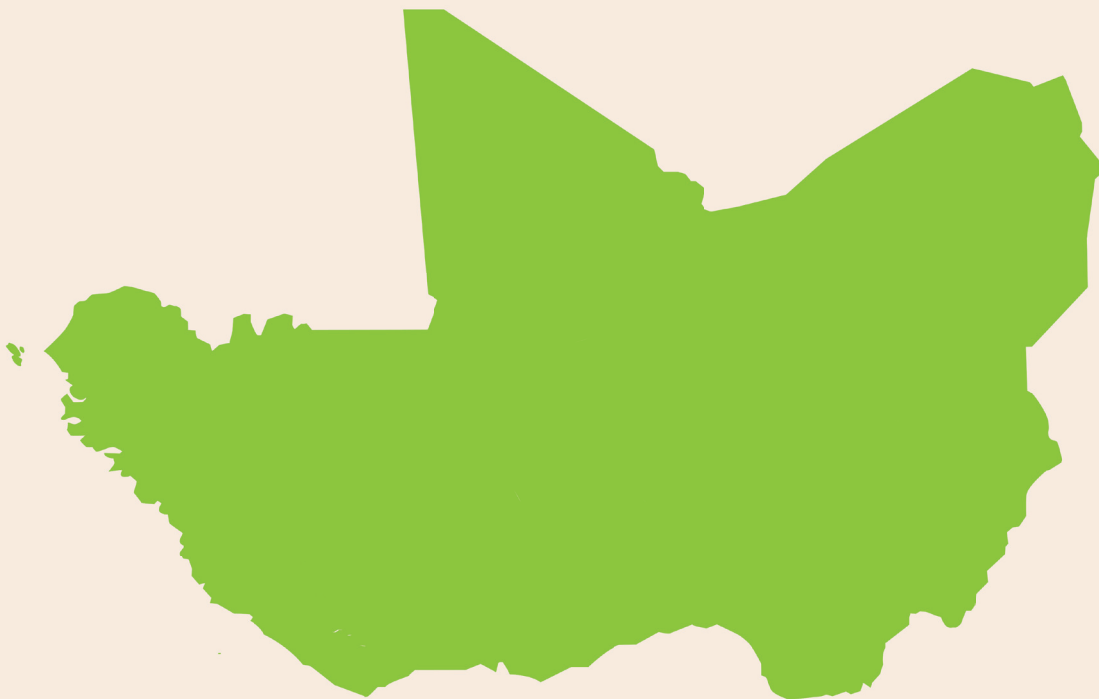




TRADING UP:

Policy innovations to expand food and agriculture trade in Africa



Created by the Treaty of Lagos in 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the oldest regional economic community (REC) in Africa. Covering over 5.1 million km², ECOWAS unites 15 West African countries.¹ It represents a combined GDP of US\$689 billion and a population of over 397 million people in 2020, about 43 percent of whom are employed in the agriculture sector.¹ The Treaty of Lagos was revised in 1993 to expand the remit of ECOWAS beyond pure economic co-operation to include social, security and political aspects. Under the revised treaty, ECOWAS “aims... to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an Economic Union of West Africa.”² The revised treaty aspires to improve the living conditions of West Africa’s population, build a resilient economy, increase co-operation between Member States, and contribute to development of the African continent.³

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.



To achieve these objectives, trade and market integration are key instruments under ECOWAS action plans. Through the revised treaty, ECOWAS plans to remove trade barriers and harmonize trade policies to successively establish a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, and finally a monetary and economic union in West Africa.⁴ Therefore, since its formation, ECOWAS has been committed to increasing trade volumes and developing economic activities within the region to improve the welfare of its citizens.⁵

There are strong complementarities in agricultural production among the ECOWAS countries, due to the difference in agroclimatic conditions among and within these countries. Consequently, important agricultural trade flows are created, connecting for example, the coastal areas in the south with the northern Sahel regions.⁶ According to the 2019 Biennial Review by the African Union, 14 out of the 15 ECOWAS countries are currently on-track to meet the Malabo commitment on Intra-African Trade in Agricultural Commodities and Services.⁷ The main traded agricultural commodities within the region are cereals, roots and tubers, and livestock products, while coffee, cocoa, cotton, rubber, fruits, and vegetables are mostly exported outside the region.⁸ The contribution of ECOWAS exports to total intracontinental agricultural exports is estimated at 14 percent on average between 2003 and 2018. In addition, 79 percent of ECOWAS intracontinental agricultural exports are within the REC itself, demonstrating a strong level integration.⁹

Progress across ECOWAS can be attributed to a set of institutional reforms, trade policy innovations, and programmatic interventions, designed and implemented at the regional level to increase the trade intensity of agricultural products.

Institutional innovations

Institutional arrangements have evolved over time to allow the REC to achieve its ambitious goals, including trade development within the region. At the start, the main institutions in ECOWAS were the Authority of Heads of State and Government (the Authority), the Council of Ministers (the Council), the Tribunal of the Community, the Executive Secretariat, and Specialized Technical Commissions (STCs). Following the revision of the ECOWAS treaty in 1993, four new institutions were added – the Community Parliament, the Economic and Social Council (which is yet to be set up), the Community Court of Justice replacing the Community Tribunal, and the Fund for Co-operation, Compensation and Development. In addition, the STCs were expanded to cover eight themes:

- Food and Agriculture
- Industry, Science and Technology, and Energy
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Transport, Communications and Tourism
- Trade, Customs, Taxation, Statistics, Money and Payments
- Political, Judicial and Legal Affairs, Regional Security and Immigration
- Human Resources, Information, Social and Cultural Affairs
- Administration and Finances

The STCs prepare ECOWAS-wide projects and programs, which are submitted to the Council through the Executive Secretary. In addition, they ensure the harmonization and coordination of projects and programs within ECOWAS. The STCs also monitor and facilitate the application of the provisions of the Treaty and related protocols under its responsibility. Like the other STCs, the trade STC is composed of representatives from each member state. It submits regular reports and recommendations through the Executive Secretary to the Council of Ministers, either on its own initiative or upon the request of the Council or the Executive Secretary.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Executive Secretariat was elevated to a Commission in 2007 (see below). The Parliament, the representative organ of the citizens of the Community, pays great attention to the various activities of the Commission, including the free movement of people and goods, the implementation of the single currency, and the standardization of export products.¹¹ The evolution of these institutions has supported consolidation of the integration process and the community spirit in their respective areas of action.¹²

Greater responsibility for the Executive Secretariat (the Commission)

In 2007, the Authority restructured the Executive Secretariat into a Commission, with increased responsibilities to move the integration process forward. Rather than playing a secretarial role for decision-making institutions, the Commission became responsible for more strategic activities, including coordinating the activities of ECOWAS institutions, driving implementation of the Treaty, and closer collaboration with the African Union. The Commission, headed by a president assisted by a vice-president, has seven departments each headed by a commissioner. Since policy documents and legal instruments are all channeled through the Commission to arrive at the Council, the office of the President of the Commission gained substantial importance with the restructuring.



A subsequent restructuring in 2013 converted the operational departments to sector-focused departments, and increased in the number of commissioners to 15 in order to have a representative from each member state. There are 13 sectors of activity that are managed by commissioners other than the president and the vice-president of the Commission namely:

- Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources
- Education, Science and Culture
- Energy and Mines
- Finance
- General Administration and Conference
- Human Resources Management
- Industry and Private Sector Promotion
- Infrastructure
- Political Affairs, Peace and Security
- Macro-Economic Policy and Economic Research
- Social Affairs and Gender
- Telecommunication and Information Technology
- Trade, Customs and Free Movement

Dispute settlement

The ECOWAS Community Court of Justice (ECCJ) is mandated to ensure the observance of law and the principles of equity and the interpretation and application of the provisions of the Revised Treaty and all other subsidiary legal instruments adopted by Community.¹³ While the court was initially composed of nominated individuals, a subsequent amendment introduced a selection and interview process to reduce political influence. The ECCJ has jurisdiction over investor-State disputes under a Supplementary Act on Investments, which gives the usual range of protections to intra-ECOWAS investors.¹⁴ Through this Act, investors can bring their case to the ECCJ to protect their investments against actions of their host States. Decisions made at the ECCJ are final and binding on all parties involved. In addition, evidence shows that the ECCJ has considerable advantages over national courts in investment dispute settlement.¹⁵

Funding ECOWAS

ECOWAS operations are almost entirely self-sufficient. Shifting away from member state contributions and donations from development partners, a new ECOWAS Community Levy introduced in 2003 requires that member states deduct and pay 0.5 percent on all imports from non-ECOWAS countries to the ECOWAS Community Fund, which is used to finance the activities of the Commission and other

institutions. This change has transformed the financial sustainability of REC, with 95 percent of its 2014 budget coming directly from the community levy. The balance was funded by development partners including the AU, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, and some bilateral partners.¹⁶

Access to finance and attracting investment

The Fund for Co-operation, Compensation and Development was created under the initial Treaty, elevated to the status of a Community Institution in 1993, and then restructured in 1999, as an international financial institution, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), located in Togo. EBID has two subsidiaries: the ECOWAS Regional Investment Bank to promote private sector businesses, and the ECOWAS Regional Development Fund to support development of the public sector.¹⁷ Funded projects and programs are related to infrastructure, industry, poverty alleviation, environment and natural resources. EBID is also committed in increasing regional trade in ECOWAS by financing trade sector activities. It also finances agriculture to achieve food self-sufficiency.¹⁸ For example, in 2012, EBID extended a loan worth US\$ 3 million to a Nigerian company to purchase, renovate and upgrade a flour mill in Niger.¹⁹

In 2009, to boost production factor movement for trade and investment uptake, ECOWAS launched a vision to create a Common Investment Market (CIM) by harmonizing investment codes across all ECOWAS member states. CIM provides the legal framework for treatment and operation of investment in the ECOWAS Common Investment Market (ECIM) and for implementation of the policy.²⁰ However, although the code can promote greater trade, its implementation is still lagging as national laws on trade and investment in some member states are not aligned to CIM. For instance, in Ghana all foreign investors in the country's retail sector (including small and informal food trade), including ECOWAS nationals, are required to finance their businesses with a minimum of US\$1 million, while Côte d'Ivoire's national investment laws exclude foreign investors, including ECOWAS nationals, in some sectors.²¹

Special focus on agriculture

In 2013, ECOWAS set up the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF), a specialized agency tasked with implementing the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP). Under its mission, RAAF strengthens the technical capacity of the ECOWAS Commission, including the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources (AEWR), to implement the Regional Agricultural Investment Programme



(RAIP). Its capacity-strengthening activities focus on providing strategic direction, training on trade law and regulation, monitoring and evaluation, and strategic intelligence. It also supports the capacity strengthening of various stakeholders and actors in member states in the preparation of records, and the implementation and monitoring of activities.²²

Competition

ECOWAS has also strengthened its institutional frameworks by developing codes and rules to guide reforms in the region to improve the regional investment climate and the region's competitiveness. In 2008, during the Summit of Heads of State and Government, the ECOWAS Regional Competition Rules were adopted. These were designed under the ECOWAS Regional Competition Policy Framework, adopted in 2007, to promote, maintain, and encourage competition and enhance economic efficiency in production, trade, and commerce at the regional level. The laws were based on recommendations from a Ministerial Monitoring Committee regarding the harmonization of policies through a community regulatory framework on competition. In 2019, the Competition Rules were institutionalized with the establishment of the ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority (ERCA) headquartered in Gambia. ERCA aims to implement the Regional Competition Rules adopted in 2008. A Consultative Committee on Competition (CCC) composed of national experts in charge of trade and competition was created as a technical body to help direct the affairs of ERCA.²³

Policy innovations

Removal of tariff and nontariff barriers to trade

Achieving trade liberalization has been a goal of ECOWAS since its inception in 1975. The process of establishing a free trade area (FTA) began in 1979, aiming to remove tariff barriers that were limiting the trade of locally produced goods. Taxes and other duties on intraregional trade were set to be eliminated over a 10-year period. Because of significant delays in implementation, a new trade liberalization scheme was adopted at the ECOWAS Summit of January 2003. As part of the scheme, a new compensation mechanism was developed to offset the loss of customs revenue caused by the removal of tariffs on intraregional trade over a period of four years. However, as the compensation mechanism relied entirely on contributions by member states, it has not been as effective. Under the trade liberalization scheme, products exempted from custom duties also have to comply with the ECOWAS rule of origin (RoO) – with agriculture and animal-sourced products exempted from the RoO requirement. A procedure

to regulate the settlement of disputes arising from the implementation of the liberalization plan was subsequently put in place in the form of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, which has the right to make a final decision without the possibility of an appeal.^{24,25} ECOWAS also initiated the formation of a customs union to achieve greater economic integration, setting a common external tariff (CET) in 2013, and thereby greatly facilitating intraregional trade of more goods and products.²⁶

Boosting agricultural productivity in line with CAADP

In addition to removing tariff and nontariff barriers to trade, ECOWAS also committed to increasing agricultural production across the region. In 2005, its first regional agricultural policy (ECOWAP) was developed as an instrument for CAADP implementation. ECOWAP specifically aims to improve livelihoods and reduce food insecurity and malnutrition as well as import dependencies by strengthening the agriculture sector. ECOWAP also sought to sustainably intensify production systems and reduce the vulnerability of West African economies by limiting factors of instability and regional insecurity. An evaluation of the progress and the impact after 10 years of implementation found that the food supply had increased, largely due to a productivity increase in cereal production estimated at 21 percent between 2005 and 2014, compared with an increase of 15 percent in cereal production in the 10 years (1995–2004) preceding ECOWAP implementation. The increase in cereal production was mainly driven by changes in rice and maize production, which increased by 96 and 68 percent, respectively, over the same period. However, the livestock sector saw only a 20 percent increase in total meat production between 2005 and 2013, lower than the 35 percent production increase between 1995 and 2004.²⁷

In 2010, the West Africa Common Industrial Policy (WACIP) was developed and adopted. The WACIP vision is to “maintain a solid industrial structure, which is globally competitive, environment-friendly and capable of significantly improving the living standards of the people by 2030.”²⁸ The policy aims to diversify and broaden the region's industrial production base, and to increase the share of processed local raw materials from 15–20 percent to an average of 30 percent by 2030. It also seeks to promote quality standards across the region. To meet these targets, new large-scale production capacities are set to be built, while expanding and upgrading existing ones. Through the interventions under WACIP, it is expected that intraregional trade



will grow from less than 12 percent to 40 percent by 2030. To ensure that the region's exports globally continue to increase, WACIP foresees an emphasis on skill development and industrial competitiveness enhancement through standardization, accreditation, and certification, while supporting the development of quality ICT infrastructure and transport.²⁹ In 2013, the Standards Harmonization Model (ECOSHAM) was implemented to define quality standards for a range of products, including enriched oils, tomato puree, natural mineral water, frozen fish fillets, smoked fish, and shea butter, as well as a Code of Good Practices on the fortification of fish and meat, mangoes, raw cashew nuts, and Irish potatoes.³⁰

Regulating fertilizer blends and seed quality

To develop a fully functional and strong regional market for seeds and fertilizer, ECOWAS has made provisions for trade of inputs within the region. An ECOWAS regulation on seed outlines harmonized procedures for the release of new varieties and certification and provides for mandatory licensing of all operators in the seed supply chain. Regulations on the trade of fertilizer set out harmonized quality control standards and labeling requirements across the REC.³¹

In 2010, the ECOWAS and West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) Commissions embarked on a program to develop a regional regulatory and policy framework to harmonize national regulations and quality control standards among the region's countries. Specifically, the program aimed to combat problems with fertilizers including poor quality of fertilizers, adulteration, and poor bag weight compliance in the region, which were resulting in reduced availability and use of fertilizers. The fertilizer quality control regulation (C/REG.13/12/12) was adopted in 2012 by ECOWAS and then mandated by the Commission to be implemented in national fertilizer regulations in 2013. Furthermore, four implementing regulations were adopted in 2016, including rules on labeling, inspection, analysis, and the role of a West Africa Committee for Fertilizer Control. By 2018, with support from the International Fertilizer Development Center (IDFC), 12 member states published the main ECOWAS regulation in their national gazettes and began the process of harmonization, and 6 countries formed technical committees to advise respective ministries of agriculture on fertilizer manufacture, inspection, sampling, analysis, and marketing.³² With a common regulation on fertilizer blends within the region, private companies can now trade fertilizers in the region unhampered.

Programmatic interventions

Agricultural trade in ECOWAS plays a central role in regional integration. As outlined above, the agroecological complementarities of the region drive the exchange of agricultural produce between the northern Sahelian countries – Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger – and the southern, coastal countries – Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. Moreover, ECOWAS and development partners have initiated several programs to drive infrastructure development and ease the business of agricultural trade.

Building a comprehensive regional quality system

Since the turn of the century, ECOWAS has embarked on an ambitious program to design and implement a quality system for the region, to manage the quality of outputs and goods traded using standards, regulations, policies, infrastructure, and technical skills. The West Africa Quality System Programme (WAQSP) is a major program of the ECOWAS Commission, created to support the implementation of the Quality Policy of ECOWAS (ECOQUAL) and the West African Common Industrial Policy (WACIP).³³ ECOQUAL was adopted in 2013 to facilitate greater intraregional and international trade while protecting consumers and the environment. To do so, ECOQUAL offers guidance on the development and operation of adequate and relevant infrastructure to oversee the quality of products and services being traded (referred to as "quality infrastructure").³⁴ This aligns with the ambitions of WACIP, adopted in 2010, to accelerate the industrialization of West Africa with greater transformation of local raw materials; and with the Harmonization Procedures of the ECOWAS Standards (ECOSHAM).

The first two phases of the West Africa Quality Programme (WAQP) spanning 2001–2005 and 2007–2012 achieved significant progress to facilitate compliance with international trade rules and technical regulations. Successes included the formulation of a regional quality policy (ECOQUAL), accreditation of 21 testing/calibration laboratories meeting international standards, and capacity building for over 4,000 technicians on metrology and inspection.³⁵ These successes provided the impetus for continued efforts in developing and implementing regional quality infrastructure.

The current phase of WAQSP, implemented since 2014, is supported financially by the European Union (EUR 12 million/US\$14.3 million), and in terms of technical capacity by UNIDO's Trade Capacity Building Branch. In line with previous ambitions, WAQSP aims to drive forward the establishment of suitable quality infrastructure and national quality policies to protect



consumer health and the environment, as well as improve private sector competitiveness and foster greater access to foreign markets.³⁶ WAQSP also advances gender mainstreaming – more than 30 percent of program beneficiaries are women.³⁷

WAQSP has five key elements, one of which is supporting the harmonization of standards initiated through ECOSHAM in 2013. Six technical committees have been set up within the ECOSHAM framework to advance the harmonization process, including one on agricultural products and one on food products. By 2017, 94 standards had been formulated through ECOSHAM,³⁸ including several on enriched oils, tomato puree, natural mineral water, frozen fish fillets, smoked fish, and shea butter. In addition, a code of good practices on fish and meat, mangoes, raw cashew nuts, and Irish potatoes has also been outlined.³⁹ Furthermore, two resolutions on the industrial development of cocoa and cashew nuts were adopted in 2017 through WAQSP.⁴⁰

Over 2016–2017, WAQSP achieved several additional key ambitions on an accelerated pace, including:

- Finalization of the National Quality Policies in Ghana and Guinea, in addition to 10 other countries, including Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, where national quality policies were already adopted.
- Establishment of the ECOWAS Agency for Quality (ECOWAQ) in 2017.
- Design of the Quality Infrastructure Scheme.
- Training of 105 participants, including 40 women, across 15 countries in food safety management systems, and the application of 26 regional food standards on rice, cassava, meat, milk, groundnuts, and sugar among others.⁴¹

In addition, WAQP also facilitated the establishment of the West African Accreditation System (SOAC) in 2010. SOAC is the sole multicountry accreditation body serving eight West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. By 2019, six food quality control laboratories were accredited, five of which were directly supported by the WAQSP. Furthermore, 1,000 experts were trained on quality management in the region and eight National Accreditation Focal Points (NAFPs) were appointed by their respective ministries.⁴²

Easing transit and trade across borders

A regional Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

between the 15 member states of ECOWAS and Mauritania, UEMOA, and the EU was concluded in 2014. To support countries in maximizing the benefits from this EPA, Côte d'Ivoire, with assistance from the EU, implemented an ambitious trade and regional integration support program, Programme d'Appui au Commerce et à l'Intégration Régionale (PACIR).⁴³ One of the goals of PACIR was to improve regional transit. To achieve this, Côte D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Mali initiated the Customs Interconnection Project (ALISA) in 2015 to trace operations, streamline procedures, reduce red tape, and coordinate data collection and sharing across their borders. Specifically, the project sought to connect the IT systems used at borders so that they could communicate with each other over a secure system.^{44,45} Following the design of functional and technical specifications, ECOWAS entered into a project agreement with UNCTAD in 2017 to adapt the ASYCUDA (Automated System for Customs Data) World regional transit module for the three countries involved. The ASYCUDA system is a digital solution that oversees the whole customs process, from the dispatch of goods for transit through arrival at border posts, warehousing, and subsequent release for delivery upon payment of duties and taxes.⁴⁶ Not only does it reduce the prevalence of smuggling and fraud, thereby improving the overall business environment, ASYCUDA also expedites customs clearance and reduces costs at border crossings.⁴⁷ The new module was piloted in 2019 along the Abidjan-Ouagadougou corridor with support from the World Bank, and then extended to two more transit corridors connecting Burkina Faso and Togo, and Benin and Niger. Within a month of implementation, average transit time between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire fell from 1.37 days (about 33 hours) to 0.95 days (about 23 hours), and revenue collection at the Benin-Niger borders increased by 16 percent. Discussions are currently underway to extend the system to Senegal too.⁴⁸ In addition, training elements included within the program have resulted in the training of five developers with in-depth knowledge of the design of the computerized transit trade system who can provide support to any other ECOWAS member state wishing to adopt the new IT solution.⁴⁹

Food Across Borders Program

Alongside the PACIR/SIGMAT program above, ECOWAS also introduced an initiative specifically targeted at improving the transit of food in the region. The Food Across Borders Program (ProFAB) was launched in 2015 by ECOWAS and UEMOA to raise the value and volume of intraregional trade in agricultural products by improving the economic

2 PACIR was renamed to SIGMAT (Regional Customs Network for Transit Trade) in March 2019. <https://www.ecowas.int/32318/>



and regulatory environment for trade. Funded by the US Agency for International Development and the Government of Canada, ProFAB is implemented by several regional organizations including Le Hub Rural, the African Center for Trade, Integration and Development (ENDA/CACID), and the Borderless Alliance – all of which are coordinated through the Permanent Intergovernmental Committee for Drought Control (CILSS). To achieve its aims, the program seeks to: build a stronger understanding of trade patterns and barriers with enhanced data collection; support the implementation of agreements on free movement of agricultural products and people; and where required, contribute to the formulation of regional policies and strategies to promote agricultural trade. The primary focus of the initiative has been on addressing the barriers to trade such as checkpoints, illegal taxes, and red tape along specific trade and transport corridors, including the Abidjan-Accra-Lome-Cotonou-Lagos route, Abidjan-Yamoussoukro-Ferkessedougou-Zegoua-Sikasso-Bougouni-Bamako route, and Dakar-Louga- Saint Louis-Rosso-Tiguient-Nouakchott route. The program is due to end in 2020.^{50,51,52,53}

Access to market information

ECOWAP was implemented through the National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIP) and the Regional Agricultural Investment Program (RAIP). While the NAIPs reflect national-level priorities on investments in the agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and forestry subsectors, the RAIP focuses on investments and public policy instruments at the regional level. It specifically promotes strategic commodities for food security and self-sufficiency in products such as rice, maize, cassava, livestock, meat, poultry, milk, and fisheries and a global environment conducive to agricultural development.⁵⁴ Under the RAIP, the ECOWAS Regional Integrated Agricultural Information System (ECOAGRIS) was developed to give decision-makers in the region access to reliable and up-to-date data and analysis for better formulation and monitoring of agricultural development policies and strategies. ECOAGRIS is also designed as a tool to promote trade among all the actors (public and private) of the agriculture sector within ECOWAS. The ECOAGRIS agricultural markets component aims to enhance the functioning of markets by improving market actors' access to information that can strengthen the bargaining power of producers, broaden consumer choices and enable traders to ensure a better flow of cereals. The agricultural markets component also targets to improve evidence-based decision-making by policy makers, the cereal boards and development partners. The data includes information on cereal

prices, supplies and stocks. In addition, regular analyses of markets and food supply are published on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis through bulletins.⁵⁵ All ECOWAS members and non-members - including Mauritania and Chad - have been included in the system allowing the interconnection of their national agricultural information systems. The system is expected to publish a yearly report on agricultural products within ECOWAS.⁵⁶

The ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS) is another initiative with the aim to improve access to timely and relevant trade related information and intelligence for informed business decisions, policy formulation and academic research. ECOTIS is a centralized portal developed by the ECOWAS Commission to respond to the increasing need of trade information and data analysis in understanding the functioning of world markets and value chains. ECOTIS compiles all trade information available in the region and from different sources in an online system. The keys areas around which ECOTIS is structured include trade agreements, trade policy, trade statistics, trade promotion, trade capacity building and resources.⁵⁷

Market access facilitation for livestock

Under the Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project (PRAPS), initiated in 2015 and being implemented in four ECOWAS member states (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal) and two nonmember states (Mauritania and Chad), national activities were aligned with regional priorities defined by ECOWAP.⁵⁸ PRAPS aims to improve access to important productive assets, services, and markets for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in cross-border areas and along transhumance routes, and to strengthen national capacities to respond efficiently to crises or emergencies. The Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) is responsible for coordination at the regional level. The project seeks to improve the living conditions for more than 2 million pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, at least 30 percent of whom are women. Under its market access facilitation component, the project aims to increase producers' access to competitive, inclusive markets and to increase trade in pastoral products (especially live animals). In the short term, the aim is to increase the number of reference markets; and in the medium term, to increase the number of animals sold at reference markets.⁵⁹ In Mali – one of the leading exporters of livestock in ECOWAS – a project report shows that the building and rehabilitation of seven markets increased the number of animals sold.⁶⁰



Conclusion

Improving intraregional trade, including trade of agricultural products, is one of the priorities of ECOWAS in achieving economic integration and social development in the region. The evolution of ECOWAS institutional frameworks provides clear evidence of the importance of trade for the REC. In addition, ECOWAS has created an enabling environment for intraregional trade that facilitates access to finance, attracts investment, and ensures fair competition, in tandem with a judiciary to settle investor-government disputes.

The establishment of the free trade area is another key achievement of ECOWAS in promoting intraregional trade with the removal of tariff and nontariff barriers for agricultural products originating within the region. ECOWAS has also made significant progress in the formation of a customs union by adopting a common external tariff, and significantly, has implemented a regional agricultural policy. Moreover, the harmonization of quality standards

and a reduction in transit time along key corridors, achieved by digitalizing customs procedures, are strong signals for continuing regional integration. Furthermore, progress has been made within the region in improving access to regional market information through ECOAGRIS.

However, increasing the volume of intraregional agricultural trade remains a challenge for the ECOWAS region, requiring increased agricultural productivity, larger investments in trade infrastructure, and continued dedication to reducing trade barriers, along with more effective enforcement of regional trade rules and regulations.





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