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**Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures**

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## 75<sup>TH</sup> REGULAR SESSION OF THE WTO SPS COMMITTEE

### COMMUNICATION BY THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES (ECCAS)

The following communication, dated 4 July 2019, is being circulated at the request of ECCAS.

#### 1 ROLE OF ECCAS IN THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

1.1. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) comprises 11 members: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. It is the only organization that shares its borders with all similar subregional institutions, which, together, constitute the main pillars of the African Union.

1.2. As regards the development of the agricultural sector, ECCAS is proceeding with the roll-out of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). It has already implemented the Common Agricultural Policy and its main offshoot, the Regional Agricultural Investment Programme for Food and Nutrition Security (PRIASAN) and related projects, as well as platforms of the stakeholders participating in the implementation of these initiatives. Such platforms include:

- the Regional Council for Agriculture, Food and Nutrition (CRAAN);
- CAADP country and regional teams;
- national and regional platforms for the development of the livestock sector;
- the Regional Platform of Farmers' Organizations in Central Africa (PROPAC).

1.3. It should be noted that, as part of this process, ECCAS receives technical assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the United States Department of Agriculture – Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Agency, the African Union – Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (CPI), the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD), and many other organizations that are involved in the development of the rural sector.

1.4. Several projects were carried out as part of the implementation of the CAADP, including:

- two phases of the Participation of African Nations in Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standard-setting Organizations (PANSPSO) project; and
- the African Veterinary Governance Programme (VET – GOV).

1.5. The PANSPSO project has allowed for the establishment of SPS committees in all ECCAS countries, including at the regional level.

1.6. In addition to the strengthening of veterinary services in the member States, the VET – GOV Programme, has allowed for the creation of the Central African Regional Animal Health Centre (RSA – AC).

1.7. The process to improve the institutional environment of and, in particular, to restructure, ECCAS, is under way, which will enable it to carry out its missions. Ultimately, this action will serve to:

- increase the quantity and improve the quality of the agricultural production of member countries;
- enable more active participation in the activities of standard-setting organizations;
- enhance inter- and intra-regional trade through the effective implementation of a continental free trade area;
- improve the collection of statistical information and the management of knowledge of the agricultural sector, and develop advocacy to promote this sector of activity.

## **2 ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL SPS COMMITTEE**

2.1. Since its creation, the Regional SPS Committee has established:

- a focal point on plant health; and
- a focal point on animal health.

2.2. A Codex Alimentarius focal point is needed to complete the core mechanism comprising the three sister organizations of the SPS Committee of the WTO, that is, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the OIE and Codex Alimentarius.

2.3. The functioning of the SPS Committee has been suspended due to the current restructuring of ECCAS.

2.4. However, it should be noted that several activities have been carried out since October 2018 and can be summarized as follows:

### **2.1 Activities of the focal point on plant health**

2.5. Activities were carried out to:

- resolve recurring institutional issues that had been dispersing energies and had been undermining the effectiveness of phytosanitary interventions in the subregion;
- control the fall armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*) following recommendations issued at the meeting in Kinshasa in July 2017;
- establish a consultation and coordination platform for phytosanitary questions from the national plant protection organizations in Central Africa, following recommendations issued during the regional workshop held on the matter in August 2018 in Douala in Cameroon;
- hold the first annual meeting of the Regional Taskforce of national plant protection organizations and partners in Central Africa from 18 to 20 June 2019 in Douala in Cameroon. These activities aimed to:
  - o allow for discussions on priority phytosanitary issues in countries and in the subregion;
  - o review the status of implementation of the action plan 2018-20 of the Taskforce and identify the priority actions to be undertaken;
  - o follow up on the process to attach the Taskforce to ECCAS;
  - o examine and discuss the SPS issues encountered in the countries in the context of trade in agricultural products.

2.6. The main recommendations issued during the first meeting of this Taskforce were as follows:

- to encourage the member States of ECCAS to take into consideration the commitments undertaken in Malabo when developing national and regional strategies to build phytosanitary capacity;
- to participate effectively in the development of regulations and in the work of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM);
- to grant the same level of importance to phytosanitary issues as public health issues;
- to build the capacity of the staff in national plant protection organizations with regard to monitoring, inspection, the diagnosis of harmful organisms, risk assessment and phytosanitary certification;

- to implement the obligations of the IPPC;
- to implement and operationalize the electronic phytosanitary certification system in each country; and
- to update, harmonize and validate phytosanitary laws and regulations.

## **2.2 Activities of the focal point on animal health**

2.7. The main activities carried out by the focal point on animal health involved:

- the implementation of a health monitoring system at the regional level to monitor the evolution of cross-border animal diseases, particularly avian flu;
- follow-up to the operationalization of the Regional Animal Health Centre of Central Africa through the signing of a headquarters agreement on 24 January 2019 in N'Djamena between ECCAS and Chad, which is the host country of the institution;
- participation in the mission to follow up on the OIE's Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) Pathway in Chad, which took place from 7 to 20 January 2019;
- follow-up to the process to build the capacity of food control laboratories and the Food Quality Control Centre (CECOQDA) based in N'Djamena in Chad;
- participation in the final stages of the development of the Regional Disease Surveillance Systems Enhancement (REDISSE4) Project for Central Africa, which will be financed by the World Bank.

## **3 PARTICIPATION OF ECCAS IN THE MEETINGS OF THE WTO SPS COMMITTEE**

3.1. ECCAS was unable to participate in the statutory meetings of the WTO SPS Committee, despite its observer status. This was due to the restructuring process which is under way and which hinders the proper conduct of its essential functions.

3.2. ECCAS therefore wishes to thank AU-IBAR for the opportunity to participate in the 75<sup>th</sup> regular session of the WTO SPS Committee, which will ensure that it will not lose its observer status and will enable it to resume regulatory activities.

## **4 OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION**

4.1. It is important to note the upcoming implementation of the Regional Project for the Promotion of Youth Entrepreneurship in Central Africa (PREJAC), which is structuring in nature and will allow for the strengthening of the organizational and operational structure of the SPS Regional Committee.

4.2. In the same vein, the launch of the REDISSE4 Project in the coming months will allow for the implementation and strengthening of the One Health Platform, and will bolster the activities of the SPS Regional Committee of ECCAS.

4.3. In April 2018, the ECCAS General Secretariat signed an agreement with the African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO).

4.4. The completion of the institutional reform which is under way in ECCAS, and which will strengthen the Department and Services responsible for agriculture, will certainly represent a new start for and will improve the functioning of the Regional SPS Committee.