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From Global Food Crisis to Local Food Insecurity

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**Perception and role of farmer organisations and agricultural producers
in reducing poverty and ensuring food security
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Executive Summary

I. Food security in West Africa

An unsatisfied right

Regular access to adequate, healthy food is a basic human right. A situation where anyone is not eating his or her fill at any time anywhere is a violation of that right. Even if there is universal awareness that this fundamental right must be a reality for everyone, solutions are taking too long. Worse, with the surge in prices in 2007-2008, the financial crisis and the economic recession which followed, the food insecurity situation has become substantially worse. Driven into a corner and feeling their human dignity has been undermined, hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest and express their feeling of helplessness, often with extreme violence. West Africa had its fair share of hunger riots in 2008. The countries the most dependent on food imports have been the most badly affected. That is the case of Senegal where 65% of cereal needs are covered by imports, because of the poor use of the country's ocean shoreline. In comparison, Niger, despite its difficult ecological conditions and perhaps because of its land-locked situation imports only 15% of its food needs.

Inadequate measures and policies

There is a consensus that food insecurity in West Africa is mainly the result of inadequate or inappropriate political measures which do not enable the region to capitalise fully on its agricultural potential. The first observation is the lack of investment in agriculture with the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and 1990s. The share of the national budget devoted to agricultural sector spending has fallen far short of the 10% level agreed by African heads of State in 2003. During the food riots, most West African countries adopted mitigation actions consisting of the free distribution of food, selling food at low prices and scrapping taxes on imported staples. Other more structural measures were implemented, including in particular the adoption of production support measures such as input subsidies, supplying seeds, facilitating access to equipment and implementing the development of certain food crops, such as rice and manioc products. The effectiveness of some economic measures such as the abolition of taxes has been contested, because it reduces the State's revenues and consequently its already limited ability to act. The food crisis has shed new light on whether the question of food supplies can be addressed solely from the point of view of the availability of products. It has highlighted the numerous risks which farmers and households have to face: the instability of markets, economic risks. In other words, production strategies and incentives, keeping as many people as possible in the agricultural professions, financing strategies, the intersectorality of agricultural policy (trade, agriculture, transport, infrastructures, etc.) are just some of the many elements to be taken into account in a consistent overall strategy to effectively combat poverty and food insecurity.

Natural resources need to be better managed and preserved for the future

West Africa has to date been able to cover to an acceptable extent its food needs, by mining its natural resources. If the trend continues, West Africa will mortgage its own production capacities. That is why food

security and poverty reduction policies must concern themselves with the rational use of natural resources and ecological sustainability, as well as with the social and economic sustainability of investments.

Global challenges are looming which cannot be ignored in the development and implementation of food security and poverty reduction programmes. These involve the deterioration of major river basins as a result of sand bar formation, temperature increases as a result of climate change, energy crises resulting in part from farming land being converted to the production of biofuels and the new phenomenon of land hoarding by the private sector and some nations.

Land resources are too important for food or civil security in West Africa to be squandered heedlessly. They are now a major economic and social issue which cannot be managed lightly. The phenomenon of land hoarding is a degrading use of the good idea of investing more in agriculture. It is totally divorced from achieving food security, combating hunger and poverty. It contradicts the principles of an inclusive economy. It is a threat to social stability and as such it must be stopped.

A need to regulate the market and promote inter-regional trade

An important aspect that the public authorities forget in food security policies is that these policies will continue to be ineffective as long as they are based solely on the State's role and capacity to create intervention stocks and safety nets for vulnerable sections of the population.

Agricultural producers and consumers are practically at the mercy of speculators who take advantage of the void created by the lack of a regulatory system to impose low prices on producers and high prices on urban consumers and regions located a long way from output areas. These speculators take advantage of the high volatility of food prices and the instability of West African agricultural markets. Price variations are both intra-annual and inter-annual as a result of not only the seasonal nature of products but also uneven production changes.

Another approach to ensuring food security is needed. It must be based on the experiences of creating and managing security stocks at the level of communities, socio-professional organisations and territorial authorities. It must also be part of regional integration approach which can generate numerous benefits in terms of price stabilisation, an increase in food supply, the management of food crises, improving the income of producers and alleviating the vulnerability of certain households.

Farmer organisations are promoting regional integration because of its obvious benefits for agricultural development. Regional integration is a way of optimising the complementarity of areas of production to ensure sufficient food stocks in West Africa while generating substantial income for producers, based on a market of 276 million inhabitants today and 500 million inhabitants in 2020.

However, in order to capitalise on this market it will be necessary to boost trade in cereal and animal products at the level of trade points such as i) the East with Nigeria and its neighbouring countries Niger and Benin, ii) the central corridor with the Ivory Coast, Ghana and the Sahelian countries of the North, and iii) the West with Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Gambia and part of Mali. Important cross-border markets have been created over time to facilitate the procurement of food supplies, such as the Diaobé in Senegal, market complexes such as Bobo-Korhogo-Sikasso and Kano-Katsina-Maradi which attract major flows of the region's products in both directions. Unfortunately, the increase in trade volumes and the potential role that cross-border markets can play in supplying the cities and regulating supply and prices are often undermined by massive imports of foodstuffs and obstacles to trade.

Farmer organisations and other stakeholders have continuously denounced the numerous formal and informal barriers to intra-regional trade and the application of a regional preference policy as a measure necessary for regional agricultural development and the region's food sovereignty.

II. Importance of the agricultural sector in combating poverty and ensuring food security

The agricultural sector plays a critical role in West Africa's economic development. It contributes 35% to GDP and generates up to 16.3% of export revenues, i.e. approximately 6 billion USD. Approximately 60% of the active population works in the sector. Women have a strong presence in the sector insofar as they handle the bulk of production, transformation and marketing tasks.

Despite a strong trend towards the use of renewable natural resources to satisfy the food needs of human beings and livestock, energy needs and other socio-economic needs, there is still considerable room for progress at the level of agriculture. There is still substantial potential as a result of both the diversity of agro-ecological areas and the availability of arable land and pasturage, water and even forest resources. West Africa has 284 million hectares of arable land of which only 24.6% is cultivated. There are estimated to be 215 million hectares of pasture land. Less than 10% of the 10 million hectares of irrigable land to be found in the major catchment areas (Niger, Volta, Senegal, Mano, Gambia, etc.) are cultivated. The region's biological diversity is also very rich.

The exploitation of natural resources plays a key role in the fight against poverty and ensuring food security. It is the basis of the private consumption of households and trade within the same country and between countries of the ECOWAS and beyond with the rest of the world.

Citizens in West Africa must thank God for having placed within their reach so many renewable natural resources. But they must also recall every day the African proverb which says "God is not a farmer! He does not farm! He does not drink! He does not eat and he does not need to care for himself!"

Citizens in West Africa must seek by themselves and for themselves the reasons for the region's failures on the food front and on the human development front.

Every level of society must measure its own efforts in the fight against poverty and insecurity and analyse the objective constraints which mean or will mean that it has not been able to do or will be able to do better what it must do for itself and for the rest of the community.

III. Poverty and food insecurity of farmers in West Africa

Food insecurity and poverty are two closely linked socio-demographic situations which exist through the world. According to one author "Poverty is a strange thing. It is timeless, international and apparently permanent." However, what differentiates one nation from another is the proportion of people affected and the measures taken to remove them from poverty on a sustainable basis.

The rural face of poverty

According to a study on the Profile of Poverty in the ECOWAS countries (ECOWAS, 2008), the poor represent less than one-third of the population of Benin, Ghana and Togo, and more than one-third of the population of Cape Verde and the Ivory Coast (table 5). Approximately half of the population lives below the poverty line in Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal and around two-thirds or over of the population were poor in Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Mali and Sierra Leone.

In other words, in West Africa, depending on the country, the percentage of the population that is unable to obtain sufficient quantities of goods and services to satisfy their basic needs ranges from 30% to more than 70% of the population. By and large, the state of poverty will be more or less worse depending on the vulnerability, lack of autonomy, degree of helplessness or even the self-esteem of citizens.

A large part of the West African population is rural and in particular the category of people who earn their living from the exploitation of natural resources. According to the same ECOWAS study, 65% of poor people live in rural areas in Nigeria and Senegal, 86% in Ghana, Guinea and Mali and even as many as 92% in Burkina Faso.

Food insecurity for agricultural professions

In general, poverty seems to be more prevalent among people whose basic profession is based on the exploitation of natural resources, in particular small-scale farmers and breeders. It has been noted for example that 46% of the rural poor in Ghana and 56% of those in Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast are food farmers. In Mali and Nigeria this figure is as high as 84%.

The groups of citizens and professions affected by poverty and extreme poverty are the following:

- Small-scale farmers whose production barely covers their needs, with small areas farmed and low output and cereal production.
- Small-scale breeders not totalling more than 3 Tropical Livestock Units 3 (UBT) and whose monetary income does not provide them with access to food and nutrient inputs.
- Shepherds having lost their herd as a result of disasters (droughts and sickness).
- Breeders having marginal land resources and few livestock.
- Women running farms whose multiple activities do not enable them to cultivate their land or who have little land security.
- Large farming families (10 or more) with too many very young children and poor families with low or irregular incomes.
- Individuals – generally pregnant and breast-feeding women, and children aged under 5, psychologically vulnerable, often suffering from protein malnutrition or a lack of micronutrients (anaemia, vitamin deficiencies).

Thus, as paradoxically as it may seem, in a West Africa whose economy is based on agriculture, a fairly substantial proportion of farmers struggle to satisfy their basic needs, in particular for food. Those who produce food to feed the population do not have "secure access at all times to safe and nutritious food and water adequate to sustain an active and healthy life with dignity", in other words they are not in a situation of food security as described in the declaration of the 1995 World Food Summit.

In West Africa, most farmers, breeders and fishermen operate as part of a family enterprise. The question of how small-scale farmer can reduce poverty and ensure food security is tantamount to raising the question of their own efforts to produce more, manage their food shortages, access basic social services, participate in the reproduction of an agrarian civilisation, while integrating a changing economic and socio-cultural environment.

IV. Resilience of family-run farms

Family-run farms and the creation of national wealth

In the countries to the south of the Sahara, in particular those of West Africa, small farms are the main provider of staple foods contributing to the food security of citizens. They alone are responsible for 30 to 50% of the national wealth, a substantial part (up to 50% for some countries) of export revenues, and are the main employer in their country. The revenues generated by family-run farms have contributed and contribute to the development of cities and the construction of various social and economic infrastructures in these countries.

The defenders and advocates of agribusiness accuse family-run farms of being the cause of the low competitiveness of African agriculture. Worse, in their arguments, they create confusion by deliberately lumping together, on the one hand, the intensification of investments or concentration of capital and/or land in the hands of a small group and, on the other hand, the professionalisation and intensification of farming. Agribusiness defenders tend to suggest to decision-makers and the donor community that family-run farms are synonymous with “extensive cultivation”, “traditional methods”, “lack of professionalism”, “subsistence economy” and other descriptions intended to depict stereotypes trapped by ignorance and conservatism.

It is easy to present the opposite of these allegations. For a number of agricultural products such as coffee, cocoa, bananas, cotton and many other crops and livestock products, West African countries rank among the world’s biggest producers and/or most competitive producers. However, these products are produced by family-run farming systems using family workers. Small-scale producers that are able to rely on family workers have demonstrated their ability to significantly increase their productivity even on small size farms provided that the conditions are right. Market gardening, rice cultivation, cotton growing and fruit growing are clear examples which demonstrate the ability of family-run farms to adapt to and adopt “modern” practices. This is reflected in mechanisation (cultivation using traction, motorised cultivators, tractors, etc.), the use of mineral fertilisers and pesticide techniques, the mastery of relatively complex irrigation channels and networks, in short learning how to adopt and master all the techniques and technologies which reflect a certain modernisation of farming.

Some research institutes such as IFPRI support the theory whereby “only small-scale farmers can help to put an end to famine in Africa”. This institute maintains that an increase in the production of small-scale farms would not only lead to an increase in income and perpetuate food security, but also reduce the cost of foodstuffs, at national level, which would boost the rest of the economy and reduce poverty. The fact that a 1% increase in output can enable an additional 6 million people to obtain an income of more than US\$ 1 per day underlines the importance of supporting family-run farms.

Household strategies faced with poverty and food insecurity

Food insecurity can be structural or cyclical:

- It is structural or chronic when a person or household does not have access to adequate and healthy food at all times. That is the case of low-income people and/or people whose agricultural production is difficult or very unstable (areas with low rainfall). It is above all rural.
- It is cyclical when it occurs following climatic accidents, the effects of pests and other natural disasters. Its intensity can vary depending on the vulnerability of the households and their possibilities of finding alternative solutions. It is also rural but also concerns the poorest urban households.

These two dimensions of food insecurity are closely linked. It is possible to change from cyclical food insecurity to a chronic situation, in particular in the event of several successive difficult years which limit the population’s capacity to implement technical or organisational changes capable of increasing their income.

Malnutrition is also an expression of food insecurity. It may be cyclical in nature or chronic. In the latter case, it may be acute or serious. It affects children and women in particular.

To cope with poverty and the food crisis, the citizens affected adjust as they can: emigration of young able bodied people (men and increasingly women), investment in non-seasonal agricultural production or the exploitation of natural resources, seeking new sources of income (temporary jobs, exoduses, family help, etc.), adjusting the family’s lifestyle.

It is the last criterion that the early-warning systems take into account to decide whether to intervene either to mitigate the effects of the crisis or provide emergency aid. Lifestyle changes will involve in some cases having only one meal a day, consuming what they can in periods of shortages, exceptional sales of young breeding stock and for others (the most affected) fire sales of personal property or production equipment and even the migration of whole families.

V. Strategies of farmer organisations to manage food insecurity and reduce poverty

Getting organised to overcome shortfalls

In reaction to the numerous difficulties encountered or in response to a variety of different pressures, family-run farms have joined forces within organisations which have gradually developed a structure from village

level to regional level, thus creating a vast West African peasant movement.

It must always be borne in mind that in West Africa, farmer and rural organisations have always played key roles and had major responsibilities in the area of agricultural and rural development. These roles have changed considerably according to the State's role, development paradigms and the institutional environment. When the State played a major economic role, the farmer organisations provided back-up for the public authorities via the mobilisation of producers for the transmission of various messages, the distribution of input products and seeds, alerts in the case of pest attacks, the primary collection of agricultural products, the distribution and collection of rural credit and other financings.

In the Sahel, with the drought and the generation of projects for the management of land and natural resources, the farmer and rural organisations play complementary roles in the preservation of the environment, the management of forests, areas of water and even pasturage. In most cases farmer organisations have performed these functions as a back-up to rural development administrations, with a quasi-obligation to report to these administrations, even if the natural resources under their responsibility can be considered to be their own.

The change in the State's role, as a result of the structural adjustment programmes, the democratisation of public life and the recognition of the freedom of association established by laws and regulations have given rise to new forms of farmer organisations which are referred to as Professional Organisations of Farmers and Agricultural Producers (OPPA). These OPPA continue to perform the same types of economic and public service functions but for themselves and by themselves and very often with human, material and financial resources that they themselves have mobilised. They have even diversified these economic activities by intervening directly in price stabilisation operations with cereal banks and in rural financing with savings banks and credit institutions.

Farmer organisations have also diversified their public service activities by using part of the revenues generated by their economic activities to build schools and health centres and even hydraulic works for human and pastoral purposes. Some farmer and rural organisations played a "local authority" role even before decentralisation was implemented.

The OPPA are formed around an activity involving the production, transformation and/or marketing of a product, a series of products or a sub-sector. Those that operate on an integrated management basis with a known and recognised production-marketing-transformation-exportation channel have over time acquired more extensive know-how, bargaining skills and the ability to forge partnerships.

It is important to note that the change in the roles and responsibilities of farmer organisations result not only from changes in the context and environment affecting rural professions and their ability to defend their rights, but also from the profound changes in the relations which they have with the other stakeholders. The attitude of rural dwellers and their organisations is increasingly less reactive. The OPPA are increasingly proactive as regards their environment. The OPPA are revolutionising preconceived ideas of ignorant farmers who rely on others to promote an improvement in the living conditions of rural dwellers and in the defence of their rights.

The dynamics of farmer groups are real, multiple and multifaceted. They must be supported irrespective of the new development paradigms which will be invented. It is the duty of governments, the allies and partners of the farmer organisations to ensure that these movements are not sidetracked or forced into an impasse. What will count is not so much the amount of financial or human resources which will be made available to farmer organisations, but its quality, the capacity to support these dynamic movements and create a political and institutional environment favourable to the profession.

Changing the policies and environment of the agricultural sector: attacking the root causes

Poverty and food insecurity have a great many causes, some of which were referred to in the previous chapters. The solutions are also multiple and multifaceted. They require consistent and relevant actions at local and regional levels. They need to be based on an inclusive approach in which each stakeholder contributes.

The farmer organisations under the aegis of national platforms and the ROPPA are already contributing to the reduction of poverty, inequalities and food insecurity. Their efforts need to be reinforced by internal efforts and via an effective system of partnerships and alliances.

It is above all important that the farmer organisations carry out effectively their various roles, according to their respective levels of organisation and action. The types of roles are as follows:

- Economic roles at the level of their member organisations and unions and federations: supplies, distribution of input products and seeds, alerts in the event of pest attacks, primary collection of agricultural products, production, transformation and exports.
- Providing services to members at all levels: information, support and advice.
- Providing services to third parties at all levels: technical and financial intermediation, project management, controlling operations, support and advice.
- Ecological-type public services, such as the management of land and natural resources,

protection of the environment, management of forests, areas of water and pasturage.

- A social role: solidarity between members, building schools, health centres and hydraulic works for human and pastoral purposes; ensuring food security.
- Trade union, political and even citizen representation at the level of national platforms and their network: participation in determining agricultural policy, the defence of interest and even community action on various themes.

Farmer organisations should pursue the actions already embarked on, among other, the following themes:

1. Promoting sovereignty and food security, promoting agricultural products and agri-foodstuffs.
2. Acting as a think tank, monitoring information, lobbying on agricultural and trade policies, regional integration, the creation of a regional agricultural market.
3. Modernising family farms via various types of action such as: support for the SPFS, managing soil fertility, managing natural resources, reinforcing land security, access to credit, etc.
4. Contributing to the development of trade between farmer organisation, cross-border or inter-community trade.
5. Participating in the crisis monitoring system: farmer organisations can have their own information and communication systems on food crises and the data collected, irrespective of its nature, can always feed discussions on national and regional systems.
6. Helping to manage and ensure the stability of supply. Farmer organisations have considerable experience in the creation of banks and cereal stores which manage stocks which can be put onto the market in order to mitigate the effects of price fluctuations. However, the effectiveness will depend on the volume of stocks and regulation, transparency and equity strategies.
7. Contributing to reducing the effects of economic crises via the development of Food-for-Work (FFW) initiatives.
8. Mobilising resources and/or opinion, solidarity actions between farmer organisations in the event of a food crisis.
9. Grouped sales and purchases of food inputs to boost security stocks, reduce costs and transform emergencies into linchpins of development.