



Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa  
C/o All Africa Conference of Churches  
Regional Office, 1235 Rue de la Paix,  
B.P. 2268, Lomé, Togo  
Telephone (+228) 22 20 46 86, Mobile  
(+228) 90 86 98 29,  
Fax : (+228) 22 20 18 75

## CONTENTS

### 'GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD'

Churches must not only recite the Lord's Prayer, but should live it. Page 1

### Churches must act!

Food security must be considered as spiritual and moral issue Page 2

### What is the Right to Food?

State obligations to food security Page 2

### The Right to Food in West Africa

In need for transformational leadership. Page 3

Churches' Concerns for the realization of the right to food  
Obstacles and challenges which must be addressed Page 3-4

### Advocating for hunger free societies

Churches Initiatives! Page 6

# THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN COUNCILS AND CHURCHES IN WEST AFRICA FECCIWA

## Realization of the Right to Food in West Africa - Churches Perspectives



Churches' supported School-Based Gardening Programs in Liberia

### "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD"

In Jesus' teaching, he taught His disciples to pray and ask God, their heavenly Father, for their daily bread (Matt 6: 11). Jesus himself demonstrated the provision of daily bread even though some of his disciples felt that the task was impossible for them (Matt 15:34). By praying the Lord's Prayer, "give us this day our daily bread", churches must advocate to claim the right to food security. (...) Give us "this day our daily bread" provides ground for moral and ethical obligations to change the present day situation through the teaching of the social doctrine of the church of Jesus Christ.

Should people who pray "give us this day our daily bread" go to bed hungry, and still live in abject poverty without the intervention of the church of Jesus Christ?

Jesus wants the prayer for daily bread be answered and so must the church and governments in Africa. The problem of food insecurity in West Africa is both production and distribution patterns.

### Recommendations

- ▶ God has provided all the resources necessary to ensure that no one suffers from hunger, malnutrition and starvation [Genesis 1]
- ▶ Food security must be considered as spiritual and Theological issue if Churches in West Africa want to sustain its relevance.
- ▶ Churches shall move communities for action in guaranteeing the full meaning in praying the Lord's Prayer "give us this day our daily bread".
- ▶ States must progressively realize their obligations to provide laws and regulations for all people to access quality food in West Africa.

West Africa is capable of producing enough to guarantee food security of its people. West African governments must fulfill the Maputo's Declaration in allocating 10% of the total national budget towards agricultural and rural development. Moreover, a fair distribution system, stopping corruption, promoting gender equity and narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor will prevent a situation where some have more than what they need while others suffer malnutrition and starvation.

From a theological perspective, our Christian faith requires that we acknowledge, with thanks, God's provision of food for us and that we feed the hungry, the widows, the orphans and the aliens. Through the medium of food, we live and grow, develop human relationships, even express our spirituality. When we lack food, we place all these pursuits in peril. To have access to food is to have this banquet of human development at one's fingertips.

## Churches must act!

It is unacceptable for the People of God that about 60% of the West African populations live in extreme poverty<sup>i</sup>. According to official sources, 10% of the population is chronically undernourished (see box 1) and 38% of children are underfed.<sup>ii</sup> 43% of the populations do not have access to clean water. Conditions which reinforce the world highest maternal and under-five mortality rates: On average, out of every 1,000 live births, 170 children will die before the age of five. And similarly every woman out of 16 has the chance of dying during pregnancy, countries like Sierra Leone and Niger are exposing even higher risk rates.<sup>iii</sup>

While God has provided all the resources [Genesis 1], the root causes of hunger, hardship and poverty are manmade and of political nature: Decades of neglect and the political marginalization of rural populations and unfair distribution of access to land, water and capital. This must stop!

The Church of Christ Jesus comes with a strong conviction that hunger is unacceptable and a complete violation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and God's divine purpose for humankind. Churches strongly disapprove inequality and the devastating effects of hunger and poverty, and advocate for the fulfillment of the Right to Food and integrated food systems in West Africa!

## What is the Right to Food?

The Right to Food is a binding obligation under international law, according to which:

- ▶ "Every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or the means for its procurement."<sup>iv</sup>

The Right to Food is a fundamental Human Right, recognized by numerous international legal instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) from 1948:

- ▶ "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food."<sup>v</sup>

It was then further defined in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) from 1966, signed by all ECOWAS countries.<sup>vi</sup>

Countries like Brazil and India established framework laws, mechanisms and institutions for the coordination of relevant ministries and civil society stakeholders, combined with complaint mechanisms to guarantee public monitoring of policies and programs empowering poor and small scale farmers. Numbers of poor and malnourished people declined. Small scale farmers in Brazil increased the food production substantially.<sup>vii</sup>

## BOX 1: State of Malnutrition and undernutrition in West Africa - Far from the Zero Hunger

The number of undernourished people in West Africa has passed from 45 million in 1990-92 to about 34.5 million in 2011-13 according to figures of the Commission for Agriculture of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This means that at least 11.5 % of the populations are still suffering from acute hunger in the region. - ZERO is the only acceptable number when it comes to hunger!

In 2012, ECOWAS started the "zero hunger initiative", aiming at the eradication of hunger by 2020 in West Africa."

The objective: Support national efforts to enshrine the Right to Food into constitutions and national multi actor forums for identifying ways for combating hunger and poverty.

West African countries remain reluctant to create the necessary legal facilities for building solid local food systems until now.<sup>viii</sup>

Political leadership and the engagement of different actors: Public institutions, courts, Churches and civil society actors, remain decisive to claim and fulfill the Right to adequate Food in West Africa. Churches can engage and participate in national fora to claim mechanisms for change!

## "Rights not Charity"

States are obliged to put in place framework legislations for the protection and facilitation of the right to food. This comprises the building blocks of food security: from securing land rights, to adequate provision of extension services and social protection schemes for poor and vulnerable.

States are obliged to:

- ▶ Respect: Not undermine livelihoods, e.g. by depriving farming communities from their lands or other live resources, such as water, seeds etc.
- ▶ Protect: Regulate the conduct of private investors (e.g. laws on land tenure, environment protection trade policies) but also safety nets, food reserves for vulnerable populations;
- ▶ Fulfil/Facilitate: Create an enabling environment for the poor to feed themselves (e.g. targeted policies, e.g. subsidy programs, school canteens, social security, public work programs, etc.);
- ▶ Fulfil/Provide: Provide legal mechanisms/ institutions for citizens to claim their rights and public information, participation in decision making plus anti-corruption mechanisms.

## The Right to Food in West Africa

In West Africa, slow progress is observed towards setting up conditions for the universal realization of the Right to Food. From 15 ECOWAS members, only Niger and Côte d'Ivoire have formally enshrined the Right to Food in their national constitutions. But not one single country has adopted a Framework Law, which effectively translates the Right to Food into concrete obligations for state administrations and providing for complaint institutions and mechanisms for public participation.

Mali and Senegal have adopted Agriculture Policy Acts (Loi d'orientation agricole), which claims targeted extension services for vulnerable food producers and women's needs into national agricultural programs. This puts administrations under pressure to comply. It should also be the first step towards the establishment of Framework Laws, coherently streamlining the Right to Food mechanisms into other policy sectors such as health and education.

Other countries have not endeavored into legal reform. However governments are starting to set up cross-sector programs for reinforcing vulnerable peoples' access to food or the means to its procurement (see box 2: Ghana School feeding Program.)

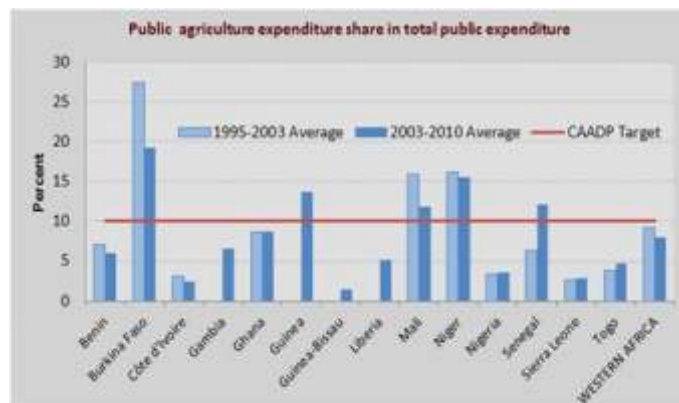
### BOX 2: Ghana School Feeding Program

Since 2005, Ghana has set up the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP), which aims at providing school feeding by procurement of food stuffs with local farming communities.

Farmers however complain that due to a lack of targeted agricultural support and procurement regulations, their food production remains insufficient and public procurement would rather benefit food importers instead of the vulnerable local farming communities.<sup>ix</sup>

Targeted policies for vulnerable farming communities remain crucial. In most West African countries, hunger remains a predominantly rural phenomenon: Farmers are lacking basic means and are left unable to produce enough food to feed their families, or to sell surplus to markets to generate income. They require appropriate state support: investment and extension services, insurance schemes, irrigation, fertilization, storage, procession, transport and marketing.

Political will and budget allocations are missing, even though all ECOWAS countries signed the 2003 Maputo declaration since more than ten years now. They committed to allocate at least 10% of their total national budgets towards agricultural and rural development, based on the needs of small scale farmers. An amount which still remains low, with regards to the agriculture's contribution



Source: Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS), 2013.

to GDPs (amounting to up to 30%) and national employments in West Africa. But of the 15 ECOWAS members, only five have reached or exceeded the 10% target in the period from 2003-2011: Mali, Senegal, Niger, Guinea and Burkina Faso.<sup>xi</sup>

Spending remains decisive. When states increase government funding or accept foreign investments into agriculture, they must ensure that needs and fundamental Rights of citizens are considered. As long as a political leadership and coherent multi actor policies are lacking, government spending will not sustainably reinforce the needs of the people on the ground, due to lacking citizen's inclusion, ineffective spending and high administrative costs.

ECOWAS members also adhere to the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), coordinated by the African Union's New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Program. It is directed at reaching annual agricultural growth rates of 6% by the commercialization of farming sectors. States must ensure that the rights of the people must not be relinquished to economic interests for local elites or a few foreign investors.

**Churches must engage states: Claim, monitor and facilitate targeted support for food justice.**

### Churches' Concerns for the Realization of the Right to Food

Even though the region is naturally endowed by abundant resources, it is incapacitated by inefficient legal mechanisms to protect the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of citizens and future generations. Commercialization of public resources without proper enforcement of protection measures endanger the Right to Food by encroaching community and public lands, natural water resources, seeds and territories of indigenous peoples.

**Churches must not keep silent and condone injustice and wickedness, triggering hunger and poverty.**

# Obstacles and challenges impeding the realization of the Right to Food in West Africa

By claiming solid solutions Churches lay foundations for future generations.

## 1. Land grabbing



Large scale investments into farmland have risen up since the global food price increase in 2008: Hence, we see land acquisition contracts and expropriation, in form of land speculations, agricultural development projects, the development of export plantations for agro fuel etc. The international research project "land matrix" revealed that two thirds of all reported large scale land acquisitions are located in Africa, an area corresponding to the size of France. The reason: lacking legal protection and bad governance.<sup>xii</sup>

In Ghana a Norwegian Biofuel company by-passed local authorities by establishing a contract with an illiterate chief farmers taking away 38000 h of land from local communities.<sup>xiv</sup> All West African countries are concerned: In Liberia, 30 % of the country's territory is subjected to land transactions. In Mali a company called GDCM (Grand Distributeur Céréalière du Mali), held by former President Modibo Keita, claims 7400 hectares of land, displacing thousands of farmers without compensations. In Ivory Coast the French investor Louis Dreyfus, reserved 300 000 hectares of land aiming to triple the country's rice production. Whereas terms and conditions of these investments remain opaque, several tens of thousands of farmers are left to the mercy of the company. In Senegal, land acquisitions for export crop production by Senegalese - Italian Senhuile, are recurrently causing conflict with local populations. The international NGO Grain warns: The irrigation needs of large scale plantations around African rivers, such as the Nile and the Niger, are rising to the point that those rivers will run dry in the medium term.<sup>xvii</sup>

Churches must hold governments accountable to publicly pursue social and environmental impact assessments for land deals in order to avoid natural disasters, conflicts over water and land.

## 2. Women's Right to Food

Women play a pivotal role for food security in Africa. Due to customary roles, they account roughly for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs; they undertake from 60% to 90% of food marketing. However gender disparities in land holdings are discernible in West Africa; rural women also have restricted access to other productive resources, such as credit schemes, agricultural inputs, extension services, and technology. In average only 7 percent of agricultural extension services are provided for women farmers and they hold less than 1 percent of land and credit available to smallholder agriculture in all of Africa. These disadvantages have detrimental impacts not only on women themselves, but also on families and communities in rural areas. West African states are obliged to "modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women."<sup>xix</sup> Countries like Niger and Mali however maintain restraint laws for women, whereas in other countries customary habits impeach the realization of women's rights, such as in Togo.

Churches must speak out and call on state administrations to fulfill their obligations to ensure that there is no discriminatory law against women and provide women the necessary conditions for the full enjoyment of their rights.

## BOX 3: Fishing communities defend their Right to Food

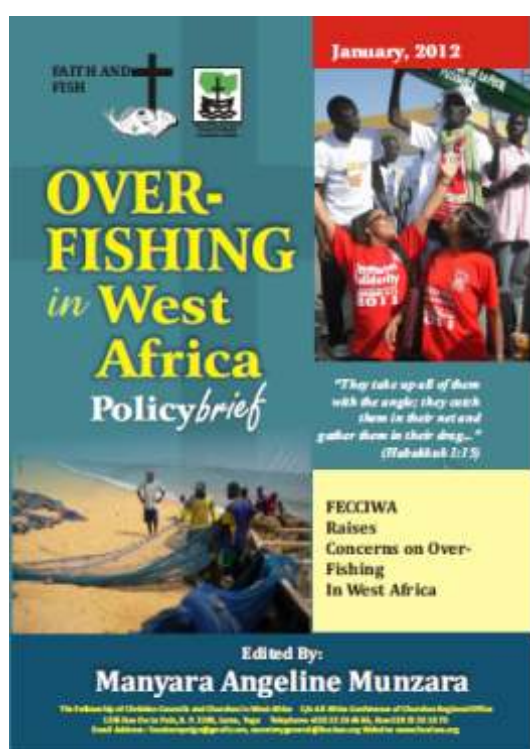
In 2007, South African artisanal fishermen were confronted by the threat of losing their fishing rights to privat investors. They successfully claimed protection of their Right to Food, which is enshrined in the South African constitution. A court order led the government to revise the Marine Living Resources Act. According the legal obligations deriving from the right to Food, it now accommodates socioeconomic rights of small-scale fishers, granting them priority access rights to maritime resources over private investors.

Note: The integration of the Right to Food into national constitutions provides for legal complaint mechanisms.

### 3. Overfishing

80% of West Africa's fish stocks are overexploited a phenomenon, caused by decades of unsustainable fishing, piracy and granting of licenses to foreign operators without control, due to lacking public scientific research on stocks and surveillance of catch management. Over-fishing not only impacts the natural balance of oceans but also on the livelihoods of 7 million workers in the artisanal fisheries in West Africa. Further, West African consumers suffer from increasing prices on fish products.<sup>xx</sup>

The proposed transition to management systems based on fishing rights (Individual transferable quotas, ITQs) a system which leads states to allocate fishing rights to investors. This threatens to deepen inequalities resulting in conflict and vulnerability and a greater exploitation of the poorest.



### 3. Environmental Degradation

Today, zones for fisheries, forests, wetlands, pastures and woods are auctioned to wealthy entrepreneurs and private companies for commercial aquaculture, industrial plantations, mining concessions or timber operations. Local populations are suffering from the devastating effects caused by exploitations of minerals, by companies such as French AREVA in uranium exploitation in Niger, the national phosphate extraction company SNPT in Togo, operations by South African AngloGold Ashanti in Mali and Burkina Faso, or Russian RUSAL Bauxite mining in Guinea Conakry and UK-based Africa Mining in Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone and Liberia livelihoods of local communities are threatened by the spread of palm oil plantations of companies such as French investment giant Bolloré and its Luxembourgian subsidiary SOCFIN, Swiss company Addax Bioenergy and the Malaysian companies Sime Darby or Golden Veroleum.

**States must be held accountable; Churches are called to remind them on their duties towards the citizens!**

In Nigeria the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the ECOWAS Court of Justice have achieved a powerful success for the defense of people's rights to Food: In 2012 they condemned the Federal State of Nigeria to pay compensation for violating the Right to Food of the Ogoni people by failing to protect their land from environmental damage in the Niger delta.

Another great concern directly relates to the protection of God's creation: The push for patenting seeds and animal breeds by biotechnology companies endangers peoples' access and use of local farming resources today. When local farming communities lose their right to use local seeds their livelihoods are put at risk. They need to be protected by legal mechanisms. International donors promote so called Public Private Partnerships which allow multinational companies to gain access and impose regulations at their interests on African agricultures.<sup>xxii</sup>

### 5. Trade liberalization vs. Local Food

Churches are concerned that liberalization of trade with countries above the West African region will sensibly impact on West Africa's efforts to attain the realization the Right to Food. Of particular concern is the implementation of recently agreed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) between the European Union (EU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Trade liberalization agreements will result in public revenues losses. Hence it will sensibly decrease provision of public services, which remain primordial for building food security in West Africa.

**Churches fear: Trade liberalization favors export promotion at the expense of food production for domestic consumption.**

Vulnerable rural farming communities - especially women - are largely excluded from the production of export crops because of constraints on access to credit, extension services, technology and transport facilities, marketing channels, and vocational training. Subsistence crops such as millet are replaced by cash crops, which are traded away often leaving farmers in precarious conditions once lean seasons prevail to long. These concerns were also expressed by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on the Right to Food, who found that the privatization of government services had exacerbated food insecurity and undermined related human development since the 1980s.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Churches Promote Hunger Free Societies for sustainable Peace and Stability

West African Christian Councils and Churches initiated the Regional Food Security Campaign to foster engagements with governments, stakeholders and the masses advocating for food justice.

The goal: lasting peace and freedom; our collective efforts will bring down hunger and poverty to zero, this will reduce migration, premature death, create employment, and foster security, peace and stability.

Churches are taking action:

### God's admonition for Food Justice

Church leaders in sermons and pastoral letters transport messages for strengthening Solidarity, Food Justice and good stewardship for God's creation. Churches by setting up institutions and joint programs for awareness raising with agriculture ministers, parliamentarians and the public, show strong stance for the realization of the Right to Food.

Christian Councils in Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone with their joint national programs are leading the way forward:

**Nigeria:** The Christina Council of Nigeria and its Member Churches are actively advocating for food justice "Ecumenical Food Advocacy and Peace Building Programme"

**Liberia:** Under the guidance of eminent Church Leaders the Christian Council of Liberia has launched the "Anti-Hunger and Poverty campaign" in 2014.

**Sierra Leone:** "Feeding the Nation" is the goal of the advocacy program of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone. They advocate for better sanitary conditions in the markets and better government support for farmers and fishermen.

Churches along their diaconal mandate engage in supporting rural farming communities all over West Africa:

**Burkina Faso:** The Reformed Evangelical Churches of Burkina Faso pursue agricultural programs which aim at helping farmers to access much needed inputs: The purchase and distribution of state subsidized fertilizers to vulnerable groups'.

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**Benin:** The Protestant Methodist Church of Benin support income generation activities, such as poultry, honey and rabbit production in their congregations.

**Gambia:** The Methodist Mission of Gambia Agricultural Service (MMAS) provides farmers support by delivering wells and farming knowledge. They run a nutrition center and training for vulnerable communities in the North of the country.

**Ghana:** The Presbyterian Agricultural Services (PAS) engaged for example in the provision of stipends and participatory trainings to vulnerable farming communities in northern Ghana during the lean season.

**Liberia:** Churches in Liberia support school based gardening programs. The Apostolic Pentecostal Church with its Relief and Development Department spearheads churches' engagements for complementing national efforts to help rebuild personal and household economies e.g. through seed distribution to community agriculture groups, schools, orphanages.

**Niger:** The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger monitors government's compliance with the "3N Program": Nigeriens feed Nigeriens" ("les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens")

**Mali:** The Evangelical Church of Mali with its Nutrition Support Program for Women and Children delivers technical knowledge to set up cereal banks. In order to increase agricultural productivity, decrease vulnerability.

**Senegal:** The Protestant Church of Senegal by the provision of machines, such as cassava grinders or cooling facilities to fishing communities targets the reinforcement of women food producers.

**Togo:** Member Churches of the Assemblies of God and the Baptist Convention of Togo are engaged in community farming and marketing of organic soya production.

## References

<sup>i</sup> Excerpt from a theological reflection by Rev. Dr. Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, General Secretary of Christian Council of Ghana.

<sup>ii</sup> Extreme poverty generally is defined as average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence.

<sup>iii</sup> UNDP 2012: "Africa Human Development Report 2012 - Towards a Food Secure Future." p 21.

<sup>iv</sup> Most West African countries are far off track in reaching the 1990 Millennium Development Goal 1: Half poverty and hunger, Goal 4: Reduction of child mortality and Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health. See UN Economic Commission for Africa, Subregional Office West Africa (SRO-WA) 2012: « Rapport sur les Conditions Economiques et Sociales en Afrique de l'Ouest en 2010 et les Perspectives pour 2011: décennie de mise en oeuvre des OMD: performances et faiblesses. »

<sup>v</sup> General Comment No. 12, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

<sup>vi</sup> Article 25 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) from 1948.

<sup>vii</sup> The CESCR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966. It commits its parties to work towards the fulfillment of economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR).

<sup>viii</sup> For more country case studies see: Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2010: "Countries tackling hunger with a right to food approach. Significant progress in implementing the right to food at national scale in Africa, Latin America and South Asia".

<sup>ix</sup> For the implementation of the Right to Food the emerging legal framework places importance on two concepts the progressive implementation and voluntary guidelines. The 187 Member States of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) adopted the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security on 23 November 2004. The Guidelines are a set of recommendations on how to implement states' obligations under Article 11 of the ICESCR. Successively, on 11 May 2012, the FAO Committee for Food Security (CFS) endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.

<sup>x</sup> ECASARD/SNV Ghana, 2009: "Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP) Initiative and the Farmers Dream".

African Union, 2003: "Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, Maputo Mozambique", Assembly of African Union, Second Ordinary Session, Assembly / AU / Dec 1. 7 (II) <http://www.nepad.org/system/files/Maputo%20Declaration.pdf>.

<sup>xi</sup> ONE, 2013: "A Growing Opportunity: Measuring

Investments in African Agriculture".

<sup>xii</sup> "Transnational Land Deals for Agriculture in the Global South: Analytical Report based on the Land Matrix Database", 2012.

<sup>xiii</sup> Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2012: "Fisheries and the right to food", Report presented at the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly [A/67/268], at [www.srfood.org/en/fisheries](http://www.srfood.org/en/fisheries).

<sup>xiv</sup> Human Rights Impact Resource Centre, 2006: "Niger: Agricultural trade liberalization and women's rights".

<sup>xv</sup> FECCIWA Policy Brief 2011: "Land grabbing undermines food security in Africa."

<sup>xvi</sup> Buntzel et al 2012: "Large Scale Land Acquisitions in Liberia - Case Studies in the Palm Oil Sector and International Law".

<sup>xvii</sup> For the effective implication and protection of interests of local communities, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests suggest the establishment of legal mechanisms for good land tenure governance. Guideline No. 8 proposes the instauration of "Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)" for the effective implication of communities. State administrations and investors must be held accountable to implement and respect these guidelines.

<sup>xviii</sup> GRAIN 2012: "Squeezing Africa dry: behind every land grab is a water grab", at <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4516-squeezing-africa-dry-behind-every-land-grab-is-a-water-grab>.

<sup>xix</sup> Action Aid 2010: "Achieving MDG1 through smallholder investment", Page 6.

<sup>xx</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was signed by all ECOWAS members, provides regular country assessments of the slow progress in the recognition of women rights including their Right to Food.

<sup>xxi</sup> FECCIWA 2011: "Policy Brief on overfishing in West Africa", at [www.fecciwa.org/administrator/index2.php?option=com\\_joomdoc&section=documents&task=download&bid=56](http://www.fecciwa.org/administrator/index2.php?option=com_joomdoc&section=documents&task=download&bid=56).

<sup>xxii</sup> See for example of debates around the "plant Breeders Bill" in Ghana at <http://foodsovereigntyghana.org/executive-summary-of-our-concerns-on-the-plant-breeders-bill-to-parliamentary-select-committee/>

<sup>xxiii</sup> For further information: EAA/CISDE, 2013: "Whose Alliance? The G8 and the Emergence of a Global Corporate Regime for Agriculture" at <http://tinyurl.com/WhoseAlliance>.

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FECCIWA/ACCEAO  
General Coordination  
Coordination Générale



[www.fecciwa.org](http://www.fecciwa.org)

C/o All Africa Conference of Churches Regional Office  
1235 Rue de la Paix, B.P. 2268, Lomé, Togo  
Telephone (+228) 22 20 46 86, Mobile (+228) 90 86 98 29, Fax : (+228) 22 20 18 75  
E-mail : [foodcampaign@fecciwa.org](mailto:foodcampaign@fecciwa.org), web site: [www.fecciwa.org](http://www.fecciwa.org)

The Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA), in the name of the thirteen member countries advocates for better conditions that ensure sustainable access to sufficient and affordable food for all people. By the Prophetic Voice of churches, members raise awareness on political and social issues, which affect agricultural and rural development. FECCIWA uses its Network of Christian Councils to dialogue with policy makers and advocate for change in West Africa.