken of:

- a. the particular nature of agricultural activity, which results from the social structure of agriculture and from structural and natural disparities between the various agricultural regions;
- b. the need to effect appropriate adjustments by degrees;
- c. the fact that in the Member States agriculture constitutes a sector closely linked with the economy as a whole.

*Source: Treaty of Rome; 1957*

The Rome Declaration<sup>6</sup> on food security did not adopt the food sovereignty approach, but it was marked by conflicting debates on the role of trade in the realisation of food security. It states: “...*We agree that trade is a key element in achieving food security. We agree to pursue food trade and overall trade policies that will encourage our producers and consumers to utilise available resources in an economically sound and sustainable manner... We will strive to ensure that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security for all through a fair and market-oriented world trade system*”. Questioned on food sovereignty and the complementarity between this concept and food security, the Director General of FAO said that “*food sovereignty is first and foremost a political question which should be left to the Member States*”, emphasising that “*while FAO is a partner of civil society, it remains an intergovernmental organisation and, as such, should be accountable to governments, and cannot engage in a debate which, as well as being divisive, could be out of phase with international agreements concluded in the framework of the WTO*”.

The concept of food sovereignty was clearly put forward by farmers’ movements and NGOs to protest the increasing liberalisation of agricultural trade and the dependency on food imports. Statements made by these organisations sometimes expressed a will to withdraw to national areas and, in other cases, to refuse dumping, and the need to provide world trade with fair rules and organised markets. In the first case, food sovereignty only seemed to be an alternative description of food self-sufficiency, and in the second, the approach took into account the interdependence of agricultural and food economies and emphasised the definition of fair rules. These two perspectives were fairly different, and the current definition did not manage to clarify them completely.

<sup>6</sup> Rome Declaration on World Food Security; World Food Summit; 13-17 November 1996; Rome.

### 3.3 A rough consensus on the food sovereignty concept

The very scope of the food sovereignty concept has led to a divide between the different trends of thought. Three visions have emerged, which, if incorrectly explained, might affect the translation of options in favour of food sovereignty into public policies and development programmes. They also have an impact on the positions taken by actors in international negotiation:

- A vision focused on **“decision-making autonomy”**. There is reasonable agreement on this vision, which emphasises the need to recognise countries’ and regions’ sovereignty in choosing their own agricultural and food policies. This vision is fairly independent of the content of agricultural and/or food policies. It refers to the strategic nature of food issues, and to its dimension as a public good. It is closely related to the debate on the responsibility of governments towards the population’s right to food;
- A vision based on **“sustainable, inward-focused development”**. This vision is promoted by Via Campesina and NGOs. It is supported by the Alterglobalist movement, and is based on the search for an alternative to the productivist agricultural development model. It is founded on the ability of family and peasant farming to develop diversified and ecological production systems, rejecting reliance on seeds and particularly GMOs (and, more generally, on multinational industries and businesses). This multifunctional agriculture can only be promoted if borders are sufficiently protected. This vision of food sovereignty goes against liberalism both within economic areas and international trade exchanges (see appendix dedicated to the Via Campesina Declaration: “The Doha Round is dead! Time for food sovereignty!” - Geneva, 28 July 2006). However, at a domestic level, supporters of international negotiations on trade regulations co-exist with supporters of an approach based on withdrawal into national areas;
- There is also a more simplistic vision focused on **“protectionism”** which only considers the dimension of “farmers’ protection” and “autonomy of decisions” of food sovereignty in order to enable countries and regions to protect agriculture and support it extensively, without needing to lead negotiations at an international level or to comply with public policies or trade regulations. However, this protectionist vision does not challenge the productivist agricultural model or export dumping.

Although one might have thought that there was a general consensus on food sovereignty, a breakdown of the various positions highlights further divides:

**Table 1: Positions developed within the framework of different food sovereignty visions**

Position	Visions		
	“Decision-making autonomy”	“Sustainable and inwardly-focused agriculture”	“Protectionist”
Autonomy of decision / orientation of agricultural and food policies	Yes	Yes	Yes
Autonomous, environmentally-friendly production systems; rejection of GMOs	-	Yes	-
Dumping on international markets	-	No	Yes
Protection at borders	-	Yes	Yes



### **3.4 Food sovereignty and the right to food: any agreement?**

In his report of 9 February 2004<sup>7</sup>, Jean Ziegler, Special Rapporteur to the United Nations, “urges Governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food in accordance with their human rights obligations. Imbalances and inequities in the global trading system that can have profound negative effects on the right to food should be urgently addressed... WTO members should resolve the current inequities and imbalances in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture...in order to ensure that the right to food is not threatened by global trading rules...Food sovereignty should be considered as an alternative model for agriculture and the agricultural trade, in order to meet State obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food.”

The concept of food sovereignty was promoted at around the same time that the idea of a right to food appeared in the public debate. This idea of a right was supported by human rights entities and movements promoting economic, social and cultural rights. The WFP and humanitarian NGOs rely on this right to engage public opinion and intervene when famine threatened vulnerable populations. We should however emphasise the fact that producer organisations and most States have not expressed their opinions clearly on this point and have not prioritised the right to food. In the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 2 and 11 sets out that governments have an obligation to progressively assure the right to food. The ICESCR provides the binding framework to ensure humanity’s freedom from hunger. In November 2004, the FAO Council adopted the “Voluntary Guidelines” (VGs) on the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. It is a practical, human-rights-based tool to help implement the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. Even if its rules are voluntary and not legally binding as such, they are built on international law and provide guidance on implementing existing obligations.

For now, mankind’s food security is most often considered as a public good, but each person’s access to food is first and foremost dependent on market logistics, which generally determines access to commodities. Although the application of this right is generally considered to be the responsibility of each country, no institution or government can be held legally responsible for its non-application or flouting if it has not included it in its Constitution or its legislation. The food security of every individual does not take precedence over other considerations. The rules which govern trade in agricultural and food products are not subjected to ethical considerations or considerations of national or international law.

It is worth highlighting the tensions which are likely to arise between the national responsibility towards the right to food (with the State in the forefront) and the fulfilment of the food sovereignty objective. If this fulfilment is to be envisaged in a strictly regional framework, it will involve a transfer of sovereignty from the national to the regional level.

### **3.5 Finding political room for manoeuvre**

The case of Mali’s “PRMC”<sup>8</sup> (Programme de restructuration du marché céréalière – Cereals Market Restructuring Programme) is interesting as it illustrates perfectly a major reversal of perception. The PRMC is a broad sectorial reform programme which was rolled out in 1981 after close consultation and under joint management between the Government and donors (as well as with close coordination between the donors). The Programme was launched at the same time as the cereals market was being restructured and liberalised through the reform of the OPAM – the Malian Agricultural Products Office –, which included focusing its functions on the management of security stock and of a market information system; construction of the cereals market: credit for operators and marketing support for village organisations; the support for the food crisis prevention and management plan, etc. The financing of these reforms (between 1981 and 1999, the PRMC’s resources came to more than 58 million Euros) was made possible by the monetisation of food aid (joint counterpart fund) and the financial substitution of food aid in kind (an application of principles taken from the Food Aid Charter).

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<sup>7</sup> Commission on Human Rights, United Nations Economic and Social Council; 60<sup>th</sup> session.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Sahel 21; the rejection of destitution, the choice of sustainable food security; CILSS; 2002; from PRMC; study of the impact of the liberalisation on the Mali cereal networks; Johny Egg et al; May 1999.

The PRMC experience has long represented and still is a success story in the minds of experts and aid agency representatives as the transition from an administered cereal-based economy to a liberalised economy. They use it as a benchmark both in terms of the reform process (dialogue, coordination, joint and jointly-managed schemes) and the contents of reforms. However, surveys carried out in Mali show that the public authorities currently in power, as well as NGOs and producer organisations, regard the PRMC as the symbol of interference by donors in public policy management, of the dismantling of the State and its loss of leadership in the management of public affairs, etc. There is a big gap between the way experts and international actors see the PRMC, and the way Malian actors see it today. The main issue is not so much whether or not this position is right or not; it is rather about grasping it fully, and understanding the frustrations that have been expressed and accumulated in this restrictive adjustment phase.

Recently in Burkina Faso and Niger, the influence of donors on the management of public affairs in the area of food security and crisis management has also been severely questioned.

In Burkina, the debate focused on two themes: national security stocks, their size and the conditions under which they could be set up; and the PNOCSUR – Plan national d’organisation et de coordination des secours d’urgence et de rehabilitation, the National Plan for the Organisation and Coordination of Emergency Assistance and Rehabilitation.

In Niger, apart from the controversy around the analysis of the 2004/5 food crisis and the way it was managed, the debate is also focused on the joint management of the national food crisis prevention and management action plan (DNP-GCA) and the gauging of security stock requirements.

In these different cases, national actors are showing their will to free themselves from constraints imposed by joint decisions and the management of certain instruments (including physical or financial security stocks) in order to develop autonomous or partially autonomous intervention policies and strategies. Burkina has now established a national security stock separate from the SNS (National Seed Service) and co-managed with donors. For the State, this choice is justified by the need for more flexible conditions in order to mobilise the stock and therefore to accelerate emergency intervention when required. According to some donors, the State is trying to free itself from common stock management rules (the “grain for grain” concept) and, more generally, crisis intervention rules.

In Niger, it was decided to increase the physical security stock, managed by the OPVN – Office des produits vivriers du Niger, the Niger National Food Products Office – following the food crisis<sup>9</sup>, at the instigation of the Presidency of the Republic, independently of the Mixed Consultation Commission set up between the State and donors who took part in the DNP-GCA. Once again, the issue was not about how relevant these decisions were, but about understanding the national authorities’ will to regain leadership on food policies. When questioned on the scope of the concept of food sovereignty and its relevance, national authorities mainly stress their desire to recapture the control of public policies in the area of food security, an area which they deem to be essential both from the point of view of responsibility and governance. African countries emphasise the fact that the Rome Declaration considers that *“Attaining food security is a complex task for which the primary responsibility rests with individual governments. ...”*

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<sup>9</sup> In November 2004, when the DNP-GCA decided on an emergency plan to mitigate the impact of the crisis, including by intervening with moderately-priced cereal sales in at-risk areas, the level of physical and financial stocks was found to be well below conventional levels. This was deemed to be the reason why intervention had been so slow and why the crisis mitigation and prevention strategy had failed, all the more so as the mobilisation of cereals proved to be very difficult in regional markets.

## 4. The Food Aid Charter and the principle of food sovereignty

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During the 1980s, there was lively debate on the consequences of food aid for agricultural economies and on the evolution of food systems. First in Europe and then at the international level, development NGOs were mobilised to denounce the misuse of free food aid provided outside emergency situations. They reckoned that this food aid in kind was primarily dictated by the big exporting countries' wish to reduce agricultural surpluses, as these surpluses unbalanced the market and affected international prices. Some African governments also raised these criticisms, and aid agencies progressively took notice of them. This was also when the subsidies war and the competition on foreign markets, mainly between the European Union and the United States, reached its peak.

### 4.1 Food aid in the context of the Cold War

Food aid policies in force during this time were drawn up in the aftermath of the Second World War with two objectives: contributing to Europe's reconstruction (part of the Marshall Plan was dedicated to food aid) and containing the Soviet offensive. The United States very quickly used food aid to regulate markets and openly promote exports, at a time when their share in international trade in farm products was decreasing.

In 1954, the American Congress voted Public Law 480, known as "Food for Peace". Apart from its humanitarian aims (fighting world hunger), a specific objective was to "speed up the consumption of United States' agricultural commodities in foreign countries, improve The United States' foreign relations, and fulfil other objectives."<sup>10</sup> The law offered several implementation methods: very long-term credits repayable in dollars, grants, etc. At the same time, American agricultural law allowed for export subsidies to facilitate the sale of commodities on export markets. Later, when the United States was faced with fierce competition from Europe, Australia, Canada, etc., they looked to share the cost of cereals market regulation, including through the use of food aid, by involving Europe. This was one of the issues at stake during the GATT's Kennedy Round between 1964 and 1967. The United States led an offensive against the Common Agricultural Policy, considered as an obstacle to American exports<sup>11</sup>.

The GATT Agreement of 1967 resulted in the inclusion of an agreement on food aid within the International Grains Agreement, as well as food aid delivery commitments by the different donors. The EEC started delivering food aid despite still suffering from a cereals deficit. It was also in the spirit of this compromise that Europe accepted the duty-free importation of soya and substitute products for cereals such as manioc<sup>12</sup> into its territory. From then on, Europe instigated a food aid policy designed, just like the US policy, as a tool closely linked with the regulation of the domestic market (food aid was then managed by the European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture). Later, the EU used free food aid and export subsidies (the "restitutions" designed to fill the gap between the guaranteed producers' price in the domestic European market and the market price in the country to which the subsidised exports were destined) to help stabilise domestic markets and maintain market prices at a sufficiently high level to support their producers.

Thus, food aid, by fulfilling many more objectives than just the management of emergency food crises, inevitably transferred market instability to the countries where it was a large part of development aid supply schemes or delivery methods. It was in this context that the Food Aid Charter was negotiated in the Sahel by the States and the main donors, after the fit of generosity displayed following the drought of

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<sup>10</sup> Taken from *L'aide Alimentaire*, Solagral, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> The United States came to the negotiations defending the position that Europe should stop producing cereals and oilseeds and specialise in livestock production.

<sup>12</sup> Solagral, *Du GATT à l'Organisation mondiale du commerce. 15 fiches pour comprendre, anticiper, débattre*. Solagral, Paris, 1995, 88 p.

1983/85<sup>13</sup> had led to the allocation of considerable volumes of aid which were belatedly mobilised to answer needs, thereby hindering the smooth running of coastal ports due to logistical transport issues, etc.

At the end of the 1980s, global food aid in cereals represented about 14 million tonnes. Aid to the Sahel accounted for roughly 5% of cereal supplies in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

## **4.2 The principles of the Food Aid Charter**

The Food Aid Charter (see Annex 1 for the complete text) was formally approved at the CILSS Heads of State Summit in Bissau in February 1990. The Charter document was unanimously endorsed by the Member States and donor members of the Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD, i.e. Canada, the European Community, the United States, France, the Netherlands, and Germany.

The Charter includes a series of considerations which help us understand the context in which it was negotiated and the ambitions of stakeholders. Some of these considerations relate directly to the issues of food sovereignty. Without challenging the role which food aid may play in the fight against hunger, the signatories recognised:

- the chance to make food aid an integral part of the overall development aid system as a **capacity-building measure at the country level to ensure food availability through domestic output and/or commercial imports;**
- the need to tailor food aid to the needs of target population groups as much as possible, from both a qualitative and a quantitative standpoint, **to avoid bringing down the price or slowing down sales of locally grown crops;**
- the need **to avoid increasing reliance on outside assistance through measures liable to encourage lasting changes in eating habits at the expense of local cereal production;**
- the need to realise that, like deficits, food surpluses can also destabilise prices, income and food availability, making it advisable **to incorporate food aid into regional trade policies to help market mechanisms minimise local fluctuations in food availability.**

The Charter views aid as a tool to achieve long-term food security by integrating it into development policies. This is achieved by acting on three levels: firstly, improving the management of food aid in kind during crises, so that it will not have adverse effects in the medium and long term, such as discouraging producers, developing reliance, changing eating habits, etc.; secondly, investing in agricultural development programmes or food security programmes by substituting aid in kind for financial aid, which is deemed to have fewer harmful effects, or by monetising aid in kind (counterpart funds); thirdly, when aid in kind is required, by promoting local and sub-regional purchasing (triangular operations). The idea here is that surplus areas should be used to ensure the supply of needy areas. Afrique Verte, an NGO which was established within the framework of the 1983 campaign “Pour le droit des peuples à se nourrir eux-mêmes” (For the Right of the People to Feed Themselves), was born out of this objective, which involved promoting trade within the Sahel in order to stimulate business, offer openings to surplus producers and reduce external reliance<sup>14</sup>.

From this angle, identifying needs was crucial; the Charter devotes two long chapters to this issue, which embraces information systems on the agricultural and food situation (quality, independence, consistency, etc.) and the assessment of food aid requirements. Another chapter is dedicated to donor consultation schemes designed to identify the nature of food situations and to coordinate action.

Three essential points must be raised:

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<sup>13</sup> During this crisis, 40% of available cereals were imported and aid accounted for 17% of total availability (sources: Vingt ans de prévention des crises alimentaires au Sahel; Réseau de prévention des crises alimentaires – CILSS; 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Sécurité alimentaire au Sahel ; 1990-2005 : quinze ans d'expérience; Afrique Verte; 2005.

- The Charter's concerns largely mirror the issues linked to food sovereignty, and the approach generally favours a long-term vision of food security based on local resources or, failing that, on commercial imports. To this end, the Charter suggests limiting free food aid, which is most destabilising for agricultural economies, to emergency situations. It takes into account issues such as food supply adequacy relative to eating habits to prevent creating sustained reliance. Finally, it invites donors to favour supplies from surplus areas within the same country or region.
- This approach is also part of a vision of food security whose main objective is to avoid destabilising markets. Three paragraphs refer to this aspect:
  - *“to incorporate food aid..., and coordinate it with trade and macroeconomic policies”;*
  - *“to fine-tune food aid to prevent (...) any harmful effects on local production and sales insofar as possible, such as a market glut, a drop in farm-gate prices, a disruption of distribution channels or a saturation of warehousing facilities”;*
  - *“to market food aid in a manner which does not drive down domestic free market prices”.*

The Charter was negotiated during the adjustment period as part of a liberal vision of agriculture- and food-based economy development. At the end of the 1990s, there was still lively debate on export liberalisation and/or protection. But there was wide consensus on the benefits of internal liberalisation, and so the challenge was not to let foreign aid influence market development. This issue is now at the heart of numerous debates on crisis management methods (see below).

- The principles of the Charter are part of a vision based on the joint management of food crises by governments and key donors. This vision is challenged by supporters of food sovereignty, who consider that national actors should regain autonomy and leadership in determining and conducting public policy.

### **4.3 Combining different national visions within the region**

Sahelian and West African countries are faced with a fairly wide range of food issues. Approaches and priorities in agricultural and food policies do not have much in common if you compare a country like Cape Verde, whose food security relies hugely on imports, with Mali, whose main food supply is provided by national producers.

**Countries now agree that food issues should be addressed on a regional level, but the viability of regional policies will depend largely upon their ability to take account of the diversity of country-wide issues: the responsibility towards the populations' food security falls to national governments, but the fulfilment of food security depends partly on the effectiveness and relevance of regional policies, especially in the area of agriculture and trade.**

The following points may help highlight the diversity of food security issues:

- Sahelian countries owe their food security primarily to local production. On average over the last three years (2002/03 to 2004/05), local production has accounted for 81% of cereals provided in the nine countries of the CILSS.
- Commercial imports account for 15.7%, and essentially include wheat and rice, while food aid accounts for 3.3%.
- National situations differ widely, as indicated by the cereal balance sheets:
  - The striking point in all cases is the variability of outputs, which has to do with the precariousness of production conditions and the vulnerability of rain-dependent crops to rainfall (impact of rainfall levels and regularity on the growing cycle);

- Niger, Mali and Burkina, which are landlocked countries, are the three major cereal-producing countries, and their production meets around 90% of their needs. These are also some of the most densely populated countries of the area;
  - Senegal stands out with the volume of its rice imports, which now exceed 800,000 tonnes and result in considerable expenses in foreign currencies;
  - The situation is fairly similar in all countries on the Atlantic coast, such as Mauritania, the Gambia, etc. The urbanisation level is partly responsible for the supply structure (see map below);
  - Cape Verde's production varies greatly and contributes little to the food supply. Food aid in Cape Verde is of a structural type, and is essentially monetised or allocated as part of food-for-work and cash-for-work programmes, which are labour-intensive and focused on communal investments, targeted at vulnerable populations and managed increasingly by the communes. It is the only country where food aid accounts for a large part of cereal supply. The same goes for commercial imports.
  - Despite variations in yields from one year to the next, the general trend is towards a large increase in production. Overall, cereal production has been in line with the region's population growth;
  - But two major factors have made this growth possible: the lack of any general and sustained climate crisis; and an increase in cultivated areas, in the absence of intensification or increased yields.
- Prices are a major concern in the Sahel. At harvest time, prices tend to fall sharply, especially when the harvest is good. Many producers are forced to sell large quantities of grain, over and above their actual surpluses, because of the fall in prices, their cash-flow needs, and their repayment obligations in respect of commercial credits on cereals they have taken with traders (the phenomenon of over-commercialisation). This means that households need to buy cereals at far higher prices to cover their needs during the lean season. Apart from cereal production areas such as south-western Burkina, southern Mali, the area covered by the Office du Niger, where cereal crops are basically cash crops, and where producers are sensitive to production price levels, cereal producers are especially sensitive to consumer prices in areas where balance can easily be jeopardised and in areas with a structural shortfall. Graph 1 shows the trend of prices in the three countries of Mali, Niger and Burkina, and in particular the regionalisation of the cereal market.

For a long time, the favourite approach to food security risk analyses in the Sahel was based on cereal production monitoring, but it must be acknowledged that today, food economies have changed dramatically, including in rural areas (diversified income sources, increased resorting to markets and temporary or permanent migration, penetration of rice in most rural villages, etc.). The key role which is now played by the market in supplying food to households (and consequently in triggering food crises) is a crucial change, which agricultural and food security policies have not yet fully grasped (see Box 3).

**Box 3: The role of prices in triggering the accessibility crisis in Niger**

A crisis analysis has shown that a significant number of households are confronted with a structural crisis. This is due to the crisis in the agricultural and agro-pastoral production systems, especially in the most densely populated area (Maradi). For the vast majority of households, including those living in what used to be known as “the bread basket of Niger” (i.e. the Maradi area), the cereal production of the family unit is no longer sufficient to cover family needs. One of the most crucial changes in recent years as regards the Sahelian population's food security conditions is probably the part played by the market as a supply source. Price change has become a crucial factor in determining a household's capacity to fulfil its food security. Yet this is precisely where the analysis of crisis risk failed following the 2004-5 wintering season. The harvest followed the locust crisis and the Sahel implemented extensive means to contain the crickets, since the region had failed to anticipate the phenomenon and to avoid the development of swarms. Harvest forecasts, which were very pessimistic at the end of the season, showed that in fact, the worst had been avoided. There was a deficit in cereal production in comparison to consumption, but this deficit was considered moderate. The deficit in fodder was more worrying, with losses estimated at 35%.

.../...

...

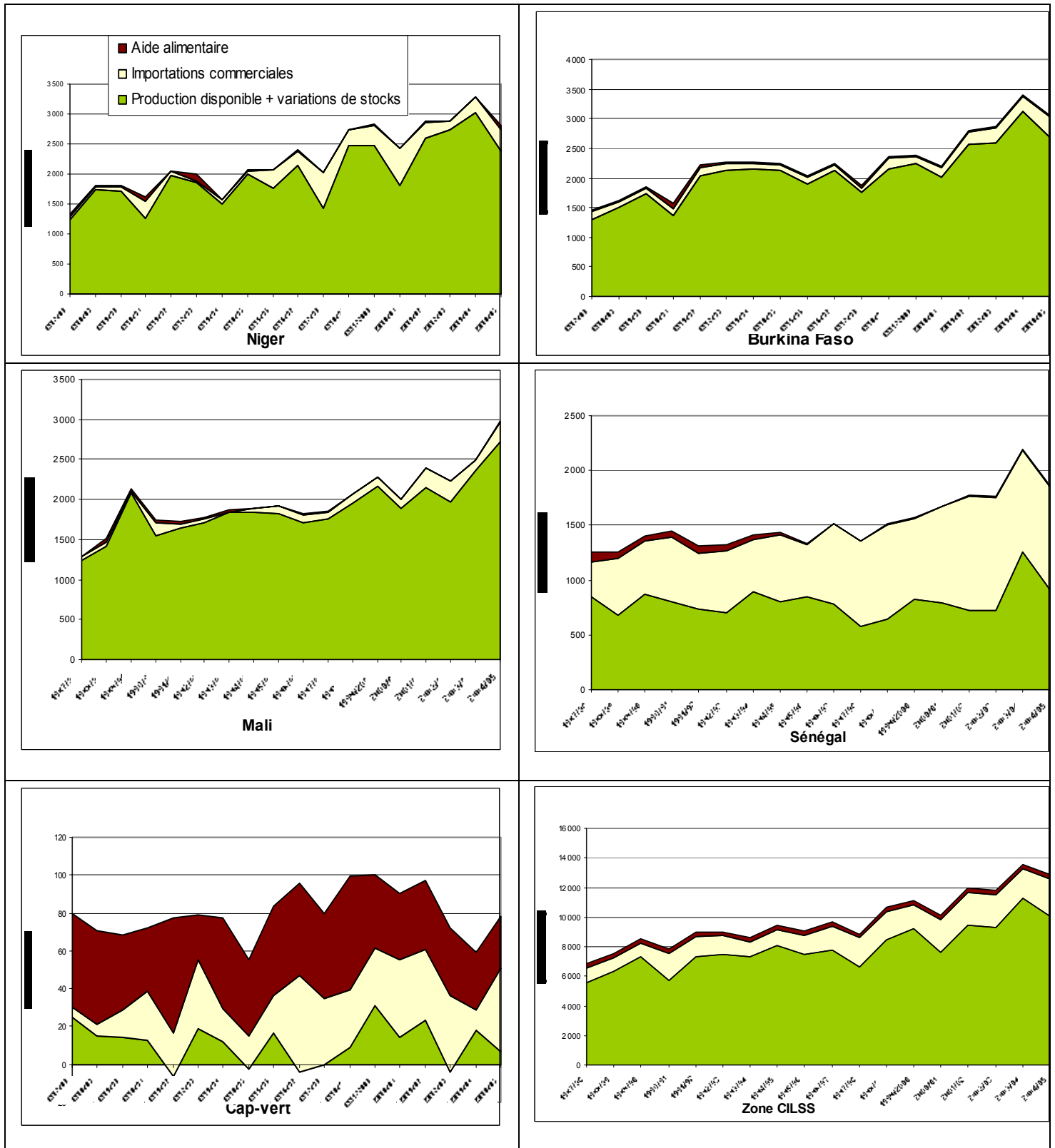
This feeling of having “avoided the worst” was reinforced by the apparently good yields in neighbouring Burkina. It seemed that the situation would be fairly easy to control, since the harvest followed another exceptionally good harvest, with record yields (3,026,000 tonnes of cereal in 2003-04, or 244kg per capita, compared with a usual consumption of 190kg). Most reports issued at the time referred to a moderate availability crisis, linked to the locust infestation and drought. Yet the most significant element of the crisis was the “accessibility” aspect, which hit most households, all the more seriously since they experienced a shortage of cereals and had a limited resource base....

Extract from the report “Évaluation de la réponse du PAM à la crise alimentaire au Niger en 2005. Volume 2 appendices – Appendix 5: Le contexte régional de la crise alimentaire du Niger ; Bureau de l'évaluation du PAM ; 2006”

**Map 1: The urbanisation of West African countries**



**Chart 1: Cereal balance sheets of some Sahelian countries in the CILSS area and trends over the last 18 years**



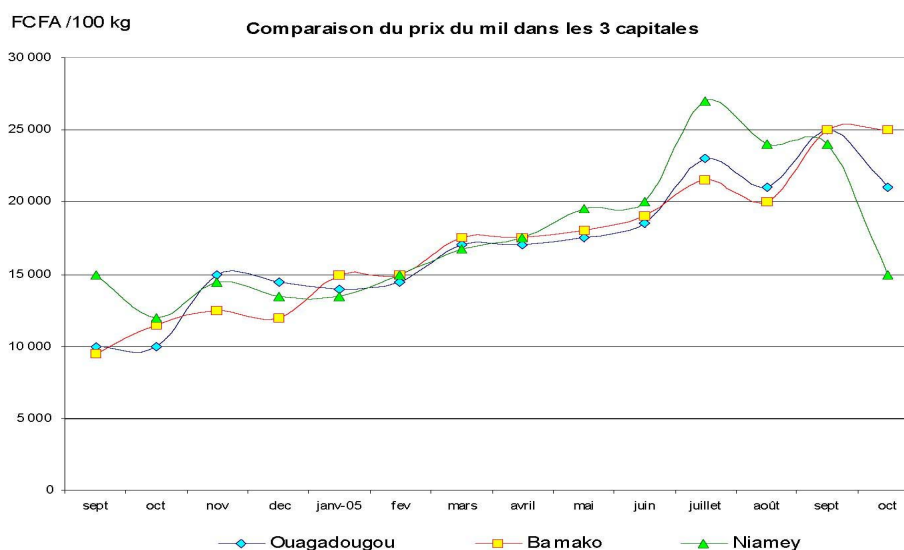
Source: Bureau Issala from CILSS data



Table 2: Cereal balance sheets in CILSS countries over the last 15 years

000s tonnes	1990/91- 1992/93	2002/03- 2004/05
Available production	6,798	10,892
Initial stocks	835	836
Imports	1,772	2,470
Of which food aid	286	357
Stocks	790	839
Stock variations	45	98
Available production + stock variations	6,842	10,990
Commercial imports	1,486	2,113
Food aid	286	357

Graph 1: Comparison of millet prices in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger



## 5. Attaining food sovereignty: an objective revisited in the context of new West African agricultural policies

Following the dismantling of agricultural policies, poverty-fighting strategies became key considerations in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Initially, CSLPs (Strategic Frameworks for the Fight against Poverty) favoured intervention in health and education, but today, approaches put greater emphasis on economic considerations. In setting ambitious objectives for the millennium (the MDGs, Millennium Development Goals), the international community has placed the issues of food, nutrition and – more generally – revenue growth at the heart of the debate. At the same time, in West Africa, the development of producer organisations at a national level and the creation of ROPPA at a regional level have promoted agricultural and food issues and given them a more central place in regional governments' and institutions' agendas.

A review of policy and process documents governing the development of such entities illustrates how much things have changed in recent years. This review considers the following strategies, orientation laws and policies:

*At a regional level:*

- The CILSS food security strategic framework rolled out in Sahelian countries;
- The UEMOA Agricultural Policy (PAU) implemented in the eight countries of the free area;

- The ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) adopted by the 15 West African countries which are members of this regional institution;

*At a national level:*

- The agro-sylvo-pastoral Orientation Law (*Loi d'orientation agro-sylvo-pastorale* - LOASP) in Senegal;
- The Agricultural Orientation Law (*Loi d'orientation agricole* - LOA) in Mali.

### **5.1 Increasingly democratic processes**

- At a national level, the agricultural policies of Mali and Senegal have the force of law, unlike in other countries. Besides the quality of the consultation process, which led to their drafting, they were first adopted by the Council of Ministers, then put before Parliament by the Government. They were extensively debated by various parliamentary commissions, before being discussed in plenary session, amended and adopted. Unlike rural development strategies, development policy letters and food security strategies, these Orientation Laws are based on two aspects of democratic legitimacy: firstly, they owe their legitimacy to consultation processes which are sufficiently decentralised to include the concerns of the producers for whom these laws were primarily implemented, and secondly, their legitimacy can be attributed to parliamentary representation. The combination of these two aspects undeniably gives them greater power than more common approaches.

Regional approaches are more complex to organise. The three regional institutions whose mandates include agricultural and food security policies launched various processes in the 1998-2006 period which led to the adoption of regional policies or strategies focused on agricultural and food challenges.

### **5.2 Food sovereignty in regional policies and strategies**

#### **5.2.1 Food security strategies promoted by the CILSS**

The first initiative was launched by the CILSS as an extension to the “Sahel 21” process which had consisted of actors from Sahelian societies drafting a long-term vision for the Sahel. This was a first step, whose aim was to try to encourage populations to think prospectively about their future. Although the idea of food sovereignty was not expressed as such, several of the identified priorities are closely related to its basic elements<sup>15</sup>:

- “...Ensuring the rapid, sustainable development of agricultural, livestock, forestry and fisheries production;
- Ensuring growth and economic diversification in order to benefit from regional markets and play a part in global trade;
- Including the Sahelian economy within a perspective based on regional integration and, increasingly, global economy”.

Although this vision emphasises the need to develop regional agricultural production to contribute to food supply, it is also strongly influenced by the wish of Sahelian populations to take part in globalisation and the internationalisation of trade rather than remain on the sidelines.

- This Sahelian vision led the CILSS to suggest that the region and countries should benefit from a “strategic framework for sustainable food security as part of the fight against poverty” (adopted by Heads of State and Government) along with long-term food security strategies at the regional and national levels, to be launched as five-year implementation programmes.

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<sup>15</sup> Source: Bilan, vision, ambitions et priorités pour l’agriculture sahélienne; 56 p; 1997; CILSS; Sahel 21. Declaration of the Forum of Sahelian Societies and Banjul Memorandum; CILSS – Sahel21.

At each stage of the process, the work was discussed, amended and validated during workshops bringing together the authorities, actors from civil society, producer organisations, development partners, etc. However, it remained a fairly traditional way of drafting policies, with actors participating only in the finalising and validating stages. The regional Strategic Paper on Sustainable Food Security in the Sahel (CSSA) was adopted in 2000<sup>16</sup>. This was also the year when ROPPA was formally set up, although producers' platforms had already been operating in most Sahelian countries. These platforms made suggestions which today would be considered as relating to food sovereignty, although at the time they were not. ROPPA or platform representatives who expressed their views during national and regional debates did not put forward this idea. The CSSA did not promote food sovereignty. The vision it developed was tinged with "food security" approaches and highlighted the commitments made during the World Food Summit (WFS – 1996) for the Sahelian region. The overall objective was to "ensure the access of Sahelians, at any time, to food needed to lead a healthy and active life by 2015." This was followed by five specific objectives, with the first three referring back to the three key aspects of structural food security (availability, accessibility, market operation). The fourth related to the prevention and management of circumstantial crises, and the final objective applied to the issues of governance and capacity-building among actors (see Box 4). The first objective – availability – clearly promotes a food supply approach based primarily on leveraging Sahelian resources and avoiding increased reliance on imports.

**Box 4: Objectives of the Strategic Paper on Sustainable Food Security in the Sahel (CILSS)**

The general purpose of the CSSA in terms of general food security is based around five specific objectives:

- Promote a productive, diversified, sustainable, regionally-integrated form of agriculture;
- Develop, facilitate and integrate national markets at the regional level;
- Facilitate sustainable access to food and social services by vulnerable groups and areas;
- Improve mechanisms for the prevention and management of circumstantial crises, and develop food security infrastructure;
- Reinforce the capacity of actors and promote good food security governance.

The purpose of the first objective was as follows: *"The objective is to ensure food security in the sub-region without increasing its reliance on extra-regional imports, by developing local production capacities. Conversely, the growth of consumer markets should also be used to ensure the development of economic foundations for Sahelian agriculture (especially the development of market areas), to diversify and to increase income in rural areas. The prerequisite remains, however, the control of water and other natural resources, as well as their sustainable management, considering the scarcity of structures which characterises the Sahel area."*

The main results expected were as follows:

- Result 1: Promoting the optimal use of natural resources, in the framework of the sustainable management of agricultural and agro-pastoral production.
- Result 2: Sahelian agriculture should respond better to the growing diversification of demand for agricultural and food products.
- Result 3: Agricultural production should respond better to the increasing demand for agricultural and food products.
- Result 4: Fish production should be greatly increased, on a sustainable basis.

Extract from: Strategic Paper on Sustainable food security as part of the fight against poverty in the Sahel. December 2000; CILSS.

**5.2.2 The UEMOA Agricultural Policy**

The UEMOA Agricultural Policy (PAU) was developed at about the same time. Unlike the CILSS, the tradition of consultation with private actors and professional organisations is less established within the UEMOA. The PAU was developed in a fairly classic way, with expert reviews (supported by a scientific committee), a fact-finding tour, national workshops, followed by a regional workshop. ROPPA gradually became involved in the regional debate. The PAU was validated after ROPPA had just conducted debates in each country in order to identify a series of positions centred around the promotion of family farming

<sup>16</sup> CILSS Member Countries Heads of State and Governments Summit, November 2000; Bamako.

and agriculture protection. ROPPA managed to persuade the UEMOA Commission to support the organisation of a workshop prior to the regional PAU validation workshop, bringing together the leaders of producer organisations from UEMOA Member Countries. Food sovereignty was not a priority for ROPPA, but it did consider that the Union's agricultural policy should clearly state that supporting family farming was essential to develop regional agriculture, and that such development should be rooted in this form of agriculture. It recommended effective protection of regional agriculture. The policy document was amended to include a particular reference to the need to take family farming into account (see Box 5).

Yet again, the fulfilment of food security through the development of a sustainable, productive and competitive form of regional agriculture was the policy's most visible objective. The policy mentioned "an adequate degree of self-sufficiency," without setting specific quantitative targets. The concept was therefore very vague and open to all sorts of interpretations. Simultaneously, the PAU set itself the objective of regaining control over local markets and integrating the larger production sectors into the global market. The PAU was adopted after the UEMOA's Common External Tariff (CET) had been implemented, and so the issue of production levels was not raised. Although some studies concluded that the levels of protection of agricultural and food products were insufficient, the agricultural policy did not address the commercial aspect at external borders. The UEMOA Commission's rural development and environment department did not consider this matter to be within its area of expertise. As a result, the objectives of winning back the domestic market and attaining an adequate level of self-sufficiency could only be pursued through improving the productivity and competitiveness of products to withstand external competition.

#### **Box 5: Translation of ROPPA's expectations into the PAU and policy objectives**

The following is emphasised in the preamble:

- The agricultural sector's strategic place in the economy of the Union's Member States and [the] fundamental role assigned to it to feed the populations and reduce poverty in rural areas;
- The need to promote more productive, and more competitive, sustainable agriculture within the Member States, allowing the population's food security to be improved by an adequate level of self-sufficiency, and to raise the farmers' standard of living and income;
- The need to win back the domestic market and integrate the large production sectors into the world market, by improving their competitiveness compared with that of third party countries, so as to reduce poverty and food dependency within the Union and its Member States;
- The need to draw up and implement a regional agricultural policy in consultation with all actors in the sector, taking account of all production and exploitation systems within the Union, including family farming;

[...]

The additional clause (no 03/2001) stipulated that the PAU:

« (...) takes into account all production and exploitation systems within the Union, including family farming (Article 2);

(...) aims to make a sustainable contribution to meeting the population's food needs, to promoting the Member States' economic and social development, and to reducing poverty by allowing:

- a) the achievement of food security, by reducing the dependency of the Union for food and improving the operation of agricultural markets;
- b) an improvement in the agricultural producers' standard of living by developing the rural economy and raising their income and their social standing (Article 3).

Extract from: "Agricultural Policy"; UEMOA Commission; June 2002.

### **5.2.3 The ECOWAS Agricultural Policy: ECOWAP**

In 2001, the ECOWAS Ministerial Commission on Agriculture and Food adopted a framework of guidelines for the creation of a regional agricultural policy, thus implementing the ECOWAS revised treaty (1993). This launched the development process of what was to become the ECOWAP, providing a common policy for all West African countries. From the start, ECOWAS built on previous policy exercises defining agricultural and/or food policies and strengthened the concertation process which focused on the following principles:

- Extensive involvement of countries and actors in pilot projects, through a regional committee consisting of a panel of countries, and networks of regional actors such as ROPPA. These played an important part in directing the work;
- A team of experts bringing together West African, European and American regional offices, with experts “steeped” in different economic experience, and a team which guaranteed impartiality and independence with regard to experiences of agricultural policies implemented by the larger countries or regions of the OECD;
- A summary of data on the sectors, markets, etc., and more importantly thorough research conducted among public actors, professional organisations and private operators in each country to identify the whole range of expectations as regards a regional policy;
- The formulation of various scenarios featuring possible policies for the region, and an impact analysis of each of these scenarios. The original idea was that several policies might be applied to the region, but that they covered different options for the future of agriculture. The strength of the policy would come from the capacity of the negotiating parties to affect these choices and to translate them into a coherent policy. The formulation of relatively clear scenarios was a fairly new way of working on drafting policies for the region (Box 6).
- Finally, the organisation of national workshops for each group of actors (producer organisations, economic actors, public sector), followed by workshops with actors from different groups, the idea being that national actors needed to agree on the policy to be adopted; this was then followed by regional workshops leading to a formal validation process by ECOWAS authorities, before the adoption by the Heads of State and Government<sup>17</sup>.

The involvement of ROPPA members in the national workshops noticeably influenced the debate, but generally, ROPPA’s position was very close to the concerns of agricultural authorities (and sometimes went beyond them, especially within the Ministries of Economy and Finance and sometimes the Ministries of Trade), following the liberalisation of agricultural and food product imports resulting from the implementation of the CET in UEMOA countries. The debate on the various scenarios enabled all actors to opt for somewhat differing positions as to the agricultural policy, including as regards the opening up of the regional agricultural market to global markets. Two major points came out of the consultations: the need for a vision to be formulated for regional agriculture (this vision was not explicit in the documents that had been submitted for the debate), and a consensus on the chosen scenario. In fact, both points reflected back to the same logic: the vision and objectives make clear references to the search for regional food sovereignty, via a food security based largely on winning back regional markets, enhancing regional production, and controlling imports (see Box 7). The chosen scenario represented a fairly pragmatic option: it was based on extensive regional integration as well as on a protection method which varied depending on the specific challenges of food sectors. This approach became the third focus of ECOWAP’s intervention, relating to the adaptation of the external trade regime. ECOWAP justified protection in three situations<sup>18</sup> in the following way:

- *“...in the absence of a viable agreement on the trade of agricultural products at the WTO, which would reduce or eliminate such subsidies, unilateral regional protection is justified, as a way of compensating for distortions on the world market;*
- *a similar differentiated protection is justified considering the uncertainties linked to market fluctuations affecting vulnerable populations;*
- *finally, it is justified as part of a means to protect investments in certain sectors in which the region has a potential comparative advantage.*

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<sup>17</sup> Decision A/DEC./01/05 adopting the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy

<sup>18</sup> Appendix to Decision A/DEC./01/05 adopting the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy

*This differentiated protection must be adapted to the domestic and international situation specific to each agricultural product. The customs duties should allow the creation of a trade environment which is sufficiently promising and stable to secure the development of specific sectors”.*

#### **Box 6: Agricultural policy scenarios submitted to ECOWAS**

The consultation process carried out in the 15 ECOWAS countries covered the analysis, issues, challenges and guiding principles needed to position the regional policy within the context of national policies (subsidiarity, complementarity, etc.). But, more importantly, the policy orientation was debated using 4 scenarios which differed from underlying scenarios. These only covered crucial points where there were differences of opinion. For example, the “growth in agriculture productivity and competitiveness”, one of the three major focuses of ECOWAP, was not included in the scenarios because the steering committee considered that there was wide consensus on this aspect. Two key questions were debated:

- the regional integration level of production and markets;
- the region’s degree of openness to the international markets.

The latter crystallised the debate and differences.

The four scenarios proposed were as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> scenario: a regional form of agriculture that is strongly integrated and very open to international markets;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> scenario: a regional form of agriculture that is little integrated and very open to international markets;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> scenario: a regional form of agriculture that is little integrated, with an agricultural sector whose protection is high and generalised;
- 4<sup>th</sup> scenario: a regional agriculture that is strongly integrated, with differentiated protection according to products and sectors.

The 4<sup>th</sup> scenario was chosen and the regional policy was built around it.

*Source: Strategic Paper on an Agricultural Policy for West Africa – ECOWAP – Reference document; July 2004; ECOWAS*

#### **Box 7: ECOWAP’s vision and objectives**

##### *Vision*

The agricultural policy is part of sustainable, modern agriculture, based on the effectiveness and efficiency of family farming and the promotion of agricultural businesses through the involvement of the private sector. Being both productive and competitive on the intra-community market as well as on international markets, it should allow for food security to be achieved and for those working in it to benefit from adequate income.

##### *General purpose*

The general purpose of the Agricultural Policy of the Economic Community of West Africa is to make a sustainable contribution to meeting the population’s food needs, to promoting the Member States’ economic and social development, and to reducing poverty, as well as inequalities between territories, zones and countries.

##### *Specific objectives*

This general purpose is split into seven specific objectives. The first three refer to food sovereignty and how best to achieve it:

- guaranteeing food security as well as food safety for West Africa’s rural and urban populations, through initiatives to attain food sovereignty for the region;
- reducing the reliance on imports by giving priority to food production and food processing, by leveraging and exploiting complementarities and comparative advantages within the region, while taking account of specific aspects linked to the insular or landlocked nature of certain rural areas or countries;
- encouraging a fair economic and commercial integration of farms in regional, national or international markets in order to improve the farming population’s income level, including women’s; ...

*Source: Appendix to Decision A/DEC./01/05 on the adoption of the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy – ECOWAS; January 2005.*

### 5.3 National strategies and policies

Senegal and Mali have recently redefined their agricultural policies. In both cases, the government has opted for so-called Orientation Law “*lois d’orientation*”. In both cases, before the bills were put before parliament by the Council of Ministers, a lengthy consultation process was conducted with relevant actors, primarily producer organisations<sup>19</sup>.

#### 5.3.1 Senegal’s agricultural policy

In both countries the new policies make explicit reference to food sovereignty. In the case of Senegal, the agro-sylvo-pastoral orientation law establish the objectives and the responsibilities of the State:

“(…)

**Article 5:** *the alleviation of poverty is the overriding priority of the State, particularly in rural areas. The State undertakes to provide for all those employed in work relating to agriculture a standard of living which will allow them to provide for their legitimate needs in terms of food, health, housing, clothing, education, training and leisure. The State also strives to provide, in the medium term, a level of food security which guarantees the food sovereignty of the country.*

**Article 6:** *The specific objectives of the agro-sylvo-pastoral development policy are:*

1. *To alleviate the effects of climactic, economic, environmental and health risks by managing water, diversifying production and training rural communities in order to improve the food security of the population and ultimately to secure the country’s food sovereignty;*

(…)”

Article 24 of this law relating to diversification, sectors and market regulation defines the means to achieve these goals:

*“The diversification of agricultural production is a very effective means to improve rural revenues and the country’s food security.*

*Moreover, it will support the development of export industries in order to meet demand from overseas, and to satisfy a growing need to find substitutes for imported foodstuffs.*

(…)”

Article 36 of Senegal’s LOASP states that *“Wherever necessary, the State will take protective measures or grant subsidies to reduce or eradicate distortions in external economic exchanges within the UEMOA and ECOWAS under the terms of World Trade Organization agreements.*

*Through multilateral and bilateral trade talks, the State strives to eradicate undesirable trade practices.”*

The State of Senegal clearly aims to regain a degree of control over the national market and improve its response to domestic food demand through a policy of diversification and import substitution. It is not averse to intervening in markets, or in protection policies, when its productions are threatened by distortion resulting from the policies of its trade partners. The law is essentially a means of ensuring food security by increasing internal provision. It does not address conditions of access to food, given that more than half the population is urban and able to meet its food needs through the market. Interviews conducted in Senegal have shown that public actors do not have fixed targets in terms of the extent to which the internal market is controlled, i.e. the degree of self-sufficiency which would be considered to have achieved food sovereignty. In response to this question, interviewees indicated that it would be sufficient to aim for a reversal of the current trend, whereby growing demand is met by increasing imports of rice kernels from Asia.

#### 5.3.2 Mali’s agricultural policy

Mali’s Agricultural Orientation Law (*Loi d’orientation agricole, LOA*) states, in Article 3 of the general provisions, that *“The agricultural development policy aims to promote sustainable, modern and competitive agriculture based primarily on recognised and protected family farms, by optimising agro-ecological potential and the country’s agricultural expertise and by creating an environment which encourages the development of a structured agricultural sector.*

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<sup>19</sup> In Mali, the President of the Republic, who was responsible for the guidelines, conferred on the CNOP (the national coordination framework for producer organisations in Mali) the responsibility for organising regional consultation and workshops on the principle issues.

*It aims to guarantee food sovereignty and to make the agricultural sector the driving force of the national economy in order to assure the well-being of its people.*

*The agricultural development policy depends upon willingness to promote the modernisation of family farming and agricultural enterprise in order to encourage the creation of a structured agro-industrial sector which is competitive and integrated into the sub-regional economy.*

(...)" The law defines what is meant by the term "food sovereignty". It is described as "*the right of a State to define and to draft an autonomous agricultural and food policy which guarantees sustainable farming based on local production and the accountability of producers, who, to this end, will have access to all necessary means, namely land, water, credit and markets.*"

Section III of the Agricultural Guidelines deals specifically with food sovereignty (see Box 8). It is interesting to note that the State is allowed to intervene in the market: "*the State is responsible for regulating imports and exports of agri-food products*", but makes no mention here of the country's commitments within the UEMOA and ECOWAS. Section V refers to production and markets and states in Article 80 that the State wishes to promote greater dynamism in the national market, fluidity of exchange and sub-regional integration of agricultural markets (...). Article 183 takes these points further and makes it clear that "*the State, where required and in consultation with agricultural professionals and other private sector actors, will take all necessary measures to protect the country's markets for agricultural products*".

Interviews conducted with actors in Mali underline the priority given to this national plan for agricultural development. Whereas trade policy is led by the supranational regional institutions, here the State allows itself to intervene directly and without reference to its partners in the international community, or so it seems.

#### **Box 8: Food sovereignty in Mali's Agricultural Orientation Law**

Heading III: Food sovereignty and risks

Chapter 1: Food sovereignty

**Article 51:** Food sovereignty is the driving force behind all agricultural development policy. Food security is one element of food sovereignty.

**Article 52:** The strategy to develop agricultural production is based first and foremost on measures dealing with land allocation, intensification, diversification and sustainability of production according to comparative advantage, competitiveness of products, ability to meet domestic demand, regulation of imports and promotion of exports.

**Article 53:** The State, in consultation with local governments, shall draft development policies for the production of crops, livestock, fish, aquaculture, forestry and fauna and is responsible for their implementation. Their primary objective will be to achieve food sovereignty in the medium term, in respect of the conditions created by the principles and objectives laid down in Section 1 of this law.

The specific measures listed in these policies are designed to encourage the availability and accessibility of a diversity of food products throughout the nation's territory.

**Article 54:** The State, in collaboration with local governments, shall, as part of its supply strategy, coordinate and support trading operations in areas of structural deficit, shall give additional support in at-risk zones, and shall bear responsibility for the regulation of imports and exports of agri-food products.

**Article 55:** Local governments may receive specific subsidies from the State in the form of food security contracts aimed at mitigating rural poverty, protecting the environment and minimising inter- and intra-regional inequalities. [...]

#### **5.4 Policy negotiation and food sovereignty**

Negotiations are important because it is clear that the more actors from the producer community are implicated in such procedures, the more the policy content reflects their views. The benefits of involvement are twofold: i) the active involvement of representatives from the producer community in policy discussions contributes to better anchoring the approach in the realities of West African producer societies; ii) the key role played by the producer community on which political leadership depends ultimately has an impact on the outcome of policy dialogue, or even, on occasion, confrontation.



The debate's democratisation, together with support for producer organisations and increased opportunity for their involvement in political dialogue, inevitably leads to the creation of more "farming-friendly" policies. Nowadays the concept of food sovereignty is seen to indicate the degree to which agricultural policy favours the interests of the small farmer or, more generally, family farming.

In other words, the perspective of "food sovereignty" is not commonly integrated in experts language. Where it is explicitly mentioned in particular policies, this is generally the result of social dialogue. This is the case particularly in Senegal, Mali and West Africa. Policy content and focus may not have been radically altered, but the "*food sovereignty stamp*" is a sign that policy has been strongly influenced by producer organisations, which defend these policies and ensure that they are implemented and adhered to in the community. One example of note is the fact that actors from civil society and producer organisations communicated more effectively about the ECOWAP than the ECOWAS Secretariat itself did. By showing that they are committed to this policy and that they "own" it, these actors are making a powerful statement and in some senses are putting decision-makers in an uncomfortable situation.

## **6. How is food sovereignty implemented in West Africa?**

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### **6.1 With regard to agricultural policy**

The recent successful creation of rural development strategies, agricultural policy and laws, at both the national level (Senegal and Mali particularly) and the regional level (PAU and ECOWAP) may be deceptive. Apart from Nigeria, countries in the region no longer pursued agricultural policies which reflected the importance of this sector in West Africa's economy and society. Today, these new policies are above all the expression of a political will to reinvest in agricultural development and to attain new goals with socio-professional actors.

Food sovereignty has too recently become a feature of agricultural policy for us to be able to analyse how national agricultural policies are managing the transition of this concept into reality. However, it is possible to make some assessment of this by considering the following:

- Protection at borders, a fundamental issue for food sovereignty, is the prerogative of regional authorities.
- Notions of "modernisation, transformation and moderate intensification of production systems", also tenets of food sovereignty, should be addressed primarily by national development policies.

Commercial issues are addressed in the next section. The issue of agricultural development is not addressed, since national policies which advance the principle of food sovereignty are still at the planning stage.

Assessments of the application of the Food Aid Charter enable us to review the level of commitment of States and other actors to activities which are integral to the creation of food sovereignty.

### **6.2 With regard to trade policy**

Until now, West African countries have taken part in two economic and trade integration frameworks: the UEMOA and ECOWAS. A merger process is expected to result in a common trade policy by 1 January 2008.

Despite the significance of agriculture as an economic sector (in terms of its contribution to GDP, exports, employment, etc.), the agri-food sector continues to lead a precarious existence. There are several indicators of this vulnerability with regard to trade:

- Of the fifteen countries, nine carry a deficit in the agri-food trade balance, including Nigeria;
- Nigeria alone accounts for 36% of the agri-food imports into the region;
- Côte d'Ivoire accounts for 52% of the area's agricultural exports;
- While imports have increased by 63% in 20 years, exports have grown more quickly, increasing by 95%;
- As a result, the agri-food trade balance for the area has moved from deficit into surplus (-\$267 million in 1982-84; +\$522 million in 2002-04). When related to population, food dependency has been on a decreasing trend;
- The trade surplus is less impressive than it may appear given that economies for the most part are still primarily based on agriculture for employment, and the sector represents a large part of GDP (around 30-35%);
- Goods imported in the largest volume are those which the region is capable of producing: cereals, milk and meat, tomatoes, sugar, etc. For example, 70% of imports from Europe are products which compete with the region's own agricultural output.
- The three largest product groups (cereals, milk and dairy produce and meat) represent around half of the region's food imports. The cost of these imports has doubled over the last 20 years (see Table 4).
- These product groups also benefit the most from production and export support policies in OECD countries (see Table 6).

Many entities expected to see external protection for agriculture extended throughout ECOWAS in favour of the Common External Tariff (CET) system adopted in the UEMOA zone. This expectation was supported by producer organisations that saw this as a way of bringing external trade policies in line with the guidelines drawn up for West Africa's new regional agricultural policy. The view was shared by NGOs and certain networks of economic operators whose task is to develop the region's agricultural products. Regional agricultural authorities (the agriculture and rural development departments of ECOWAS and the UEMOA) and national authorities also hoped that producers and actors in all the region's industrial sectors would be supported through enhanced protection of their regional markets.

During negotiation of the ECOWAP, producer organisations were pleased that the adoption of the sectoral policy came before the adoption of the ECOWAS CET, whereas the UEMOA Agriculture Policy was adopted when the CET had already been fixed. Ministries of agriculture of some of the countries in the economic area saw the extension of the CET as an opportunity to revise the four levels of the CET, which they felt were inappropriate for food and agricultural produce<sup>20</sup>.

In this context, the adoption of the CET by ECOWAS Heads of State and Government<sup>21</sup> in January 2006 was a surprise. The Heads of State, responding to a proposal from the trade ministers of the 15 ECOWAS countries, confirmed that the Customs Union would retain the four-tier CET with customs duties of 0, 5, 10 and 20% (see Box 9).

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. interview with Ndiobo Diène, Bruno Buffaria and Philippe Chedanne; "Entre autonomie de décision et règles communes"; pp 24-25 ; Grain de sel n°34-35 March-August 2006;

<sup>21</sup> Decision A/DEC. 17/01/06 on the adoption of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff; 29<sup>th</sup> session of the Heads of State and Government Conference, Niamey;

### **Box 9: Breakdown of the Common External Tariff (CET)**

The CET is composed of:

- Customs duties (CD), the statistical tax (ST) and the ECOWAS community tax (PC/ECOWAS);
- The regressive protection tax (TDP);
- Import activity tax (CIT).

Products are classified according to the tariff and statistical groups and divided into four categories to which a different customs duty rate will apply:

- Category 0: essential products of a social nature;
- Category 1: essential products, basic raw materials, capital goods and specific input;
- Category 2: input and intermediate products;
- Category 3: finished consumer goods.

The customs duties set for each of these four categories are as follows: category 0: 0%; category 1: 5%; category 2: 10%; category 3: 20%.

For the time, the TDP, which is intended to temporarily protect sectors which would be subject to over-rapid and destabilising liberalisation because of the application of the CET, and the TCI (the ECOWAS special safeguard measure) intended to react to significant increases in imports and/or a significant fall in import prices, have not yet been implemented. They are community mechanisms applied at the national level which are not yet operational in the non-UEMOA member countries. In the same way, the ECOWAS Secretariat has evoked the possibility of a supplementary mechanism intended to neutralise the impact of subsidies on exports from OECD countries to the ECOWAS area; this mechanism, known as the “ECOWAS countervailing duty” (PCC) is still being negotiated by the countries involved.

*Source: Agritrade; CTA- Bureau Issala according to Decision A/DEC.17/01/06 on the adoption of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff*

In fact, there have always been two interpretations of the decision by ECOWAS Heads of State in 2003 to expand the UEMOA CET and create a Customs Union between the 15 West African countries. The decision was part of preparations for the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between West Africa and the EU. The EPA was designed to reform the trade conventions governing all trade between the two regions. It seeks to address the issues arising from the incompatibility of the former trading regime (the Lomé Convention) with WTO regulations: the Lomé Convention supported non-reciprocal trading preferences which allowed ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries to benefit from tariff concessions on their exports to Europe without being forced to give concessions to imports from Europe. This type of non-reciprocal agreement can only be granted to countries with LDC status. For non-LDC countries, concessions must either be extended to all developing countries (under the non-discrimination principle known as the Most-Favoured Nation clause) or must be granted by the creation of a free trade area under which trade concessions are reciprocal between the two countries or two regions (WTO, Article XXIV). Of the 15 ECOWAS member countries in West Africa, twelve are LDC and three are non-LDC: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria. These three countries account for around 80% of the region's exports to the EU, both in terms of total exports and agricultural products exports.

The EPA should be implemented on 1 January 2008, the date which marks the expiry of the WTO derogation allowing the European Union and ACP countries exemption from certain multilateral trade regulations. The EPA will seek to ensure compatibility between WTO regulations by creating free trade areas between ACP countries (in this case, West Africa) and the European Union. In order to achieve this near-total trade liberalisation between the two economic areas (by 2020), West Africa must become a genuine Customs Union with a common external tariff.

One interpretation of this idea of an “extended CET” was that non-UEMOA members would adopt the UEMOA CET almost as it was, particularly in terms of the tariff levels, leaving the classification of certain products to be decided. Another view was that the Heads of State had adopted the general tenets of the CET and the disciplines that these implied, but that the debate was ongoing with regard to tariff margins and categorisation and classification of goods.

The terms of the Heads of State decision do not fit either of these interpretations exactly, and therefore it is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion on the correlation between the ECOWAP and the level of the CET. The following points go some way to clarifying the situation:

- The current framework of the CET remains valid until modified by a decision of Ministers of Trade. In other words, there is nothing to stop a reclassification within the four existing bands, a change in the categories or the introduction of new tariffs. These could arise from ongoing regional negotiation, a change in the balance of powers, mobilisation of actors, etc.
- Member States and the UEMOA Commission did not wish to review the four CET bands.
- Non-UEMOA member countries were invited to draw up two lists of goods to be exempt from the CET: the first list (List A) includes goods for which the country agrees with the proposed tariff rating but feels that it may be unable to comply with the tariff during the transition period which runs from January 2006 to December 2007. A temporary exemption is thus required. The second list (List B) covers products for which the country does not agree with the application of the proposed tariff rating once the transition period has elapsed.
- The CET Committee comprises representatives from all ECOWAS Member States and has been involved in negotiations to reclassify certain goods. The potential creation of a fifth tariff band of 50% is not widely supported by the countries. Even Nigeria, which raised the prospect of such a tariff in its List B, does not seem to be actively supporting its creation.
- Certain goods, such as rice (taxed at 10%) and milk powder (currently classified as an input and taxed at only 5%) can be reclassified as Category 3 products (subject to 20% customs duty).
- Consistency between the ECOWAP and the external trade policy is now generally discussed in terms of distortion in the compensation payments designed to alleviate the impact of dumping by West Africa's competitors. Other mechanisms likely to be adopted include the special safeguard measure to be used in case of a sudden increase in imports or to offset price weakness on international markets.
- The European Union is one of the key suppliers of agri-food products imported into the region. As a result, the dismantling of protective barriers at state borders (i.e. the non-application of the CET on imports from Europe, under the EPA) would lead to imports from Europe competing directly with West African products.
- Faced with this threat, which was highlighted in several industries by studies on the impact of a EU-West Africa EPA, agricultural products could be considered as sensitive goods and thus be excluded, permanently or temporarily, partially or completely, from the plan to liberalise trade. Negotiations on trade liberalisation between the two regions (i.e. abolition of tariffs; products to which they apply; frequency and scheduling; and protection or exclusion of sensitive goods, etc.) are due to be held in 2007.

Over the next few years, the trajectory of West African trade policy will be crucial for regional agriculture. The current level of protection, when compared with other countries and regions, indicates that the area is already very involved in external trade. This liberalisation was achieved without any of West Africa's main competitors abolishing or reducing agricultural subsidies. In Nigeria, the customs duty simple average applied to agricultural goods is 39%. However, in all other ECOWAS countries, it is less than 15% - on a par with Brazil, an agricultural exporter known to be in favour of free trade. Although West Africa's productivity levels bear no comparison with those of its industrialised competitors, the support given to West Africa is very low, while in developed countries, the agricultural sector is highly subsidised. It is estimated that the EU spends around 65 billion Euros in community and national support for agriculture, and that subsidies (including the "surcharge" paid by consumers) amount to around 121 billion Euros in total. This figure is 30 times greater than the contribution made by the European Development Fund to all 77 ACP countries.

As a result, the pursuit of food sovereignty in West Africa is closely tied to agriculture and trade policy reforms in competing countries, particularly in Europe. International negotiation is essential if equitable rules are to be implemented in the area of international trade. One might assume that African countries could act unilaterally to sustain the necessary levels of protection. However, this implies ignoring the fact that not all countries in the region have the same interests. For example, whereas Nigeria plans to tax rice at 50%, other countries would consider rice to be an “essential product of a social nature”, i.e. would wish to be tax free. This is the case in the Gambia. As a result, the dumping of certain goods exacerbates the conflict of interests between producers and consumers and between countries. It creates barriers to regional integration by making a negotiated compromise between different groups of actors and different countries less likely. Negotiation of the Food Aid Charter has been a good illustration of this: it shows that – because certain “poor practices” of aid are in the interest both of beneficiary and donor countries – the two parties have to make a joint effort to proceed in the right direction, otherwise the reform process will fail. The growing interdependence of agricultural and food economies encourages us to review the reforms to be made on both sides, and the way both parties should implement them. The West Africa’s regional integration agenda has accelerated considerably by the prospect of the setting up of the EPA and the constraints which came with it. The progress made in West Africa over the last four years would not have been as extensive without this international effort.

Table 3: Comparison of customs duties applied to different agricultural products

Country	Simple average applied (%)	Weighted average applied (%)
<b>Industrialised countries</b>		
<i>All industrialised countries</i>	24,1	14,1
Australia	1,3	2,4
Canada	9,8	11,7
European Union	19,8	17,4
New Zealand	1,6	2,4
United States	5,0	5,0
<b>Developing Countries</b>		
<i>Pacific and East Asia</i>	17,0	39,1
China	15,7	12,6
Thailand	34,8	15,3
<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	13,4	18,4
Brazil	12,2	11,5
Morocco	41,0	27,0
India	35,3	28,4
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>	17,5	16,2
Benin	13,9	14,9
Burkina Faso	13,9	14,0
Côte d'Ivoire	10,9	9,7
Guinea-Bissau	13,8	17,4
Mali	13,9	13,5
Niger	13,9	13,3
Nigeria	39,0	29,1
Senegal	14,0	11,5
Togo	13,9	11,8

Source: FAO

Table 4: Imports into ECOWAS of three product categories which compete with the region's own output

	1984/85	1993/94	2003/04	2003-04/ 1993-04
<b>ECOWAS imports by volume (tonnes)</b>				
Cereals	4,390,416	4,645,383	8,941,939	192%
Dairy produce and eggs	204,617	161,147	268,842	167%
Meat and meat products	45,995	78,578	222,766	283%
<b>ECOWAS imports by value (\$1,000)</b>				
Cereals	1,076,828	1,005,357	1,873,872	186%
Dairy produce and eggs	223,744	254,332	529,424	208%
Meat and meat products	49,729	73,087	221,005	302%
<i>Total for the three product groups</i>	<i>1,350,301</i>	<i>1,332,775</i>	<i>2,624,300</i>	<i>197%</i>

Source: FAO data

Table 5: Agri-food exports and imports for ECOWAS countries

	Exports (\$1000)			Imports (\$1000)			Agri-food balance (\$1000)		
	1982-84	1992-94	2002-2004	1982-84	1992-94	2002-2004	1982-84	1992-94	2002-2004
<b>Benin</b>	43 141	103 670	223 316	112 903	172 797	259 699	-69 763	-69 127	-36 382
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	57 535	89 147	265 040	81 680	119 337	139 228	-24 145	-30 190	125 812
<b>Cape Verde</b>	586	748	271	26 058	63 476	96 443	-25 473	-62 728	-96 172
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	1 520 044	1 532 210	3 135 503	386 014	383 381	574 717	1 134 030	1 148 828	2 560 786
<b>Gambia</b>	28 708	19 736	19 954	40 871	88 407	101 849	-12 163	-68 672	-81 895
<b>Ghana</b>	357 756	326 617	984 230	101 173	211 483	685 732	256 583	115 134	298 498
<b>Guinea</b>	27 524	39 129	40 336	46 318	168 645	194 079	-18 794	-129 516	-153 743
<b>Guinea-</b>									
<b>Bissau</b>	8 571	16 773	52 659	11 377	33 261	44 051	-2 806	-16 488	8 608
<b>Liberia</b>	108 465	21 355	85 630	98 375	87 893	95 216	10 090	-66 538	-9 587
<b>Mali</b>	191 757	251 815	298 399	75 722	109 021	159 981	116 034	142 794	138 418
<b>Niger</b>	68 805	27 232	64 259	84 120	72 871	147 265	-15 315	-45 639	-83 006
<b>Nigeria</b>	381 299	259 112	502 982	1 840 323	860 583	1 990 305	-1 459 024	-601 471	-1 487 323
<b>Senegal</b>	170 148	114 612	161 773	268 000	358 746	705 918	-97 852	-244 134	-544 144
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	32 574	13 804	11 335	60 961	108 077	152 102	-28 387	-94 274	-140 767
<b>Togo</b>	61 348	93 063	116 569	91 845	60 959	93 393	-30 497	32 104	23 175
<b>ECOWAS</b>	3 058 261	2 909 022	5 962 255	3 325 744	2 898 939	5 439 978	-267 483	10 084	522 276

Source :FAO Data

**Table 6: Public subsidies granted by West Africa's main agricultural competitors**

PSE: Producer Subsidy Equivalent	1986-88		2005	
	PSE (bn Euros)	PSE as % of value of production	PSE (bn Euros)	PSE as % of value of production
Australia	1,320	5	1,453	5
Canada	6,066	36	6,015	21
European Union	100,147	41	133,785	32
Japan	49,579	64	47,435	56
New Zealand	474	11	262	3
United States	36,958	22	42,669	16
OECD	242,474	37	279,845	29

*Source: Agricultural Policies in OECD Countries: At a Glance; OECD; 2006*

### **6.3 Application of the Charter in Sahelian countries**

The Charter is not a binding instrument. Its implementation is at the will of actors. Added to this is the “collective will” which is brought to bear upon one or another actor and which leads to the respect of common rules.

The research carried out for this document in Cape Verde, Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso supports earlier findings in Niger. The Food Aid Charter is no longer referred to explicitly in the management of food crisis and aid. The principal actors from aid agencies and national governments who drafted the Charter have for the most part moved on to different roles and are no longer in positions where they are able to apply the Charter. This does not mean that its principles are not respected. On the contrary, an “aid management culture” seems to have emerged in the Sahel both in the ranks of decision-makers and among donors, and is encouraging compliance with the Charter’s key principles.

In most countries, the Charter’s principles are generally upheld in food crisis prevention and management policies (FCPM). Some countries make explicit reference to it in their FCPM policies, as is the case in Niger.

One major improvement which has come about through the application of the Charter is that of programme aid. Aid in this form was deemed the most inappropriate given its potential for destabilising local agricultural and food economies. It has been abolished by several donors. Only rice aid from America and, mainly, from Japan, remains. Japanese rice aid has been criticised by producer organisations (and some donors) and poses a major competition problem for local producers. It is however accepted by governments because it supports the balance of payments and involves relatively few obligations or conditions.

#### **6.3.1 Crisis anticipation and mitigation**

All countries have made significant efforts to set up information systems to review production (through the agricultural census), shortages, populations and vulnerable zones (through early warning systems), and market operation (through market information systems). As a result, the countries have been able to forecast harvests and provisionally assess cereal output, which, based on actual harvests, allows them to highlight significant gaps between supply (production, stocks, imports, programme aid) and demand. They are then able to plan and organise their response to any crisis well ahead of any crisis, usually during the lean season. Generally speaking, the available information supports the dialogue between national actors and donors, allowing them to assess food aid requirements. It may also help to identify potential upstream measures to prevent or mitigate the crisis, spare populations from the crisis and allow food aid to be mobilised. Such measures aim to provide additional resources to households and strengthen endogenous mechanisms to withstand crises by:



- Setting up or reinstating cereal banks;
- Setting up seed banks so that seed doesn't run out;
- Encouraging the cultivation of off-season crops;
- Providing fodder so that livestock does not lose its value;
- Establishing cash or food-for-work operations;
- Selling cereals at affordable prices; etc.

**This set of crisis mitigation measures is regularly used in various countries where an early assessment of the food situation has been possible. The first rule of effective aid management would therefore be to avoid recourse to such measures altogether.**

These information systems are vulnerable, however, and most do not yet have secure funding or the necessary level of staffing and institutional support. Also, they were primarily designed in response to national food security goals. Consequently they pay little regard to the flow of food products between countries, even though markets now operate on a regional level. This approach is also predicated upon food crises arising from production shortage, and places great emphasis upon cereal output. It does not pay sufficient heed to vulnerable populations and the problems of access to food. Where it does take account of these factors, it favours rural populations experiencing production shortages. However, these countries are making rapid progress developing their programmes in tandem with key partners, and a common system for assessing vulnerability has been established.

### **6.3.2 Proliferation of actors and diminishing opportunity for dialogue and consultation**

Food aid has become only one minor element of cereal supply and for the last decade has represented just 2% on average of cereal availability in the Sahel. A significant proportion of this aid is provided through local purchasing and triangular aid (see Graph 2).

The main obstacles are those resulting from the proliferation of actors involved in the mobilisation of food aid in the event of a crisis. What happened recently in Niger is a good illustration of this. Generally, however, the larger and more established aid agencies are genuine proponents of the principles of the Charter and tend to share a fairly similar vision. They are fully engaged in consultation and coordination activities with each other and with national and regional authorities<sup>22</sup>.

In the fifteen years since the Charter was signed, the representation of actors involved in aid has changed significantly. Whereas at one time signatories to the Charter accounted for 75% of the aid given, they now only provide 50% of all food aid to the Sahel. New donors, particularly Japan, the Arab countries, various associations, elected and local bodies, etc. are allocating aid in ways that have changed little over time. Japan allocates aid which can be monetised. Under certain clauses of WTO agreements, this allows Japan to sell rice it has imported, thereby minimizing disruption to its own internal market. This rice aid is regularly criticised by other donors, producer organisations and NGOs, who feel that it disrupts rice markets and affects national production. Other donors send aid based on what is available (all sorts of products, often perishable, in small quantities), which is by no means compliant with the Charter's principles (the respect for eating habits in particular). These donors often do not participate in national crisis prevention and management initiatives, and governments are not always willing to encourage them to respect the Charter's regulations.

Another important subject which merits attention, since it lies at the heart of the debate on food sovereignty, is the management of aid and its relation to market operation. The debate became particularly animated during the food crisis in Niger. Donor States responded by intervening to sell at affordable prices. This was sharply criticised by certain NGOs<sup>23</sup> because it protected traders' interests. The criticism was echoed by elements of Niger's civil society. In other words, when the Charter was adopted, its aim was to manage aid in such a way that it would not cause market prices to collapse. This involved

<sup>22</sup> The CILSS regional plan brings together most of the large bi- and multilateral donors (notably the WFP) with international information systems (Fewsnet, GIEWS/FAO, VAM/WFP)

<sup>23</sup> Dossier Niger: *Payer ou mourir*, June 2005; MSF

protecting producer interests so as not to deter them from producing in the medium-long term, and the integration of aid into the development strategies of “free-market” food economies. However, Niger’s experience has raised the question of how aid can be used to regulate the market and lower prices in order to improve vulnerable populations’ access to food and bring an end to real or apparent speculation by traders.

Opportunities for consultation are also crucial: talks generally bring together national governments and donors. Producer organisations and NGOs, which have a stake in long-term food security programmes, are rarely invited to the negotiating table. This situation has arisen through planning traditions which have favoured consultation and coordination between the actors who managed the aid, which means that those with more long-term concerns are rarely represented in discussions on preventing and managing crises. This has an impact on political choices and the relief measures taken. Similarly, the larger humanitarian aid actors, such as Echo and the emergency relief NGOs, are not party to the planning process, yet they have significant capacities to act in ways not covered by the agreed strategy of States and regular donors.

Every year Japan donates a significant amount of rice. According to WFP/Interfais data, aid from Japan to the CILSS countries in the 2004-5 campaign totalled 54,418 tonnes. This is programmed aid allocated to the Japanese government. In practice Japan allocates financial resources and the beneficiary government opens a tender for the supply of rice by Japanese companies. This rice aid allows Japan to abide by a particular clause of the WTO Marrakesh Agreement regarding *minimum guaranteed access* to the national market. The donor country agrees to open its national market with a minimum import threshold of 5% of total domestic consumption. Japan produces about 10 million tonnes of paddy rice per year. Since 1996 it has imported between 500,000 and 600,000 tonnes of rice per year.

The rice sector is heavily protected in Japan, not just by customs tariffs but also by the quality of the rice cultivated. The country does not want its markets disrupted by imports which it is forced by WTO regulations to accept. Its rice production (and national self-sufficiency) is based on very small-scale farming which would not generate sufficient returns for its producers without the benefit of protection. Therefore Japan honours its engagements under the London Convention on food aid (300,000 tonnes wheat equivalent out of a total donor commitment of 10 million tonnes) by re-exporting as food aid a significant proportion of the imports it has to accept.

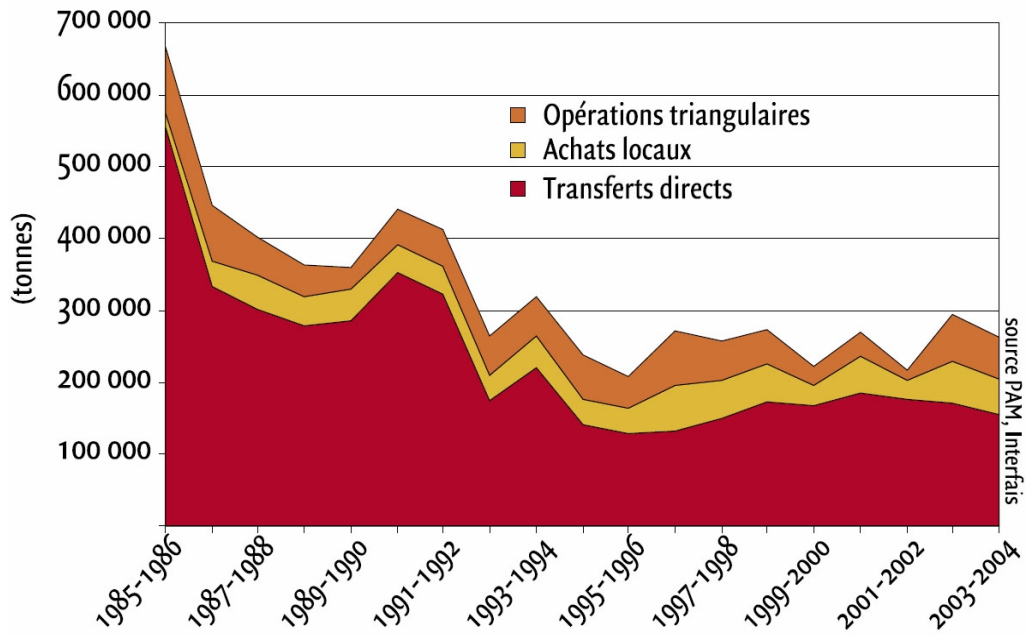
In the Sahel, the aid programme has been scaled down significantly because of the problems it causes, namely market distortion, competition with local industry, etc. Even when aid is re-sold, it pulls down market prices. The United States finances some of the food security activities undertaken by American NGOs via monetised aid. The donations finance the activities of these projects. Japan is one of the principal suppliers to the aid programme. The aid, when it arrives in the destination country, is either added to security stocks or immediately resold by tender to traders who sell the food on to local markets.

These aid packages are allocated irrespective of a country’s cereal availability. The aid is dispatched whether the agricultural campaign yields a surplus or a shortage. In fact, since most of the countries have rice shortages, the aid is viewed as a prop to the balance of payments, substituting commercial imports which are an expensive drain on foreign currency. Rice which is often three or four years old is sold at such low prices that products from other sources simply cannot compete. This forces down market prices for domestically produced rice and for other cereals whose markets are subsequently affected. In surplus years, food aid imports augment the downward price trend.

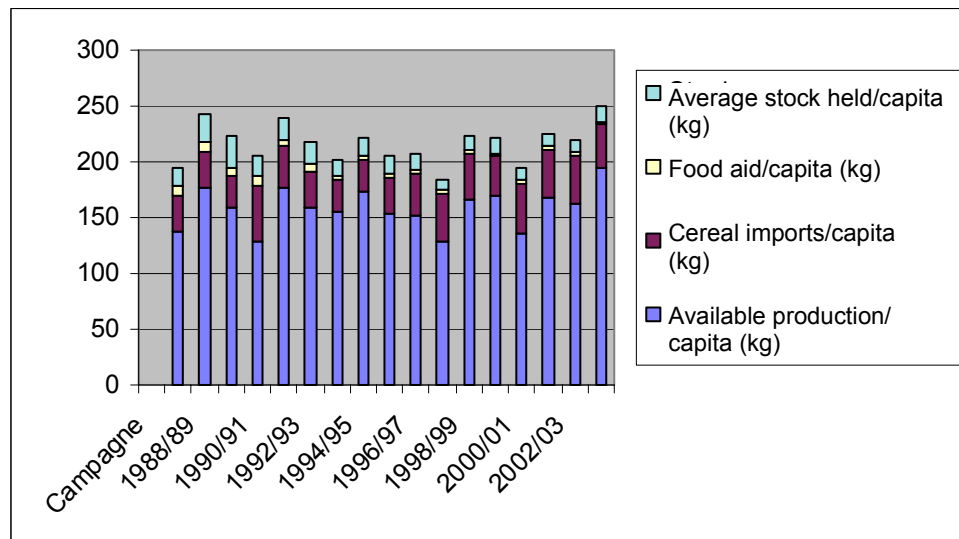
### **6.3.3 General improvement, but with many shortcomings**

To conclude, respect for the tenets of the Food Aid Charter is one of the building blocks of food sovereignty. However, the Charter relates only to the management of emergent food crises and the use of structural food aid. This is essential but not sufficient. There is a pressing need for structural food security policies. The ambitious policies adopted nationally and regionally in this regard have not been applied extensively enough to demonstrate their efficacy in resolving longer-term challenges to food sovereignty.

**Graph 2: Supply structure in the CILSS area**



**Graph 3: Food aid deliveries and method of supply**



Source: CILSS data

**Table 7: Food aid to the Sahel donated by non-signatories to the Charter**

	<b>Campaign year average 1992-93 / 1993-94</b>	<b>Campaign year average 2001-02 / 2002-03</b>
Total food aid to the CILSS area (Tonnes)	292,157	249,692
Food aid as a proportion of the region's cereal supply	3.3%	2.1%
Proportion of aid donated by Charter signatories	<b>75%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Proportion of aid donated by non-signatories to the Charter	<b>25%</b>	<b>50%</b>

*Source: WFP-Interfais and CILSS*

Effective management of aid in kind is dependent on the following:

- **Gauging need:** this is in turn dependent upon the quality and regularity of information supplied, and the ability to analyse and make decisions based on all the information available. Mobilisation of aid is often slow, except where a humanitarian crisis seizes media attention. Needs therefore have to be anticipated. The earlier the intervention in a potential crisis, however, the less reliable and comprehensive the information available. The aid programme, for example, will be established according to production estimates. The reliability of information systems is often fiercely debated during serious crises because of its impact on aid planning;
- **Respect for eating habits:** international food aid which has not been purchased on the local market tends to consist almost exclusively of rice and wheat flour. Sourcing dry cereals – millet or sorghum – requires the purchaser to buy locally in areas where there is a surplus or from neighbouring countries. In the rural areas of countries such as Burkina Faso or Mali, rice is consumed almost everywhere, even though it is not a traditional part of the diet; wheat and wheat-based products, on the other hand, are rarely consumed in landlocked countries and in rural areas. There is evidence that sorghum imported from the United States or Thailand is not well thought of.
- **The targeting of aid and, more generally, effective management of aid:** this refers to the targeting of emergency aid at those most in need. Targeting depends on advance warning of shortages. Such warnings generally ensure aid can be targeted geographically (when the system works best, even to specific villages). Some countries now use indirect targeting methods, based on highly labour-intensive work or the sale of products at social or affordable prices but in small quantities. For programme aid, effective management enables aid to be converted into funds which are then used in food security programmes, to finance and maintain emergency stocks, or even to finance information systems;
- **Local purchasing:** this can help to stimulate local markets and provide a revenue source for producers with surplus product to sell. Local (institutional) purchasing also provides structure to a market, requiring traders or producer organisations to respond to demand in terms of: weight, quality, goods free from impurities and parasites, delivery time, etc. In this regard, the learning aspect is important. Most aid agencies now allow for local purchasing. However, they sometimes underestimate the effect of institutional purchasing upon prices, and the difficulty of supplying large quantities when cereal supplies are often piecemeal and suppliers are not used to selling by tender.
- **Avoiding market destabilisation:** this can be achieved in two ways: by researching all possible alternatives to free aid and by ensuring that aid is received when people most need it. There are still frequent examples of aid arriving after the harvest.

Evaluations of the Food Aid Charter conducted since the early 1990s highlight several problems in its application. These fall into three main categories: (i) local sourcing; (ii) taking account of eating habits when selecting foods; and (iii) impact on cereal markets.

***a) The Food Aid Charter and the prioritisation of local sourcing***

Although local purchasing has gradually replaced international purchasing over time, there are still significant obstacles to sourcing locally:

- Certain donor policies are not sufficiently adapted to local circumstances to enable the donor to give financial aid for local purchasing, or to give physical or other forms of aid. Therefore, even though it may be possible to purchase locally, some sponsors are restricted by their own legislation to giving aid in kind;
- Problems in sourcing local cereals, and the cost involved, often prove more significant than when sourcing internationally. This is because supply is spread so widely and it can be difficult to gather together quantities sufficient to meet demand. High prices reflect poor infrastructure and the resulting high transport and intermediate costs;
- Such difficulties can lead to significant delays in mobilising aid which are sometimes greater than when sourcing internationally.

In recent years, the development of trade networks, the increasing professionalism of traders and producer organisations (for example, their ability to participate in tenders and their respect for contractual undertakings), as well as an increasing market knowledge (availability, price, type and reliability of operators) have all contributed to a considerable improvement in the mobilisation of local resources and have enhanced the “competitiveness” of local sourcing compared to international purchasing.

***b) The Charter and respect for eating habits***

Assessments of the Charter reveal that there are still problems with regard to adequate supply of foods suitable to the local diet. It is interesting that certain products which were seen as potentially unsuitable fifteen years ago – noodles, for example – have now been adopted as part of the normal diet in Sahelian countries and compete with other basic foodstuffs.

***c) The Charter and its impact on cereal markets***

Studies show a discernible improvement in the management of food aid and some reduction in the adverse effects of aid on producer markets and strategies. This has been achieved primarily through improvements in information and early warning systems, which allows for effective anticipation of potential problems. As a result, in spite of the significant and continued delays in mobilising aid, this aid is still dispatched before the end of the problematic lean season. However, there are still instances of aid being delivered after the harvest, which exacerbates the post-harvest fall in prices.

## **7. Outstanding issues**

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Food sovereignty is widely seen to herald a new era which marks a return to the nation as originator and enforcer of agriculture and food policies, or a renewed call for regional and international regulation, particularly with regard to trade in food goods. Achieving food security is also fundamental. The emergence of food sovereignty is a manifestation of agriculture’s return to centre-stage. However, although rapid urbanisation in Africa increases the need to strive for food sovereignty, food insecurity among vulnerable populations, who have limited resources and whose survival is so dependent on markets, is an unresolved issue to which food sovereignty alone is not the solution.

## **7.1 Does food sovereignty provide a solution to food insecurity?**

One of the difficulties and major contradictions which food and agricultural policy must address is the question of access to food for those in poverty. There has been a general tendency to put the interests of urban populations in direct opposition to those of rural inhabitants (since, for reasons of public order and political stability, politicians are inclined to legislate in favour of the urban population). This conflict of interests has long been the excuse for the urban bias of food legislation. However, as the 2004/5 food crisis in Niger and the regular food crises in rural areas demonstrate, the problem is a great deal more complex. In countries such as Niger, Senegal and especially Cape Verde, the majority of producers, including cereal growers, are net purchasers of cereals, because they no longer grow enough grain to cover the needs of their own families. They use markets not to sell cereals – even though they have harvested their crop to make some cash – but to buy them. These farmers are thus more affected by a change in the purchase price for cereals than they are by producer selling prices. In the long term, if they are to generate their own production, market protection and the resulting price increases (the objective of protection) should encourage them to increase their output of foodstuffs and reduce their dependency. An important question, however, is how this transition should be managed. Producer organisations, notably ROPPA, suggest that this difficult transition should be made by gradually increasing levels of protection in tandem with the gradual increase in domestic output. This creates its own difficulties, in that successive increments in the level of protection could have too insignificant an impact on prices to encourage farmers to increase the acreage of land given over to food production. However, with high protective barriers, producers may also be diverted away from farming and devote more of their resources to feeding their families.

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that prices for agricultural and food goods in the Sahel (particularly cereals, but also livestock) are influenced above all by the climatic conditions which prevail during the agricultural campaign. Prices can vary from year to year by 100-300% at harvest time or during the lean season. This instability is primarily a result of domestic influences, whereas protection is principally designed to prevent international market fluctuations affecting the domestic market, or to compensate for the gap between domestic and international prices arising from differences in competitiveness or the effects of dumping.

Protection at borders is the major demand of advocates of food sovereignty. To be effective, this protection must lead to higher prices for food goods on the domestic market. The debate on the measures which must accompany market protection, particularly the changes which will improve productivity and competitiveness, will be crucial and may determine the viability of policies which have food sovereignty as their objective. **It has been suggested that achieving food sovereignty in the region depends entirely on two conditions:**

- **Effective protection at the region's borders;**
- **Domestic support for farmers so that they are able to benefit from this protection, i.e. ensuring access to the tools of production (land policy, inputs, the improvements wrought by research and innovation, agricultural advice); access to funds allocated for investment and agriculture; the development of market infrastructure; better access to insurance, etc.**

**In other words, placing West Africa's market on firm foundations is dependent on maintaining a combined approach of protection together with agricultural policies which invest in and offer security to farmers.**

Whatever their position, POs do aim to promote solutions to food supply problems. They claim that by prioritising local food production to meet demand, food sovereignty policies contribute directly to improvements in rural nutrition, encourage respect for urban eating habits and, by improving incomes and living standards in rural areas, help to eradicate poverty by halting the rural exodus.

Producer organisations and NGOs are less forthcoming on the effect that protection has on commodity prices and markets and consequently upon at-risk populations' access to food. Although the notion of food sovereignty implies domestic producers regaining some control over the market, it does not, however, provide all the answers to food security.

## **7.2 Food sovereignty and integrated areas**

Studies have shown that national agricultural policies usually focus on the domestic situation. Actors involved, whether public policy makers or POs, endeavour to develop farming only as far as the country's borders. Most guidelines and strategies, however, take regional policies into account. For example, in Mali and Senegal, guidelines make explicit reference to the PAU and the ECOWAP. Mali's National Assembly Commission for Foreign Affairs aims specifically to make its Agricultural Orientation Law compatible with its obligations under UEMOA and ECOWAS.

### **7.2.1 Uncertainty over the role of regional policy**

National food security strategies are also tied in with regional initiatives, particularly the strategic framework adopted by Sahelian countries through the CILSS. Yet there is still some distance between this approach and the wholesale placing of national agriculture in an exclusively regional context and framework.

Agricultural policies make somewhat limited reference to the priorities of the community when it comes to food and agricultural produce markets. They expect regional policy to provide them with the necessary degree of protection from imports which could harm their local markets, but do not defer to the region in developing their own agricultural economy, except where they benefit from the regional market in being able to export their produce. National approaches do not infer national economies' subjugation to the regional economy. Such a position requires evaluation of the complementarities of production and demand, using comparative advantage to encourage further specialisation and the creation of a true common agricultural market. This is illustrated by the rice sector in Mali. Actors there believe that the Office du Niger area is the region's rice grower *par excellence*. Governments have handed responsibility for land allocation to overseas institutions and investors in order to make the best use of undeveloped land. They expect the region to provide adequate protection from overseas imports to allow them to supply neighbouring countries. However, actors in Senegal – which imports approximately 800,000 tonnes of rice annually at a cost of 240 million dollars – do not envisage changing their buying habits to purchase from Mali, as the community preference system would dictate. Cape Verde, structurally dependent because of its agricultural weakness, bases its own food security on the security of external supply. In this context it could not be claimed that regional priority supply agreements lead to food security.

### **7.2.2 The temptation to withdraw within national boundaries**

In recent years, where food crises have occurred, some countries' initial reaction has been to close their borders, officially or otherwise. This happened during the latest food crisis in Niger. Burkina Faso and Nigeria also halted the export of cereals in order to avoid "a spread of the Niger crisis." By so doing, these countries fueled the price rise in Niger, increasing the widespread vulnerability to poverty. The higher prices resulting from the breakdown of the regional supply network was the major cause of the crisis which, for the large majority of poor households, was mainly one of access to cereals, even in Maradi, the area regarded as Niger's bread basket. The interruption of supply to certain parts of the region at a time when other Sahelian countries had surplus production shows that it had been impossible to execute the crisis mitigation strategy drawn up by the Government and its partners in late 2004. The strategy was based on selling cereal (67,000 tonnes) at affordable prices (10,000 FCFA/bag when market prices had risen to 35,000 FCFA) and stocking cereal banks, etc. But the inflation which took hold when it became impossible to buy from neighbouring countries meant these measures could not be implemented. Though this prevention strategy was later judged to be severely lacking given the scale of the crisis, the fact that it could not be executed precipitated the major crisis which was so catastrophic for young children who had no food.

Recent studies have highlighted the interdependence of these two countries in terms of household revenue sources (including migrant households) and food markets<sup>24</sup>. They have also noted the impact of Nigeria's public policy upon Niger's markets and food security. For landlocked countries whose economies are strongly dependent upon neighbouring countries, food sovereignty is difficult to achieve based on national resources alone.

A contradiction arises, therefore, which countries cannot overcome. The development of regional markets and the suppression of internal barriers to trade, whether official or unofficial, are very effective ways of maximising selling opportunities for producers and encouraging them to invest in production. Increasing market size also helps mould supply to demand, which in turn contributes to price stability and regulation. In other words, agricultural policies which focus on regional trading assist in developing production, in regaining control of regional markets and in reducing dependency on imported food. At the same time, this way of circulating provisions can be a threat when production shortages or price increases occur. At such times, countries react by turning in on themselves and stocking up on basic goods. It is worth noting here that the debate over the level of security stocks needed to prevent crisis is rekindled each time one of the region's countries is affected by crisis. The circulation and stockpiling of basic goods must be examined as part of the development of new crisis mitigation and prevention strategies, with attention to the impact of choices on the region's dependency on food imports and, where relevant, food aid.

**Supporters of food sovereignty must specify whether this concept can be adapted only to the region or whether it should exist primarily as a national goal. Depending on the answer to this question, crisis prevention and mitigation measures may have to be re-examined. The answer will also have a significant impact on the region's ability to commit itself wholly to the notion of food sovereignty. Does regional food sovereignty require countries to renounce national food sovereignty? If it does, consideration should be given to the conditions under which countries will accept this change of sovereignty and the implications of this, especially where the right to food is concerned.**

### **7.3 What role do international regulations play?**

The Doha Development Round agricultural talks will have to address the question of whether or not food should be a separate category under international trade regulations. Several proposals have been made and discussed since the Doha Round negotiations. These include: food issues becoming a specific part of development; special safeguard measures for sensitive and special goods; an end to export subsidies, etc. For the time-being, however, these talks have broken down.

Can the region's countries profit from this hiatus to consolidate their position and identify regulatory instruments which will allow food sovereignty to be covered by the trade talks?

## **8. Conclusions and prospects**

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Food sovereignty's emergence into the arena of public debate is a manifestation above all of the desire of public actors, socio-professional organisations and civil society to ensure that agricultural and food policies reflect public choices.

The Food Aid Charter was negotiated by States and donors during the structural adjustment era. Its aim was to integrate food aid into food security policies based on liberalised markets for food goods. Although some of the Charter's principles overlap with the aims and objectives of food sovereignty, the impact of the Charter, which aims to improve the aid system and eradicate the distortions that it causes, has been

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<sup>24</sup> Egg J. et al. *Évaluation du dispositif de prévention et de gestion des crises alimentaires du Niger durant la crise de 2004-2005*; rapport principal; Cellule Crises alimentaires – IRAM; June 2006; SWAC, CILSS, Fewsnet, OCHA, WFP, WAMIS-NET, UNICEF; Food Security and Cross Border Trade in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi (K<sup>2</sup>M) Corridor; Joint Mission Report; July 2006;



somewhat limited. The Charter was not designed to influence trade or agricultural policy and has not done so. However it is still a useful tool on two levels: (i) the question of the need for food aid will continue to arise and will always be an issue even where food sovereignty is achieved; (ii) the principles of the Charter have become a rallying point for the various actors involved, encouraging them to direct their activities more cohesively. Where public authorities are too weak to impose their will, the convergence of actors around common goals is crucial.

Food sovereignty is a central theme of several important public debates:

- To which geographical areas should the development and enforcement of public policy apply? National agricultural policies cannot be ‘transposed’ into regional ones, it would seem. Food supply strategies often favour the purchase of goods on international markets rather than exploring the opportunities offered by neighbouring countries. Relatively low food prices on international markets reinforce this tendency, especially as the quality is often felt to be more reliable and consumers often seem to prefer imported goods. The “food sovereignty” vision will be a product of the region’s concerted efforts to exploit the complementarities of specialised production. In theory, the guidelines laid down in the ECOWAP also encourage this.
- While the goal of food sovereignty may be easier to achieve regionally, **individual governments will consider it their responsibility to guarantee food security for their own people**. Indeed, States are increasingly taken to task over respect for the right to food. The alleviation of hunger and malnutrition are included in the MDGs. A course must be steered between these national responsibilities and regional policies, between national sovereignty and the transfer of sovereignty to the region. The way forward will depend on other initiatives, most effective if adopted regionally, and should generate consensus among the different agencies which intervene. This consensus should also be encouraged among local governments which will be increasingly involved in providing a safety net for vulnerable populations.
- This leads to the delicate question of the **overlap between food sovereignty and food security**. Clearly, food sovereignty favours the approach of “increasing local food supply”. Protection policies which are necessary to support this goal must be accompanied by increased prices for basic food items. Given the extent of poverty in the region, such a strategy may pose severe problems with regard to access to food for poor populations both urban and rural who depend entirely or partially on the markets in order to feed themselves.
- In order to resolve this contradiction, must **public policies make separate provisions for:**
  - The execution of effective programmes to support West African agriculture, in particular those which improve the competitiveness of food products and the response of producers to changing consumer demand (in terms of processing, quality, regularity, etc.), etc. These new policies and orientation laws will prove less effective than their forerunners if States and actors fail to implement these policies in the field. This is a fundamental challenge for these policies.
  - Safety nets for populations who face short-term difficulties because of a strengthening of protective trade tariffs. The commitment to address the conflict of interests between poor consumers and producers, between short-termism and the medium-long term development is absolutely vital to the success of strategies which aim to achieve food sovereignty by involving the whole community.
- Given the enormous pressures on this region, **unilateral efforts to attain food sovereignty are unlikely to succeed**. These pressures are twofold, exerted by international trade regulations and by trade practices. Dumping by West Africa’s competitors, prospects of a free trade area between West Africa and the EU or multilateral food trade liberalisation have the same result. They deepen the conflict of interests between the region’s countries (those who stand to benefit from liberalisation and those who would benefit from protection) and heighten tensions

between economic agents (i.e. consumers and producers, the latter having dual status as “producer-consumer”). Experience demonstrates that under such conditions, it is unlikely that protective barriers at West Africa’s borders, agreed and implemented on a unilateral basis, could alone succeed in improving West African farming.

- In this regard, the application of the Food Aid Charter has proved effective: aid management practices improved considerably in the 20 years during which all aid protagonists were gathered around the same table and committed to solving the same problems. Dumping and very low international food prices are now creating the same problems that food aid posed 20 years ago (and still poses from time to time), i.e. changes in eating habits, preference for imports over local produce, producer discouragement, price weakness and instability, impoverishment, exodus, deteriorating food security, increased dependency, etc.
- Action therefore needs to be taken on different levels:
  - At the national level, there are three factors to consider:
    - Dialogue between agricultural actors and trade ministers who are for the moment reluctant to increase protection for agricultural goods;
    - Food policies targeted at the populations most likely to suffer as a result of increased protection. The ‘safety net’ could be covered in part by the levying of customs duties;
    - Effective execution of programmes to modernise/transform/intensify agriculture.
  - At the regional level, there are five important types of intervention to consider:
    - The level of tariff protection necessary to support effective community preference without raising food costs to the consumer;
    - The regulation of regional markets and stabilisation of food markets to make these markets more stable and easier to forecast, and to reduce the risk of governments re-seizing control as soon as a food crisis emerges. This re-nationalisation can increase the risk of short-term crisis and runs contrary to the long-term goal of regional food sovereignty;
    - Agreeing upon how to make provision for disparities between countries and, where relevant, the compensation and support which can be effected by the community, e.g., partial mutualisation of food security stocks, the setting up of food security funds to encourage structural policy-making in countries where dependency on imports is greatest, prioritising infrastructure development, etc.;
    - Supporting programmes to modernise/develop agriculture, which focus on value added supplied by the region (resolution of shared problems, management of interdependency, etc.);
    - Making representation on behalf of all the countries at international summits, particularly WTO talks and EPA preparations, would encourage promotion of the community’s interests above those of individual governments. The region must strengthen its participation in the drafting of international trade regulations and negotiations on public policy affecting the competitiveness of agricultural goods. The only negotiation on export subsidies is unlikely to restore conditions for fair competition. Such negotiations should cover all political instruments which affect international competition and recognise fully agriculture’s multifunctional role and its strategic importance in food production. Which instruments can be implemented or proposed to the WTO which, alongside existing measures such as safeguard clauses and classification of sensitive goods, would help to attain food sovereignty?

Although the Food Aid Charter has helped to rationalise aid management during food crises, particularly among SWAC donors, respect for the Charter principles alone does not bring food sovereignty any closer. Indeed, the Charter addresses the management of cyclical food crises and the impact of crisis management on long-term agricultural development and food security. The Charter is no longer referred to in the management of crises, although its principles are commonly applied.

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## Appendices

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### *Appendix 1: Official text of the Food Aid Charter*

*This document has been unanimously adopted by CILSS member States and Club du Sahel donor countries (Canada, European Union, Germany, France, Netherlands, United States). It was formally approved by the CILSS Heads of State at their summit in Guinea Bissau on 10 February 1990.*

#### **The parties concerned**

- 1) Recognising the importance of food aid in the battle against hunger and malnutrition;
- 2) Recognising the need for food aid to be treated as an active component of overall development aid efforts which encourage each country's ability to provide adequate food supplies either from their own production or commercial imports;
- 3) Recognising that donors and beneficiaries have expressed the desire to improve the use of this aid by applying the lessons of past experience and the recommendations made in this field;
- 4) Recognising the need to adapt food aid as fully as possible, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to the needs of target populations, so as to avoid a fall in prices for local products or any barrier to their route to market;
- 5) Recognising that responding to need as swiftly as possible requires procedures which can be executed rapidly and flexibly and which procure at the best available prices a reliable supply of food aid by sea, land or, as a last resort, air;
- 6) Recognising the need to avoid increasing dependency on imports through activities which may, in the long term, change eating habits to the detriment of locally produced cereals;
- 7) Recognising that both food surplus and food shortage can disrupt prices, revenues and food availability, and that there is therefore a need to include food aid in regional trade policies in order to reduce local fluctuations in food supply.
- 8) Recognising that a genuine solution to the problems caused by food aid is not possible without consensus between donor countries, and between these countries and the beneficiaries, in order to coordinate efforts and activities;

#### **Adhere to the following:**

##### **I. DEFINITION OF THE OBJECTIVES OF FOOD AID**

The objective of food aid is to contribute to food security by responding in an appropriate and timely way to food shortages whether these are caused by structural weakness or from crisis situations which require emergency action.

The long-term objective is to prevent crisis and to correct structural deficiencies by supporting development and targeting action at the most vulnerable groups. In this context, food aid has a valuable role whether it is supplied in the form of food commodities or through the use of counterpart funds generated by local sale of these commodities.

## **II. EVALUATION OF THE FOOD SITUATION**

**II. 1-** Donor Governments and multilateral institutions, and beneficiaries, in collaboration with all partners involved in development, undertake to cooperate in evaluating the food situation in Sahelian countries in order that decisions can be made on the basis of reliable information and realistic forecasts, particularly with regard to food shortages and surpluses. Similarly, when urgent aid is required, they undertake to share immediately with one another information in their hands which will help in formulating and executing the most appropriate response. The parties are committed to improving the quality of national and regional data.

**II.2 –** The parties undertake to harmonise and improve their appraisal criteria based upon:

- A proper evaluation of each country's food demand and supply: domestic production and consumption, stock movements, imports and exports of any kind;
- Indicators of the food situation with regard to nutrition levels, the purchasing power of the population groups concerned, price levels on different markets and availability of products in areas where they are produced and consumed;
- The ability of individual countries to absorb food aid and, in particular, the additional financial and technical resources necessary to ensure optimal utilisation of this aid.

## **III. EVALUATION OF FOOD AID REQUIREMENTS**

Beneficiary governments and bilateral and multilateral aid donors undertake to meet at least once a year in order to assess requirements by examining food balance sheets which are drawn up jointly in order to define:

- The objectives of food aid in its various forms;
- The type, quantity and quality of aid to be given;
- Areas and populations affected;
- Logistical constraints;
- The time at which delivery of aid would be most appropriate and, conversely, when it would be undesirable to deliver aid.

These points form the basis of supply planning to which food aid donors and national authorities will adhere. In time, such planning will in turn provide the framework for defining and executing the action taken by different partners. A consultation framework must be established in countries where currently none exists.

## **IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF FOOD AID**

**IV.1 –** The donors undertake to harmonise their decisions and coordinate their activities. In order to satisfy need as fully as possible and optimise logistical operations, they shall enter into agreements with each Sahelian country regarding the quantitative distribution of aid, selection of goods and the source of these goods (local purchasing, triangular operations or imports), and the beneficiaries.

The parties shall exchange information on delays that might occur in dispatching aid once needs have been identified, methods of distribution and utilisation of aid and the key features of logistical operations.

**IV.2 –** The parties concerned recognise that food aid needs to be an integral part of agricultural and rural development policies, that it must be coordinated with other types of aid and with trade and macro-economic policies, and that it must feature in any long-term development plans.

Where aid planning covers multiple donations in a year, it is advisable, whenever possible, to substitute food goods with financial and technical aid as long as cereal availability is sufficient to allow this.



Therefore, the donors undertake:

- To plan their contributions at least once a year to allow beneficiary countries to make allowances for this aid in their development policies;
- To structure aid so as to avoid, wherever possible, any adverse effect on local production and trade, i.e. restriction of sales opportunities, a fall in producer prices, disruption to distribution chains or overloading of storage facilities;
- To minimise any action which would accelerate lasting changes to eating habits to the detriment of local production.

**IV.3** – Donors and beneficiary countries undertake:

- Not to distribute free food aid except in emergencies or to assist vulnerable groups;
- To sell aid in a way which does not affect pricing on the domestic open market;
- To use counterpart funds to support development activities, particularly those which contribute to food security.

**IV.4.** The parties undertake:

- To promote cereal exchanges between countries with a cereal surplus and countries in deficit through triangular operations and by stimulating regional cereal trading.

## **V. OUTCOMES AND PROSPECTS**

**V.1** – The annual Food Crisis Prevention Network meeting in the Sahel, organised jointly by the CILSS and the Sahel Club, will provide the opportunity for retrospective analysis of:

- The situation with regard to the nutrition of beneficiary populations;
- The impact of aid on the national economies of beneficiary countries, particularly upon trade and rural development;
- The contribution of donors and beneficiaries to overall food security.

**V.2.** – The parties also undertake to investigate potential improvements to:

- the monitoring of the food situation;
- the coordination of assessment work;
- the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among donors and beneficiaries;
- the procurement of transport and logistical support for aid distribution;
- the general effectiveness of the consultation and cooperation procedures in which all the parties are involved.

## *Appendix 2: Terms of reference for regional consultation*

Analysis of Agricultural, Trade and Food Cooperation Policies in the Sahel and West Africa  
with Reference to the Principles of the Food Aid Charter

### **1. Context**

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In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the food aid distributed in the Sahelian countries was found to be unsatisfactory in a number of ways:

- Food aid in the Sahel had influenced eating habits,
- It competed with local production and inadvertently perpetuated food insecurity,
- Food aid alone could not sustain food security, which is dependent to a greater degree upon the development of domestic production, regional trade and the effective implementation of agricultural policies.

The involvement of the international community, via the Food Crisis Prevention Network, led to the adoption of the Food Aid Charter during the CILSS Heads of State summit in Guinea Bissau on 10 February 1990. This historic moment marked the rethinking of food aid, and defined its new goals as:

- Contributing to food security as a response to both structural and emergent situations without distorting local agricultural production or markets,
- In the long term, preventing crisis and structural shortages by targeting aid towards vulnerable groups.

This new vision was also a commitment:

- **On the part of the international community, especially donors, to:**
  - a. Harmonise their decisions and coordinate their activities,
  - b. Recognise the need to allow for food aid in agricultural development policies, to make sure food aid and other types of aid are treated consistently by trade and macro-economic policies, and to make food aid part of long-term development planning,
  - c. Ensure that food aid did not stifle local production and trade,
  - d. Restrict to a minimum any activity which could have a sustained impact on eating habits to the detriment of local foods.
- **On the part of donors and beneficiaries:**
  - a. Not to distribute free aid except where vulnerable groups were in an emergency situation,
  - b. To market this aid in such a way that it does not distort pricing on the domestic market,
  - c. To use counterpart funds to support development aimed at food security.

The principles enshrined in the Food Aid Charter are noble and represent the political concerns with regard to “Food Sovereignty<sup>25</sup>” as expressed in the ECOWAS common agricultural policy<sup>26</sup> (ECOWAP) “to guarantee food security and safe food for West Africa’s rural and urban populations, through initiatives to attain food sovereignty for the region.”

Although these principles have been widely approved, the question remains over whether or not they can be implemented effectively within individual countries. To attempt to answer this question, the Food Crisis Prevention Network for the Sahel has met regularly since 1991 to assess the Charter.

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<sup>25</sup> “The RIGHT and RESPONSIBILITY of a country or group of countries to define and develop its own food policies, whilst avoiding dumping products in any other country”.

<sup>26</sup> ECOWAS, 2005. Ecowap. ECOWAS, Abuja, Nigeria, p18.

## **2. The objective of the consultation process**

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The objective of this consultation process is to build from assessments of the Charter an analysis of regional trade, agricultural and food cooperation policies in each country, bearing in mind the ECOWAP definition of “Food Sovereignty”. These principles are the basis for evaluating the everyday reality of implementing such policies in individual countries and regionally.

The specific objectives are:

- To analyse thoroughly the extent to which regional agricultural and trade policies are informed by the principles of the Food Aid Charter
- To analyse how Charter principles are observed in agricultural and food cooperation policies within individual countries and particularly in their relationships with Arab and Asian countries, etc.
- To make relevant and practicable recommendations to countries and the region which aim to encourage food security and respect for the tenets of the Food Aid Charter in the economic, agricultural and cooperation policies of West African countries and in the region’s trade policies.

## **3. Expected outcomes**

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It is expected that this consultation process will result in the publication of a concise document of around 50 pages, in French or English, analysing the everyday application of agricultural, trade and food cooperation policies within individual countries and regionally and making specific recommendations at each of these levels. The document will include an executive summary of 3-4 pages, outlining the key conclusions and recommendations made.

The document will be used as the basis for the SWAC Secretariat’s presentation to the regional conference on Food Sovereignty, organised by ROPPA in Niamey in September/October 2006.

## **4. Main tasks**

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The main tasks of the consultants are:

- To format the data, which will be used in meetings with various actors in the field;
- To review relevant literature, including an analysis of assessments of the Food Aid Charter, with reference to other documents on this subject published by different institutions and organisations: SWAC, CILSS, FAO, Afrique Verte, WFP, etc.
- To organise meetings with the main actors in this field: SWAC, the CILSS, the UEMOA, FAO, ROPPA, ECOWAS, WFP, Afrique Verte, Action Aid, etc., in order to:
  - a** reach a better understanding of the reality of applying the principles of the Charter within countries and regionally,
  - b** analyse the efficacy of agricultural and trade policies in terms of the Food Sovereignty approach defined in the ECOWAP,
  - c** organise meetings with different actors in Burkina Faso, Niger and Cape Verde, including State and civil society actors, producers, political decision-makers, etc.