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## Network of Peasant Organisations and Producers in West Africa (ROPPA)

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NEPAD – Doha Round (WTO)  
Peasant Proposals for West Africa

**For farming policies  
in favour of family farms and trade rules  
that show solidarity**

August 2003

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## Preamble

The Organisation of Peasants and Producers in West Africa wish to advise the leaders of the African States, their trading partners in Africa and Africa's trading partners from every continent in the world, the organisations of civil society and in particular their peers who also represent agricultural producers from other regions in the world, of the lines along which they want to see agriculture develop in Africa.

2003 and 2004 will be marked by the major measures taken to stimulate agriculture on the continent of Africa pursuant to NEPAD, (New Partnership for Africa's Development), and by the Doha Round of agriculture and trade negotiations.

The subject is complex, the task huge and the balance of power very much to Africa's disadvantage. The natural conditions, particularly for the sub-Saharan countries of the Sahel, are a major constraint whereas the majority of Africa's populations depends on them to provide food security and a source of income.

Agriculture remains a determining factor in the economies of African States and in the lives of their populations. Systems of production are varied and diverse, carried out by millions working on tiny family farms<sup>(1)</sup> with in common the fact that they use family labour and family resources to cultivate the soil, raise livestock, plant trees...

(1) *L'avenir de l'agriculture... A travers les exploitations familiales ?*  
Note d'introduction et de débat sur les exploitations familiales, Roppa-SOS Faim, août 2003

## 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\*. ROPPA is an organisation aiming at i) the promotion and the defence of the values supporting an efficient and sustainable farmers' agriculture at the service of family farms and agricultural producers; ii) supporting the concerted dialogue and the institutional reinforcement of the farmers organisations and agricultural producers in every country; iii) 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; iv) interafrican promotion and solidarity and v) the representation of farmers organisations and agricultural producers at the subregional, regional and international levels.

### Website of ROPPA:

[www.roppa.info](http://www.roppa.info)

ROPPA is very active on the international scene in highlighting the interests of family farms and in promoting mutually supportive agricultural and trade policies at the benefit of all farmers. ROPPA has co-organised the seminar of Dakar (May, 19-21 2003), that has adopted the "Dakar Declaration" by the representatives of farmers organisations and agricultural producers of more than 30 countries. The participants have decided in Dakar to work closer together and try to co-ordinate their activities on the trade negotiations of the WTO.

A website in three languages is dedicated to the Dakar process:

[www.Dakar-Cancun.org](http://www.Dakar-Cancun.org)

\* Bénin, Burkina-Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Gambie, Mali, Niger, Sénégal

## For a regional agricultural policy centred on family farms

Ideally, ROPPA wants agriculture to enable the majority of family farms to make a decent living from the fruits of their labour in working the land, managing livestock and processing local produce, while at the same time being fully aware of the predominant place agriculture occupies in the economy, and of its importance for rural and urban consumers alike, anxious to secure such products, in sufficient quantity, of adequate quality and at reasonable prices.

ROPPA would recall that the level of agricultural prices determines the level of producers' income. The possibility for development of family farms, and the pace at which development can take place, depend on these remunerative prices: such development is the key to growth in both agriculture and the national economies, and of sustainable management of natural resources.

From this point of view, the control of agricultural prices is of capital importance if these fundamental objectives are to be met.

Bearing in mind the overall objectives, the general thrust of policies on agriculture and investment must include:

- a) sustainable increases in agricultural productivity: (i) to ensure availability and accessibility of food in terms of both quantity and quality; (ii) to feed the populations and supply raw materials to Africa's industries, and its small- and medium-sized enterprises engaged in processing local produce;
- b) better organisation of our professions to improve performance: (i) to provide or cause to be provided the services and goods which the family farms need; (ii) to uphold their interests and concerns; (iii) to secure essential partnerships with other professionals and economic players;
- c) to set up or maintain in situ adequate systems for managing agricultural price trends as well as securing sound, sustainable bases for farm incomes.

The Organisations of Peasants & Producers in West Africa are convinced that the future lies in encouraging domestic (internal) consumption of what the region produces, which corresponds to its cultures, social organisation and history.

Open-minded by tradition, but also by their awareness of the need to take full advantage of the complementarities between the multiplicity of agricultural regions, as well as of markets of a sufficient size, the members of ROPPA conceive of an agricultural policy on a regional scale.

While History left us with frontiers which do little to foster or develop complementarities, which separate populations against their wishes and which have allocated resources and access to the sea quite randomly, the progress now being made by sub-regional and regional institutions is enabling peaceable solutions to be envisaged in which such boundaries are unchallenged.

Yet, the unhindered circulation of products, services and people will contribute fully to the development of agriculture through the exchange of trade, finance, technologies and cultures.

## A. What ROPPA members wish from the States and regional Economic Organisations

Having regard to the orientations announced, members of ROPPA would wish to obtain the following commitments from the States and the regional Economic Organisations:

- ▶ That there be fair treatment for agriculture in allocation of budget resources: agriculture (in particular of the type intended to win back our own markets) cannot be financed primarily from external resources. This trend must be gradually reversed.
- ▶ That good governance be extended into rural civil society: our States must not do to the agricultural sector what they do not do to other sectors of the economy. While the organisation, administration and management of agricultural professions are of necessity subject to regulation, they are a matter for the initiative and the decision-making autonomy of the peasants and producers themselves.
- ▶ That, in the spirit of NEPAD, tools and support mechanisms for private investment in family farms be deployed at country-, sub-region- and continent level: we have learned from the story of agricultural development on other continents that support for agriculture is essential to its development and that, in return, the agricultural sector strengthens national sovereignty. Viable, attractive tools and support mechanisms are the levers necessary to ensure the growth in agricultural productivity which NEPAD expects.
- ▶ More precisely, on the subject of agricultural prices, ROPPA considers that the mix of protective measures in the sub-region (if not the whole region) and of internal deregulation must be determined so as to enable normal remunerative prices to be established. ROPPA proposes that these protective measures be based on levies on imported products; levies defined on the basis of indicative domestic prices calculated on estimated production costs.
- ▶ ROPPA would draw the attention of the authorities to the risks of unbalance and polarisation which go hand in hand with any process of liberalization. Even if this risk is slight at regional level compared to what it is on a world-scale, the regional authorities must devise a solidarity policy to prevent variations of too great a significance arising in the sub-region. ROPPA proposes, therefore, that a portion of the levies made on imported products be applied to actions of regional solidarity.
- ▶ That mechanisms to ensure the full, autonomous and total participation of every player, especially the producers and their organisations, be implemented: this is one of the keys to the success of NEPAD.

## B. With the benefit of its experience of structural adjustment programmes, NEPAD could take better account of populations' expectations

It is unfortunate and to be regretted, but the Peasants & Producers Organisations note that the vision, orientations and strategies proposed in the principal documents submitted by NEPAD, namely: the NEPAD Agricultural Programme, the Regional Food Security Programmes and the Detailed Programme for African Agriculture, merely reproduce the same main priorities that have been proposed since negotiations and the application of the agricultural structural adjustment plans, i.e.:

- ▶ To increase production: especially for export.
- ▶ To clarify land ownership rights to facilitate registration of land: an advantage for those who are already the most well-to-do.

- ▶ To access external markets.
- ▶ To promote the enterprise spirit and the private sector: from which family farms are very often excluded.
- ▶ To reinforce research and promote technology.

In fact, and until proof to the contrary, ROPPA maintains that in spite of the efforts made by the sub-region's peasants and producers, none of the promises made at these negotiations has been kept: the position of African produce on world markets has weakened, the balance of agricultural trade is in fact unbalanced, the living conditions for producers have deteriorated yet further, the natural resources which are factors of production for the producers, continue to be depleted. In much of our countryside, the extreme poverty, the under-nourishment, the soil erosion if not the downright desertification of crop-producing areas, are reaching alarming levels.

This sorry state of affairs is not due solely to unfavourable climate conditions or poor economic circumstances, but rather is the logical outcome of the rules of the game negotiated and then imposed on producers. The break-up of public policy at a time when producers needed support and, above all (liberalization obliges) making our agricultures compete with agricultures that are more powerful, better equipped and heavily subsidised, has not given the West African producers a chance. It's the old story of inevitable defeat ... because before economic competitiveness even comes into play, simply analysing the rules makes it plain that what was being asked of the West African farmer was downright impossible. And exploiting a few "niche" markets in outer urban areas or the narrow export market is not going to do away with the huge difficulties experienced by family businesses in the sub-region.

The Peasant and Producer Organisations of West Africa insist that the major players, i.e., the family farms and their organisations, be given the chance to discuss and to negotiate NEPAD's vision, direction and strategy for themselves.

### **ROPPA's "methodological" proposals**

The peasants and producers of West Africa want:

- ▶ an accurate appraisal of every stage in of economic liberalization as negotiated by the governments, to be made of all produce from and of all the principal production systems in the different agro-ecological areas of the sub-region.
- ▶ More globally, they would like an assessment carried out of the impact such an orientation will have on the farming economies in the countries of the sub-region.
- ▶ involvement of the organisations of peasants and producers at every stage in working-out and implementing agricultural and trade policies and investment programmes.

Adequate involvement of the peasant and producer organisations lies in particular in their capacity for analysis, working-out proposals and negotiation. This presupposes that the competent authorities give full recognition to these organisations, respect their autonomy and contribute to their reinforcement.

From this point of view, the necessary institutionalisation of the consultation processes and the involvement of the players must be designed so as to ensure that the autonomy and capacities of the peasant organisations are upheld.

## C. The family farm and African production systems in particular

ROPPA wants the family-run business to be given pride of place at the heart of any agricultural policy and to be considered as the essential unit on which any policies for food security, combating poverty and managing natural resources rationally are based.

In West Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the family farm is the largely dominant type of production, consumption and natural resource management unit. It is in the family farm that the essential economic, social and environmental building blocks are laid down. It is within the family that the bonds of solidarity are forged which constitute our very own system of "social security". It is the family which not only ensures food security for our countries, but also provides the basis of employment, currency, savings and investment and proper management of natural resources.

There can be no prosperous farming economy in our countries if the family farms are caught in a poverty trap. Good economic health for our farms is key to any process of development.

In particular, agricultural policy must ensure there are mechanisms in place to respond:

- ▶ to the well-founded risk aversion common in all farmers: this assumes the proper use of incentives and risk management measures;
- ▶ to the mixed farming and complementarities which are inherent in the farms: these merit an alternative approach in addition to the "industry" approach;
- ▶ to the complexity of production systems and to the specificity of each farm and thus to the need for personalised agricultural services designed with the customer in mind...

## D. Priority for domestic markets: for control of supply and stable prices

*« The defenders of free trade have had over 50 years to prepare. Thanks to policies and programmes which were adapted, they have been able to create the conditions in which players from the public and private sectors, the socio-professional and sub-regional organisations can succeed. That we benefit from the same thing in our own countries is important and not up for negotiation. »*

*(Niamey Memorandum, ROPPA)*

The rules of the game have got to evolve, but even if they cannot be challenged immediately, ROPPA asks that the negotiators make use of every opportunity in the signed agreements. From this point of view, the producers cannot understand why the CET (Common External Tariff) has been fixed at the floor rate and not at the ceiling rate as allowed under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture. This situation, whereby international produce is dumped on our countries, must be reviewed urgently.

Therein lies the basic instrument to control domestic prices and to fund the budget for our States; they could then ease up on the amount levied from our own production (example of the cotton industry).

Instances of supply management have proved effective in stabilizing prices at adequate levels, and their beneficial effect on making incomes from family farms more secure is also proven. Price stability is a determining factor in producers deciding to grow one crop or another, that too has been amply demonstrated.

## On international trade

The international economic environment in which the aims of NEPAD for African agriculture will be achieved is mainly characterised by the following facts:

- ▶ in the main, the prices for African exported produce are continually falling, in spite of improvements in quality;
- ▶ dependency on imported foodstuffs but also on industrial products obtained from agricultural raw materials (wheat, rice, oil, meat... sugar, cotton fabric, clothing...) is increasing and is worrying.

That is why basing growth and development of African agriculture mainly on exports and external markets offers no guarantee of being able either to meet the challenge of feeding the African peoples, or to give them sustainable opportunities for generating decent incomes.

However, following the example of producers in other regions on other continents, international markets present opportunities for trade which benefit the food-processors, consumers and producers in the respective regions. Tropical produce such as coffee or cocoa could not in fact do without these markets. Neither, for that matter, could cotton which (where West Africa is concerned) is highly dependent on exports.

In other words, the one does not exclude the other, but in the case of agriculture, and for the future of family farms, trading strategies must focus on domestic, internal markets.

Trade policies and agricultural policies are complicated structures which interact dynamically and should be harmonized.

ROPFA finds it unacceptable that when trade policy is import-export oriented, yet further restrictions are imposed, almost to the extent of the trade policy actually substituting itself for an agricultural policy.

On this subject, the political will owes it to itself to be as voluntaristic and vigorous as the international institutional constraints are strong – if not more so:

- ▶ the international finance and development institutions are pushing for agricultural markets to be deregulated, for agricultural services to be privatised and for the means of State intervention to be dismantled;
- ▶ the WTO has got its beady eye on agriculture and it is giving absolute priority to liberalizing international trade over support for agriculture and internal market regulation.

### A. International markets for agricultural products are highly imperfect

Having had first-hand experience (to their cost), the African States know all about the weaknesses of the international markets:

- ▶ They are chronically, highly and permanently unstable, expectations [forecasts] are difficult in the medium-term.
- ▶ In the long term, agricultural products depreciate in value on these markets and subsequent events always prove any forecasts of medium- and long-term world food price rises to be unfounded and, what's more, they contribute to the downward price trends by incentivising increases in exportable production.
- ▶ The international agricultural markets are dominated by food-industry oligopolies which are increasingly concentrated, in industry as in mass distribution.
- ▶ The international markets are subject to dumping and selling-off and are just an outlet for regulating internal markets, to which State interventions make a contribution to encourage the competitiveness of their national productions.

- ▶ The “world” prices relate only to a tiny share of world production (with the exception of certain products such as cocoa, coffee, etc.): 10% for cereals, 8.2% for meat, 6.4% for dairy produce (average figures for 1995-98).

A two-fold conclusion may be drawn from these characteristics of the international markets:

- ▶ they are high-risk, particularly since the balance of power is not in the agricultural producers' favour;
- ▶ they cannot be used as a standard for measuring adequate price levels.

## B. On the trade negotiations

The end of the pragmatism of GATT (which had granted agriculture special status) spells wide-scale deregulation of the agricultural markets and a tightening up on most agricultural policy-making instruments.

Wanting growth of international trade at any price, the WTO is bent on dismantling import protections, which were instruments available to everyone, rich and poor alike. It now favours instruments of protection which are only available to rich countries (aid decoupled from production as ranked in WTO's Green Box).

This situation can but exacerbate the competition between systems of agricultural production to the detriment of family production units and, more especially, to the detriment of those countries unable to distribute direct aid in support of their producers' incomes.

In spite of the differentiated treatment from which our countries (will) benefit, the levels of protection for agriculture are too low. As a case in point, the common external tariff of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) should be raised and thus make a contribution to protecting the internal markets.

Even if the disparities are genuine, in particular as regards aids to competitiveness in all their forms, ROPPA hopes that denouncing them will not lead to contributing to the removal of agricultural policy instruments altogether or, worse still, to fooling producers over the durability of a trade which is based on the theory of “comparative advantage”. The “comparative advantages” have many dynamic aspects to them which can be achieved of necessity through structural and investment policies, which may be encouraged by NEPAD. “Structural” policies absolutely must be consistent with agricultural policies, but can only succeed if protected inside zones of comparable productivity.

The case of West Africa exemplifies the tension in opening-up inside the region and sheltering it compared to other regions. Protecting the region is not justified solely on the basis of a significant differential in productivity, such as may exist between an agriculture that is capital- and input-intensive, and the African peasant agriculture which is not capita-intensive and low in input. One has to consider the competition from other regions, just as much of a handicap, where cheaper labour, the particular agrarian structures (of the latifundium large estate type, with captive labour force, for example), price system, currency, trade and other State interventions enable internal agricultural markets to be captured to the detriment of regional producers. The example of Senegal importing rice from Vietnam attests to this. Protection at the frontiers is the principal instrument to be maintained or to be reinstated. Effort must, therefore, be directed on two fronts: the maintaining of effective customs barriers on a regional scale, and the dynamization of complementarities and inter-regional food security with the aid of structural policies, such as the European Union has carried out internally (Structural Funds...)

### Productivity, liberalisation and poverty

By way of introduction at a ROPPA Workshop held in Niamey, Niger in May 2001, Professor Marcel Mazoyer was invited <sup>(2)</sup> to share his thoughts on the evolution of the various different agricultural systems in the world. In summary, his analysis is as follows:

The farming situation, just like the food situation, is “untenable”. Indeed, on the farming side whereas half the world’s population is engaged in agriculture (3 billion out of the 6 billion inhabitants), there are only 30 million producers engaged in “modernized” agriculture, while some 600 to 700 million have never had the benefit of any technical or economic support and are thus stakeholders in “orphan agricultures” (research orphans!). The difference, that is 600 to 700 million active farmers, have participated in “the green revolution” touching either semi-temperate, semi-tropical crops (rice, maize, wheat, soya) or tropical cash crops, yet these producers still work manually, although sometimes with the help of draught animals.

On the food side, once again the situation is catastrophic: 800 million people are chronically undernourished and two billion are suffering from severe deficiencies. Three-quarters of these persons are peasants, that is to say producer-sellers (and not, as is often thought, consumer-purchasers). This situation of impoverishment or “pauperisation” is not some random outcome, but indeed the logical outcome of a “machine for impoverishment and exclusion” which has been grinding away for decades if not centuries, but which has really stepped up a gear over the last twenty years or so.

What happens in effect when agricultures of differing productivity have to compete with one another is that the least competitive (and often those with the least State support) are steam-rolled. Free trade which, in the wake of international trade negotiations and structural adjustment plans, has now become the rule, now places agricultures where the productivity ratios are 1 : 1000 in contact with one another. This ratio was only 1 : 10 at the start of the [last] century whereas at that time, trade was reduced because of transport difficulties and costs and the protectionist economic measures which prevailed.

In fact, the “machine” is more pernicious than ever because the competition is false, to the extent that the competitors never encounter one another but play out their match on the international markets, which account for only 5 to 10% of corresponding world produce and which are often nothing more than an outlet for selling off surpluses from the more competitive agricultures.

In the end, in order to understand the machine properly, you need to ask yourself what are the reasons for this special “competitiveness” of these agricultures, because if these agricultures have been able and have known how to modernize, very often they also benefit from comparative advantages due to very special conditions (workers dramatically under-remunerated and natural resources depleted in the fazendas of Latin America, subsidies to enable North American and European producers to export their produce, etc.). The outcome of this “triple-whammy” unfair competition is that world prices are fixed without reference to production costs, even the reduced costs of the most competitive farms.

(2) “Agricultural policy of UEMOA and family farms”, methodological workshop report, ROPPA, Niamey (Niger) May 2001

## C. Of the necessary solidarity between family farm producers

ROPPA hosted a seminar in Dakar at the end of which the representatives of family farms from every continent issued the following statement containing principles of solidarity which we wish to take forward to Cancún:

- ▶ The first requirement of solidarity is to stop exports destabilising the internal markets of other countries. Priority must be given to supplying the internal market.
- ▶ Market access must be arranged without deregulating the importing country's market. The aim must be to eliminate all forms of dumping.
- ▶ Subsidies to agriculture, allocated on the basis of the rights and expectations of the populations, are quite legitimate, provided that they do not serve to promote exports.
- ▶ Trade rules must not prevent a country from fostering a sustainable system of production, based on family farms.
- ▶ We need consultation and an effort to control supply on the international markets, in particular joint action on the part of producer and consumer countries, to stabilise the markets and ensure fair prices for products basically intended for export (coffee, cocoa, etc.).
- ▶ Preferential import agreements, inasmuch as they are better targeted and organised, can also play a positive role, in particular for small countries with vulnerable economies.

### **Food sovereignty is every community's basic right**

What is being affirmed here, in the end, is that international trade rules must allow States the option – either singly or in an alliance – to define their own national (regional) policies and to use adequate instruments (protective customs measures, agricultural aid, etc.), necessary to respond to what the populations expect from agriculture. That is what food sovereignty means.

The concept of food sovereignty was introduced onto the international stage by Via Campesina in 1996 at the World Food Summit, and a press release dated 30 August 2003 summarises it as follows: "Every community should have the right to produce its own food, the right to food sovereignty. That means that communities have the right to define their own agricultural and food policies, to protect and regulate their own domestic production and to protect their internal market from other countries dumping their farming surpluses on them. This also implies that they [the communities] do not dump their own farm and food produce, that is to say, that they do not sell on the international markets at a price lower than the cost of production."

### **The gradual reduction of dumping**

The absence of dumping or of practices which are tantamount to dumping (prices that are lower than production costs), must be a priority objective. Yet attaining this objective implies an improvement of the world market. At the very low current price levels, even a "normal" exporter could be deemed to be "dumping".

In practice, we also need to put a stop – world-wide – to a export-priority policy which is largely responsible for the current slump. The rules for eliminating dumping must also include all the forms of aid which contribute to it, including aid qualified as "decoupled" (Green box, Blue box) etc.

As a practice, dumping falls typically within a policy of export priority or of "conquering external markets" – the effects of which are thereby aggravated – but it is the first choice of an agricultural policy based on export priority which, with its corollary requirement of access to the market, is open to question.

## **Mankind is the answer to Mankind's problems**

In spite of the dramas which the members of the Peasant & Producer Organisations are living through: the poverty, HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, food insecurity, insecurity of persons, the massacres and killings in armed conflicts... we remain convinced that the sustainable development of agriculture in Africa is an historic process which cannot be the same as any other because of the different ecological, human and temporal conditions.

Africa's regions were forced open to trade – first of their people, then of the produce of their lands – and forced open even wider with “structural adjustment” programmes. They owe it to themselves to make an attempt at properly understood protection of their agriculture.

And “proper understanding” is only possible through dialogue, consultation, and the ability to listen to one another, qualities which are still valued in Africa. Their use by everyone, but first of all by the highest political authorities on the continent, might get us back on track, in the footsteps of nations which today are the envy of the world because their people get enough to eat, are cared for when they are sick, at free to move about and communicate at will, and to improve their minds... as the need arises.

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