The EAT programme

The ECOWAS Agricultural Trade (EAT) programme, funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), “One World – No Hunger” special initiative, is a crucial component of the German-ECOWAS cooperation and implemented by The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) and The International Trade Centre (ITC). This initiative is designed to tackle regional policy coordination, economic integration and food security, focusing on enhancing intra-ECOWAS agrifood trade.

Agricultural trade challenges in the ECOWAS region

Malnutrition, rapid population growth, and heavy reliance on food imports are some of the key challenges that need to be addressed by the region to foster economic development. These factors emphasize the urgent need to address food security and the effects of global geopolitical pressure on food prices.

Enhancing coordination on food trade policies within the region is paramount to tackling food security issues and mitigating the volatility of food prices. For this purpose, the ECOWAS Commission has developed various instruments, such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), aimed at boosting intra-regional agricultural trade volumes and coordination efforts.

However, recorded data on intra-regional agricultural trade volumes remain low due to inadequate infrastructure and resources at customs points, lack of harmonization between regional and national regulations, transparency issues in administrative procedures leading to delays and unexpected costs, and limited information on market opportunities for businesses.

To address the above issues, which are often at the origin of informal trade practices, the EAT programme aims to foster an environment conducive to intra-regional agricultural trade. It seeks to improve the capacity of policymakers to make informed decisions on trade and food security matters, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and streamline administrative procedures at the border to ensure the safety and quality of traded goods. Additionally, it aims to equip agri-food businesses with the tools and knowledge needed to better trade within the region, with a specific focus on gender and youth inclusion.

How we work

Within the framework of the EAT programme, ITC implements a multi-level and multi-stakeholder strategy, closely collaborating with the ECOWAS Commission, Member States, civil society, the private sector, and various trade entities. This holistic approach addresses the political, economic, gender, climate, food, and nutrition security aspects of regional agricultural trade.

ITC’s commitment under the EAT programme reflects its broader objectives, which include bolstering regional institutions in Africa, promoting gender-sensitive and sustainable agricultural trade and enhancing local trade promotion services for the private sector in order to ensure the sustainability of the action.

ITC will provide advice and assistance to reinforce the ECOWAS Commission’s capacity in coordinating agricultural trade policies, by facilitating public-private dialogues, introducing trade intelligence and monitoring tools, as well as advocating for cooperative trade facilitation approaches.

Regional organizations and national authorities will be supported through tailored capacity-building programmes to improve their services to the private sector and ensure the application of agricultural trade measures at the border, with particular attention to testing their efficacy. The whole action is ultimately tailored to benefit small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and small agricultural traders, by upscaling their skills and providing them with a more conducive ecosystem for intra-regional agricultural trade.
Aside from regional policy interventions, the EAT programme focuses on field activities in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Niger and Nigeria to establish a methodology that can later be applied throughout the entire region.

**Target countries and sectors**

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Product sectors targeted by the initiative were identified keeping in mind their importance as staple food, the risk of value loss due to their perishability, as well as the comparative advantages offered by the region. These include: Cassava, Corn, Fertilizer, Onion, Pineapple, Processed meat, Rice and Tomato.

**Main partners and beneficiaries**

The programme is implemented under the guidance of the ECOWAS Commission, involving directorates overseeing agriculture and rural development, trade, customs, free movement of people, and the Gender Development Center. ITC is an implementing partner, alongside GIZ and the OECD Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC). Additional partners encompass regional and national trade associations, chambers of commerce and agriculture, pertinent national ministries and authorities, civil society organizations, and private sector stakeholders. Directly benefiting SMEs, cooperatives, and associations of small-scale cross-border traders operating in the agri-food sector.

**About ITC**

The International Trade Centre is the joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. ITC helps small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and emerging economies to be more competitive in global markets.

**Programme outputs**

- **Trade Policy Harmonization**
  Advising the ECOWAS Commission and member states on the coordination and harmonization of policies and initiatives with the objective to improve the operationalization of a supportive agricultural trade ecosystem in the region.

- **Trade Facilitation**
  Supporting the implementation of gender-sensitive and sustainable trade facilitation measures and services at the border to unleash the potential of intra-regional agricultural trade and increase incentives to conduct formal trade operations.

- **Private Sector Promotion**
  Equipping SMEs and small agricultural traders, in collaboration with local Business Support Organizations, with the knowledge and skills needed to tap into the opportunities offered by the regional agricultural market.

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