



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**



## **FSN Forum in Africa**

part of the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition

### **TOPIC NOTE**

**20.11.2017 – 08.12.2017**

[www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/trade](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/trade)

## **The 11th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11) and its significance for food security in Africa**

Through the 2014 Malabo Declaration, African governments made a specific and clear commitment to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services, and to harnessing market and trade opportunities locally, regionally, and internationally. This is increasingly regarded as a means to promote agricultural transformation in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), to help address the key challenges in the region related to agricultural development such as diverse agro-ecological systems and small national markets.



At the same time, the relationship between trade and food security is attracting increased attention on both the trade and the development agendas. The eradication of global hunger by 2030 is a key goal in the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and trade is recognized as one of the means for achieving the SDGs. The challenge is how to ensure that the expansion of agricultural trade works for and not against, the elimination of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. This challenge has been at the forefront as governments' struggle to negotiate the changes to the current global agreements on agricultural trade that allow sufficient flexibility to countries to pursue their individual needs.

Ahead of the 11<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires from 10 to 13 December 2017, FAO and IFPRI, through the FSN Forum and the IFPRI Food Security Portal, are joining forces to provide a platform to share knowledge and exchange views on the significance of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference for Africa.

This is an opportunity to increase awareness on the linkages between trade and food security, and on the significance of the WTO agreements in relation to these linkages.

We invite all interested FSN Forum members and colleagues to join this debate on the FSN Forum (open from 20 November to 8 December) and on the [IFPRI Africa South of the Sahara Food Security Portal](#) (on the 27 November) reflecting on the following questions:

**1. Do you think the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) provide sufficient policy space for domestic support for countries in Africa? Why or why not?**

The general approach of the Agreement on Agriculture with regard to domestic support is to allow unlimited support through policies that meet certain criteria (Green Box, Blue Box and Development Box)<sup>i</sup>. Support through other policies is subject to limits. Countries that have a positive Bound Total AMS<sup>ii</sup> in their Schedule of Commitments, have space to provide non-exempt support up to the Bound Total AMS ceiling. Most developing countries, however, have a Bound Total AMS of zero. This generally limits their AMS support to their 10% *de minimis* levels. Many countries in Africa implement some form of domestic support programmes, such as input subsidies, market price support and public stockholding measures, and support is increasingly geared toward to increasing the adoption of climate-smart practices.

**2. In your opinion, do export restrictions enhance or undermine food security in African countries? Should the WTO disciplines on export restrictions be stricter or allow greater flexibility?**

In the WTO, export restrictions are mainly governed by Article 12 of the Agreement on Agriculture<sup>iii</sup>, and GATT Article XI<sup>iv</sup>. Article 12 of the AoA foresees that when any member institutes any new export prohibition or restriction on foodstuffs, in accordance with GATT Article XI, then: advance consideration should be given to the effects upon importing WTO Members' food security, advance information on the measure, and further information or consultations upon request should be provided. There is an exemption from such requirements for developing countries unless they are net-food exporters of the specific foodstuff concerned. Export restrictions – particularly of key staple commodities – are common policy instruments used in many countries in Africa, to respond to food security concerns; particularly to lower prices and ensure adequate domestic availability of food. However, these policies are often implemented in an ad hoc way, and their impacts on food security at the national vs. the regional levels, and in the short vs. longer terms are debated.

**3. What efforts can be made at the multilateral level, to complement regional integration efforts? In your opinion, are there some policy areas that are better addressed at the multilateral level, and others at the regional level?**

There has been renewed attention to the debate on whether regional trade agreements (RTAs) provide an alternative to the multilateral trading system (MTS), or whether RTAs and the MTS complement each other, in the goal of reducing barriers to trade. While overlapping memberships in the various regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa can create a number of challenges, the RECs have each achieved varying degrees of economic integration, and negotiations for the tripartite free trade area (TFTA) and the continental free trade area (CFTA) aim to further these efforts.

We look forward to an interesting and lively exchange.

*Georgios Mermigkas and Ishrat Gadhok*

FAO Trade and Markets Division

<sup>i</sup> Green Box: Support to agriculture that is allowed without limits because it does not distort trade, or at most causes minimal distortion. It refers to Annex 2 of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.

Blue Box: Support with constraints on production or other conditions designed to reduce distortion. Currently, no limitation is applied to it.

Development Box: Certain development measures, allowed without limitation only in developing countries. They are outlined in Article 6.2 of the AoA.

ii AMS – Aggregate Measurement of Support: Refers to the calculation of support for agriculture that is considered to distort trade and therefore subject to reduction commitments.

iii [https://www.wto.org/English/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/14-ag\\_01\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/English/docs_e/legal_e/14-ag_01_e.htm)

iv [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/analytic\\_index\\_e/gatt1994\\_05\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/analytic_index_e/gatt1994_05_e.htm)