

SRAI tackles the global food price crisis in West Africa

A regional conference addressing food price transmission took place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on April 4-6, 2011. Its theme was “lessons from West African experiences of the management of the outbreak of the prices in agricultural products in 2007-08”.

Given the rising world food prices in the last six months, the question, “to what degree higher world prices for tradable commodities are transmitted back to consumers and farmers” is highly relevant. The current situation recalls the world food crisis of 2007-08, which has plunged many countries in West Africa into crisis, and caused political instability and riots. In response to the crisis of 2007-08, the 2008 Geneva Conference on Trade and Development provided a platform for dialogue and discussions on innovative approaches and actions in agriculture and trade for policymakers in West Africa and the rest of the world.

The SRAI project (strengthening Regional Agriculture Integration), originated from those discussions. Funded by the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, it is run by Michigan State University in partnership with the CILSS and national and regional research institutions. The aim is to increase the capacity of Sahel countries in West Africa to implement more effective agricultural and market policies.

Organized by the CILSS, the ReSAKSS and the SRAI project team with the support of the Government of Burkina Faso, the conference gathered 60 policy-makers, Prime Ministerial and Ministry of Agriculture advisors and researchers. They represented 13 international (WFP, FAO) and regional organizations, eight West African countries and the Farmers and Consumers Organization of Burkina Faso.

The conference shared the main research results from SRAI. Participants discussed policies and measures for mitigating the negative effects of increasing global food prices on the population of West Africa.

SRAI results show that 33% of price increases have been transmitted from international to local markets in West Africa, mainly on rice and wheat. The impact varies: countries with coastline are more affected than landlocked ones. However, the producers have not benefited fully from these effects of price increases. Following the price increase, a dynamic reconfiguration of

production and consumption areas has taken place in the sub-region, especially for rice production.

Conference discussions centered on how to break the strong dependence of regional markets on international markets, the need to support local production and improve the willingness to buy traditional crops, and the importance of inter-regional trade and functioning markets supported by good roads. Investments in agriculture are essential for achieving real food security, because they can induce sustainable productivity increases and help create favorable conditions for the private sector and properly functioning markets. Delegates made a set of recommendations on national agricultural policies and measures to deal with price volatility, market barriers, consumption trends and regional trade.

Oumar Niangado from the Syngenta Foundation took part in the panel discussion. He noted that although agriculture has been back on the political agenda since 2008, little has been happening at ground level. The rise in food prices in 2011 is ‘good’ in the sense that governments are refocusing on agriculture. As only certain food (e.g. wheat, corn, sugar) has experienced price increases, local food grains such as millet and sorghum should serve as important substitutions in the time of food shortage.

The Syngenta Foundation focuses on these two grain crops in the PRECAD project, seeking to increase yields and build storage facilities in Mali. Post-harvest management including storage and processing is extremely important, not only to keep good stock of the produce, but also to meet urban consumers’ preference. Niangado also noted the importance of focusing on the main production areas in the region and reaching their full production potentials.

CILSS: Permanent Interstate Committee to Combat Drought in the Sahel

ReSAKSS: Regional Strategic Analysis Knowledge Support System