

Summary Report of the Virtual Regional Policy Dialogue Event on Enhancing Cross Border Trade and Food Security through Data and Information Sharing October 7, 2020

Introduction

With support from the European Union and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) jointly organized a virtual regional policy dialogue event on *Enhancing Cross Border Trade and Food Security through Data and Information Sharing* on October 7, 2020. This event was organized as part of both the Food Security Portal¹ (FSP) project and the CAADP-XP4² project and was attended by 102 participants from around the world.

The theme chosen for this virtual regional policy dialogue was data and information sharing, with a focus on regional cross-border trade of agricultural commodities and inputs and its implications for food security in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a global health crisis

¹ Now in its third phase, the European Commission-funded, IFPRI-led Food Security Portal (III) project aims to contribute to better informed actions to improve food security and nutrition as well as resilience to shocks. The specific objective of the project is to strengthen capacity for improved timely food security information, policy research, and analysis, particularly in Africa south of the Sahara. Through its online portals — the [Food Security Portal](#) (FSP) and the [Africa south of the Sahara Food Security Portal](#) (FSP-SSA) — FSP III seeks to help improve the ability of governments and decision makers to respond to and prevent food crises by bringing together policy-relevant tools and information in one place. To contribute toward this goal, a series of country and regional level policy dialogue events are organized on an annual basis to bring together key national and regional partners and stakeholders to strengthen critical African networks, enhance knowledge-sharing, align information needs, identify and pursue knowledge gaps, and recommend actions for improving food and nutrition security policies and data.

² The CAADP-XP4 project is an EU-funded and IFAD-managed project that aims at enabling agricultural research and innovation, including extension services, to contribute effectively to food and nutrition security, economic development and climate mitigation in Africa. This is to be achieved by: i) improving institutional capacities; ii) re-positioning of the regional and sub-regional agriculture research and extension organizations; and iii) promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing among organizations. The CAADP-XP4 project has 5 main outputs: (i) strengthened capacity of ASARECA and its sub-regional partner organizations to perform their mandate; (ii) multi-stakeholder partnerships for innovation established and in operation; (iii) strengthened national policies, regional institutional arrangements and market access; (iv) knowledge management for advocacy and decision support and communication improved; and (v) effective planning, coordination, partnerships, monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting enhanced.

causing deep disruptions to and widespread impacts on food systems, social systems, and economic development. The scale of the pandemic's expected impact on poverty, food security, nutrition, and the world economy is unprecedented and requires strong and coordinated interventions across both developed and developing countries. Fundamental to the development and implementation of effective and coherent policy responses to COVID-19 that support recovery, rebuilding, and resilience, is the availability of high-quality, up-to-date data. Developing countries, which tend to have weak institutions and limited capacity and resources, are thus posed to face the pandemic's most devastating and long-lasting consequences.

This policy dialogue event was organized to address some of the challenges and opportunities for improving data, policy responses, and regional coordination in light of the current pandemic and the dire stakes it raises for food security and nutrition. With a focus on the Eastern and Central Africa (ECA) sub-region, the virtual event included opening remarks by Dr. Rob Vos, IFPRI's Director of Markets, Trade and Institutions, a presentation on *Data and information sharing in COVID-19 times* by Prof. Jean Jacques Mbonigaba Muhinda, Executive Director of ASARECA, and a presentation on *Trade in a time of crisis: Domestic market disruption and the role of transborder trade* by Dr. Antoine Bouet, Senior Research Fellow at IFPRI. The event also included a series of reflections from a panel of national and regional representatives as well as space for open discussions with the webinar participants. Closing remarks were given by Dr. Rob Vos from IFPRI and Dr. Enock Warinda, Deputy Executive Director of ASARECA. A summary of the deliberations is presented here.

Opening Remarks

During his opening remarks, Dr. Rob Vos reiterated that the objective of the regional policy dialogue was to bring together key stakeholders to share challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities around two main themes: (i) supporting data and information sharing, particularly around regional cross border trade; and (ii) improving evidence-based decision making processes. The overall aim of sharing challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities in this policy dialogue setting was to contribute toward increasing cross border trade in agricultural commodities and inputs amidst the COVID-19 crisis and the sharing of experiences in accessing and utilizing the FSP and FSP-SSA online portals.

Data and Information Sharing in COVID-19 Times

Prof. Jean Jacques Mbonigaba Muhinda followed the opening remarks with a presentation on *Data and information sharing in COVID-19 times*. Prof. Muhinda spoke on the role of data and information sharing in enhancing cross border trade and food security in COVID-19 times and the role of ASARECA in supporting improving data and information sharing. Prof. Muhinda emphasized that now, more than ever before, there is a collective responsibility to stay informed and spread reliable information about the state of food production and trade of agricultural commodities in the sub-region to limit misinformed trade decisions that would further disrupt food markets.

He enumerated key aspects of cross border trade for which the quality and availability of up to date data and information are crucial. These include:

“The global COVID-19 outbreak calls for more collective action; and I believe that we can learn from proven good practices, as well as emerging lessons elsewhere to keep food moving in a safe and affordable way.”

Prof. Jean Jacques Mbonigaba Muhinda

- Clearance processes and procedures
- Sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards
- Trade regulations, tariff structures, and customs rules
- Export and import commodity restrictions
- Commodity prices and available commodity volumes
- Available commodity types, varieties, breeds
- Available demand and associated trade risks

Prof. Muhinda shared that ASARECA has been coordinating multidisciplinary agricultural research for development projects and partnerships in ECA over the last 25 years. Currently, ASARECA is in advanced stages of establishing a comprehensive Eastern and Central Africa sub-region Knowledge and Information Hub (ECA-Ki-Hub) and is in the process of creating a Community of Practice (CoP) comprising critical data and information experts in the national systems. The CoP will be harnessed to facilitate collaboration within and across National Agriculture Research and Extension Systems in the generation, processing, sharing, clearing, and dissemination of data.

Trade in a Time of Crisis: Domestic Market Disruption and the Role of Transborder Trade

Dr. Antoine Bouet gave a presentation on *Trade in a time of crisis: Domestic market disruption and the role of transborder trade*. He traced the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in terms of its channels (economic crisis, supply disruptions, panics) emphasizing that impacts vary by sector and by country. The COVID-19 crisis, which is now characterized by social distancing and reduced mobility, has various implications on income, remittances, and demand for food, cotton, and energy – all of which have differentiated impacts for different African countries. The supply disruption policies implemented include lockdowns, border closures, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, and international transportation. These policies have direct implications on trade in Africa. Panics have also resulted in export restrictions and massive buying.

Dr. Bouet presented some trade statistics showing the large decline in world trade in the second quarter of 2020, with this mostly affecting fuels. Agricultural exports at the world level actually increased, though there are differentiated impacts for countries. A more dire picture for both the second and third quarter of 2020 is expected when a more widespread and severe impact from the pandemic is realized. Dr. Bouet included evidence of informal trade from the Kenya-Tanzania border which showed a decrease in informal trade and an increase in formal trade. This is presumably due to tighter controls at the borders for informal trade due to pandemic response measures.

Dr. Bouet concluded his presentation with short-term recommendations that included the re-opening of marketplaces and borders for trade, which could lead to high incomes for farmers and cheaper access to food for consumers. In the long term, Dr. Bouet supported an openness strategy and described how the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could help with this if they address issues of non-tariff measures and customs procedures.

Panel Reflections from National and Regional Representatives

Mr. Godfrey Walakira, Principal Commercial Officer, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, Uganda

Mr. Walakira provided reflections from a national perspective. These reflections covered four main areas of focus: (i) an overview of trade in Uganda; (ii) informal trade and impacts of COVID-19 in Uganda; (iii) the role of data and information sharing in cross border trade and food security; and (iv) what the government has done to enhance cross border trade.

Uganda is a member of several trading blocks. Since COVID-19 hit, Uganda has experienced a drop in informal exports. Formal exports, however, have performed well during the pandemic. Uganda's response to COVID-19 included strict controls and restrictive measures, which were implemented around the third week of March 2020. These measures, which included the closure of borders (both on land and in air) – with exception given to transit-related cargo, impacted cross border trade.

When reflecting on the role of data and information sharing in cross border trade, Mr. Walakira took note of five key areas where action is needed. Improving data and information sharing around cross border trade will require, among other things:

- A better understanding of the behavior of the border communities in terms of total production versus what is marketed and consumed by the households (what is the appropriate balance between consumption and trading);
- Identification of the key agriculture value chains for development;
- Mapping of the key agricultural products to enhance cross border community household welfare;
- The development of cross border relationships to improve transparency and sharing of information at both borders; and
- Harmonization of key parameters/indicators for data collection and information that relates to all the major stakeholders.

When reflecting on what the Government of Uganda has done to enhance cross border trade, Mr. Walakira listed six key initiatives. These included:

- The construction of border markets (one stop border posts);
- A simplified trade regime to facilitate small and medium traders;
- An electronic window to simplify and reduce the cost of doing business;
- Creation of a trade information portal that provides information on trade procedures;
- Modernization of customs procedures; and
- Improvements to Uganda's quality and standards infrastructure.

Ambassador Dr. Kipyego Cheluget, Assistant Secretary General, COMESA

As a representative of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Ambassador Cheluget provided reflections from a regional perspective. COMESA is made up of 21 member states, making it the largest regional economic body in Africa in terms of membership, and it accounts for a third of the population of the continent. Ambassador Cheluget shared that COVID-19 has made it clear that – in relation to regional cross border agricultural trade – there is a strong need for improved data and information. Data and information on selected food commodities and agricultural inputs within the regional supply chain is crucial for determining if the food as well as agricultural inputs are adequate to meet the regional food and input requirements. Ambassador Cheluget further stated that data and information can fuel economic and social opportunities for everyone through its potential to stimulate an increase in regional trade between the surplus and deficit areas in COMESA, contributing to satisfying food and agricultural input demands through regional supply chains.

Ambassador Cheluget noted three key actions that COMESA is currently taking to guide how they intend to address this need for improved data and information:

- Article 140 (Development of Comprehensive Information Systems) of the COMESA Treaty provides a policy context for developing statistics;

- COMESA's forthcoming Midterm Strategic Plan (MTSP) (2021-2025) in which statistics will be recognized as foundational to supporting strategic objectives; and
- COMESA's forthcoming Statistics Strategy (2021-2025) which will provide a blueprint and implementation plan for statistics including agriculture and cross border trade.

Ambassador Cheluguet concluded his remarks by stressing that a regional strategy around agriculture-related statistical development is needed which will focus on capacity development and technical assistance to Member states; promote data harmonization; strengthen partnerships; promote synergies between continental, regional and national levels; and advocate for strong statistical values as captured in the African Charter on Statistics.

Dr. Fadel Ndiame, Deputy President, AGRA

Dr. Ndiame provided reflections from the perspective of AGRA, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. This alliance focuses on increasing incomes and improving the food security of 30 million farming households in 11 focus countries in Africa by 2021. Dr. Ndiame made clear AGRA's commitment to strengthening and leveraging partnerships and collaborations around the improvement of data and information to support African governments' and smallholder farmers' ability to respond to and mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on food systems in Africa. With the COVID-19 context, Dr. Ndiame emphasized the need to avoid knee-jerk and uncoordinated decision making, and discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with improving evidence-based policy making.

Dr. Ndiame shared that AGRA has developed a COVID-19 response action, which includes collaboration with a data analytics and research partner to complement their data collection efforts and synthesize datasets for deeper insights and trends to inform AGRA's COVID-19 and post-COVID priorities across all of AGRA's focus countries.

Dr. Ndiame went on to describe some the relevant initiatives in which AGRA is currently involved. These include:

- **Market Information System:** This initiative focuses on close to real-time collecting and monitoring of food prices, stocks and trade information for selected key food crops/products in selected countries in East, Southern, and West Africa.
- **Regional Food Balance Sheet Initiative:** Food Balance Sheets (FBS) are an important part of food security policies in all countries. The Regional Food Trade and Resilience Programme has identified this as a key entry point in supporting governments formulate and implement evidence-based food security and trade policies.
- **Political economic monitoring of policy decisions:** This program has commissioned a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) study on food systems aimed at monitoring and documenting real-time food system-related policies and other decisions at national and regional levels that affect food security at country and regional levels.
- **Food Security War Room (FSWR):** AGRA is supporting various national governments in their preparedness around food security monitoring as a result of the COVID-19 situation and for their long-term agriculture transformation agendas.
- **Regional Food Trade Coalition and Task Forces:** Following the launch of the Regional Food Trade Coalition at the 2019 African Green Revolution Forum and on the back of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Africa Trade and Resilience (AFTR) initiative instituted two Coalition COVID-19 Task Forces (TFs) and one Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Women in Trade. The two TFs are: Food and Nutrition Security Data and Hunger Hotspots and the Logistical and Trade Corridors. The TFs are undertaking evidence gathering and monitoring activities to get a better understanding of the impact



of COVID-19 on regional trade activities and to propose mechanisms and interventions for responding to impacts of the pandemic. The Women in Trade TWG is in the formative stages of operationalization.

Wrap-up and Closing

Dr. Rob Vos thanked participants, panelists, and speakers for joining this informative webinar that explored, from a variety of perspectives, the use of data and information sharing to enhance cross border trade and food security. Dr. Vos acknowledged that progress in improving data and information collection and sharing is encouraging; however, significant challenges remain. Challenges that will require our commitment to cooperation and collaboration and our continued support to information platforms such as the Food Security Portal and the other initiatives of IFPRI, ASARECA, and their many partners. Dr. Vos closed his remarks with a call to organize a follow-up meeting to ensure that the discussions and learnings presented during this webinar are taken forward and that progress is continually shared among a wide range of stakeholders.

Dr. Enock Warinda similarly thanked participants and panelists for making the webinar a successful event. Dr. Warinda noted that empirical evidence of the economic impact of COVID-19 on cross-border trade exists; what we need to focus on now is how we work together to make sure data and information is availed and accessed by everybody. Dr. Warinda likewise emphasized the need for strong partnerships, collaboration and implementation plans, particularly in bringing information and portals together for the benefit of all stakeholders.