



ECOWAS to Mainstream Social Safety Nets for Food Security and Nutrition Approach in West Africa



Accra, Ghana, 3rd November 2016: Social protection related to food security and nutrition plays a vital role in reducing poverty and improving food security in West Africa. As part of the implementation of ECOWAP, the ECOWAS Regional Agricultural Policy, it appears that several countries in West Africa do not have significant experience in the implementation of projects and programs related to social safety nets in line with a national social protection strategy. This is, among others, the reason why in 2012, ECOWAS initiated a Regional Program of Support to the National Social Security Nets in West Africa. This program promotes preventive social safety net programs (predictable and enrolled in the duration of interventions, targeting people on the basis of vulnerability rather than on the basis of exposure to a shock).

*“This regional training workshop fully and timely falls within the approach and the perspective of the region that is to prevent crises as much as possible before they occur. As a matter of fact, ECOWAS Agricultural Policy as you may all know has an important component on preventing and managing food and social security crises. **Mr. Seth OSEI Akoto**, Director of Crop Services, representing the Minister of Food and Agriculture of Ghana, explains. “I wish to state that those who will be trained here in Accra will have the obligation to share the knowledge acquired here once back to their respective countries. This is the only way that West Africa will generate knowledge and bring development to our hard-working populations as well as sustaining the vulnerable in our communities”, he concludes.*

ECOWAS benefits from the support of the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID) to fund innovative field projects in the area of safety nets for food security and nutrition. These projects are implemented by various development actors in ECOWAS Member States. The selection of projects backers is done through call for proposals managed by the Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF/ECOWAS). Following a first call for proposals launched in January 2015, 10 field projects on social safety nets were selected for an aggregate grant amount of \$ 2,146,789. A second call for proposals will be launched by the end of 2016, still with the support of AECID.

*“It is a renewed pleasure for Spanish Cooperation Agency (AECID) to support ECOWAS, through ARAA/RAAF, in order to put in place innovative initiatives in social protection aimed to reduce food and nutrition insecurity of vulnerable population. Following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2005 with ECOWAS, the Spanish Cooperation is strongly engaged with Regional Agriculture Policy funding several projects in Agriculture, Food Security, Nutrition and Rural Development sectors. Despite the advances in social indicators, vulnerability and food insecurity continue to be a major challenge at the regional level. For this reason, it is high time to start assessing field projects to document successes and best practices for scaling up; and communication definitely has a major role to play in the visibility of the great things that are happening at the grassroots levels. We welcome the fact that this regional training workshop will be used as a tool to strengthen national capacities of the Member States and contribute in promoting a regional network in order to enhance dialogue on policies and innovative actions for strengthening social safety nets in the region, “**Mr. Aja Andres, Juan**, Technical Advisor and Representative of AECID strongly insists.*

*“The assessment of the approach used to select and fund the first batch of field projects in 2015/2016 gave us insights to shortly break, discuss and agree on a common understanding of the concept of the topic of social safety nets and on how best to design viable projects relating to the matter in hand. I do believe that this training has the advantage, especially at the stepdown stage at national levels, to provide the necessary instruments to national players of ECOWAS Member States to better formulate and implement projects of social safety nets that will positively impacts our brothers and sisters.”, **Mr. Salifou Ousseini**, Executive Director of ARAA/ECOWAS, comments.*

In the same vein and considering the shortcomings identified in the definition of actions and formulation of the first batch of the innovative projects on food safety nets, RAAF/ECOWAS, with technical support from FAO and financial support from AECID, has trained a pool of master trainers at the regional level with the ultimate goal to stepdown these trainings at national levels through national restitution workshops.

*“For years, FAO has been at the forefront in developing and championing social protection programs and approaches with a view to ensuring the achievement of food security and nutrition for all. Needless to mention that this is consistent with and contributes to the commitment to leave no one behind of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda”, **Mr.***

Abebe Haile Gabriel, Country Representative to FAO Ghana and Deputy Regional Representative for Africa, states.

Participants to this regional training came from the 15 ECOWAS Member States, Producers' organizations including the trainers, some resources persons and some ECOWAS and FAO experts facilitating the workshop organization and discussions. The training facilitated a common understanding of the concept of social safety nets by all participants. Potential projects backers and implementers got familiar with the instruments commonly used in the formulation and implementation of social safety net projects.

Participants were taken through definition of concepts, instruments for safety nets for food security and nutrition, targeting approach, project design, project funding, preparation and organization of national restitution workshops, experience sharing on field safety nets projects design and implementation.

"The biggest challenge now is that, once back to our respective countries, we as trained trainers will have to strengthen the capacity of our countries in the area of the formulation of innovative projects related to safety nets for food security and nutrition. Though the training was well done, I still believe that some RAAF and FAO Experts may still have to come down to some of our countries whose capacities are still weak to really support us in how to organize a strong and coherent project case for funding." **Mr. Patrick Tarnue Worzie** from Liberia advocates.

Preventing, tracking and fighting the social safety nets for food security and nutrition cases contributes to the operationalization of the Sahel Strategy of ECOWAS and contributes to the implementation of the Global Alliance for Resilience under the guidelines of the Regional Program to Support the National Social Security Nets. These projects also take into account the Social Policy of the African Union which calls for the strengthening of social protection mechanisms, the fight against poverty and hunger, the creation of full employment and decent work opportunities for all, the improvement of access to education, care and health facilities, the promotion of gender equality and the involvement of the most vulnerable groups in key development activities.

The workshop has given clear cut guidance and directives for the stepdown trainings at national level with a flexible roadmap. However, some RAAF and FAO experts might still have to provide additional backstopping assistance to some Member States that really need it.

Created in 2011 by the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) is a specialized Agency based in Lomé, Togo with the mandate *"to ensure the technical implementation of regional investment programs and plans that contribute to operationalize the regional agricultural policy based on institutions, organizations and regional actors with proven skills."* Within the framework of the projects that it coordinates and with support from financial partners, ARAA/RAAF, through calls for proposals, directly funds projects on the ground initiated by the public and private sectors, NGOs, and farmers' associations/organizations in the region.

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