



## **ECOWAS: A Regional Reserve to Prevent and Manage Food Crises in West Africa**

### ***1. Why a Regional Food Reserve?***

ECOWAS has made Prevention and Food and Nutritional Crises management an integral part of its Agricultural Policy. As a result, the Heads of States and Governments decided to set up a Regional Food Security Reserve by Supplementary Act<sup>1</sup> of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty in February 2013. This Regional Reserve is intended primarily for emergency operations in case of a major economic crisis in one or several countries.

The Regional Food Security Reserve is part of the Regional Agricultural Investment Program, one of its objectives being to *"reduce food vulnerability and to promote sustainable access to food."*

It should be recalled that the food crisis caused by soaring prices in 2007/08 greatly changed the situation on food security at global and regional levels. Furthermore, analyses reveal that in West Africa the increase in international prices is not the only factor that led to the crisis. Since the early 2000s, and despite the absence of major drought, the region has been experiencing, especially in the Sahel region, repetitive food and nutrition crises. The issue of physical security stocks has therefore been brought back to the forefront to better manage these shocks.

This Regional Food Security Reserve is the third line of defence to prevent and manage food crises. It complements proximity stocks (first line of defence in villages and communities) and national food security stocks (second line of defence) held by States. The ECOWAS strategy includes the deployment and strengthening of these three lines of defence.

### ***2. What are its objectives?***

The Regional Food Security Reserve has three main objectives, namely: (i) complement the efforts of Member States to provide rapid and diversified food and nutrition assistance; (ii) express regional solidarity with Member States and affected populations through transparent, fair and predictable mechanisms; (iii) contribute to food sovereignty and to political, economic, and commercial integration in West Africa. In other words, it is meant to provide the region with appropriate means to mitigate and contain the impact of shocks on food security to populations. This is one of the key regional instruments to support national capacity for the prevention and management of food crises and reduce the vulnerability of the poor, rural and urban populations.

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<sup>1</sup> N° AS/2/02/2013

### ***3. How will the Reserve function?***

ECOWAS has scheduled the initial stage for four years with a total reserve of 176,000 tons before increasing it to 294,000 tons from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> year and to 411,000 tons starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> year. This Reserve consists of a physical stock (one third of the total), stored in the warehouses of national storage companies, and a financial reserve (two thirds of the total). The growth rate, volumes and share of the two components shall be adjusted from the early evaluations of the functioning of the Reserve.

The Reserve deals primarily with loans or free transfer of food or financial resources decided by the Management Committee. These interventions express regional solidarity and the contribution of the region to the response plans or emergency plans designed by countries in response to a food crisis. As such, the generalization of national contingency plans sufficiently harmonized at regional level, and from which the food crisis response plans are designed, is an important step towards improving the general quality of the crisis response strategies and true fairness of the regional response.

The financing plan is based on a combination of national, regional and international resources. Depending on the resources mobilized and the level of commitment of regional and international policy makers, the Reserve will adjust its interventions between the two forms of support: loans or transfers on the one hand, and free transfers (regional solidarity) on the other hand.

### ***4. What is its current deployment?***

It is expected that ECOWAS will fund ECOWADF, whose mission is to support agricultural development and thus enable the Regional Reserve to fully play its role. Since 2015, the EU spends up to 56 million Euros on an initial food security storage support project in West Africa.

The support project – with a five-year duration – has as overall goal to contribute to the effective response to food crises and enhance household resilience with a view to security and sustainable regional food sovereignty in a context of security and sustainable food sovereignty, by promoting emergency food reserve systems at local, national, and regional levels.

This financial support has enabled the Regional Reserve to fully start field activities in the first quarter of 2016. The Technical Management Unit of the Reserve is operational and is hosted by the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF). It is currently making its first procurement by tender to create an initial physical stock comprised of 15,000 tons of cereals, and is preparing a second procurement that will increase the stock to 31,500 tons of cereals and 2,600 tons of enriched flour in 2017.

The Regional Reserve relies on existing storage infrastructure in four sub-spaces, including: (1) Northern Nigeria/Niger/Northern Benin (East Subspace); (2) Southern Mali/Southern Burkina Faso/Northern Ghana/Northern Cote d'Ivoire/Northern Togo (Central Subspace); (3) Senegal, The Gambia, Cape Verde, and Guinea Bissau (West Atlantic Subspace); (4) Guinea/Liberia/Sierra Leone (Atlantic Gulf Subspace).



Government agencies with storage infrastructure that can sign contracts with RAAF to receive, store, and conserve food have been selected following a call for proposals.

The project is a contribution to the constitution of the physical reserve and its governance. It also aims to improve the quality of information systems, increase proximity stocks in partnership with producers' organizations, and strengthen national security stocks, in partnership with the States and with the Regional Network. It is for this reason that the RESOGEST<sup>2</sup> was set up.

### ***5. What are the roles of the stakeholders?***

All actors are called upon to contribute to this regional system. While ensuring the leadership of the Regional Reserve initiative, ECOWAS knows it can count on the contributions of national institutions managing public stocks in its regional storage strategy, especially through RESOGEST. The same applies to all institutions of regional integration, technical organizations and above all, producer organizations and inter-professional organizations, Member States and technical and financial partners who support development efforts in West Africa. As part of the support project, AFD, AECID and the AGRHYMET Regional Centre of CILSS act as implementing operators.

The coordination of the implementation of the Regional Reserve as well as that of the support project, is provided by the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) based in Lomé, Togo.

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*

<sup>2</sup> Network of Companies for the Management of National Food Security Stocks in the Sahel and in West Africa

*actors with proven skills.*". Within the framework of the projects that it coordinates and with support from financial partners, 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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