

# Farming dynamics

**West African farmers' platforms and international solidarity organisations from the North** come together to influence ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly policies

The EU-ACP Parliamentary Assembly

A dynamic, collective and shared process

With concrete results

But also weaknesses and limitations

The ripple effect of lobbying at the JPA



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*Defending family farming is a core issue in JPA debates.*

Over the course of a three year campaign (2006-2008) called «Alimen-Terre», which was co-financed by the EU and coordinated by the CFSI1, SOS Faim and four West African farmer platforms (FP) developed a particularly close collaborative relationship. The FPs are the Confédération Paysanne du Faso (CPF), the Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes du Mali (CNOP), Plate-Forme Paysanne Nationale du Niger (PFPN), and the Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR), from Senegal. Through seminars, field visits and the sharing of experiences among international solidarity organisations from the North and farmers' representatives from the South, as well as of European agricultural organisations, common positions and proposals emerged to together defend family farming, both in the South and the North.

1: French Committee for International Solidarity



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Nadjirou Sall, FONGS General Secretary, Dao Bassiakha of the CPF (Burkina Faso), and Marie H el ene Aubert (D eput ee UE), at the JPA in Prague, 2009.

The participants involved identified the European Union (EU) - African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Parliamentary Assembly as a important and unifying target for Northern International Solidarity organisations and Southern FP to lobby jointly. Together they designated this new joint advocacy initiative 'the West African Process' (in French, 'la Dynamique Afrique de l'Ouest') or for short «the Process».

## The EU-ACP Parliamentary Assembly

### The EU-ACP Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), a body established in the Cotonou Agreement

The JPA was created by Article 17 of the Cotonou Agreement, which intends to build a comprehensive partnership between the EU and the ACP States, in the period 2000-2020, based on three pillars: development cooperation, trade and economic cooperation and a political dimension. The JPA is one of three official organs of the process whose primarily advisory role is to:

- ✔ promote democratic processes through dialogue and consultation;
- ✔ promote better understanding between the peoples of the European Union and the ACP States and raise public awareness of development issues;

- ✔ examine issues relating to development and the ACP-EU partnership;
- ✔ adopt resolutions and make recommendations to the Council of Ministers in order to achieve the objectives of the agreement.

The JPA is composed of an equal number of parliamentary representatives from the EU and the ACP countries; currently 78 members of the European Parliament are chosen in proportion to the number of elected representatives from each political group and 78 ACP members (one per country). It meets twice a year in plenary session for 3-4 days, alternating between the EU and an ACP State.<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with the rules it adopted, the JPA is composed of three standing committees: political affairs; economic, finance and trade development, social and environmental affairs.<sup>3</sup>

### A unique space for dialogue with ACP and EU parliamentarians

In accordance with the principles of the Cotonou Agreement, it was expected that the JPA should regularly be in contact with representatives of ACP-EU civil society to exchange views on the terms and status of the objectives of the Agreement (Article 28 of the internal rules of

2: To strengthen regional integration and foster cooperation between national parliaments, meetings between members of the EU and ACP parliamentarians can be organised at the regional level.

3: Each one meets at most four times a year (twice during the JPA and twice in between the 2 JPA sessions in Brussels).

the JPA).<sup>4</sup> Thus, for several years, the Confederation of European solidarity (CONCORD), took the opportunity to be this contact in the JPA, nurturing ACP and EU parliamentarians knowledge of and reflections on the major issues of EU-ACP (European Development Fund (EDF), the future of the Cotonou Agreement, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and so on), through «briefing papers» and «lunch debates». The first luncheon, in 2004, was co-organized by SOS FAIM and focussed on the issues of its 'Frozen Chicken' campaign. Other solidarity organisations and associations have been involved on a case by case basis in one or other JPA, but none have stayed the course over time.

In 2008, the stakeholders in *the Process* (as they themselves have named it), following a dialogue about their advocacy strategy, decided to target the JPA with farmers' demands shared by both farmers' organisations from the South and solidarity organisations in the North.

4: «The Assembly shall ensure that the ACP and EU states maintain regular contact and consultations with representatives of the ACP-EU economic and social spheres and other civil society actors in order to obtain their views on achieving the objectives of the partnership agreement. These civil society representatives may attend regional and subregional meetings and those of the standing committees and take part in workshops. The Bureau considers the terms of the invitations they are sent on a case-by-case basis.»

**Why the JPA?** The partner organisations in *the Process* were quick to understand that this was a particularly special body, whether it met in an ACP or EU country. Indeed, EU parliamentarians as well as ACP parliamentarians are more accessible, receptive, or even requiring of information, than they are at home in their home institutions. On site for several days and inevitably less distracted by daily demands, they are often quite open and available to talk to.

## A dynamic, collective and shared process...

### Ownership of the approach by partners on an equal footing

The advantage of this approach is undoubtedly in its ownership by the stakeholders in the South and North. This is not a North-South or South-North proposal, but an exchange between farmer leaders from the South and solidarity organisations from the North, which led to choosing the JPA in 2008.

## SOS Faim's role at various JPAs

**In April 2009, at the Prague JPA, the FPs discussed the food crisis, while the FAO announced the threshold of one billion people suffering from hunger.**

*In October 2009, at the regional West African JPA in Ouagadougou, the FPs presented their vision of what climate change meant for farmers in the South. They have continued the discussion in December 2009, at the Luanda JPA on the basis of a documentary film made during the Ouagadougou JPA.*

*In April 2010, at the Tenerife JPA, farmers' organisations discussed agriculture in terms of migration, a particularly worrying phenomenon for this Spanish island on close to Mauritania.*

*In December 2010, the Kinshasa JPA saw the FP focus their message around demands they wanted included in the emergency resolution on the food crisis.*

*At the Budapest JPA in April 2011, the FPs went back to the ACP-EU parliamentarians, in one-on-one meetings, to provide positive experiences of support for family farming, based on case studies in the different member countries of the Process.*

*... And in November, in Togo, the FPs will continue to advocate on behalf of family farming as a key to food security and sustainable development and solidarity. The specific topic will be identified soon, in conjunction with the Process participants, while keeping in mind the official agenda of the JPA.*



After an initial test participation in Prague, in April 2009, which resulted in a lunch debate held at the official JPA building on the theme «Ending the food crisis thanks to farmers», and which brought together more than 25 EU and ACP members and other assistants and participants, the JPA was unanimously confirmed as a strategic place to advocate in defence of family farming.

Subsequently, after each meeting, *Process* stakeholders share their assessment of the activities and approach, and - so far, at least - have always confirmed their interest in the JPA.

Whether it is the substance (what theme to address at each particular JPA?) or the form (what type of activity? Lunch debate, film screening, one-on-one exchanges, press releases, motions...), all the participants in the process set the framework for their involvement in each of these meetings.

Of course, the participants from the North, at this stage, have more funding for their lobbying efforts (with national or European funding). However, there is no reason that in the future that funding could not be applied for which is more south oriented (for example, Belgian Cooperation has «North-South Synergy» funds). This would provide a financial component to the egalitarian approach among participants from North and South. So far, this has not been done.

### An ongoing process

*The Process*, which has also deliberately not been formalised and institutionalised, is subject to change. To date, the group's composition has evolved and three additional national platforms have been included - those of Togo, Benin and Guinea Conakry, in addition to the four platforms mentioned above, as well as two international solidarity organisations, CFSI and the Flemish organisation, Vredeseilanden. The expansion of the group, as with its conception was carried out through transparent consultation and dialogue. The composition of *the Process* may change again in the future, if the stakeholders think it useful.

The role played by Belgian farmers' organisations in *the Process* is also noteworthy. On many occasions, SOS FAIM has invited Walloon agricultural leaders from the FUGEA (United Federation of breeder and farmer groups), or the UAW (Union of Walloon farmers) who were able to strengthen the relevance of the message that family farming is a vehicle for development and food security. The West African farmer leaders particularly appreciated the coming together with their «colleagues» in the North.



## With concrete results

### What precisely do the parliamentarians do at the JPA?

At the JPA, the EU-ACP parliamentarians debate in a plenary session topics related to EU-ACP relations, on the themes of cooperation, and economic or trade relations, and those with a political dimension. Some of these discussions are expected to lead to resolutions that are voted on by the JPA before being sent to other institutions (European Commission, European Council, European Parliament, Secretary of the ACP, ACP Ministers, and so on).

In addition, reports on various and varied issues are written jointly by an EU and an ACP parliamentarian to take stock of a key theme of EU-ACP relations (the impact of crises, climate change, budget support, effectiveness of aid, technology transfer, and so forth), which is then debated in the Standing Committees and brought together in a report adopted in the plenary session.

Similarly, the EU and ACP parliamentarians are invited, in accordance with a procedure clearly established in the JPA regulations, to address written and oral questions to the European Commission, which is present at the JPA and generally represented by the European Commissioner for Development, who responds in writing or orally to the questions that are asked on a regular basis. Parliamentarians also have a session in which to ask questions of the Council (made up of EU ministers), usually represented by the Prime Minister or the Minister for Development of the country holding the rotating presidency of the EU.

Among the main areas of activity of the JPA, also worthy of mention are the emergency resolutions, developed as the name indicates on urgent topics proposed by the Committees or the Bureau of the JPA (e.g. situation in the Ivory Coast in 2010 food crisis in 2008, situation in southern Sudan in 2011).

### Gradual integration of farmers' concerns

The whole strategy of the participants in *the Process* is to take advantage of the various official mechanisms of the JPA (debates, resolutions, reports, questions to the Commission or the Council, ...) and its informal ones (discussions in the halls, small informal meetings, lunch debates ...) to raise farmers' demands. Clearly, the





Lunch debate during the Luanda JPA on climate change, in 2009.

agenda of discussion topics or of themes of the report may be more or less relevant to advocating on behalf of the issue of family farming. Therefore, one line of approach is to lobby the JPA Bureau in order to influence the choice of these themes, which are decided upon at the Bureau and Committees meetings, such that these address the concerns of farmers' leaders. Thus the topic of debate in the Plenary of the JPA in Budapest on the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on ACP states was clearly it was not intended by chosen following the lobbying by *Process* participants who saw the impact of the CAP on agriculture in West Africa as a key issue for a forum such as the JPA. Unfortunately, the Bureau of the JPA did not intend that the plenary debate lead to a resolution with recommendations.

It is clear that family agriculture has figured very prominently over the last three years in discussions at the JPA and that lobbying by participants in the *Process* is partly responsible. Agriculture has undoubtedly risen up the development agenda as a result of the food crisis; however, bringing the agricultural

sector to the fore is not enough, it is essential that family farming gets the attention it merits. In this regard, the presence of West African farmers' leaders and their speeches, have without a doubt, supported the lobbying efforts to gain due recognition for agriculture at the JPA.

  
**Agriculture has undoubtedly risen up the development agenda as a result of the food crisis**  


### The creation of alliances within the JPA

European Parliament members of the EU-ACP Delegation have a four year term during which, at best, and depending on their motivation, they will participate in the two annual meetings of the JPA, and in their Committee's meetings and will volunteer to write reports ... We have seen some European parliamentarians particularly involved: the Belgian Louis Michel, co-chair of the JPA, and former European Commissioner for Development, who is wary of civil society, but is able to recognise its contributions and appreciate this initiative. Similarly, the Bulgarian Maryia Nedelcheva (EPP), the Spaniard Martinez Martinez (S&D), the German Michael Gali (EPP), and the Frenchman Michèle Rivasi (Greens), are just some of the

parliamentarians who believe in the JPA and in whom participants in *the Process* have been able to build trust to debate the issues of family farming. In addition, the Bureau members and assistants to the political groups, who serve beyond the political mandates of the parliamentarians, are proving to be strategic allies. Among the ACP members of the delegation, the rotation of parliamentarians is quite usual, which is not always beneficial. One notices, however, more stability in recent times in terms of some delegations. Thus, the representative of Mali, and Vice President of the Malian parliament Assarid Ag Imbarcawane, is undoubtedly one of the pillars of the Assembly. Around for many years, he speaks regularly, and is among those who propose resolutions. He is well known in Mali's CNOP, and even if he does not enjoy unanimous support amongst his parliamentary colleagues he is an essential person in the search for alliances within the ACP to raise the priorities of *the Process*. The Senegalese parliamentarian, Amadou Ciré Sall and the Burkinabe parliamentarian Achille Tapsoba (in attendance in 2009-2010) have also become allies of *the Process*.

Gradually over the various JPA, within the Assembly hall where discussions take place, but also in the corridors of the JPA, the breakfast room, or at the opening drink *the Process* participants have built a network of relationships with these people and won their trust.

## But also weaknesses and limitations

### Words, and more words ...

The JPA brings together parliamentarians from 105 countries (78 ACP and 27 European states), which is far from negligible in terms of geographic coverage. But the JPA is primarily a consultative body, which has not been given any decision making powers. It makes resolutions that are passed on to other bodies that have a real legislative power, but the fate that these decision-making bodies reserve for the JPA's resolutions are beyond its control. In this sense, the JPA can be seen as a forum, a place of exchanges but where nothing moves forward, and nothing concrete gets done and nothing palpable results. Some parliamentarians sometimes share this

negative and pessimistic vision of the institution. *The Process* participants are aware of this limitation; but accept it, given the other benefits that arise, among other things via the «ripple effect» (see below).

### An assembly that could falter and disappear

Another limitation is a decline in motivation and onset of fatigue amongst ACP parliamentarians, and lately also amongst EU parliamentarians. And participants in *the Process* noted less energy in proceedings within the JPA during the 21<sup>st</sup> session in Budapest. Note that the JPA, as an institution of the Cotonou Agreement, will disappear in 2020, upon the expiry of this agreement and will be taken over eventually by the EU-Africa partnership, which does not envisage an assembly of the same magnitude. In the meantime, in any case, the participants in *the Process* remain convinced of the value of this initiative because, above and beyond the JPA parliamentary members,

they are also addressing their own national and regional parliamentarians.



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## The ripple effect of lobbying at the JPA

### Farmers taken seriously at home

Participants in *the Process* from the South have repeatedly said: «*Since we started taking part in the JPA, when we meet these same members in our countries, we are now respected and listened to*». The fact that farmers' leaders attend meetings of this international body, outside their own country and in the presence of their partners in the North, happens to be proof of their credibility and has built confidence which further justifies the importance of the initiative, and reinforces the national advocacy efforts these platforms carry out independently of the JPA. The presence of farmers' leaders at the JPA confers on them an aura that has positive repercussions within their own national parliaments, although this is still difficult to measure in terms of national policy-making: all the farmers' leaders involved in *the Process* have experienced this and welcome this collateral benefit. At the same time, the experience helps to build capacity and expertise in terms of advocacy.

## The emergency resolution adopted in December 2010 on food security



West African farmers' leaders, at the Kinshasa JPA, 2010.

**Two months before the JPA in December 2010 in Kinshasa, the farmers' platforms, having learned of the JPA's intention to adopt an emergency resolution on «food security» in Kinshasa, decided to adopt a common position on this issue.**

This position was communicated to certain parliamentarians, before the Kinshasa JPA. And the day before the official opening of the JPA in Kinshasa, it has been widely disseminated through personal contact with African and European parliamentarians and their assistants. Having learned that a proposal for consensus on the resolution would be built based upon the ACP position as formulated by Assarid, the farmers' proposals were incorporated into the ACP position and a new document circulated. A very important debate ensued in the committee responsible for drafting the resolution on introducing the

concept of «food sovereignty», which is such a priority to the FPs. The consensus position was to adopt the definition of food sovereignty proposed by the platforms without adopting the term itself. In the end, the participants in the Process were extremely satisfied with the text of the resolution which adopted its key proposals: priority given to supporting family farming in the struggle for food security and recognition of the need to increase investment both from the ACP countries and from European donors; the vital right to food should be regarded as inalienable and universal, as should the right of each country or region to determine its agricultural policy in order to cover the food needs of its population; recognition of the negative impact on food security of massive sales of agricultural land to private interests outside the countries concerned; denunciation of speculative activities in food procurement and so forth.

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### A bond that unites and is productive beyond the JPA

Similarly, beyond the unifying work that the JPA constitutes for the participants in *the Process*, they have collaborated on studies (mid-term review of the 9<sup>th</sup> EDF) or supported the activities of Process participants in their home countries to reinforce the legitimacy of their advocacy and strengthen *the Process* itself (participation of *the Process* stakeholders in the Farmer Days event in Niamey, in 2009).

The JPA also allows ad hoc lobbying of other interesting parties present on the occasion of the JPA. In April 2011, in Budapest *the Process* participants met Mohammed Ibn Chambas, formerly Chairman of ECOWAS and now Secretary General of the ACP group in Brussels. Devoid of political decision-making power, his personality and diplomatic influence is such that he is a key figure in the evolution of EU-ACP relations. He was asked by the FPs to assist in developing a briefing for ACP parliamentarians, prior to the JPA.

## Conclusion

At the heart of the problem of hunger and poverty is a lack of political will, partly caused by a political participants' low level of knowledge and information regarding rural development issues.

As family farming should be a lever for sustainable development in poor countries where the majority of the population depends on agriculture, lobbying by participants in *the Process* within the JPA to take better account of family farming is an initiative that makes perfect sense for farmers' organisations from the South and solidarity organisations from the North, all of whom are participants this *Process*.

**This issue of Farming Dynamics was written by Virginia Pissoort, Food Sovereignty campaign manager, SOS FAIM Belgium.**

## SOS Faim and the farmers' organisations

For several years, SOS Faim supports different farmers' organisations in Africa and Latin America. SOS Faim publishes *Farming Dynamics* which deals with the challenges faced by agricultural producers' and farmers' organisations in their development.

This publication is available for download in French, English and Spanish on SOS Faim's website: [www.sosfaim.org](http://www.sosfaim.org).

Apart from *Farming Dynamics*, SOS Faim publishes another newsletter, **Zoom microfinance**: as with all development tools, we have to analyse the aims, models and implementation conditions of aid to microfinance institutions. It is with this purpose in mind that Sos Faim publishes *Zoom microfinance*.

This publication is also available for download in French, English and Spanish on SOS Faim's website: [www.sosfaim.org](http://www.sosfaim.org).

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