

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Roundtable on Promoting Access to Regional and International Markets for Agricultural Commodities in Africa

5th African Agriculture Science Week and FARA General Assembly Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso – 19 – 24 July, 2010

Background

During the last two decades, the spread of democracy and market-based economic systems has encouraged efforts that advance popular participation in governance and development in African countries. As a result, African nations are decentralizing their governance structures in their endeavors to improve citizens' participation in the political, social, cultural and economic sector of the economy, creating space for civil society organizations, NGOs and indigenous private sector organizations in fostering development in Africa.

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the effectiveness of efforts by African governments to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will rely largely on the quality of governance in those countries and the extent to which governments interact with civil society organizations to accomplish these goals. While many developing regions, especially Asia and the Pacific, are on track towards meeting the first Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger (MDG1), progress in Africa has been rather slow. Africa is the only region expected to have more poor people in 2015 than it did in 1990.

As the dominant economic sector, growth in agriculture is critical to stimulating economic growth, reducing poverty and improving food and nutrition security in Africa. Agricultural growth rates in Africa have increased only modestly, averaging less than 3.0% in the last two decades. It is only in the last few years that growth in agriculture has averaged 5.0%, with all five sub-regions of Africa recording positive growth rates; led by North Africa with a 7 percent annual growth rate (UNECA and AUC, 2008). To maintain the momentum in growth of agriculture, there is need for greater participation by the private sector, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Farmers' Organizations (FOs) in agricultural production and trade. There is also need for these stakeholders to fully participate in policymaking processes, particularly, those that enhance agricultural productivity and facilitate smallholder farmer access to both input and output markets.

CSOs and FOs can play a facilitative role in linking farmers to markets by enabling them to take advantage of existing trade promotion instruments and initiatives. They can also promote policy formulation and implementation by ensuring that the policies respond to the critical issues that constrain agricultural development and trade. To do this however, they need to be well informed of the key issues at stake in promoting agricultural development and trade. FDA and FARA believe that an agenda that exposes CSOs and FOs to the policy issues, the existing initiatives for addressing the issues and the experiences gained and lessons learnt from implementing the initiatives would enhance their understanding and capacities to better respond to the needs of smallholder farmers.

FDA, FARA and other institutions are currently organizing a series of policy dialogues, as part of a process, to create greater awareness on regional agricultural trade policy issues. The outcomes and key messages coming out of these policy dialogues provide important discussions points for CSOs and FOs on how they can support and add value to policy formulation and implementation processes. FDA and FARA are therefore organizing a Roundtable on promoting access to regional markets for agricultural commodities in Africa for CSOs and FOs to discuss key policy issues of relevance to market access and trade. The roundtable, which will focus on *Access to Regional and International Markets for Agricultural Commodities in Africa* and will take place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on 20 July 2010 during the 5th African Agriculture Science Week & FARA General Assembly. The intent of the roundtable is to share the lessons and key messages arising from the on-going policy dialogue and also to expand the understanding of key regional agricultural trade policy issues among CSOs and FOs.

Objectives of the Roundtable

The purpose of the roundtable on *Promoting Access to Regional and International Markets for Agricultural Commodities in Africa* is to increase awareness among CSOs and FOs on policy issues affecting regional and international agricultural trade, promote dialogue on these issues, and catalyze a consensus-building process among CSOs and FOs on the policy options that can be promoted by CSOs and FOs. The roundtable will provide space for open discussion on important agricultural trade policy issues. The specific objectives are to:

Stimulate discussion and dialogue among NGOs and other civil society groups on alternative regional agricultural trade policy issues, and to:

- Advocate for pragmatic regional agricultural trade policies that promote and facilitate access to regional and international markets.
- Identify and agree on the regional policy and strategic options that CSOs and FOs can promote in order to enhance access to markets for smallholder farmers.

Issues to be discussed

The roundtable will focus on three sets of issues:

First, CSOs and FOs will examine those factors that influence smallholder farmers' access to regional and international agricultural commodity and input markets. They will address questions, such as, to what extent has trade barriers, i.e., foreign subsidies, tariffs and non-tariff barriers, food safety and quality standards, etc., impeded/promoted access to regional and international markets for African agricultural commodities? What impact these strategies have on regional and international agricultural commodity and input markets and what are the implications for smallholder producers' access to markets? How can CSOs and FOs contribute to the enhancement of the capacities of smallholder farmers and processors to enable them to comply with non-tariff barriers, i.e., sanitary and phyto-sanitary requirements and food quality and safety standards? How can they mobilize themselves to assist farmers to make use of trade promotion initiatives, such as, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and Aid for Trade (AFT) initiatives?

Secondly, CSOs and FOs will look at the experiences gained from the implementation of agricultural trade policy reforms. In order to gain a better understanding of the trade policy responses to some of the barriers to trade and emerging opportunities, the participants will discuss relevant national and regional experiences, best practices and success stories with respect to trade policy reforms. Participants will share experiences and lessons learned from countries/regions implementing trade-related policy reforms. They will also draw lessons from success stories/best practices that CSOs and FOs can help to scale-up and out in other countries/regions for enhanced market access.

Thirdly, the roundtable will discuss trade policy response instruments/initiatives, i.e., AGOA, that are designed to promote agricultural commodity market access. Policies that facilitate a path for trade-led sustainable growth are critical for lifting millions of African smallholder producers out of poverty. Participants will identify and discuss the merits of those trade policy instruments that are relevant for promoting smallholder access to regional and international markets and for adapting African economies to the new highly competitive global environment. They will look at the best strategies that CSOs and FOs can use to support the use of these policy instruments/initiatives.

Expected outcomes

It is expected that the outcomes of the roundtable discussion will contribute to a better awareness and understanding of critical policy issues, and therefore enhance CSOs' and FOs' participation in policymaking processes, and enrich the support that they can provide to their members.

Venue

The roundtable will be held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 20 July 2010 and is being organized by The Foundation for Democracy in Africa, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and the AGOA Civil Society Network.