



CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

The World Trade Organization and Food Security in West Africa Prospects for the ECOWAS Region

Godwin S. Ichimi

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Contemporary African Political Economy

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ISSN 2945-7351 ISSN 2945-736X (electronic)
Contemporary African Political Economy
ISBN 978-3-031-53880-3 ISBN 978-3-031-53881-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53881-0>

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FOREWORD

Food insecurity is perhaps the foremost survival and developmental challenge confronting Africa and the global south. A recent report referencing the unacceptably high number of people who have fallen into the hunger net globally indicates that the figures are still growing at an alarming rate.

This book foregrounds the nexus between trade, development, and food security as a point of departure for the ongoing discourse on the global food crisis. The character of trade which underpins global production, distribution, and consumption of food and other commodities is of crucial significance precisely because it defines the flow and direction of income, and, by extension, access to food and food production resources as well. In this regard, the book rightly focuses on the World Trade Organisation (WTO)—a major multilateral institutional trading arrangement that mediates the flows and ebbs of global commodity exchanges including food and agricultural commodities.

There is no gainsaying that, as one of the world's leading neoliberal institutions, the WTO gives vent to and compels its members at critical times to acquiesce to the hegemonic narrative according to which the competitive pressures of market forces are presented as necessary, inevitable, and progressive. Furthermore, the WTO binds together the different shades of the food (sub) systems that subsist along the broad spectrum of the global food economy, framing and legitimising those contradictions that trail the processes of this order. In effect, the WTO is

part of an international neoliberal food order with a concomitant diplomacy that frames and itself is framed by the exigencies and the realities of history, economic power, and other geostrategic considerations.

Under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and other regimes of the WTO, the major agricultural trade concerns of the West African region—limited access to the international market, the decline in commodity prices, as well as trade-distorting policies and protectionist measures in the developed countries—remain unaddressed. Other problematic areas are the rules on investment and intellectual property rights under the Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMS), and the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) that respectively appear to do little other than advance the liberalisation of capital whilst consolidating the grip of Transnational Corporations (TNCs) over agriculture as well as other commanding heights of the regional economy. Arguably, these are all implicated to a large extent in the production as well as the exacerbation of the conditions of food insecurity in West Africa.

This book's major salient point lies in its contention that overcoming food insecurity in West Africa requires a re-examination of the character of state intervention and, at the ECOWAS levels, a reorganisation of the bases for multilateral trading arrangements. I also concur with the author's position that a paradigm shift is a non-negotiable imperative. Agricultural policies must move away from the oligopolistic character of the neoliberal food order by which the industrialised economies of the Centre dominate and control the markets, prices, and resource inputs of the labor-intensive peasant economies of the West African sub-region. As important as the WTO is, it must muster the political will to address the trade issues that are at the root of the food crisis in West Africa and the global south.

I heartily commend this book to all those who, in official or unofficial capacities, are interested in addressing the perennial problems of hunger and general food insecurity in West Africa and beyond.

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PREFACE

This book focuses on *The World Trade Organisation and Food Security in West Africa*. It is cast against the background of the prevailing global food crisis which is generally accepted as having assumed monumental dimensions in sub-Saharan Africa where a total of over 150 million people are said to be under the direct threat of hunger and starvation. The study appraises the mainstream understanding of the root causes of the ongoing food crisis, the policies prescribed for their resolution as well as the efficacy of the neoliberal multilateral institutional frameworks from within which these policies are currently being deployed. The global and regional multilateral institutions of reference here are the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) respectively.

The study contends that the hegemonic narrative is severely limited; that the perspective which drives it suffers from some highly virulent blind-spots on the critical questions of history and the structural notions of power— notions which go to the very heart of the contemporary structuring of the global food system, and which, in the case of West Africa, is assuring the privileged access of some classes to food and food-producing resources whilst excluding the bulk of the class of the majority. Consequently, from a macro historical qualitative perspective, the study adopts and deploys an alternative conceptual framework from within which it appraises the regional agricultural and related trade policies of the member

states of the ECOWAS which were developed in response to the neoliberal regimes of the WTO.

With the reality of third world structural dependency as a point of departure, and situating this within the theoretical framework of Robert W. Cox and the tenets of Dependency theory, the study poses the question of whether and/or how, in the specific instance of West Africa, the framing of the region's food and agricultural policies, couched as they have been in conformity to the broader context of the regimes of the WTO, has resulted in the aggravation of insecurity in food production and consumption.

Pursuant to investigating this question, the study finds that as adherence by the member states of the ECOWAS to the rules of the WTO Agreements and the dictates of neoliberal economic agenda in general intensifies, regional food and agricultural development strategies of the region have invariably proven incapable of overcoming the logic of structural capitalist dependency. Rather, as the ECOWAP achieves coincidence with the regimes of the WTO, the exact material conditions that stymie the prospects for structural transformation of the agrarian economy in the West African region are being reinforced. The exacerbation of the associated problems of agricultural productivity decline, as well as the concomitant loss of household and national incomes is effectively putting even the food that is available both in the local and international markets well beyond the reach of the bulk of much of the people of West Africa.

Lagos, Nigeria

Godwin S. Ichimi

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAFP	Africa Agriculture Finance Project
ACP	African Caribbean and Pacific Countries
AoA	Agreement on Agriculture
AU	African Union
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARIFTA	Caribbean Free Trade Association
CEAO	Communaute Economique De L’afrique De L’Ouest
CEEAC	Communauté Économique des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale
CEPGL	Communaute Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs
CET	Common External Tariff
CIC	Common Investment Code
COMESA	Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa
ECOWAP	Common Agricultural Policy of the ECOWAS
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPAs	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariff and Trade
GCF	Gross Capital Formation
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LAFTA	Latin American Free Trade Association
LDCs	Less Developed countries
MTAs	Multilateral Trade Agreements

MWST	Modern World System Theory
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NIDL	New International Division of Labour
NPFS	National Programme on Food Security
ODA	Official Development Aid
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
RPFS	Regional Programme on Food Security
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SPFS	Special Programme on food Security
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary Standards
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
TRIMS	Trade Related Investment Measures
TRIPs	Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights
UDEAC	Union Douanière et Economique des Etats de l'Afrique Centrale
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UR	Uruguay Round
WACH	West African Clearing House
WCED	World Commission on Environmental Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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Introduction

The coming into existence of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after the Uruguay Rounds in 1995 produced a plethora of rules and regulation on the basis of which proceeded the liberalisation of global trade on an unprecedented scale. However unlike under the preceding General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) where agriculture was largely excluded from the contemplation of international regulation, the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) soon brought the agrifood sector within the full contemplation of the forces of the international market.

The AoA along with the corps of other WTO rules and regulations— Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, (TRIPS), Agreement on Trade-related Investment Measures (TRIMs), Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary, (SPS), etc.— produced a wide-ranging trading regime which, apart from agriculture, integrates and deals with such critically important areas as textiles and clothing, investments, industrial standards and product safety, food sanitation regulations, intellectual property, and much more WTO. These WTO rules dictate that operations of this multilateral trading system conform essentially to the principles and rules of non-discrimination, open access and fair competition.

Negotiations at the WTO are based on reciprocal bargaining. The problem for this research, first and foremost therefore pertains to the

determinants as well as implications of globally negotiated outcomes for the agrifood subsectors in West Africa. Suffice to say in this connection that these negotiations and agreements were reached whilst historical inequities and asymmetries in economic, political and military powers between and among nations were at unprecedented heights. This questions the cardinal perfect market assumptions underlining some of the fundamental neoliberal premises of the rules of the WTO which is that, given sufficiently competitive conditions, free trade would work as envisioned, dispensing qualitative growth and development.

The point about this particular research problem is the imperative to understand and expose how food policy outcomes are impacted upon by the reality of this asymmetry in the relative concentration of wealth and power between and among states and other competing actors. This asymmetry manifests in diverse forms including relative differentials in the control of capital and technology; in the control and access to better information, and of markets as well. All of these influence the outcome of institutional contestations in general; they impact on agriculture and the current quest to reform the rules on global trade in agriculture; and ultimately, they are germane to the discourse on the current food crisis in West Africa.

Multilateralism is the veritable mechanism for global governance in the contemporary era of neoliberal hegemony. As trade assumes increasing significance in the geo-strategic calculations of both the developed and developing countries, the principles of multilateralism also became the corner-stone of Multilateral Trading Arrangements (MTAs). In West Africa, as in the other regions of the continent, it is regarded as a veritable tool and strategy for the establishment of regional engines of growth and development in diverse socio-economic sectors. In specific reference to agriculture, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional organization, is actively pursuing an Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) which focuses on the realisation of regional food security whilst placing premium on the prospects which MTAs offer.

This study is persuaded that current MTAs are a significant facet of the mechanisms of global exchange relations. And in that wise operate as the constitutive framework which defines and facilitates the substantive engagement of the major social forces—both regional and global- which are embroiled in the contestation over the control and domination of the arena of accumulation. Following this the study problematizes the material conditions which MTAs engender and, to that extent, questions

the prospects they offer for the structural transformation of agrarian social formations in the West African region. This research problem in itself has conceptual ramifications which is inextricably historical.

As several politico-economic studies, particularly from the colonial era have revealed (See for example Ake, 1981; Ekekwe, 1986), their nebulous hold over the arena of accumulation makes the indigenous segments of the dominant class quite quiescent. The study is persuaded that as presently articulated by the political class in alliance with transnational classes, current regional integration schemes in West Africa reflect the neoliberal agenda which in the era of globalisation seeks to extend the arena of accumulation beyond the boundaries of the state. This rendition is not novel. Critical theorists continue to rehash it in varied ways especially within the notion of the internationalised state. Cox (1996) deploys perhaps one of the most popular versions of this concept. As valid and analytically useful as it is for this study however, the application of this notion to the West African context, fails to sufficiently historicise and foreground the fundamental issue of dependency.

Recent history reveals that the people of the Sahel in West and Central Africa were hit by an unusually severe series of droughts forty years ago. The scale of the subsequent tragedy was gigantic: over one hundred thousand human lives as well as millions of cattle and other livestock were lost in 1973 alone. Millions fled their homelands to refugee camps and urban areas (Glantz, 1976). This ecological disaster stirred intense controversy across the entire epistemic world as well as among the managers of public and private institutions at all levels. Nicolson (1986: 1) attempted to capture the plethora of rationalisations proffered thus:

Climatologists offered a variety of hypotheses – including changes in tropical winds, sea-surface temperatures, and global temperatures- to account for the observed variation in rainfall. Another hypothesis by J. G. Charney (1975) proposed that degradation of vegetation in this semi-arid region, perhaps caused by human activities, increases the capacity of dry ground to reflect solar radiation. The concept of desertification also became prominent, furthering the hypothesis that human intervention, perhaps more than climate, is turning these marginal lands into deserts.

Whilst the perennial search for causation continues, the unprecedented losses and sufferings as well as the social dislocations precipitated by this crisis lingered and combined over time with such factors as the neglect

of agriculture, policy failures and adverse external circumstances, notably, the two oil shocks in the 1970s, the recession in the OECD countries, and the increase in real interest rates. Dismal balance of payment deficits, chronic debts and the debilitating burden of debt servicing all added to an untoward macroeconomic situation constraining the capacity of states to meet the food requirements of their populations.

Since the 1970s, the disaster has persisted; making increasingly debilitating, albeit intermittent, foray into the livelihood of diverse communities in the region. The countries involved, as well as diverse stakeholders across the spectrum of national and international political economies, appear, from all intent and purpose, to have been expending considerable effort in the attempt to halt and even reverse the trend. Targeted food security interventions in sub-Saharan Africa and varied programmes and policies focus not just on the preservation of current income and food consumption but also on long term livelihood interventions that reduce vulnerability. Pursuant to this, contrived programmes have tended to be geographically specific in orientation, self-targeting in administrative terms and articulated to, among other things, support traditional community food security arrangements. So at the global level, for example, the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) purports to help to improve food security within poor households through National Programmes for Food Security (NPFS) and Regional Programmes for Food Security (RPFS).

These efforts notwithstanding, the food security situation in sub-Saharan Africa remains tenuous even as hunger stalks millions of people. The contemporary food crisis, though global, has in the case of Africa, assumed monumental and, some would say, distinctive dimensions over the years. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest proportion— one-third—of its people suffering from chronic hunger (FAO, 1998). In fourteen (14) countries in the region, 35 per cent or more of the population were chronically undernourished in 2001–2003. Hunger in sub-Saharan Africa is as persistent as it is widespread. Between 1990–1992 and 2001–2003, the number of undernourished people increased from 169 to 206 million, and only 15 of the 39 countries for which data are reported reduced the number of undernourished. A total of approximately 150 million Africans are reported to be under the direct threat of famine and malnutrition (FAO, 2007). The 2006–2008 global food shortages along with the astronomical increases in global food prices especially those of rice, wheat, and vegetable oils presented some of the most

palpable indicators of this reality. Between 2000 and 2006, world cereal demand rose by 8 per cent relative to price increases of 50 per cent, and even this doubled in early 2008 effectively putting food beyond the reach of so many. The attempt to bridge the gap between aggregate demand and supply via importation produced debilitating rise in the import bills which for the least developed countries (LDCs) rose by 37 per cent from 2007 to 2008, from \$17.9 million to \$24.6 million, after having risen by 30 per cent in 2006. According to a UN report:

The annual food import basket in LDCs cost more than three times that of 2000, not because of the increase volume of food imports, but as a result of rising food prices. (UN, 2009: 7–8)

By the logic of comparative advantage, countries ought to, in line with their resource endowments, specialise in the production of goods and services in which their output is maximised relative to the output of other counterparties engaged in the same production line. Evidence are adduced to support the conclusion that liberalised trade, proceeding according to the dictate of comparative advantage, is a veritable instrument for unleashing the requisite economic forces that enhance the potential for higher income and, by extension, development. It is argued that open, export oriented economies have been able to achieve higher and sustained level of development whilst closed economies have not (Brohman, 1996: 36).

Decades of assiduous adherence to such neoliberal prescriptions, however, has proven incapable of ameliorating the region's macro-economic malaise or reversing the crisis of the food sector in particular. On the contrary, as neoliberal globalisation intensifies over the past few decades, West Africa, along with the rest of the continent and the other parts of the global south, has been increasingly incapacitated by the most dismal, debilitating forms of the crisis of dependent capitalism.

What is most pertinent here is not just the increasing widening of the ambits of the rules of the WTO into areas which are crucially related to agro-food development - investments, intellectual property rights, tariffs, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, etc. It is the fact also that the extensive rules of the WTO have become the overarching context which mediates regional and extra-regional trading relations across the world. In the case of West Africa, they (WTO rules) frame not just the content and orientation of the current ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), but

equally important, that of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) which is being arrived at between the ECOWAS and the European Union (EU) under the auspices of the pact between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the EU.

Contested as they are, the relationship between trade, development and food security continue to remain the touch stone of the on-going discourse on the global food crisis. Amartya Sen's *Poverty and Famines* (1983), however intervenes meaningfully in the discourse by foregrounding the relationship between poverty and hunger. He identifies the underlining causes of hunger and famines as a function of 'entitlement' to food within a society characterised by profound socio-economic asymmetry. He argues that:

The importance of inter-group distributional issues rest not merely in the fact that an overall shortage may be very unequally shared by different groups, but also in the very recognition that some groups may suffer acute absolute deprivation even when there is no overall shortage. (ibid: 43–44)

From this perspective famines are seen as direct products of maldistribution of food resources within a country or from the inability of poorer segments of society to pay for food that is available in the local markets. Similarly, Christensen (1978) has argued in this connection that in market or quasi-market systems, the distribution of income and assets structures both food consumption patterns and food production systems.

The reality on ground would, at first glance, suggest that local food production and exchange relation are far removed from global production and marketing conditions such as are being framed under the prevailing WTO- regulated and open trade regimes. The reason for this is not far-fetched as it usually appears that in Africa as in much of the developing world:

... much cross-border trade is carried on (largely by women) 'informally' and outside of the policy disciplines of their governments, let alone the WTO. More significantly, two-thirds of 'formal' international trade takes place as intra-firm and inter-firm transactions (UNCTAD, 1995) outside of the 'open competitive' WTO defined trade parameters that ostensibly guide and characterise the new 'global' economy. (Keet, 2000: 7)

To leave the matter at this superficial level however ignores the profound ways in which the peasantry is structurally connected to

global trade networks through the intermediation of myriad comprador elements, state institutional agents and multilateral institutional arrangements. Through complicated marketing webs spawned by the interaction of diverse middlemen and women, brokers, state marketing boards, transnational agricultural produce-buying conglomerates, contract farming systems, etc., agricultural commodities find their way from the most remote of rural settlements in Africa into the mainstream of regional and global exchange relations.

Jones (2003) along with other critical scholars have already established the irrefutable connection between the local conditions of excruciating poverty and debilitating malnutrition in Africa and the routine operations of global economic forces. For Jones, to understand the condition under which Africa's rural poor toils, conditions which she describes as the "‘civilised’, modern horrors of over-work", it is imperative to appreciate that: 'the global constitution of capital provides the historic and conceptual contexts for any full contemporary analysis of rural poverty' (Jones, 2003: 41).

Food security depends on measures at the national, sub-national and individual household levels as much as on the practices and rules that guide exchange (or marketing) across international borders. In the context of this study however, this perspective is furthered by the premium being placed on current neoliberal MTAs precisely because, in themselves, the crucially important elements of global agrifood regimes which they engender are instrumental not just to the success or failure of national and/or regional food security efforts (SeEVERS, 1978; Konandreas, 2007) but to the structuring of the wider regional arena of capitalist accumulation.

There is a palpable acquiescence with the proposition that regimes of exchange, across the broad spectrum of the domestic and international levels, are key agents mediating the distribution and access to food entitlements. But in so doing, it is submitted also that, firstly, it is valid to locate neoliberal institutional arrangements like the WTO in the very vortex of the discourse on food insecurity. This point is significant for as Glipo has argued:

... the principal culprits implicated in the discourse on food security are those variables which link food issues with the dominant free trade paradigm and the related policies of absolute trade liberalisation, deregulation and privatization. (Glipo cited in Konandreas, 2007: 2)

And, even more important, secondly, that the syndromes of structural dependency is both exacerbated and entrenched on account of the neoliberal rules and regulation which the invasive regimes of the WTO enforces, regimes to which the framing of the food and agricultural policies of West African countries are being designed to reflect and conform with.

In the final analysis, the study finds that the regimes of the WTO are implicated in the production as well as the exacerbation of the conditions of food insecurity in West Africa. They privilege certain dominant classes' access to food and agro-food production resources, and they consign the countries of the region to rules which are inimical to agricultural growth and development, limiting their policy options to boost domestic production and opportunities in export markets even as past and present distortions in the developed market economies are legitimised.

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