



Focus Section B

Stakeholder Involvement in Policy Development and Implementation

The experience of ROPPA and national producer organizations¹⁴³

The Network of Peasant Organizations and Producers in West Africa (ROPPA) is the largest federation of farmer organizations in West Africa, formed in 2000 with membership of over 100 organizations from 12 of the countries within ECOWAS.¹⁴⁴ The network is open to all countries within ECOWAS. ROPPA and its member organizations were quick to recognise that they had vital interests at stake as national and regional Agricultural policies began to be reconfigured under PAU and ECOWAP in the early 2000s and later with negotiation of the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union. The experience of these organizations in influencing national and regional agricultural policies provides insights into the role and limits of different interest groups in helping shape policies in the region.

ROPPA sees itself as a defender of family farming in West Africa, with a special emphasis on smaller family operations, which constitute the large majority of farmers in the region. It believes that with expanded support, its constituent producer organizations can play a vital role in providing technical and financial support services to these family farms.

ROPPA's vision

The doctrine of ROPPA is inextricably linked to the international debates that arose in the second half of the 1990s following the introduction of agriculture into the WTO negotiations.

¹⁴³ This focus section draws heavily on ROPPA, 2012b.

¹⁴⁴ Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo

This doctrine:

- » defends the importance of family farming;
- » opposes the liberalization of agricultural trade because of the multifunctionality of agriculture (“Agriculture is not a commodity”); and
- » advocates the sovereignty of States and Regional Economic Communities in the area of agricultural and food policies.

ROPPA argues that family farming in West Africa is under threat due to:

- » *Structural under-investment in family farms*, on the part of both West African governments and their technical and financial partners. ROPPA argues that many African government decision-makers equate modern agriculture with large-scale mechanised operations and have little faith in the capacity of small- and medium-sized family farms to feed the region.
- » *Imports of low-cost agricultural products* encouraged by trade and agricultural policies which, in ROPPA's view, have undermined the development of local food sectors.
- » *Strong competition for agricultural land*, fed by the demand for biofuels and manifested in the large transfers of land to both domestic and foreign entities not previously engaged in farming in the region. ROPPA argues that West African family farmers have for years faced unfair competition from cheap agricultural imports and are now facing an even more severe battle to hold on to their own land.

- » *Climate change*, which further endangers the agricultural sector due to the degradation of natural resources, undermining productivity.
- » *The inconsistency between European and West African agricultural policies*, particularly as they affect the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) being negotiated with the European Union, which call for duty-free trade for a range of goods and services between the EU and West Africa. ROPPA argues that such agreements risk flooding West Africa with subsidised European agricultural products, thereby undermining local production and weakening food security in the region.¹⁴⁵

Given these concerns, ROPPA and its constituent organizations have strongly argued that agricultural policies in the region need to be based on five key principles:

1. The recognition of the *family farm*, both as a legal entity and as the foundation for agricultural development strategies, as opposed to a strategy targeting what ROPPA terms “capitalist agriculture”.
2. The recognition of the concept of *food sovereignty* as a key food policy goal. ROPPA defines food sovereignty as the “the right of every country or group of countries to define its agricultural policy in the interest of its populations and to develop and protect its production and markets so that they can satisfy the needs for a safe, sufficient, and culturally acceptable food supply and also serve as the basis for just remuneration for the labour of family farms.” From a policy perspective, the notion of food sovereignty implies a strong preference for local over imported products and at least some degree of autonomy for policy makers to establish food policies independently of the strictures of international agreements such as the WTO.
3. *Giving priority to the regional West African market* (including creation of a common agri-

cultural market within West Africa) and border protection of the regional market against extra-regional imports.

4. Providing for a *secure system of land tenure and sustainable production systems*.
5. Ensuring adequate *financing for family farms*.

ROPPA's experience with regional and national policy initiatives

ROPPA and its constituent organizations have been very active since the launching of the regional policy initiatives (PAU and ECOWAP) through consultations at both the national and regional levels. For example, ROPPA is a member of the steering committee for ECOWAP. National Producer Organizations (POs) were involved to varying degrees in the design of and debate about the national CAADP programmes. The degree of involvement generally went beyond the traditional discussion between government officials and producer organizations about proposed policies and programmes to a broader democratic debate about policy objectives and ways to achieve them. ROPPA and its affiliated POs were particularly successful in getting the notion of food sovereignty included as an explicit objective of both PAU and ECOWAP, as well as in national legislation setting out the broad vision and objectives of agricultural development policy in a number of countries, such as the *Loi d'Orientation Agricole* in Mali and the *Loi d'Orientation Agro-Sylvo-Pastorale* in Senegal. These laws, as well as the regional programmes, also explicitly recognize the importance of family farming, although they also left open the possibility of including other forms of agricultural enterprises as part of the structure of farming.

At the regional level, ROPPA was also successful in pushing for a fifth, higher tariff band (eventually set at 35%) of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff, aimed primarily at protecting “sensitive” agricultural products. It also succeeded in lobbying for inclusion of a specific objective in ECOWAP aimed at providing West African agriculture with financing mechanisms adapted

¹⁴⁵ ROPPA's argument is that even in the absence of explicit export subsidies in the EU, a variety of other support payments to EU farmers drive down those farmers' average cost of production, allowing them to sell at essentially subsidised prices.

to the diversity of farms and value chains and the multiplicity of types of investments needed. The organization was also instrumental in successfully arguing for the inclusion of representatives from POs in three of the key structures established for the implementation of ECOWAP: the Regional Consultative Committee on Food and Agriculture; the Regional Fund for Food and Agriculture, and the proposed instruments for monitoring and evaluation. ROPPA attributes its considerable successes in influencing the regional policies not only to its own organizational skills, preparation, and grass-roots mobilization, but also its strong links with producer organizations and NGOs in Europe and the Americas that helped build support among ECOWAS's and WAEMU's development partners for the positions advocated by ROPPA.

ROPPA's experience, however, has been that it was more successful in influencing the design of regional agricultural policies (PAU and ECOWAP) than more general trade policies (such as the WAEMU CET and the EPA negotiations with the EU) that involve more than just the agricultural sector. These latter policies affect a broader array of interests and hence create a greater competition for influence within the policy process. ROPPA also believes that producer organizations were more influential in shaping agricultural policies at the regional level than at the national level (e.g. national CAADP plans). ROPPA attributes this lower success at the national level to the reluctance of many politicians and bureaucrats to see independent power bases emerge that could, by themselves or through alliances with other civil-society organizations, serve as a counterweight in domestic politics to those currently in power. A second complementary hypothesis is that political leaders at the national level confront more immediately the potential urban unrest caused by high food prices and hence are less receptive than their regional counterparts to ROPPA's calls for higher levels of agricultural protection.

ROPPA has also found that even if it is deeply implicated in the design of regional policies, implementation often poses problems. Examples include:

- » For the PAU: (i) the decision of WAEMU to launch the programme without organizing the promised meeting of the PAU implementation committee in which POs were to be represented, (ii) the establishment of the regional fund for agriculture as well as the administrative procedures for its management without notification or consultation with the POs or ROPPA and (iii) the use of the fund in 2008 (with the agreement of the member states) to deal with the crisis brought about by soaring food prices and to aid displaced persons rather than for its original purposes of supporting specific programmes to benefit West African farmers.
- » The slow implementation of many of the provisions of ECOWAP, which ROPPA believes would be beneficial to its members.
- » Most recently, the perception that the agenda and the timing of the ECOWAP/CAADP and PAU processes have been hijacked by interests in the G8 and G20 who have been pushing for an approach to agricultural development in Africa that promotes public-private partnerships with large international agribusiness firms. This approach, epitomised by the "Grow Africa" initiative launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos in May 2012 and the complementary New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition promoted by the United States, calls for greater international private-sector investment in African agriculture and sets ambitious targets for increasing such investment. In ROPPA's view, these initiatives promote a vision of capitalist agriculture at variance with ROPPA's vision of family farming. Furthermore, in the present context of ambiguous and insecure rules regarding land tenure and water rights in many West African countries, ROPPA feels that these initiatives open the door to the possibility of widespread "land grabs" by private entrepreneurs and multinational firms at the expense of small family farms. Equally important, ROPPA sees these new initiatives as shifting the ownership of the agricultural development agenda for West Africa back towards the high-income

countries, thus undermining ROPPA's efforts and that of its allies to build West-African-led programmes. In writing to the President of the African Union Commission on May 12, 2012, the President of ROPPA summarised ROPPA's concerns as follows¹⁴⁶:

“We would like to simply remind everyone that food security and sovereignty will be the basis of our general development, as all African governments continue to stress. This is a strategic issue. That is why we must build our food policy on our own resources, as is the case for all regions of the world. The G8 and the G20 should not constitute the place where such decisions are made.”

¹⁴⁶ For the full text of the letter, see ROPPA, 2012b.