

**“Is it possible to negotiate development agreements between the EU and the ACP regions ?”**

**The ACP farmer networks present their contributions to the Comprehensive Review of EPA Preparations and Negotiation for All ACP Regions**

**12th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly**

**Bridgetown, Barbados**

**Tuesday 21 November 2006**

**13:00 to 14:30**

**Workshop Report**

The workshop was organized by farmer networks from five ACP regions<sup>1</sup> with support from European NGO and international agency partners<sup>2</sup>. It was presided over by **Carl Schyfter** (Sweden) and **Walter Francois** (St. Lucia), Co-Chairs of the Committee on Economic Development, Finance and Trade of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

**Marcella Harris** of WINFA (Caribbean) opened the session by outlining the process which had led up to the workshop: Over the past couple of years ACP agricultural producer organizations had become increasingly concerned about the EPA negotiations. Their worries were fuelled by the farmers' direct experience of the negative impact of liberalization on smallholder agriculture under the structural adjustment regimes of the past two decades. They were exacerbated by their mounting frustration at the difficulty of obtaining clear information about the negotiation stakes and meaningful involvement in the process. At a seminar on the EPAs in Rome on 17 February 2006 organized by the EuropAfrica campaign, ACP farmer representatives requested their NGO partners to join forces with the Rome-based agriculture agencies – IFAD and FAO – in order to support the farmers' efforts to make a meaningful contribution to the midterm review of the EPA negotiations- This partnership was confirmed at a meeting in Brussels in May 2006. An exchange of letters between the Honorary President of ROPPA, on behalf of all of the networks, and the Secretary-General of the ACP Group formalized the farmer organizations' intention to contribute to the review and the ACP Secretariat's willingness to take their input into account in drafting the official ACP review report.

Over the past three months each regional network has worked on its assessment with the assistance of a resource person selected and supervised by the network itself. Consultations have taken place with farmers in the various countries and the networks have entered into contact with

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Network of Peasant and Agricultural Producer Organizations of West Africa* (ROPPA), the *Windward Island Farmers Association* (WINFA), the *East African Farmers Federation* (EAFF), the *Sub-regional Platform of Peasant Organizations of Central Africa* (PROPAC) and the *Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions* (SACAU)

<sup>2</sup> The campaign "EuropAfrica: for a mutually-supportive and sustainable agriculture in the North and the South" (Terra Nuova, Collectif Stratégies Alimentaires, Crocevia), "AlimenTerre" (SOS-Faim, CFSI), APRODEV, IFAD and FAO.

the regional intergovernmental entities which are conducting the negotiations. The reports are being submitted to the regional entities. At all-ACP level a synthesis report of the five assessments, highlighting major concerns and proposals, is being finalized and will be delivered to the ACP Secretariat by mid December. Over the coming months the five networks will embark on intensive sensitization and lobbying activities at national and regional levels. At the same time, the results of their assessments will be drawn upon by the European NGO partners in their advocacy work in Europe.

The farmer network representatives then reported the major conclusions emerging from the regional assessments of the EPA process. For **Saliou Sarr** (ROPFA – West Africa), it is possible for the EU and the ACP to negotiate development agreements, but only if they are based on the principles contained in the Cotonou Agreement. He cited in particular article 34, which underlines the imperative of respecting the political choices of the ACP countries, and article 35, which highlights the need to take into account the different levels of development of the negotiating partners. Sarr drew attention to the current imbalance in West African trade with Europe. He emphasized the potential for intra-regional trade in West Africa based on the region's complementary production zones and on the capacities of its producers. He highlighted three points in particular:

- Priority must be given to achieving regional integration before opening up West African markets. The policy choices of the ECOWAS governments, expressed in the common agricultural policy they have adopted (ECOWAP), should be respected.
- ECOWAS is composed of 13 LDCs and 3 non LDCs who account for 80% of all trade with the European Union. The EU and the ACP countries should join forces within the WTO to push for a revision of article XXIV and for the adoption of equitable rules regarding treatment of regions in which a majority of the countries are LDCs.
- Asymmetric opening can be part of the solution. An opening of 100% for Europe and 30% for West Africa - over a period of more than 12 years - would make it possible to achieve regional integration and to protect West African food crops. Investment in agriculture and infrastructure would, of course, also be needed.

**Philip Kiriro** (EAFF – East Africa) noted that while the EU feels the “development dimension” of the EPAs is about market access, ESA is concerned about how to cover the costs of adjustment. The EU is not forthcoming on the issue of funding for development. Another area of concern is the stalled Doha process. What sense does it make to talk about WTO compatibility if we don't know the final form the multilateral rules will take? ESA is holding out for a ten year implementation period but the farmers feel more time is needed in order to make regional integration a reality, to remove barriers to intra-regional trade, to build institutions capable of managing the integration process. The negotiation calendar is unrealistic. Participation of non-state actors has been ad hoc up to now. Impact studies carried out in ESA indicate that EPAs as presently being negotiated would lead to a reduction of intra-regional trade and a loss of government revenues. The impact on food security is not clear and better studies are needed. What do ESA farmers feel is the way forward? Once the midterm review has been concluded all concerned parties need to strategize and to package a new, inclusive EPA process that puts development at the centre.

**Renwick Rose** (WINFA, Caribbean) evoked the vibrant farm women of St. Vincent, tuned into the broadcast of the workshop at that moment, in order to transport participants out of the sheltered conference centre into the immediacy of the real world where farmers are actively confronting the challenges under discussion. He cited just a few of the concrete issues which the Caribbean farmers' assessment had pinpointed:

- The agricultural trade deficit is a major problem for the Caribbean. The region imports more than it produces due to a host of supply side constraints. EPAs must address these issues, targeting not just exports but - above all - the domestic and regional markets.

- Regional integration is a pillar of the EPA process. In the Caribbean it cannot be achieved without improving sea transport.
- Global warming is a serious threat to the Caribbean islands, bringing erosion of beaches and an intensification of the natural catastrophes to which Caribbean people are subjected. A partnership agreement that does not acknowledge this problem is inconceivable.
- Caribbean farmers deplore the slow rate of EDF disbursement and the lack of involvement of farmer's organizations in deciding how funds should be used. They need capacity building to be able to engage effectively.

In closing Rose cautioned that the Windwards small banana producers do not intend to surrender their fight to obtain a managed quota for their produce which, they maintain, would not constitute a threat to any other interests. Compensation funds, and assistance in general, should be directed straight to those it is expected to benefit in order to be effective. Building strong farmers' organizations is a clarion call across the regions.

**Elisabeth Atangana** (PROPAC, Central Africa) painted a dim picture of the state of agriculture in her region today, reduced to subsistence level by liberalization and dumping. The situation of women farmers, who shoulder the main burden of family food security, is particularly difficult. People are not informed about or involved in EPA negotiations. For the agreements to work for development they would need to dynamize the agricultural economy, improve and stabilize farmers' revenues, and make rural areas attractive places to live in. Sensitive products should be excluded from market opening and fiscal losses compensated so that governments can invest in agriculture. Credit and infrastructure ensuring effective access to markets are prime needs. The end of 2007 is too soon to close the negotiations. Farmers' organizations need to be better informed and prepared.

**Ishmael Sunga** (SACAU, Southern Africa) wound up the presentations by reviewing the main points which had emerged from the assessment in his region, many of which echoed the concerns of other regions. Low awareness of EPAs among farmers is a major issue: in only three SADC countries has there been any engagement in the process. A lesson learned from this experience is that farmers' organizations need to be more proactive and present themselves at the party without waiting to be invited. Impact studies are hard to access in the SADC region, to the point where it is legitimate to doubt whether negotiating positions are really backed up by sound analysis. SADC is not ready to open up. There are a series of supply side constraints that need to be addressed, and EPA implementation should be benchmarked to overcoming these problems. Regional integration is essential and it requires a political as well as an economic foundation.. A common agricultural policy should be put into place before the region can consider how to engage with the rest of the world. A list of special and sensitive products has to be drawn up in a transparent way with the participation of farmers' organizations. WTO compatibility should not take precedence over sustainable agricultural development. The current time frame for negotiations is unrealistic, particularly since there has not been sufficient participation thus far and farmers are now gearing up to get engaged. Clear information is needed on what will happen at the end of 2007 if the negotiations have not been concluded.

Reacting to the presentations **Claude Martens**, head of the unit of the Commission's DG Trade charged with negotiating the EPAs, stressed that he had found them extremely interesting and looked forward to seeing the complete reports. The Commission, he said, shares the farmer organizations' concerns and is responding to them by taking into account the development dimension, a pillar of the Cotonou Agreement, stating that "We are really satisfied that what we are doing in EPA negotiations addresses your concerns". He noted that:

- The EPAs will include a development chapter focusing on, among other things, poverty eradication, elimination of HIV-AIDS and aid for trade. A figure of 2 billion Euro was mentioned in this regard.
- Food security is another top priority in the EPAs and each region has the right to protect food sustainability.

- A waiver regarding preferential treatment for bananas, fish and other such commodities would face difficulties in the WTO and without an EPA the Caribbean would lose its preferences on products like canned tuna and bananas.
- Many impact assessment studies have been undertaken and the **serious ones all** point to positive welfare effects and impacts. **He cited a study carried out by Jacques Gallezot for ROPPA** as a case in point.
- The ACP and the EU are working towards concluding the EPA negotiations on schedule, and the process is being followed by the WTO members.

During the brief discussion which followed, the ROPPA representative contested the Commissioner's reading of the Gallezot study, which is not an impact assessment but a discussion of the margin for manoeuvre within the current negotiations. . The Chairs and panellists expressed concern that the Commissioner was not aware of **the serious studies that show** negative impacts for the EPAs and promised to make them available to him. The workshop closed with an encouragement to the EU to provide funds for conducting neutral impact assessment studies.

**For further information:**

ROPPA: [roppa@roppa-ao.org](mailto:roppa@roppa-ao.org)

EAFF: [info@eaffu.org](mailto:info@eaffu.org)

PROPAC: [cnop\\_cam2001@yahoo.fr](mailto:cnop_cam2001@yahoo.fr)

SACAU: [info@sacau.org](mailto:info@sacau.org)

WINFA: [winfa@caribsurf.com](mailto:winfa@caribsurf.com)

EuropAfrica: [info@europafrika.info](mailto:info@europafrika.info)