

## The AU Joint Ministerial on Agriculture and Trade: preparations and key messages

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An important event is taking place at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa from 26-30 November: the AU Joint Conference of Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Trade. Building on the 2012 AU Heads of State Summit on enhancing regional integration, the theme for this Joint Ministerial is “Boosting Intra-African Trade: a key to agricultural transformation and ensuring food and nutrition security”. This is a very welcome move, since Africa needs higher levels of intra-regional trade to achieve food security goals and economic growth.

Today, Africa as a continent has the lowest levels of intraregional trade in the world. Production sheds and markets are not confined within national borders, but trade and infrastructure barriers, as well as political bottlenecks, limit the effectiveness of trade policies and agricultural programs to achieve their potentials. The recent crises in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa could have been largely avoided if regional agricultural markets functioned better. So the AU Joint Conference is an important opportunity for African Ministers of Agriculture and Trade to discuss how to jointly tackle those bottlenecks, hopefully by renewing their commitments towards, and identifying strategies for, boosting intra-African trade to allow greater food and nutrition security on the continent.

When the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), one of the key development partners involved in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), together with ECDPM and other partners, about two years ago, started emphasizing the importance of building bridges between the agriculture and trade policies, programmes and processes, many thought this was not a real priority for Africa. However, as highlighted in a series of ECDPM publications on the regional dimensions of food security over 2011 and 2012 (e.g. [www.ecdpm.org/dp128](http://www.ecdpm.org/dp128)), there is increasing consensus that CAADP in particular offers a window of opportunity to integrate trade and agriculture. For this reason, last September, ECDPM also published a special issue of ECDPM's monthly magazine GREAT Insights (“Governance, Regional integration, Economics, Agriculture and Trade, a name pointing to the inter-sectoral linkages) focusing on food security and covering key ‘outstanding issues’ in the CAADP processes and policies ([www.ecdpm.org/great\\_issue7](http://www.ecdpm.org/great_issue7)). Representatives from farmers’ organisations and development partners,

including the Dutch MFA, wrote about the relation between regional cooperation and food security. Other articles explored important questions, which also challenge the effectiveness of CAADP, such as: what agriculture development model is the renewed international attention on food security promoting? what role for climate-smart agriculture? how are emerging economies like Brazil interacting with African partners to promote food security? what role for private sector and aid?

At the AU Joint Ministerial, the debate on how to bridge trade and agriculture in Africa moves beyond research and informal policy dialogue, to fully become part of the high-level political agenda. The Ministers will begin to review and adopt strategies to operationalise the vision of achieving food security in Africa using intra-Africa trade as the key instrument, considering the progress that has been made recently in transforming African agriculture through CAADP and noting in particular that linking different agricultural value chains through trade is still among the fundamental agricultural challenges. The Joint Ministerial will try to:

- Identify synergies, linkages and complementarities in on-going initiatives in agriculture and trade development (CAADP, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Frameworks, Aid for Trade, Grow Africa, African Agribusiness and Agroindustries Development Initiative-3ADI, etc).
- Agree on areas of immediate follow up actions at country and sub-regional levels, including coordination mechanisms between Ministries of Agriculture and Ministries of Trade at Member State level, also linked to those at the level of Regional Economic Communities.
- Build consensus on specific programmatic areas, approaches and actions for high-level political engagement with the AU Heads of State and Government, meeting next time in January 2013.

This is an ambitious agenda, but absolutely worth pursuing and supporting. The Development Partners Task Team (DPTT), coordinating development partners' input for the CAADP process, will help, in particular through the sub-group of DPTT members working on regional dimensions, chaired by the Dutch MFA. In this context, ECDPM will continue to contribute through analysis, partnership building and facilitation of frank policy dialogue around trade and agriculture. Thanks to such roles, working with African institutions over the years on regional integration and trade policies and Africa, and more recently on the regional dimensions of CAADP, both ECDPM's Programmes on Trade and Food Security were invited to the Joint Ministerial and the senior officials/experts sessions that will precede it. ECDPM's Francesco Rampa and Dan Lui will attend the whole week of meetings and contribute through presentations and dissemination of relevant ECDPM's publications and policy briefs. Some of the key messages they will bring to Addis include:

- Building bridges between agriculture and trade is so important that it deserves regular discussions at the highest political level. Ministers should agree to institutionalize the Joint Ministerial as a yearly event, so to better follow up on decisions taken. As 2013 is CAADP's 10-year anniversary, the Heads of State should also interact -when assessing progress in these 10 years- about the importance of intra-african trade for transforming African agriculture.
- Ministers should find concrete ways to better involve farmers and the rest of the private sector in ongoing trade and agriculture initiatives, as they are crucial to develop the production, processing and marketing infrastructure needed for increasing trade between surplus areas and deficit areas in the continent, thus reducing dependency from food imports from outside Africa.
- Mechanisms should be found to tackle political bottlenecks such as non-implementation of land reforms or politicians' direct involvement in staple food production and trade. Political feasibility should be more prominent in the design and implementation of policies and investment plans, in agriculture, starting with the identification of more politically attractive targets for CAADP (e.g. employment, not only agricultural productivity) as well as in trade, since agricultural markets are about food, hence politics, and cannot be looked at simply through sector neutral trade measures.

In addition to the joint sessions of the Experts and the Ministers, the two communities will also meet separately to discuss more in depth specific agriculture and trade issues. The Agriculture experts and Ministers will focus on "Sustaining the CAADP Momentum", an initiative launched by AU Commission,

NEPAD Agency and Regional Economic Communities that aims to highlight the key themes, bold strategies and action areas to catalyse transformation, expand investments, as well as strengthen and align Africa's own capacity for increased, sustainable and competitive agriculture performance.

The Ministers of Agriculture will therefore review progress of implementation of previous decisions, review and consider the progress, achievements and lessons in CAADP implementation since the Maputo decision in 2003 and consider the 5-10 year proposals on key issues, actions and drivers to sustain the CAADP momentum with focus on implementation for results. The Ministers will also take note and consider the proposals on key targets and scorecards for measuring agricultural performance within 5-10 years.

Experts and Ministers of Trade will in turn consider not only the role of regional integration for food security, but also assess the status of trade negotiations and initiatives, and decide on the way forward, for: Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU; African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) with the USA; WTO Round; and the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).

Finally, it is important to consider that risks remain. The Joint Ministerial was originally scheduled to take place from 29 October to 2 November, but was postponed. This came as a surprise, announced only four days before the start of the meetings in Addis. According to the related AU press release, the reason was the low response and confirmation of attendance by AU Member States. This is worrying, since apparently some African Ministers were not available to start working on the integration of trade and agriculture policies for achieving food security on the continent. Although the postponement may also have been related to the insufficiently advanced technical preparations (background papers, etc.), there is a clear risk that the Ministerial Conference only produces a Declaration, without real commitment or follow-up and very slow implementation. This happened before in other important areas for the development of the Continent (including regional integration and the CFTA itself), and should be avoided.

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