



EUROPEAN REPORT  
ON **DEVELOPMENT**

# DEVELOPING A FUTURE OUT OF FRAGILITY

*Cambridge, United Kingdom, March 17th-18th 2009.*

## WORKSHOP: "FOOD CRISES AND THE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF THE AGRICULTURAL AND COMMODITY SECTOR IN FRAGILE COUNTRIES"

This workshop was the first of four important events organised by the European University Institute (EUI) to prepare the European Report on Development 2009 (ERD 2009).

### WHY A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE?

As Giorgia Giovannetti, the scientific director of the initiative, pointed out, the EU is one of the main donors, economic partners, and destinations of migration from developing countries, especially in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA). Moreover, as Françoise Moreau (European Commission) stressed, the ERD 2009 is part of a broader vision of the role that the EU can play in influencing the global debate on development.

### WHY A FOCUS ON FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT IN FRAGILE STATES?

During the workshop it was underlined that no guideline for development policies in situations of fragility can avoid considering two major issues: food security and agricultural development.

- **Most SSA fragile states are agriculture-based countries** and their development is strongly connected to the growth of the primary sector. Luca Alinovi (FAO) highlighted that agriculture-based livelihoods are a key feature of fragile States in SSA.
- Fragile SSA countries face **strong constraints in ensuring food security**. These countries are characterized by persistence food insecurity, high undernourishment rates and vulnerability to food crises and price shocks.
- **Fragility, food security and agriculture are strictly linked**. Alinovi observed that competition over land, water and pasture has acted as both a key driver and consequence of conflicts. Ajit Singh (Cambridge Univ.) et al., on the other hand, stressed that low public security might lead to low agricultural performances. Michiel Keyzer (Centre for World Food Studies) noted that leaders who cannot guarantee food security will not be respected, and hence lack the authority to tax for other, growth-oriented, purposes.

### IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

Firstly, as Giovannetti noted, SSA fragile States are among the largest recipients of food and humanitarian aid, but the recent economic crisis is likely to push policymakers to manage limited funds in a more efficient way, which, in turn, might imply a reconsideration of donors' priorities. Secondly, according to Donato Romano (Univ. of Florence), in certain situations of fragility, we have accumulated some knowledge of intervention practices and of local coping and adaptive strategies that can represent opportunities to be leveraged. Thirdly, findings by Alexander Sarris and George Rapsomanikis (FAO) suggest that the recent food price shock might not be a stand-alone event but a response to small shocks in evolving global food markets that gradually created a situation of tightly-balanced supply and demand.



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## KEY CHALLENGES.

Several speakers associated the analysis of the recent food crisis with the debate on agriculture policy paradigms, the evolution of the agriculture sector in SSA and explanations of the slowing rates of increase in SSA farm productivity. Their presentations discussed a number of factors behind vulnerability which limit the capacity of the agriculture sector to ensure food security and a stable income to farmers:

- the progressive worsening of the terms of trade and a low capacity of Africa's commodity sector to gain from increasing prices;
- an increasing dependence on food imports;
- low investment levels in agricultural R&D and in rural infrastructures ;
- the prevalence of an agriculture development paradigm which has failed to take into account local actors, practices, knowledge and institutions;
- a lack of insurance and safety nets;
- a lack of appropriate price signals and access to outlet markets;
- difficulty in regional integration ;
- difficulty in liberalisation of the agricultural sector at global level and obstacles to an export-led strategy in Africa LDCs;
- institutional problems: both public and private sectors tend to be extremely weak and might have neither the incentives nor sufficient trust to work together.

## HOW TO INTERVENE IN SITUATIONS OF FRAGILITY?

Around thirty policy practitioners, representatives from NGOs, academic institutions and international organizations in presentations, discussions and round table draw some implications on development policy in countries in situations of fragility:

- Local partners and institutions should be involved in defining and implementing responses to fragility, while the institutional and governance dimension of delivery assistance should be strengthened. This means that interventions need to be context-specific (based on knowledge of the role and functioning of local formal and informal institutions).
- Productivity and scaling up in value chains are key issues which must be addressed. African agriculture has the potential to be able to tap into the opportunity of globalisation but this implies a process of structural transformation pushed by institutional, infrastructural and technological reforms.
- External actions should combine both short- and long-term perspectives. This implies that humanitarian interventions should not be separated from agriculture development policies, and should not overlook or jeopardize the building or protection of local governance and legitimacy in food security responsibility.
- Trade can raise the standards of African products and provide incentives for scaling up. Nevertheless, at present these markets are too distorted and are far from being integrated into global markets; integration is an option which must be considered carefully: some speakers highlighted that an optimal degree of isolation protects households from shocks.
- The path to liberalisation is still tricky, but the elimination of domestic support to agriculture in developed countries is a sine-qua-non condition for the success of negotiations within the WTO.

For further information on the ERD 2009,  
please go to the ERD website:  
<http://erd.eui.eu>

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