



Rice Value Chain Promotion: ECOWAS and the African Development Bank Join Forces

Cross-border Trade in Agricultural Products: ECOWAS and IFAD Work Together to Remove Trade Barriers

Promoting Youth Employment: Over US\$2 Million Granted to Agricultural Research Centres

Food Security: ECOWAS Launches the Regional Food Security Storage Strategy Review Process



Mrs. Massandjé Touré-Litsé

Commissioner for Economic Affairs
and Agriculture,
ECOWAS Commission

Dear Partners,

The region's current political situation adds to the complexity of the challenges and hinders the achievement of food, nutrition and pastoral security in West Africa and the Sahel. These challenges are compounded by increasing degradation and fragmentation, characterized by persistent conflict, recurrent economic shocks, the emergence of pandemics, intensifying climate crises and reduced access to basic social services.

The situation demands that we review and update our policies, strategies, plans and other instruments for promoting and managing food, nutrition and pastoral security. The ECOWAS Commission will therefore review the Regional Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) and the Regional Food Security Storage Strategy. This involves addressing the thorny issue of optimising the institutional and financing arrangements governing the agricultural sector, to ensure greater sustainability of action and impact.

ECOWAS also cares for stakeholder capacity building through training. This includes physical and online training courses on local food storage, as well as an e-learning platform on the Regional Agricultural Policy and greater involvement of young people and women in the agricultural economy.

We have also continued our activities in other priority sectors over the past quarter, such as food system resilience, promotion of the rice and livestock feed value chains within the framework of the Regional Food Security Reserve. The mid-term review of the food system resilience programme has taught us the need to prioritise actions according to available resources. The African Development Bank is committed to supporting the development of the rice sector as part of the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, and discussions are in progress with the Spanish Cooperation Agency to set up an index-based insurance mechanism in response to pastoral crises.

This issue of **ECOWAP News** also reminds us of our shared responsibility regarding the risk of having more than 47 million people who could be affected by acute food and nutrition insecurity between now and the lean season in June-August 2025 if appropriate measures are not taken.

I wish you all a pleasant reading of the following lines while encouraging increased collaborative efforts.

Ecowap News

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Rice Value Chain Promotion: ECOWAS and the African Development Bank Join Forces

The African Development Bank (AfDB) and ECOWAS have signed a US\$12 million grant agreement as part of an initiative to improve rice production and food security in West Africa. The grant reflects a shared commitment to advancing regional agricultural development, particularly in the rice sector.



The signing of this agreement is an important milestone for the ECOWAS Rice Observatory, a strategic coordination mechanism aimed at aligning government, private sector and donor investments in the rice sector. The initiative is part of a larger, multi-phase, \$650 million multinational programme designed to promote rice sovereignty in West Africa. Primarily intended to boost local production, it aims to reduce West Africa's huge annual rice import bill, currently estimated at over US\$3.5 billion.

The Regional West Africa Rice Development (REWARD) programme is a direct response to the Dakar Summit 2: "Feeding Africa, Food Sovereignty and Resilience" where West African States identified rice as the strategic commodity for achieving food security through targeted public and private investments; the ultimate goal is to make the region self-sufficient in rice production by 2030. REWARD is aligned with the Agricultural Policy, the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan for the Rice Offensive (2014-2025) and the Regional Rice Roadmap (2025-2035).

In addition to political and governance reforms, ECOWAS will play a leading role in the overall coordination and management of the programme, in close collaboration with AfricaRice, with a specific implementation unit housed within the ECOWAS Commission. With the signing of this agreement, ECOWAS and the AfDB are taking a decisive step towards transforming the rice sector in West Africa. By supporting local production, including the strengthening of value chains and policy harmonisation, the region is moving closer to rice sovereignty, an important step that will not only i) reduce imports, but also ii) improve food security, iii) create jobs and iv) build economic resilience for millions of people in West Africa.



Food Security: ECOWAS Launches the Regional Food Security Storage Strategy Review Process

The ECOWAS Commission is concerned about the growing need for sovereign financing of West African agriculture in general, and more specifically, the mechanisms for responding to food and nutrition crises, to be tailored to the realities of Member States in the face of the new challenges facing the region in terms of food and nutrition security. On March 20, 2025, the Commission officially launched the process of adapting the Regional Food Security Storage Strategy to the new challenges that are emerging in terms of food, nutrition and pastoral security.

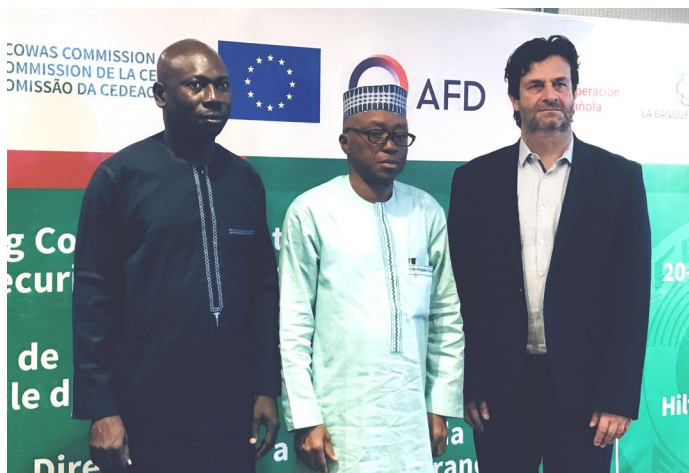
The ECOWAS regional food security storage strategy, adopted in 2012, is based on three (03) pillars, namely i) food security storage to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in the event of cyclical food crises, ii) interventions to improve market functioning and reduce price volatility, and iii) food security social safety nets for populations with structural livelihood deficits. In less than ten (10)

years of implementation, significant progress has been made, notably through the capitalisation of best practices in proximity stock management by producer organisations, the development of national storage strategies by Member States, and the creation of the Regional Food Security Reserve (RFSR), which has been activated 22 times since its inception, to the benefit of 4.3 million vulnerable people.

However, there are still many challenges to be met. In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation and the emergence of new risks, the review of the Regional Food Storage Strategy aims to build regional capacity to prevent and manage food, nutrition and pastoral crises in a sustainable and coordinated manner. To recall, the main objectives of the review are to: i) adapt the Regional Food Storage Strategy to the new priorities of ECOWAP@2035, ii) adjust the RFSR's fields of intervention, its crisis response instruments, its

rules and operating procedures, and iii) optimise the institutional and financial arrangements and prepare for a new phase of regional deployment.

ECOWAS reaffirms its commitment, alongside its regional partners (UEMOA, CILSS, RESOGEST) and international partners (European Union, AFD, AECID, World Bank, etc.), to strengthening food and nutrition security for vulnerable populations through this review.



Cross-border Trade of Agricultural Products: ECOWAS and IFAD work together to remove Trade Barriers

In March 2025, the Regional Programme for the Integration of Agricultural Markets (PRIMA-Togo and Regional PRIMA) organised campaign meetings to disseminate the results of the baseline study and raise awareness in four corridors between Togo and Benin. The meetings brought together cross-border trade stakeholders from Togo and other countries in the sub-region, notably Benin.

The purpose of the discussions was to present the results of the baseline study carried out by RAAF on cross-border trade between Benin and Togo, and to inform and raise awareness amongst stakeholders on the issues and challenges facing cross-border trade. It also highlighted PRIMA's actions to help remove trade barriers and improve trade flows.

RAAF presented the results of the baseline study to PRIMA stakeholders, including traders, transporters, administrative authorities, local elected representatives, border agencies, defence and security forces, border post control officers and producer organisations. The baseline study highlighted several obstacles to the smooth operation of cross-border trade, namely the predominance of informal trade, ignorance of regulations and road harassment. At the same time, the West African Organisation for Cross-Border Trade in Food, Agro-Forestry-Pastoral and Fisheries Products (AOCTAH) reported on its "Road Fluidity and Agri-Livestock Operation" initiative, which was designed to lower barriers to trade along cross-border trade corridors.

With market driving or boosting production at grassroots level, production surplus should be marketed to increase producers' incomes. Discussions thus made it possible to agree on a roadmap for setting up frameworks for multi-stakeholder dialogue, strengthening

road governance and establishing mechanisms for improving knowledge on cross-border trade.

To recall, PRIMA is funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It is in line with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) at the sub-regional and continental levels. PRIMA is being implemented through two national projects (PRIMA Benin and PRIMA Togo, with a regional coordination unit within RAAF) over a 6-year period (from 2023 to 2028), with a particular focus on cross-border trade corridors between Togo and Benin and other ECOWAS countries.



Promoting Youth Employment: Over US\$2 Million granted to Agricultural Research Centres

The ECOWAS Commission has donated two million two hundred and thirty-eight thousand (2,238,000) US dollars to ten (10) agricultural research centres in the sub-region, and to five (05) agroecology and organic production centres and the Songhai centre on February 25, 2025, in Porto Novo, Benin, as part of the Regional Youth Employment Strategy in Agricultural Value Chains.

The grant was awarded to train 3,850 young people, 40% of whom are women, to boost youth employment in the region. The cheques were distributed during the awareness-raising and mobilisation workshop for the various centres benefiting from the 2024/2025 grant on the content of the Regional Youth Employment Strategy in Agricultural Value Chains, and the challenges related to issues involved in the professional integration of young people in the agro-forestry-pastoral and fisheries sector. The grant is broken down as follows: USD 936,000 for the Songhai Centre, USD 708,000 for CORAF and 10 national agricultural research centres

in Member States, USD 594,000 for agro-ecological and organic production centres to implement the Organic and Ecological Agriculture Initiative.

The initiative is fully in line with ECOWAS' vision of promoting sustainable, inclusive and innovative agricultural development. Training young people means investing in our collective future. It means empowering them to transform agriculture, improve productivity and make the agricultural sector more competitive. It's also a way to combat unemployment by offering them real opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship.

It should be noted that the ECOWAS Commission financed, from its own funds (1,033,991 USD) in 2023, twenty-five (25) centres in the community area and doubled the subsidy in 2024 (2,434,301 USD) to promote youth employment and self-employment, particularly in the agro-forestry-pastoral and fisheries sector. This approach forms the basis of a new economic paradigm in which agriculture, industry and services work in synergy to promote sustainable development, environmental regeneration and wealth creation.



Regional Agricultural Policy: Towards the Development of an E-learning Platform

The Regional Agricultural Policy e-learning platform is an essential tool for improving agricultural knowledge and practices. Recognising the growing importance of digital platforms for information dissemination and training, the ECOWAS Commission is committed to developing an e-learning platform tailored to the specific needs of stakeholders.



The conceptualisation of the learning platform, which began in 2024, aims to improve access to agricultural information in West

Africa through a centralised platform offering tailored educational resources. In February 2025, a software requirements validation workshop brought together some 50 stakeholders, including agricultural, communication, monitoring-evaluation and IT experts from the Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development and the ECOWAS Commission's Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food.

The workshop validated and refined the design of the ECOWAP e-learning platform. Thanks to constructive feedback from stakeholders, a detailed action plan was drawn up to guide the next steps of development, testing and deployment. The final proposal, together with a provisional budget including identified funding sources, was validated, thus opening the door to the actual development of the platform.

This validation represents a decisive step in the deployment of the platform. The initiative will contribute to a more modern, sustainable and inclusive agriculture by strengthening access to information and facilitating learning.

Addressing Pastoral Crises: Towards the Establishment of an Index-based Insurance Mechanism

The economy of pastoral communities in the Sahel depends heavily on livestock farming, which is their main source of income and subsistence. Communities are particularly vulnerable to the manifestations and impacts of climate change, especially the risk of drought. To protect the livelihoods of these communities, the Research and Innovation for Productive, Resilient and Healthy Agro-Pastoral Systems in West Africa (PRISMA) project, co-funded by the European Union and the Spanish Cooperation, conducted a study on index-based insurance in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, led by the Polytechnic University of Madrid and coordinated by the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food.

The study not only took stock of experiences in the sub-region but also defined the conditions for the success of a regional index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) mechanism and made proposals to address the major challenges identified in the three countries. There are several initiatives on index-based insurance in the sub-region, notably those of the World Bank's Global Insurance Facility and the African Union's African Risk Capacity. The development of such insurance requires preconditions based on several key pillars, namely (i) the development of technical and technological infrastructure, (ii) the development of financial infrastructure, (iii) capacity building and institutional expertise, (iv) the establishment of a legal, regulatory and political framework, and (v) multi-stakeholder and sectoral coordination.

Challenges to the implementation of such a mechanism include (i) lack of prior experience in agricultural insurance based on the impacts of climate change, (ii) limited availability of agricultural statistics and difficulties in accessing climate observation data, (iii) difficulties in communication and payment management, and (iv) producers' distrust of insurance products and financial institutions.

To meet the challenges, it is necessary, amongst other things, to (i) strengthen collaboration among the various stakeholders, (ii) set up initial subsidies that reduce financial barriers for beneficiaries and encourage adherence to the IBLI, (iii) train beneficiary communities with a view to greater ownership of the IBLI, (iv) implement pilot projects in selected areas to validate the mechanism before scaling up.



Food System Resilience in West Africa and the Sahel: Midterm-Review Results of the Support Project (FSRP)

ECOWAP is implemented around several key thematic areas including building the resilience of food and nutrition security and sovereignty. ECOWAS aims to ensure sustainable and competitive agriculture to guarantee food sovereignty. To achieve this, several initiatives, including the West African Food System Resilience Programme (FSRP/PR-SA), are being implemented for the benefit of populations.

Funded by the World Bank and officially launched in June 2022, the FSRP implements activities relating to digital advisory services for the prevention of food crises, the sustainability and adaptation of the productive base and intra-regional trade facilitation. Activities are coordinated respectively by CILSS, CORAF and ECOWAS, which provides overall coordination for the programme with eight (08) beneficiary countries, namely Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo. The region aims to reduce the number of food-insecure people in the targeted areas by 25%, with a

total of over 5.5 million beneficiaries, 40% of whom are women. Significant achievements have been recorded despite the challenging context for implementing activities on the ground. In 2024, a total of 2,344,411 direct beneficiaries, 35% of whom were women, were reached by FSRP's activities carried out in seven (07) countries, namely Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo. Compared to the 2022 base year, a reduction of almost 22.2% in the number of food-insecure people was also observed in the intervention zones of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Togo.

Regarding access to climate services, all countries in the Sahelian and Sudano-Sahelian zones have had access to CILSS information on seasonal agricultural forecasts and risk management. CORAF-coordinated activities will enable countries to implement sustainable production and productivity systems to boost producers' incomes, with the dissemination of 221 technologies and innovations. An agricultural trade and market dashboard has been developed and put into operation in five countries (Ghana, Niger, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo) under ECOWAS coordination, and is set to be rolled out in all countries.

The various mid-term evaluations in February 2025, both in the countries and at regional level, have enabled to build on best practices and facilitate better integration of innovative approaches aimed at improving food security, the resilience of farming systems and access to markets.



ECOWAS Learns from the Experience of Training Capacity Building in Local Stock Management

Local stocks are of paramount importance, as they represent the first line of defence against food and nutrition crises. To enhance their effectiveness, ECOWAS prioritises skills development and professionalisation of the stakeholders involved in their management. A training programme has been designed, with the support of the European Union, the Agence Française de Développement, the Spanish Cooperation Agency and the World Bank, to build the capacity of local actors in proximity stocks management.



The initiative aims to develop a continuous training programme to strengthen the capacities of proximity storage organisations. It has resulted in the development of training modules based on the capitalisation of best practices, the setting up of an e-learning platform and the identification of trainers and step-down institutions throughout the sub-region. Based on this approach, regional and national training sessions were organised for a large network of food and nutrition security stakeholders, including members of farmers' and producers' organisations as well as grassroots stakeholders.

The approach consisted in identifying and strengthening a regional training institution for leaders and technicians of producers' organisations. INADES-Formation was chosen to design and deliver training courses for trainers at regional level, and to support the replication of training courses in the various countries for elected officials and proximity stock managers. The regional training programme on proximity storage was developed through (i) the development of a training syllabus organised around eight (08) specialised thematic modules, (ii) the design of an e-learning platform to provide distance training and (iii) the identification of trainers and step-down training institutions in the countries.

ECOWAS, with the support of INADES Formation, is rolling out this training programme for regional trainers who, in turn, organise training at national level in the fifteen (15) ECOWAS countries, as well as in Chad and Mauritania. To date, the region has a pool of 86 specialised regional trainers, and the programme has already trained members of over 160 producer organisations. In addition to physical training, a web platform has also been developed to promote and facilitate e-learning. Through this initiative, ECOWAS and its partners reaffirm their commitment to a resilient and inclusive storage system, guaranteeing the food and nutrition security of populations, and working to make the learning system sustainable.



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