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**Regional validation workshop of the Support Programme for monitoring the recommendations of the regional conference on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa**

**Cotonou, Benin, 29-31 March 2014**

**Statement of conclusions and recommendations**

**With the technical support of:**

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**And financial assistance from:**

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# *Introduction*

1. The Task Force for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the regional conference on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa, held in Accra, Republic of Ghana, in January 2013 met from 29 to 31 March 2014 in Cotonou, at the invitation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
2. The overall objective of the meeting was to review the draft document of the programme to support the implementation of the recommendations of the conference on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa. Three major results were expected from the workshop: (i) the different parts of the programme have been thoroughly analyzed, (ii) recommendations for improving the different components of the programme are made, (iii) the raodmap for the validation of the programme is defined.

1. Took part in the meeting: representatives of ECOWAS, Technical and Financial Partners (USAID, DGIS, Canadian Cooperation), regional programmes centred on trade in agricultural products (Communal Approach to Market Access, financed by DGIS; the Trade Hub, financed by USAID), civil society organisations (POSCAO, WAWA, FENACOVICI), networks of organisations of agricultural producers and pastoralists and poultry farmers (ROPPA, RBM, UOFA), the private sector (ROAC, RECAO), non-governmental organisations (OXFAM, Alliance Borderless), technical institutions of regional cooperation (CILSS, IFPRI, CORAF/WECARD ), RESIMAO/WAMIS-NET and HUB RURAL.

# *Opening ceremony.*

1. The opening ceremony was marked by three addresses.
2. In his introductory remarks, the HUB RURAL Executive Director, **Dr. Yamar MBODJ**, first welcomed participants to the meeting. He then recalled the process which led to this meeting, the logical continuation of the commitments made by the various stakeholders in the Accra Regional Conference. Finally, he stressed the importance of this meeting which aims at examining the document of the draft programme for facilitating the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa.
3. Speaking on behalf of the technical and financial partners, Dr. **Candice BUZZARD**, Regional Agriculture Director & Head of Economic Growth Team USAID/West Africa, first of all congratulated the ECOWAS Authorities for their efforts to operationalize the general guidelines of the ECOWAP, the regional agricultural policy. She also commended the HUB RURAL for the speed with which they have accompanied the process of implementation of the recommendations and commitments from the conference on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa. She insisted on the USAID principles, including those relating to the alignment of its support with the regional policy orientations and specifically those of the ECOWAP. The USAID is carefully examining all these initiatives that contribute to the implementation of the policies freely defined by the regional actors, she said. The activities planned by the draft programme submitted to the appreciation of participants in this meeting generally take up the recommendations made in Accra. USAID is looking forward to the assessment participants in this meeting will make of those recommendations in order to take a final position on its contribution to their implementation.
4. Officially opening the meeting, Mr. **Alain Sy TRAORE,** ECOWAS Acting Director of Agriculture and Rural Development first of all apologized on behalf of the Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources, **Dr. L. Marc ATOUGA** who wanted to personally take part in this important meeting. He then focused on the link between the programme whose draft document is submitted to the assessment of participants, with the orientations of the regional agricultural policy, i.e. the ECOWAP/CAADP. He thanked USAID for aligning with the concerns and orientations of the regional agricultural policy that the Institution has helped to formulate and implement. He expressed the wish to see USAID become the mouthpiece of the ECOWAS Commission amongst the other technical and financial partners for increasing their commitment to the implementation of the regional policies and programmes.

# *Conduct of deliberations.*

1. The deliberations took place alternately in plenary sessions and working groups.
2. The first plenary session was devoted to the presentation and overall assessment of the draft programme document. The draft provides an analysis of the regional context of West Africa marked by: (i) high population growth amid a restructuring of settlement patterns, (ii) economic transformations marked by relatively high growth, but not inclusive. Indeed, the agricultural productivity is still low, a phenomenon which not only makes the regional food situation more precarious, but maintains large populations in a state of poverty, especially in rural areas. The programme builds on initiatives taken by the regional actors, before defining a general objective in line with those of the regional agricultural policies (PAU and ECOWAP); it is based on activities organised around three areas of intervention:

* 1. *Contribute to a better understanding of the functioning of trade in agricultural products;*
  2. *Provide a strategic monitoring of the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa;*
  3. *Contribute to the formulation and implementation of regional policies and strategies for the promotion of trade in agricultural and food products.*

1. The mechanism of implementation is based on existing institutional arrangements, both from the point of view of the political management and leadership entrusted to ECOWAS and UEMOA and the technical implementation, through specialised regional institutions (CILSS, Alliance Borderless and NANTS) in partnership with civil society organisations, PO networks, the private sector and Non-Governmental Organisations. The coordination will be provided by the HUB RURAL. Four funding sources are identified: Regional Economic Communities, Member States, technical and financial partners and the private sector. The programme has also identified a number of risks and assumptions, as well as complementary measures to be implemented to maximize the achievement of its objectives.

1. The general discussion that followed the presentation addressed a number of concerns, including: (i) the level of capitalization of initiatives taken by the regional actors and technical and financial partners working on the theme of the regional market, (ii) the link between the programme and the regional agricultural policies, as well as projects and programmes that contribute to their implementation, (iii) the relevance of some indicators, including that relating to the volume and value of regional trade expected at the end of the programme, (iv) the role of the various stakeholders in the implementation of activities, (v) the place and role of the Task Force after the programme formulation, (vi) the links between the information systems provided and ECOAGRIS, the ECOWAS agricultural information system, (vii) the nature of the monitoring-evaluation system to be implemented, (viii) the issue of sustainability of strategies and actions promoted by the programme.

1. Both ECOWAS and HUB RURAL officials and the consultants brought up a series of responses to the concerns expressed by participants in the meeting. These responses informed participants about the scope and relevance of many of the proposals made by the draft programme.
2. Participants were then divided into three working groups to thoroughly examine each of the three areas of intervention of the programme, as well as activities, actions, stakeholders, targets and indicators relating thereto.

# *Recommendations*

1. Following the discussion that followed the presentation of reports from the working groups, the participants made the following recommendations.
2. ***On the background and rationale of the programme***

* Better document the initiatives taken by the various regional and national actors and build on the best practices they convey, in order to take them into account in the proposals of strategies and activities to promote in the programme.
* Take into account the will expressed by governments, which is materialized by the numerous measures taken to remove barriers to trade, as an opportunity for the success of the programme activities.

1. ***On the results***

* Maintain the results of Axes 1 and 2, both in terms of their number and their current wording.
* Add a result to Axis 3, in order to get the two results originally planned preceded by a series of activities that help (i) identify policies and measures to promote regional trade in force at both the national and regional levels, (ii) assess their level of implementation.

1. ***On the activities***

* In addition to the new activities that accompany the third additional result proposed at the third Axis, the participants recommended to: (i) ensure that there is no duplication of activities and sub-activities at all the programme results, (ii) harmonize their formulation.
* Participants recommended to clearly define the monitoring-evaluation system and mechanisms of the programme activities.

1. ***On the indicators and targets***

* Participants recommended to: (i) take into account indicators and targets proposed by the agricultural and trade policies in force in the region, on the one hand and programmes driven by the regional actors, on the other hand, (ii) harmonize the wording of indicators by distinguishing between the indicators of impact and effect (outcome) at the level of the objectives and results and the indicators of achievement (output) which relate to the activities and sub-activities.

1. ***On the stakeholders and implementation arrangements***

* Participants recommended to: (i) clarify the role and contribution of each stakeholder in the technical implementation of the programme, (ii) replace the Task Force by a steering committee, (iii) give a greater role to NANTS in the technical implementation of the programme in view of the importance of Nigeria in the regional trade.

1. ***On the programme funding***

* Participants recommended to better explain the funding mechanisms of the programme by specifying the opportunities brought by: (i) the regional integration institutions (UEMOA and ECOWAS) through the three instruments at their disposal, including regional funds, community solidarity levies and financial assistance from their partners; (ii) Member States; (iii) technical partners, by exploring the possibilities of using the opportunities of the programmes they implement; (iv) the private sector; (v) regional actors. All regional actors were urged to make a firm commitment to contribute to the implementation of the programme without sparing the technical resources and skills they have.

1. ***On the assumptions and risks***

* Participants recommended adding to the assumptions and risks identified by the draft programme, two others on (i) matters of security of people and goods in line with the current situation in the region, (ii) capacity and opportunities for resource mobilization.
* Participants also recommended to involve the ECOWAS and UEMOA Parliaments and Courts of Justice in the programme implementation process.

# Stakeholder commitments.

15. At the end of the meeting, a round table to record the commitments of key stakeholders was done.

* Socio-professional, civil society and private sector organisations undertook to develop the necessary synergies, contribute with their expertise in advocacy and discussion with the authorities and other actors involved in the regional trade to maximize the achievement of the programme results.
* Technical and financial partners asserted their interest in this programme, in terms of the consistency of its objectives with those of the regional agricultural policies and its importance to increase regional trade, improve agricultural productivity and contribute to poverty reduction. They committed themselves to carefully examine any requests for technical and financial support for the implementation of the programme.

# *The roadmap*

16. Participants agreed on the following as part of the raodmap:

* Transmission of the statement of conclusions in French, on 1 April 2014;
* Transmission of the statement of conclusions in English, on 7 April 2014;
* Transmission of the revised version of the document in French and English versions to Task Force members for amendament, on 20 April 2014,
* Collection of comments and amendments on 30 April 2014,
* Finalization of the revised version of the programme document in French and English versions, on 15 May 2014,
* Transmission of the finalized version to ECOWAS, UEMOA and Task Force members on 20 May 2014.

# *Closing ceremony*

17. The closing ceremony was marked by four speeches:

* Speaking first, Mr. DODO Bouréima, Chairman of the Consultative Framework of Networks of West African Peasant Organisations, commended the quality of the work well done. He then thanked the initiators of the meeting: ECOWAS, USAID and the HUB RURAL for the facilities they have offered and which significantly contributed to the results achieved;
* Mr. KEN UKAOHA, Permanent Secretary of the National Association of Nigerian Traders first presented his association's apprecition for the invitation extended to them to participate in this important meeting. He said that, since the preparatory meeting in Ouagadougou, he has been able to measure the commitment of ECOWAS, HUB RURAL and their technical and financial partners to the successful outcome of this programme. He would like to thank USAID in particular for their commitment in the implementation of programmes that contribute to the operationalization of the ECOWAP. He then invited all participants to take positive initiatives to materialize the programme objectives.
* Speaking next, **Dr. Candice BUZZARD**, Regional Agriculture Director & Head of Economic Growth Team USAID/West Africa congratulated all participants for the important work they have successfully carried out during the three days of the meeting. She then drew a parallel between her experience in South and East Africa before expressing her joy to work with the ECOWAS teams. She said she was proud of all the participants and the work achieved in so short a time;
* Speaking last, Mr. Alain Sy Traore, ECOWAS Acting Director of Agriculture and Rural Development first expressed the appreciation of his institution to USAID for their continued support to the implementation of the regional agricultural policy, the ECOWAP/CAADP. He commended the HUB RURAL Executive Director and his team for the work well done and the quality of the documents produced. He then thanked the workshop participants for their dedication and attendance, all of which have made it possible to achieve the objectives of the meeting. He urged stakeholders to a sincere commitment to the implementation phase of the programme, before declaring closed the review workshop of the draft programme in support of the implementation of the recommendations of the regional conference on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

**Regional workshop on the free movement of agricultural products in West Africa**

**Cotonou, 29-31 March 2014**

**List of attendance**

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