



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

## About this discussion

This document summarizes the online discussion *The 11th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11) and its significance for food security in Africa*, held on the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa (FSN Forum Africa) from 20 November to 8 December 2017. The discussion was facilitated by Georgios Mermigkas and Ishrat Gadhok of the FAO Trade and Markets Division, in collaboration with the Africa South of the Sahara Food Security Portal of IFPRI.

Participation and views expressed during this discussion reflect the complexity of the topic of trade and food security and the lively debate that distinguishes it.

Although the discussion received only 16 comments, these represent quite a range of different perspectives.

African governments have committed to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services. Trade has been recognized as one of the means for achieving the SDGs, especially SDG2. However, cross-border trade is also implicated in exposing vulnerable small-scale actors to greater competition and undermining food availability and food access in low-income countries under certain conditions.

## What is the nature of the trade and food security nexus?

To have positive effects on food security, trade policies must be coherent with food security and nutrition objectives, which requires leadership and political commitment ([Lal Manavado](#)).

In general, trade in Africa is not achieving the expected results and benefiting all actors involved. According to participants, this has to do with the fact that many commercial agreements are not enforced and the region has limited market power and trade volume. Therefore, policies (including reforms) should focus more on the competitiveness of African value chains ([Krishna Rao Pinniti](#)).

A research paper shared by one participant shows that moving into cash crop production for export can generate employment opportunities that contribute to higher income and to food security ([Eugenio Diaz-Bonilla](#)).

A different point of view is that before entering the export market, agriculture production should first serve to support the food security of producers and of communities in production areas: according to one participant, trade is not the right way to eradicate hunger by 2030 because the logic that governs trade is fundamentally different from that governing the achievement of food security ([Emile Hougbo](#)).

Another participant stressed that increasing exports can result in higher food insecurity especially in low-income countries: for instance, the food deficit of least developed countries

increased by 12.5 percent per year from 1995 to 2016, while at the same time their imports increased by 9 percent and their exports by 6.6 percent (Jacques Berthelot).

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## Provisions of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA)

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The policy environment provided by the AOA seems to be adequate for domestic support (Emile Hougbo, Kelvin Nkai). But participants questioned the willingness and capacity to implement measures in support of fair and effective participation of all African actors in trade. Indeed, African agriculture will benefit from trade only if more efforts are put into making agriculture competitive: not only by improving crop yields, product conservation and limiting food losses

and waste, but also by supporting access to markets and fair prices (Krishna Rao Pinniti). Proficiency in competitiveness also needs to be developed (Wajid Pirzada).

In the context of fair participation of African countries in international trade, the call to remove all export subsidies in developed countries (Kelvin Nkai) and the urgent need to reform the European Union agricultural policies (Jacques Berthelot) were also raised.

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## Export restrictions

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There was consensus among participants on the non-effectiveness of export restrictions; especially in the long run, export restrictions have a negative impact on food security in both producing and importing countries. In the producing countries, they lead to uncertainty and instability in both availability and access to food, as lower prices can cause reduced investments and reduced production. In the importing countries, export restrictions lead to higher prices (Annah Mutinda).

Therefore, some participants felt that WTO regulations should be stricter in banning export restrictions (Annah Mutinda).

However, it was also highlighted that there are cases when countries could see export restrictions as an emergency measure to reinforce food security, and that in supporting these cases the WTO disciplines should allow for great flexibility. Sociopolitical unrest and displacement caused by climate change, and in general risk of food insecurity, can justify the (temporary) implementation of export restrictions (Adebayo Depo, Aklilu Nigussie, Harriet Nsubuga).

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## Regional integration

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Regional integration can benefit agricultural trade in Africa, although experience shows that regional measures are difficult to implement and are unlikely to succeed in Africa; this is the reason why national measures can prove to be more effective (Emile Hougbo).

However, if regional communities became members of the WTO in the same way as the European Union, they could be well placed to implement measures in support of food security and trade for the benefit of African countries (Jacques Berthelot).

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## REFERENCES SHARED BY PARTICIPANTS

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