

Cotonou declaration

On the development of the cotton sector in africa

The Farmers' consultation meeting on the development of the cotton sector in African took place in Cotonou (Benin) from 11 to 14 May 2004. It was attended by farmers from twelve Western, Eastern and Central African countries, representatives of European farmers' organisations, of the French Foreign Affairs ministry, the West and Central African ministries responsible for agriculture, the FAO, the WAEMU, USAID, research institutions, NGOs from North and South and resource persons.

With the help of plentiful documentation and excellent presentations, the participants discussed the situation in the cotton sector in each of the countries, regional and international agricultural and trade policies, different advocacy and lobbying strategies at regional and international levels, opportunities to improve the quality of the cotton produced on family farms and regional and international initiatives to develop the sector and/or re-open the negotiations on the international trade agreements.

With regard to the situation of the cotton sector in their respective countries, the farmers made the following observations:

- The cotton sector in African is highly dependent on international markets for the sale of produce and the purchase of farm inputs.
- National cotton sectors face considerable internal and external constraints:

Internal constraints include the stagnation of yields, the disorganisation of research and support services, the rising cost of factors of production, the unreliability of cotton payments, the emergence of new players with no experience in the cotton sector who do not abide by the rules, the absence of mechanisms for arbitration and legal recourse, and the inability of emerging sectoral organisations to play a regulatory role due to the absence of clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the different players involved, including the State.

External constraints include the distortion of world markets caused by the export subsidies paid out by rich countries like the United States and the European Union, which have a disastrous effect on the incomes and living standards of farmers elsewhere. This situation has led farmers' organisations to lose faith in the durability of the sector and in the will of developed countries to combat poverty and inequalities. They wonder whether it is worth continuing to try and improve their competitiveness and the diversification of their production systems if the market is so unreliable.

- Declining State involvement and the current trend towards privatisation and liberalisation have brought about some important changes including better recognition of the roles and responsibilities of farmers' organisations. However, not enough has been done to increase the organisations' capacity to play the roles required of them and to fulfil new functions such as providing their members with information, support, advice, supplies and agricultural inputs.
- Furthermore, the reforms presently underway were badly prepared and have not yet led to a consistent and lasting improvement of farmers' incomes.

Through detailed discussions in the plenary sessions and workshops, the participants forged their vision of the development of the cotton sector.

The farmers' organisations see cotton growing as one of a series of farming activities carried out on family farms, where diversification is a key characteristic.

Thus, while cotton is some farmers' main crop, they are also involved in subsistence farming, livestock farming and the processing of produce. It is for this reason that the farmers' organisations believe that **any initiative or sustainable development policy for the cotton sector in Africa must:**

Be based on the family farming model and be part of an overall effort to give farmers more income security, reduce the sector's dependency on the world market and restore the dignity of the farming profession.

Permit sustainable management of natural resources in order to safeguard the production potential of family farms.

On the basis of this vision the farmers' organisations at the Cotonou meeting mapped out orientations and actions to make the cotton sector sustainable and profitable for farming families and their members.

The farmers' organisations gave ROPPA a mandate to promote this vision and to implement the orientations and actions decided upon at the workshop. They recommended that the results of the workshop be used as a framework of reference for forthcoming advocacy and lobbying activities.

They also asked ROPPA to do everything within its power to see that the conclusions of the workshop were shared with as many farmers as possible.

The farmers' organisations decided to use ROPPA as a forum to discuss all sub-regional and international issues concerning cotton. To make this possible the farmers' organisations asked ROPPA to act as soon as possible on their proposal to create a working group on cotton within ROPPA.



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ORIENTATIONS AND ACTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COTTON SECTOR

I. Reducing the sector's dependency on foreign markets

Dependency can be reduced by:

- Processing and selling cotton locally, and promoting and protecting these activities through:
 - Appropriate fiscal and customs initiatives to better regulate imports and protect the region's own production. The adjustment of the WAEMU and ECOWAS common external tariff to take account of the need to sell locally processed cotton and cotton by-products.
 - Combating fraudulent textile imports.
 - Eliminating unofficial barriers to facilitate regional trade.
- Increasing regional self-reliance by producing farm inputs (seed, fertilisers, pesticides) in sufficient quantities and of sufficient quality. Prior research will be required to determine the feasibility of this objective.

II. Remuneration of labour and improvement of income security

To provide fair remuneration and income security for farmers it will be necessary to:

- Set up mechanisms to lessen the risks family farmers face, aiming to achieve:
 - Guaranteed cost-effective prices for farmers.
 - Guaranteed swift payment by cottonseed purchasers.
 - The creation, by the sectoral organisation, of a price stabilisation fund, with transparent management mechanisms.
 - The creation of disaster funds with the States and the Organisations for Regional Economic Integration (WAEMU, ECOWAS, CEMAC) as major contributors.
- Create an arbitration system for the sector to ensure better protection of the interests of all the parties.
- Improve the farmers' organisations' ability to negotiate and to use the legal system to get their rights respected.

III. Improving the performance and the competitiveness of family farms

To maintain and improve present standards of performance and competitiveness it will be vital to:

- Set up a durable funding mechanism for production and marketing at national and regional levels.
- Improve the productivity of existing production systems through the integrated and sustainable management of natural resources. Farmers will require assistance in:
 - Integrated pest control.
 - Integrated soil fertility and water management.
 - Soil conservation and reconditioning.
 - The use of high-yield varieties with good quality fibre.
- Help create an efficient delivery system ensuring the timely arrival of farm inputs in sufficient quantities. This could be done at regional level by encouraging healthy competition between suppliers and by setting up national and regional purchasing pools so farmers can place collective orders.
- Promote technological innovation on all family farms by:
 - Stepping up agricultural research in the different countries and improving dialogue between researchers and farmers' organisations, which implies the creation or reinforcement of structures for dialogue between farmers' organisations and researchers.
 - Setting up efficient support and advice services promoting (inter alia) management councils. The latter need to be extended to all categories of family farms and be embedded in legal framework with a durable funding mechanism to which farmers contribute.
- Provide a political, economic and institutional environment in which farmers can feel secure, through:
 - Government recognition of farmers' capacity to invest in companies being privatised, implying the partial or total transfer of State shares to farmers' organisations.
 - The setting up of an approval system for farm inputs and a quality control system for farm inputs at regional level.
 - The encouragement of healthy competition between suppliers of farm inputs and surveillance to ensure that terms and conditions are properly respected.
 - Land reform to improve family farmers' security of tenure.

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- The facilitation of access to legal advice to help farmers' organisations deal with disputes.
- Development of the road network to facilitate the collection of produce.
- Regard for farmers' interests during international trade negotiations (particularly EPA and WTO negotiations) and efforts to ensure the genuine involvement of regional farmers' organisations in the EPA and WTO bargaining processes to reduce the risk of even fiercer competition from imported products on local markets and the restriction of access to markets in the North through artificially created tariff barriers.

IV. Protecting the sector and the farmers' interests

To protect the sector and the farmers' interests, the farmers organisations have pledged to:

- Develop an information and communication system for family farms. The farmers' organisations request ROPPA to help revive the Cotton Observatory and incorporate it into its broader information and communication system.
- Participate in all alliances to protect the sector and build strong alliances with civil society organisations.
- The farmers' organisations also invite the States and their sub-regional and regional economic organisations to continue and intensify their pleas for the renegotiation of the WTO rules to make international trade fairer. The farmers organisations give ROPPA a mandate to organise their support and their mobilisation, alongside the States and the Regional Economic Organisations, to obtain the adoption of fairer trade rules guaranteeing countries and groups in the North and the South the right to protect their farming sectors and their markets so as to ensure fair payment of family farmers' labour and products and feed their populations.
- They encourage ROPPA to continue its work in the coalition of farmers' organisations from Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas to increase awareness of farmers' organisations' views and their proposals for fair trade and the sustainable development of family farming.
- With regard to their advocacy and lobbying work, ROPPA and the farmers' organisation reaffirm their desire for a strong partnership with like minded NGOs in the North and in the South.

The farmers' organisations are convinced that the good implementation of all the recommendations will help make the African cotton sector a vehicle for progress for family farms. They ask ROPPA to translate these recommendations into a plan of action.

The farmers' organisations reiterate their firm belief that family farming and family farms are capable of feeding Africa's population in a way that is in keeping with the continent's values and traditions.

ROPPA

The Network of Peasant Organizations and Producers in West African, ROPPA has been created in the year 2000 in Cotonou as an initiative of the farmers organisations and agricultural producers from ten Western African countries (Bénin, Burkina-Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Gambie, Mali, Niger, Sénégal). ROPPA is an organisation aiming at:

- The promotion and the defence of the values supporting an efficient and sustainable farmers' agriculture at the service of family farms and agricultural producers.
- Supporting the concerted dialogue and the institutional reinforcement of the farmers organisations and agricultural producers in every country.
- The training and the information of professional agricultural organisations on the basis of the experiences of their members and of those of other actors in development.
- Interafrican promotion and solidarity.
- The representation of farmers organisations and agricultural producers at the subregional, regional and international levels.



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