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#Press Release#

ECOWAS Launches a New Regional Action Plan for Rice Self-sufficiency in West Africa by 2025

The ECOWAS Commission, in collaboration with its partners, launched this Tuesday, 10th August 2021, its New Regional Action Plan (2020-2025) to operationalize its Rice Policy, commonly known as "Rice Offensive". The launch was done through a mixed format press conference (online and physical) followed by a roundtable with ECOWAP (the Regional Agricultural Policy) donors to mobilize the necessary resources for effective implementation of the Plan.

The press conference, which benefited from the technical and financial support of GIZ and CORAF/WECARD, enabled the ECOWAS Commission to take the national and international press through the content of the Action Plan and the ambition and vision of the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, as well as the efforts made by the region to make West Africans self-sufficient in rice by 2025.

The ECOWAS Commissioner for Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources, Mr Sékou Sangaré, pointed out that the strong dependence on rice imports to meet growing consumption needs in recent years commends the region to produce more rice to feed itself, and this, through a synergy of effective actions among all stakeholders.

Indeed, rice consumption in the region is rising fast under the combined effect of population growth, changing eating habits and rapid urbanization. Experiences in Member States such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Mali show variable progresses in countries that have voluntarily taken and implemented, to various levels, measures to regulate their internal markets by favoring local production through a partnership that involves both the private sector and local farmers.

However, despite many efforts, the mid-term evaluation of the ECOWAS Rice Offensive in 2020 presented a situation that is still worrying. Local rice production represents only 60% of the needs for an average annual consumption estimated at 15.86 million tons which causes the region to lose huge amounts of foreign currency in the massive importation of rice. Rice consumption is projected to grow to almost 24 million metric tons by 2025 based on the trends in the last five year.

This situation, according to the ECOWAS Director for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr. Alain Sy Traoré, contrasts sharply with the region's potential in terms of human resources, land, and water, which is already faced, among other things, with civil and health insecurity, unemployment, poverty, and high migration. There are also great disparities between countries in the application of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) on rice, with application levels ranging from 75% to very low.



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The new Action Plan aims to accelerate the implementation of the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, which was launched in 2015 as the instrument to help fulfill the ambition of a rice self-sufficient West Africa by 2025. The objectives of the Rice Offensive contribute to those of ECOWAP, the Regional Agricultural Policy, geared towards achieving the economic development of the rice value chain in the ECOWAS region.

Adding to the overall cost of more than US\$500 million to implement the ECOWAS Rice Offensive, the region has to raise another amount of US\$43,097,000 to implement the Action Plan that is built around six strategic components, namely; (i) policy and regulatory measures to make the rice sector more productive and competitive, (ii) a financing mechanism and public-private partnership, (iii) coordination of interprofessional structuring at both national and regional levels, (iv) coordination/management of the action plan, (v) effective trade and marketing systems, and (vi) knowledge management and sharing.

The financing mechanism is designed to be taken care of by the ECOWAS and UEMOA Commissions through their respective investment banks, namely EBID and BOAD, the Member States, technical and financial partners, and the private sector. To this end, the ECOWAP donors' roundtable that followed the press conference made it possible to launch an urgent call to all partners to support the implementation of the initiative.

Rice being a priority crop in most Member States, some of the solutions that could help remove bottlenecks and ensure the viability and sustainability of rice farming would be to (i) create an enabling environment for investment in the sector, (ii) promote intensification of rice cultivation to boost productivity, (iii) improve farmers' access to agricultural inputs, like quality seeds, (iv) strengthen rice-based knowledge management system for upscale of technologies and innovation, and (v) continue to invest in hydro-agricultural infrastructure to facilitate irrigation, marketing, storage, processing, and market supply, with the strong involvement of the private sector and small producers.

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