

West And Central Africa Seek Solution to Agricultural Problems

BETWEEN August 30 and September 1, 2006, participants drawn from all the West and Central African countries, including Nigeria, gathered in Saly, Portugal, in Senegal to brainstorm on how to improve agriculture and strengthen their negotiating position as regards trading in agricultural products with the outside world, particularly at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The workshop titled “International Workshop on the reinforcement of dialogue on trade policies” was organised by the Dakar-based Conference of Ministers of West and Central Africa (CMA/WCA), attended by public and private stakeholders- including farmers organisations, researchers, policy makers, parliamentarians and journalists. It discussed trade development policies and shared available information on the role of agriculture in the socio-economic development and regional integration process among others.

The workshop was co-organised by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), through the PRIECA/AO project, Technical Agricultural Centre (CTA,) International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP), and UPA-DI.

The main objectives include (a) to share available information on agriculture’s role in socio economic development and regional integration process in West and Central Africa, (b) to appraise international talks, notably the agricultural component of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), (c) to highlight the role and part of the public and private stakeholders, especially the farmers’ organizations, professional organisations and Chambers of Agriculture (d) to involve parliamentarians and journalists in the participatory and consensual approach to agricultural and trade development policies.

The aim was to improve the identified stakeholders capacities to help them spread the decisions and recommendations made at the political, legislative and policy-making levels. These stakeholders are then to eventually build an alliance to promote a harmonised and consensual agricultural policy conducive to regional economic integration in West and Central Africa (WCA).

The opening ceremony was chaired by Mamadou Seck, who represented the Senegalese Minister of NEPAD, African Regional Integration and Good Governance Policy.

Present at the ceremony were Mr. Alasane Diamoutene who is the representative of the Minister of Agriculture of Cote d’Ivoire and Current Chairman of the CMA/WCA; Dr. Soumano Sako, ACBF Executive Director; Mr. Vicente Fautrel, representative of the Technical Agricultural Centre (CTA); Dr. Dominique Njinkeu, Executive Director of the International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP); His Excellency, Samuel Amehou, Beninoise Ambassador to Geneva and Mr. Baba Dioum, CMA/WCA General Co-coordinator.

Also present was Dr. Shettima Mustafa (OFR), one- time Agriculture Minister in Nigeria and now Deputy National President II, All farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN).

Co-ordinator-General of the CMA/WCA, Mr. Baba Dioum of Senegal, welcomed workshop participants and thanked the Senegalese authorities for hosting the workshop.

He thanked Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade for trying to make agriculture become a major player in Africa’s economy.

The meeting, he said, was a continuation of the Bamako meeting of October 2005. The major reason was to inform stakeholders of the state of Agriculture in Africa.

Generally, it was noted that Africa's agriculture was still far from fulfilling its role of feeding Africa which still imports most of its food to feed its people. It was generally agreed that Africa should play its part in Agriculture in the world.

Africa's agricultural performance is falling. Africa needs to integrate to improve its agriculture in order to compete with other parts of the world, he noted.

CTA boss Vincent Fautrel said it was up to Africa to develop and strengthen its capacity to negotiate at the international level. Africa must try to influence the rules of the WTO, he said.

Fautrel noted that since farmers dominated the population at the grassroots, Africa must organize them for effective results.

He particularly noted that the level of African trade at the WTO has dropped from 10 per cent, to 3 per cent, and called for integration among Africa states as one of the ways to improve agricultural fortunes in Africa. In fact, it was the consensus that the best way to reduce poverty was increase agricultural food production. He made reference to India where the poverty rate had dropped from 33 per cent to 17 per cent.

For Dr. Shettima Mustapha, Africa had so much policies but was lacking in implementation.

He said Africa's major headache was how to co-ordinate national and sub-regional policies for concrete implementation.

He questioned the political will on the part of African leaders to carry on integration. For instance, he asked how many countries had complied with the call for at least 10 per cent of the national budget to be allocated to the agricultural sector?

He said it was important to always involve parliamentarians in such workshops because they are the ones to make laws for their respective countries and recommended that a deadline be set for countries to implement the resolution to give at least 10 percent of annual budgets to the agricultural sector.

However, he noted that illiteracy was a major problem at the grassroots level and that this had a way of affecting implementation of policies.

It was also discovered that agriculture was suffering because of transportation difficulties and called on African countries to invest in the area of building roads to ensure easy access and transportation.

It was equally noted that rural farmers in Africa still resorted to subsistence farming because of lack of access to loans.

He said Africa must wake up to do something for Africa before it is too late.

He explained that foreign aid cannot make Africa step out of poverty. Those giving aid do so for their own selfish end, he added.

After three days of brainstorming, the workshop with the theme, "Agricultural policies and Trade in West and Central Africa, widening dialogue to build an alliance," recommended the effective allocation of 10 per cent of annual budgets to agriculture in countries of the region within the framework of NEPAD as a way to build capacities in the agricultural sector.

Although the workshop participants said the region had no intention to stay away from international negotiations, they said the region was more interested in integration among member states.

The workshop expressed concern over the European Union (EU) sanitary standards, which would come into effect in early 2007, which may result in the reduction of exports from the region to Europe.

The new measure would require adjustments from the regional states, which would induce costs, which the weak economies of the regional states cannot bear.

The workshop report therefore called for a development-oriented Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that would take into account, the adjustment costs, among other things.

The report noted that the more developed countries use the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Trade Barriers (TTB) measures to protect their markets through the adoption of standards higher than those applied in the organisations in charge of these issues.

On food aid, the workshop report noted that foreign aid was useful for West and Central African countries, which suffer from climatic problems and persistent conflicts.

However, it said food aid might disrupt local production through significant supply to the markets. It therefore recommended that food aid be monetised.

The workshop recommended the speeding up of the development of Agricultural policy in Central Africa, harmonization between this policy and that of West Africa, notably within the framework of the CADEP (the agricultural component of the NEPAD), and to use that policy as platform for the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations.

While expressing the wish for the prompt setting up of the Agricultural policy instruments in the region, the workshop called for transfer of recommendations and studies to the decision, making circles for them to constitute inputs for the re-inforcement or formulation of the negotiation position.

The main objective of the International Workshop, which was attended by over 30 participants from all the West and Central African countries, including Nigeria, was to share available information on agriculture's role in socio-economic development and regional integration process in West and Central Africa. The workshop also aimed to appraise International talks, notably the agricultural component of the WTO and the EPA; to highlight the role of the public and private stakeholders, especially the farmers' organisations through the professional organisations and Chambers of Agriculture; and to involve parliamentarians and journalists in the participatory and consensual approach of agricultural and development policies.

On the closing day of the conference, the co-ordinator-General of CMA/WCA, Mr. Baba Dioum, Executive Director of ILEAP, Dr. Dominique Njinkeu of Cameroun, Dr. Shettima Mustapha of Nigeria and Hon. Clement Kofi Humado, member of parliament representing Anlo constituency in Ghana, had an interactive session with journalists during which more light was shed on the workshop and why Africa must improve its agricultural fortunes.

BABA DIOUM

Why is a body like CMA/WCA necessary?

As you know, CMA/WCA is a conference of Ministers of West and Central Africa launched in 1991 by all the Ministers of the region, particularly from Nigeria, headed at that time by Dr. Shettima.

What we aim is first of all to be in the market, the second is to put more emphasis and competitiveness on our products for export and the third is to build the capacity to design agricultural policies and to implement them. Really, it was meant to let everybody to know what we are doing.

But we have observed a lack of dialogue within ourselves, from government to civil societies ie the farmers, the researchers and donor agencies and this workshop, is an attempt to gather them together and to reflect about the state of regional based international trade and also, how to implement policies we have designed, in a good manner.

That is why we called a meeting like this workshop to try to focus on how we can really analyse the problem, dealing with the negotiation in WTO, dealing also with what we call partnership with Europe in the aspect of agriculture, how to give the tools, the means and arguments to our Ministers, societies to go to these negotiations well prepared to defend the position of our region.

Can you throw more light, on policy implementation.

Really, if you want to implement these policies, you have to design it with the other actors. For example if the farmers participate in the design of the policy, I am sure, if there is a consensus, they will take the policy seriously.

What advice do you have for African governments to really integrate farmers, knowing that they have been excluded for long?

First, you have to build the capacities of the farmers because even if you want to bring them together (integrate) if they have not the capacity, they cannot respond. Please build their capacity, organize them, let them organize themselves, democratically, give them capacity to negotiate with the government as a first step. The second step is to get them to negotiate at the regional level and to join the regional bodies, then from there, they join the international arena. Because they have to know what we negotiate at the WTO, what you have to negotiate with the Europeans, before going back of the farms. Now they would know the new policy, new way to produce and new way to market their produce, new way to transport maybe new way to enrich the quality of their products. It is very important to build capacity at the lower level.

What is the situation in Senegal.

Really, the body of farmers, their organization is very strong, they are very strong, well organized and now they are negotiating with the government on all the aspects of agriculture. This is why I think that we have to build the capacity. We have to build on human capacity from the farm.

Africa, i.e West and Central Africa, do we really have powers to negotiate knowing that we mostly have primary products.

Originally, we had powers as a colony. The structure of the economy of the trade between the North and South then was: please produce coffee for my market, or produce Cocoa for my market. Now when we became independent we had some agreement with these countries from the North (former colonial masters). But finally when Europe allowed other countries that were not colonized like Asia, Latin America, to come into their market, we lost many of our positions in that market. We lost some of our force because we hadn't the capacity to produce better, the capacity maybe to market better. Now the only chance we have is to be together because in WTO, the policy is one

country, one vote and also you need to reach a consensus. If we don't agree here, even if Nigeria, Gabon or Senegal does not agree on a position, we cannot make a decision.

This is why we have power. We have now to know what we have to negotiate, what is our interest. This is why we have to build our capacity, to enforce our capacity to be able to come with agreements also.

You have to argue, you have to be defensive sometimes, you have to be offensive sometimes. That is why I think that being together, we have the force to negotiate.

DR. DOMINIQUE NJINKEU

Why is it necessary to build Alliances among African groups e.g. journalists, researchers etc.

There are many reasons why alliances are needed in properly negotiating agriculture. The first is that although agriculture is very important for West and Central African countries, it is also extremely important for the powerful countries of this world-the US, EU, Japan and they come to this negotiation very well prepared with very sound analysis, with a lot of money invested in it. If people in Europe have found it necessary to come to the agriculture negotiating table as E.U rather than as France or UK, what about Gabon, Senegal, Cameroun etc?. We are nothing. Therefore parliamentarians that would make laws and regulations for our country, if they don't know what is going on, how do they make favourable laws? Also the public has to be properly informed, if the journalists don't understand the issue and do not become part of the solution then you would not be able to mobilize the entire stakeholders to be able to set every thing right. So it is essential to have as broad an alliance as possible so as to make sure that we properly understand the issue and capture our interest. But it is more so because when you go to the WTO or EPA negotiation, people who don't come from our region are not prepared to yield to our key interest; unless we have a strong message given to our politicians and such a strong message cannot come from the Ministry of Trade alone, cannot come from the Ministry of Agriculture alone, it will come from the entire society who depend on agriculture to call upon the Minister, the Prime Minister, the opinion leader to ensure that we get our trading partners to understand that what we are trying to negotiate in agriculture, whether in the EPA or the WTO or when we start talking with Japan, China, is crucial and we cannot afford not getting what we are asking for.

In spite of past conferences, why is it that farmers at the grassroots are not being carried along?

I do agree that the masses are not being carried along, but I think that the matter is much more systemic than that, in the sense that we do have people in the Ministry of agriculture who have expertise in these field. In the Ministry of trade for instance, we have expertise, but you don't have enough interaction between those two, you don't have a clear vision on where you want to take agricultural development and as a result, what you have is piecemeal. If you were to get to the level where vision is set, properly integrated to help proper training of the leaders, the agricultural economist, the trade specialist and have all that together, then they will be in a position to properly capture the concern of the African agricultural sector and I think at this time that is one of the major problems why we are getting the type of result we are getting.

After this conference, what are we expecting?

First, what we need to get out of here would be for the CMA/WCA to take a clear lead in helping to articulate agricultural position not only in the negotiation but also in the

reform at the regional and national levels. We are lucky to have at this conference, the parliamentarians, the farmers association, the researchers. We do need to come out of here with a good coalition, bringing all those together with the leadership of the CMA/WCA, to then have something like a road map in terms of what do we do at the ECOWAS front, what do we do at the CMA/WCA front, and how do we do it now that we are aiming at having an economic partnership agreement probably in the next few weeks or months, how do we integrate, how do we create synergy between what we are doing at the regional level and in those negotiations and then when all this is done, how does it fit into the negotiation. So if we come out of here with that type of programme, and then have somebody in the drivers seat, which in this case could be the Minister in CMA/WCA, we could probably have a different thing on the ground. But each actor has to play its role and those actors are represented at this conference.

What is the future for Africa's agricultural development?

I am hopeful but with caution in the sense that the move internationally is towards helping Africa. Of course, there is a difference between that move which can be politically motivated and translating that into real action. What it takes now is for the African leaders to capitalize on that move and then put together a strategy, and we do have some elements of strategy whether in NEPAD, or in ECOWAS and CAM/WCA, so at the moment, if we were to put all that together, aid is likely to increase, some reform is likely to be undertaken at the international level at the agricultural sector. As we said earlier, regional trade is important. Given all that, if we were to do it and I think we can, then there is a likelihood in enhancing the welfare of the citizens in the agricultural sector of the economy.

Are decisions in workshops of this nature implementable?

The way to make sure that the decisions of this workshop are implemented is already inbuilt into the programme from the very beginning.

In essence, we ensured that CMA/WCA etc are represented at the meeting because at the regional level those are the institutions that will be in charge of negotiations on behalf of the WCA region. Then we ensured that in each country, the ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Trade are represented. On the World Trade Organisation (WTO) side, we ensured that the co-coordinator of the African Group, is represented, thus he is here to tell us what they are to do next in Geneva. So by design, we ensured that the conclusions will be implemented.

DR. SHETTING MUSTAPHA

In the light of what we have said so far, what do you suggest should be the stand of West and Central Africa in strengthening agriculture?

I think the crux of the matter has been discussed. Let me take off from where Dominique stopped. I think he has given a beautiful expose of the relationship between the partners. But you see, there is always something hidden that we don't seem to quite appreciate and this thing can only be tackled if we are together. For instance this so-called free trade, Liberalisation, we have always argued that it is not free trade we need but fair trade, and that is where he was referring to that may be you need some sets of rules that will favour different levels of development. Issues of subsidy often come and you find that even though at the negotiating table, the WTO level- diplomacy, protocols and so on, but there are other agencies of these developed countries that will come to you and breathe down your neck to say, don't subsidise agriculture, don't subsidise your

farmers, don't do this, don't do that. So as a developing country, you find that your hands are tied behind your back at one instance, and at another instance, you are given the impression that you are equal, kind of equal partners, so these are areas where you just have to take a stand. I don't know of any country in the world where the government does not subsidise its farmers, so the issue that developing countries should not do this, should not do that doesn't arise. Secondly, when you are competing, the concept of competition means that you bring out your best, he brings out his best, if you are going into horse racing naturally you have to bring out your best horses. If you bring 3rd rate horses, obviously you know that you are losing from the start. So this issue of negotiating, you just have to prepare yourself. In the competitive aspect of it for example, if you take Europe or America versus Africa, in Europe and America, electricity power is not a problem, water availability is not a problem, even mechanised approach to processing is not a problem, so if the man is processing or producing something in Europe and America and you are sitting here in Senegal or in Nigeria, where half the time you don't have electricity power and so on, roads and so on, then obviously your cost of production is a factor and cost of production also determines the price at which you are going to sell. So there are quite a number of things. That is why, I think when we first met here in Dakar to inaugurate the conference of Ministers, some of the things that came out were that look, we have common things, Cameroun, Nigeria, Benin, etc we have common things, why can't we develop and encourage internal trade among ourselves, then we go to the second stage where we can now trade with outside partners. So these are the issues that kept going on and I think the conference of Ministers over the last 15 years, they have done quite a lot but they need to do quite a lot more and we in Africa, we really have to sit and sort ourselves out so that we know precisely how to tackle some of these issues, and how to face some of these strong countries.

I think we still have advantage because there are certain products that you cannot grow in Europe, probably you cannot produce in America so they need it, and that is where we have the strength.

What should be the role of Agriculture in Africa's development?

Yes thank you, I think the issue of agriculture, not only in West and Central Africa but in the whole of the African continent is very crucial but most specifically in West and Central Africa. It is one thing we depend on predominantly and I don't think anybody can play with agriculture in this region. First of all people must eat, secondly, our industries are still agro-based industries and in any case, God in his infinite mercy has been very kind to this area, because we are in the tropical area and in some areas we have up to about 10 months of rainfall in a year and we have rivers, we have large bodies of water, so what else do we do outside agriculture and I think it is very very paramount that we give due emphasis to agriculture in this sub-region.

What actually do you think the government should do for instance in Nigeria, to at least promote agriculture?

Well, I guess, first and foremost my reaction to this question is, let the government be serious and sincere and I want to make this as a summary of my reaction. What I mean by that is that government is really not the best entity to do active farming. Government should create the necessary atmosphere, give the necessary support and make sure that regulations are made but the actual active production of crops and livestock and processing and marketing, let it be done by the farmers and the entrepreneurs who in

actual fact, are better suited to do that but government has to regulate. You know, there are certain basic functions government has to do, make sure that there is the infrastructure, guarantee some kind of basic minimum. If all things fail, government is there to assist the farmer, you know that kind of thing, but not to be directly involved in buying and selling fertilizer, etc. I don't think government has any business with that.

Fertilizer. Are you saying that government is not effective in distributing the product and what effect has that on farming?

Not at all. You see, the problem with the Fertilizer thing is that it is more of politics than actual farming business. Let me give you an example. Presently Nigeria has about 30 million hectares of cultivable land, now if you take this 30 million for instance, even if you are going to put one bag, just one bag of fertilizer which is certainly not enough, you require 30 million bags of fertilizer, it is not? 30 million bags of fertilizer reduced to tons is 1.5 million metric tonnes. Currently, the Federal government at its best provides only 200,000 metric tonnes. All the states put together probably offer another 300,000 metric tonnes. Something like that, and other stakeholders, may give another 50,000 so what we are talking about is probably 600,000-700,000 metric tonnes as opposed to the minimum of 1.5 million metric tones. But you know if you are going to produce crops like maize and rice you require at least 8-10 bags of fertilizer per hectare to produce this. So if at the rate of 1 bag per hectare you require 1.5 million, how much more if you require 10 bags per hectare. So you see, that is why I am saying really, government should just encourage the farmers and the stakeholders to just go ahead and buy their fertilizer and so on. Now the problem there is that the average Nigerian farmer is poor. He cannot afford to bring billions of naira to go and buy fertilizer, so what we in the farmers association have been trying to do in the last two years or so is to make government realize that they cannot do these in competition with the private sector.

We are not saying that they should give us the money, no no, all we are saying is that let them guarantee the farmers to acquire or to procure the required quantity of fertilizer, it may cost N5 billion or N6 billion or whatever billion but let the government stand as guarantor so that the commercial banks can go and handle it. Once the fertilizer is on the ground, the Nigerian farmer will buy it without problem. But if you ask him to bring money and deposit money, then he will look at your face and say well this man is trying to play some wayo, because he has gone through difficult experiences, people have collected his money and at the end of the season no fertilizer, no money, not even the person who collected the money, so because of that what we are saying is let government just give the guarantee, we will go to the market and buy it at the bottom price, because we are directly involved and because if we are to buy the fertilizer that we require for 2007, we would probably start buying it now in August or September of this year and then by January, February, 2007 like in down south-Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, the season starts you know about February, so there is no point you give this man fertilizer in July or August. Even up North in my area which is dry the rainy season starts about May, June, so what's the point in giving me fertilizer in September or October except it is for the other coming year, so these are the dynamics on the ground as far as the fertilizer thing is concerned.

How do you integrate in Africa, Trade Wise?

The problem again is simple. It is a question of value addition. You see, what we are now doing is we are helping employment in other countries rather than in our countries.

What we are pushing for, in this conference, is develop the capacity not only for improved production but also value addition-processing. You may not process to the final stage, you may just process to the primary level, let it go out as primary processed product so that the refining can take place there, but at least if you put primary processing, you will be employing some people here and you are improving the shelf life. Take for instance, oranges, or fruits or cashews or groundnut, whatever, the moment you reduce it to concentrate or whatever, then you know you have increased the shelf live and you've added value so the man who is buying it will now process it finally into juice and so on and so forth. Right now, despite the quantum of oranges and fruits we are producing in Nigeria, people still import concentrates, which is a shame. So these are the areas that really, really government should have a role, not that government should come and set up processing plants no, I think we've passed that stage. Not that government should go and open up thousands of hectares of land to produce, we've passed that stage. Government probably is the least organised to do that kind of thing. But because they control, because they regulate, they should pave the way for this kind of activity to take place through facilities like loans, single digit agricultural loans, through land allocation, provision of roads, electric power, provision of security all these are the functions of government, not buying fertilizer and things like that.

Is it necessary for Nigeria and other CMA/CWA members to set up factories to refine primary products.

Certainly we can. You see, these things require capacity building, you can't wake up overnight and grow big, I mean, you and I know that in Nigeria, we've been through this, we have set-up the NAFCONS of this world, we have set up the refineries of this world, we have set up all sorts of things, the real gigantic things, but you know how they ended and if you look at other countries like India, China, and so on, they have these their small cottage industries that feed the major industries. Unless you have these blanks filled, if you start big you may not even have the raw materials to use.

For instance, take the issue of cassava, now there is a policy to incorporate 10 percent cassava flour into bread production. Fine. I think as a policy it is good, I support it, but what are the mechanics put in place to actualise this, because at one stage the bakers were saying fine, we have no problem with that, but processing cassava to the fine stage of incorporating into the wheat flour requires additional investment.

Who will take care of that, You know, so these are the nitty-gritties that, like I said, government has its role. Otherwise, I think in due course, we will grow. If you set up small machines for chipping cassava, for grating cassava, for peeling or whatever, you know, then in due course, you will go for the starch, ethanol and so on, but right now, as we are talking, Nigeria is talking about production of ethanol from cassava, from sugarcane, from maize, from this, from that, but I thought all these were stages. You go to primary 1,2, etc, you can't just be born today and tomorrow you are in the University. And this is our problem. That is why some of our major industries are not making it. They are collapsing. In any case, above all, where is the electric power that would run these big machines.

Some of these cottage industries you can run on 2.5 or 3.5kva generators.

Some like drying you can even use solar to dry them but some of these big machines you require electric energy.

Where do you get it, PHCN is not just there.

HON CLEMENT KOFI HUMADO

What can you say has come out of this workshop?

Thank you. I am a member of the Committee on food and agriculture of the parliament of Ghana and I have also participated in the workshop. Well as regards what came out of the workshop, I think very clear recommendations have been made. We have reviewed our position on our negotiation capacity as a region not only for ECOWAS but also for the CMA/WCA region and we have identified the problems with the WTO negotiations and the European partnership agreement negotiation and we have charted a few actions that we need to consider to improve on our performance at the negotiations level. And also, we looked at the issues of intra-regional trade, why we cannot increase inter-regional trade, that is trade among ourselves in ECOWAS and also between ECOWAS and CMA/WCA and we've also identified a few issues which need to be tackled for the future and we've also looked at the agricultural position, issues of food aid as a disincentive to local production. I think that the workshop was quite successful. It has enabled us to highlight the issues, to chart a way forward.

What hope is there for Africa's development vis-à-vis the other parts of the world?.

Well, we still have hope, you know it is a competitive situation and we do not have to give up, if we give up, it will be worse than continuing to fight. We still have hope, we only need to put our acts together as a people of the sub region and to continuously look at how we can improve our negotiation situation and also to trade among ourselves.

There is no reason why we cannot trade among ourselves, because I personally have worked in the sub region and I know that there are tradable commodities that we can trade among ourselves. So if the doors to EPA, WTO, are getting closed, maybe it is a blessing in disguise. We can begin to open doors for regional trade, so I believe that we still have hope and that we should not give up.

