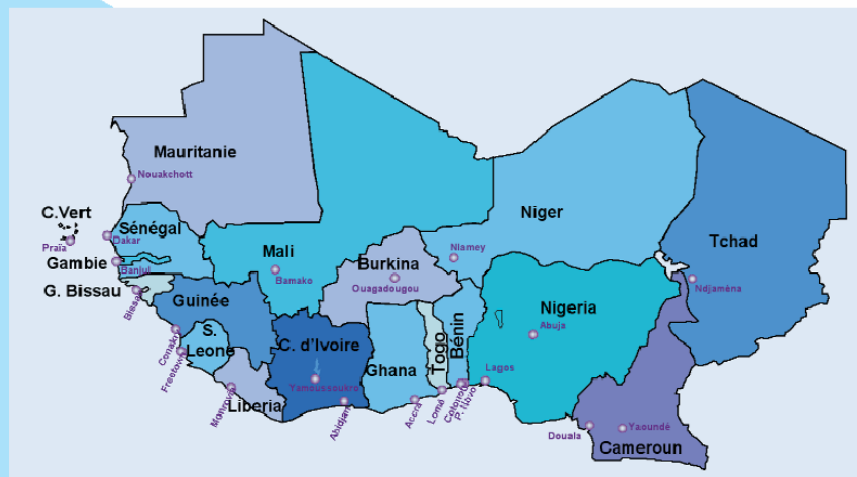


STATEMENT

*Food security over the medium- and long-term
in the Sahel and West Africa*

Normand Lauzon,
Director, Sahel and West Africa Club



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Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD
Le Seine Saint-Germain, 4 Boulevard des Isles
92130 ISSY-LES-MOULINEAUX (France)
Postal Address:
2, rue André-Pascal
75775 Paris Cedex 16
Tel: +33 (0) 1 45 24 89 87
Fax: +33 (0) 1 45 24 90 31
www.oecd.org/sah

Introduction

We are pleased to participate at this regional Conference on “The Agricultural and Food Security Situation in West Africa”.

We would like to thank the CILSS and the International Centre for Soil Fertility (IFDC) for inviting us to this important meeting. We would also like to thank the Ghanaian government for their warm welcome. This meeting comes just at the right time. After the recent difficulties that some West African countries have experienced, in particular, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania, it is apparent that certain food security issues in the Sahel must be examined as regards the complementarity between food deficient regions and those regions with a food surplus. Therefore complementarity between Sahelian countries and coastal countries takes on vital importance.

Before sharing our perspective on food security over the medium- and long-term in West Africa with you, we would first like to briefly present the Sahel and West Africa Club.

Introduction

- 1) Presentation of the Sahel and West Africa Club
- 2) Our perception of food security over the medium- and long-term in the Sahel and West Africa
- 3) What are the lessons learned from the recent food insecurity situation?
- 4) The SWAC's contribution to food security issues
- 5) Conclusion

1) *Presentation of the Sahel and West Africa Club*

First, several words on the Sahel and West Africa Club and our perception of the region.

The Sahel and West Africa Club

- In the mid-1970s, within the context of severe drought, several Member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an organisation to which the Club is attached, in partnership with Sahelian countries, created the Friends of the Sahel Club. The aim was to establish a forum for the international community to discuss and encourage strong support for the region. In 2001, our governing board decided to expand the Club's geographic coverage to encompass the 15 ECOWAS member countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo), plus Mauritania, Chad and Cameroon. The Club then became the Sahel and West Africa Club in 2001.
- Taking into account the evolutions of the region for the last 30 years and responding to the demands expressed by our partners in the region, the Club has undertaken new issues. Accordingly, today, our work covers four areas:
 - Medium- and Long-Term Development Perspectives
 - Agricultural Transformation and Sustainable Development
 - Local Development and the Process of Regional Integration
 - Governance, Conflict Dynamics, Peace and Security
- Within the framework of our work, our main objectives are to:
 - Help identify strategic issues concerning medium- and long-term development in West Africa;
 - Contribute to mobilising and strengthening African capacities within a network approach;
 - Support initiatives and efforts by Africans fostering medium- and long-term development in the region;
 - Facilitate exchanges between regional actors and OECD Member countries;
 - Promote constructive debates that lead to innovative decisions within and outside the region aimed at building a better future for the region.
- The Club works in network with West African partners representing governments and all civil society actors their diversity. It works in close collaboration with development partners of West Africa as well as international organisations; at the continental level, with the African Union, the NEPAD Initiative and the AfDB; at the regional level with ECOWAS, UNOWA, the WAEMU, the CILSS as well as organisations such as ROPPA.

Our perception of the region

- West Africa has experienced significant change over the last decades, and should not be perceived as a stagnant region but rather as a region in constant evolution.
- A retrospective look at the region enables us to conclude that over the last decades there have been significant social, cultural, institutional and political changes. To cite just a few: new modes of governance; a shift from a single-party to a multi-party system; expansion of the employment-generating informal sector; macro-economic and structural adjustments; economic liberalisation; changes in the configuration and role of the media; emergence of civil society's role within its professional or community-based representative organisations; evolution of women's rights in society and their changing role in public affairs; higher priority for local development and the regional integration process. Today, the importance of these challenges is exacerbated by the very high percentage of youth under 20 years of age (over 55% of the population). What other region of the world has undergone such transformations?
- These tremendous upheavals have created political and social tensions but also an opening up and reconfiguration of the West African public space.
- While insisting on the dynamics of change and West Africa's capacities to change and adapt, the purpose here is not to say that "everything is going well". These changes have been impeded by problems of governance; human security; national and international strategies and policies; new pandemics.
- For us, the vital question is: "**Where and how are the approximately 430 million West Africans going to live in 2020?**" This means that there will be an increase of over 100 million inhabitants than there are now. This demographic growth will be embodied by the predominance of youth seeking employment; increased urbanisation; pressure on land and food security; socio-economic infrastructure needs for an expanding population; heightened migratory movements, etc. These are some of the many issues that will be the source of tensions even conflicts to which societies and governments within the region will need to respond.

2) *Our perception of food security over the medium- and long-term in the Sahel and West Africa*

Allow me now to refer to some important phases as regards food security.

An increase in cereal production in order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population and a crises prevention strategy

- Since 1960, the West African agricultural sector has experienced intense changes. Cereal production has **risen sharply in order to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population**. This production increase has resulted from a combination of improved yields and extended areas under cultivation.

However, despite this production increase, food insecurity persists in Sahelian countries of which the causes are at the same time structural and circumstantial.

- After the disastrous droughts of 1973 and 1984 that severely affected the Sahelian countries, **the international community became aware of the problems these countries were facing**. It was during the 1970s that cereal management structures were set up in several Sahelian countries so as to improve stock management and face the possible food problems at the local and national levels. Within this context, the CILSS and the Club du Sahel were created in order to support the countries in this region, victims of the drought. I would like to recall here the close collaboration which has existed over the years between the CILSS and the Club and which has been strengthened with my good friend, the Executive Secretary of the CILSS, Mr. Musa Mbenga and our colleagues.
- As from the 1980s, the Sahelian countries and their development partners have made tremendous efforts to prevent food crises while setting up prevention strategies which are based largely on information and early warning systems. Furthermore, in order to avoid the harmful affects of food aid on agricultural production in countries in the region, the Sahel and West Africa Club member countries have jointly decided with the CILSS member countries to establish a **“Food Aid Charter”**, aiming to assure a better management of aid flows.
- At the beginning of this decade, the information and early warning systems experienced great difficulty notably with the termination of the Diagnostic Permanent (DIAPER) programme; national services did not always have the sufficient financial means in order to carry out agricultural surveys and follow up the development of agricultural campaigns. The quality of the data was also affected. This situation has weakened the credibility of information sources and has been **one of the factors which has slowed down intervention by the international community**.

3) **What are the lessons learned from the recent food insecurity situation?**

The Sahel and West Africa Club has closely followed the food difficulties which some Sahelian countries have faced over the last few months. We have retained five main lessons:

- **First, sufficient national production, even a surplus, can mask food insecurity in fragile zones and vulnerable groups.** The recent food difficulties which some Sahelian countries have experienced, in particular Niger, have demonstrated that the severe cases of food insecurity are mainly localised in specific cross-cutting zones where activities are mostly pastoral. For example, in Mali, although it was estimated that there would be a surplus in national production, certain zones experienced severe food problems.
- In this context, it also seems to me important to take into account within these vulnerable groups which I have just mentioned, the rapidly expanding urban populations. Indeed some of them are exposed to great food insecurity due notably to urban poverty and their weak purchasing power. This reality demonstrates the need to assure better coordinated actions between rural and urban areas as well as national and regional levels.

- **Secondly, circumstantial food insecurity can mask vulnerability and structural poverty.** Malnutrition, in particular amongst children, is one of the indicators of structural poverty. The work carried out by the FAO has shown that in certain countries in the region, a high percentage of children suffer from chronic malnutrition, and that the situation has not improved over the last ten years. In more fragile zones, the proportion of children suffering from chronic malnutrition could reach 50%. Within this context, a climatic disturbance or a pest attack like the desert locusts can trigger a severe food crisis. **In this case, structural food insecurity stems from poverty and problems of access to food from insufficient foodstuffs in the market. The food security issue can thus not be dissociated from chronic poverty since some households are incapable of purchasing cereals, even at subsidised prices.** There are numerous causes of poverty including governance, economic and agricultural policies, access to natural resources, and infrastructure. One of the questions which deserve to be examined is **How to fully integrate modes of governance and the fight against poverty within the food security strategy in West Africa?**
- **Thirdly, contradicting information makes it difficult to mobilise resources and generate action.** In September 2004, the Club organised a meeting on desert locusts in West Africa where it was emphasised that despite alarms by the FAO, the resources needed to fight the scourge could not be mobilised quickly. As regards the recent food crisis in Niger, contradictory information has been circulated; which makes it difficult to mobilise resources and coordinate actions on the ground.
- **Fourthly, circumstantial food responses are not enough.** The trade terms between livestock products and cereals is sharply deteriorating. In order to meet the very high price of cereal and the declining price of livestock, the pastoralists have been forced to sell a large part of their livestock in order to feed themselves. Today, some households find themselves completely destitute. They would only be able to maintain their future livelihoods if they manage to build up their herds again.
- **Finally, fifthly, the issue of complementarity between deficient zones and surplus zones, one of the themes of this meeting, raises some questions which deserve examination and debate.** The assessment of the food situation made by the CILSS and other organisations which work on food security issues has demonstrated that the global level of CILSS Member countries cereal production was sufficient even in excess. But this reality has not hindered serious localised crises in certain areas of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. **Has there been a gap in trade fluidity between deficient zones and surplus zones? If such is the case, what have been the obstacles as regards this trade? What could be the political measures needed by governments and regional organisations like the WAEMU, ECOWAS, and NEPAD to improve trade fluidity?**

4) The SWAC's contribution to food security issues

I would now like to present the most recent initiatives and those soon to be carried out by the Club and its strategic partners in the region.

- In 2002, the Club carried out, in collaboration with the CILSS, a study on **“Complementary tools integrating cereal market dynamics into the analytical and decision-making process”**. This study aimed to better understand why since the 2001/2002 campaign the price of cereals remained high although production was considered sufficient. This study had thus showed, among others things, that the price level depends not only on the ongoing annual production level but also on agricultural production of the last two years.
- In September 2004, the SWAC organised at OECD Headquarters **an information and exchange meeting on the impact of the desert locust outbreak and its consequences** on agricultural production and food security in the Sahel. One of this meeting’s objectives was to alert the international community of the consequences of this scourge on the region. It had been emphasised that it would be a significant factor of food insecurity in West Africa, in particular in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.
- The CILSS and SWAC Secretariats are carrying out a joint study **on the retrospective and spatial analysis of vulnerable Sahelian zones**. This study aims to provide a detailed descriptive analysis of the fragility of these zones and to propose concrete actions to prevent food crises. We will of course share the results of these analyses with you.
- Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that this coming 18 October, the SWAC, in collaboration with the CILSS and ECOWAS is organising a meeting at OECD Headquarters on **“the medium- and long-term challenges of food security in West Africa”**. This meeting will be an opportunity to stimulate exchanges of information and views between members of the international community and West African countries on this issue through a debate on the structural and circumstantial causes of food security and to define medium- and long-term concrete actions. It will also be an opportunity to share the outcome of exchanges that will take place during this meeting in Accra.

Allow me now to raise some questions which, in my opinion, deserve to be debated.

- *What assessment can we make on the early warning systems? Are the information and alert systems dysfunctional? And how do we fix this?*
- *What is the impact of agricultural and economic policies supporting food security over the medium- and long-term? How to better integrate the local, national and regional levels as regards food security?*
- *What should be the role and responsibilities of services monitoring agricultural campaigns, local and national authorities as well as the international community for better coordinated actions related to food security? Have the principles of the “Food Aid Charter” been sufficiently taken into account by the international community and CILSS member countries in managing the recent food crisis?*
- *How can we over the long term assure that the objective of food security for all be reached?*

5) *Conclusion*

- We are convinced that food security's structural and circumstantial aspects remain a permanent challenge in particular in fragile zones and for vulnerable groups.
- Food security is not limited to the volume of production as we have already indicated. Food security is also a function of the availability of agricultural products, access to these products, purchasing power and consumer income, terms of exchange for livestock/cereal, security stock management at both the local and national levels as well as economic and agricultural policies.
- We are pleased that this conference addresses fundamental issues for the region and we hope that at the end of this meeting, concrete proposals for action will emerge aiming to improve food security over the medium- and long-term in the Sahel and West Africa.

Thank you.