



### West Africa's Agricultural Policy: What Outcome After Ten Years?

*In January 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a regional agricultural policy: ECOWAP. Ten years later, where are we in regard to this ambitious policy that aimed to improve food security, and economic and social development, and reduce poverty and inequalities throughout the region? What programmes and systems have been set up? Have they been able to attain their targets? This Brief addresses these questions. It was written following the ten-year ECOWAP assessment process conducted by ECOWAS in 2015. The first section reviews the ambition of ECOWAP's initial objectives. The second section reports on the implementation of this policy. The third section highlights certain elements of its results and points of discussion.*

#### I. Initial Principles and Objectives: An Ambitious Policy

**Strong integration and food sovereignty as a target.** ECOWAS's agricultural policy (ECOWAP) was adopted in January 2005 in Accra (Ghana). The elaboration of this policy mobilised the stakeholders concerned (States, farmers' organisations, regional institutions, etc.) who reflected on and discussed four scenarios, varying the degree of regional integration and the level of trade protection applied to regional production. They opted for strong regional integration and 'differential' (that is to say relatively higher than for other goods) protection of agricultural products. This participatory approach—something new in the region—made it possible to build a shared vision of the region's agricultural and food stakes.

**Family farms are central.** The document adopting ECOWAP asserts that the 'agricultural policy is set within the perspective of a modern and sustainable agriculture based on effective and efficient family farms and the promotion of agricultural enterprises through the involvement of the private sector.' This vision, which acknowledges the effectiveness and efficiency of family farms, was an important advance in 2005.

**Ambitious objectives.** ECOWAP aims to 'contribute in a sustainable manner to satisfying the food needs of the population, to economic and social development and to poverty reduction in member States as well as address inequalities between territories, areas and countries.' This overall objective is broken down into seven specific objectives, ranging from population's food security (in a food sovereignty approach) to farms'

market integration, and involving job creation, production intensification, economic vulnerability reduction, and even the elaboration of agricultural finance mechanisms. Three axes of intervention were chosen in 2005: increasing the productivity and competitiveness of West African agriculture; implementing a trade regime within West Africa; and adopting a trade regime vis-à-vis countries outside the region.

**National and regional plans.** Concretely, ECOWAP was transcribed into 15 national agricultural investment plans that address States' priorities, and a regional agricultural investment plan, the objective of which is to manage the interdependencies between national agricultural systems, address regional-scale constraints (according to the subsidiarity principle), pool certain services, strengthen inter-State cooperation, and manage the relationship with the global market.

**Organise stakeholders and federate initiatives.** Fundamentally, ECOWAP aims to be a federating framework for initiatives and stakeholders in the region. On the regional level, ECOWAS mandates cooperation organisations to implement ECOWAP based on their distinctive competencies. For example, CILSS is the mandated technical institution for information and decision-making assistance on food security, natural resource management and anti-desertification efforts, CORAF supports and coordinates agricultural research and knowledge management, etc.

### CAADP, NAIPs, RAIP, Maputo Commitments: What are they?

In July 2001, the African Union adopted the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development' (NEPAD), the objective of which is to provide an overall framework for the economic cooperation and integration of African countries. Adopted in July 2003 in Maputo, the **Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)** is the agricultural component of NEPAD. In 2002, the African Union mandated ECOWAS to coordinate and monitor implementation of the CAADP in West Africa. Since then, the ECOWAP and CAADP processes have been linked. ECOWAP/CAADP implementation relies on two levels of intervention: national and regional, with the definition of **national and regional agricultural investment plans (NAIPs and the RAIP)**. These Plans include the objectives of ECOWAP and the CAADP. They notably aim to provide a numerical translation of the different agricultural development options to implement to attain annual growth of 6% in the agricultural sector (which was supposed to allow poverty to be cut in half between 2005 and 2015). In the framework of their NAIPs, States have **pledged, in line with the 2003 Maputo Declaration**, to devote at least 10% of their budgets to agriculture.

## II. What Path Has ECOWAP Taken from 2005 to 2015?

### A. 2005 – 2008: some technical advances

**A slow start.** After ECOWAP was adopted, a first action plan was set for the 2006-2010 period on the regional scale. It aimed to design and set up the institutional arrangements, financial mechanism and monitoring-and-evaluation system. It also aimed to initiate the first priority actions while integrating already existing programmes. In countries, this 2005-2008 phase seems to have had few tangible results.

**Regulatory harmonisation.** Several regulations were drawn up and adopted during this period, usually jointly

with WAEMU. In 2008, these were regulations on quality control harmonisation, the certification and marketing of seeds, and the harmonisation of pesticide approval rules. These regulations—which are binding on countries—aim to promote a conducive environment for the sector and make the market more fluid. Other regulations followed in 2010: on fertiliser quality control, the harmonisation of health and safety rules for livestock, plants and foodstuffs, veterinary drug management procedures, and even the creation of a Regional Veterinary Committee.

### B. Renewed Mobilisation Following the 2008 Crisis

**A will to speed up ECOWAP.** The 2008 food crisis was an awakening to the need to put agriculture and food security back at the heart of the national and regional agenda. It was also the opportunity for the region to confirm the relevance of ECOWAP, while setting priorities to speed up its implementation. The regional offensive for food production and the fight against hunger, adopted in June 2008, then set three priority axes: (i) the promotion of strategic food value chains for food sovereignty; (ii) the promotion of an overall environment conducive to regional agricultural development; and (iii) the reduction of food vulnerability and the promotion of stable and sustainable access to food.

**ECOWAP, a 'framework' for agricultural interventions.** In November 2009, a conference was held on financing agriculture in West Africa. At its conclusion, the main agricultural development stakeholders in the region signed a pact making ECOWAP the framework of reference for interventions in the agricultural sector. Donors pledged to increase and harmonise their funding for ECOWAP. The 'business meeting' aiming to mobilise financing to implement the first Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (2010-2015), was held in June 2010. RAIP financing was estimated at 900 million dollars, of which ECOWAS pledged to contribute 150. At the end of 2015, the technical and financial partners report having contributed 300 to 350 million dollars. Because of the food

and health crises that affected the region, ECOWAS has for its part been unable to liberate the funding initially planned.

**The launch of regional programmes.** Between 2010 and 2015, several programmes were developed on the various axes of the RAIP. Nearly 52 projects or programmes are underway (the main ones are listed in the box below).

**The launch of national programmes.** On the national level, the NAIPs were drawn up in 2009 and 2010. They list agricultural sector financing needs over 4 - to 5 - year periods in a relatively standardised format. The displayed ambition is to channel and steer financing towards the value chains or areas seen as priorities by each country. Like the monitoring-and-assessment systems, these NAIPs are little operational overall; it is not currently possible to know with precision their degree of execution. In any case, they have made it possible to increase the financing allocated to the agricultural sector, although no country has attained the threshold of 10% of the national budget announced in Maputo in 2003. States have thus mobilised more than two billion dollars of additional funding (from external and internal sources) to finance the NAIPs since 2010. Some limitations have nevertheless been expressed regarding these NAIPs. First, they ignore certain important stakes, such as farmers' access to financing or land. They take into little account policy instruments (grants, price regulation, etc.) and other policies (trade, agrifood,

industry, training, etc.). Next, they rarely provide a hierarchy of priorities, which in some cases can lead to investment programming that is out of scale with

available resources. Côte d'Ivoire, for example, estimated the cost of executing its NAIP at 2,000 billion CFA francs (more than 3.8 billion dollars).

### **Main Regional Programmes**

Initiatives were launched to intensify production systems, such as setting up a **Seed Alliance** in collaboration with CORAF (USAID support) and the **strategy to promote fertiliser use** in collaboration with IFDC. **Sectoral action plans** were drawn up to tackle challenges downstream from production. They dealt with the **fisheries and aquaculture, livestock, rice cropping and village poultry rearing** sectors. These plans generally integrate management of shared resources on the regional level and the economic organisation of the value chains. To improve farmers' economic, trade, institutional and financial environment, a **regional agricultural information system (ECOAGRIS)** was launched in all ECOWAS countries plus Chad and Mauritania. In the area of market regulation for agricultural products, the Commission is supporting the **institutional development of certain inter-branch organisations**, such as the West African Grain Network. It is also steering the development of value chains on the regional scale for certain products that are traded heavily between Sahelian and coastal countries (the USAID-supported **ATP/EATP programme**). **Market regulation support programmes (PARMAO)** and programmes to **facilitate the free circulation of agricultural products (PrOFAB)** also aim to contribute to the regulation of the regional agricultural product market. Finally, several food security initiatives have been launched, such as the adoption of the **Charter for Food Crisis Prevention and Management**, the **AGIR Alliance** (initially carried by the European Union and entrusted to ECOWAS), and the establishment of a **Regional Food Security Reserve** whose first physical stock should be set up in 2016.

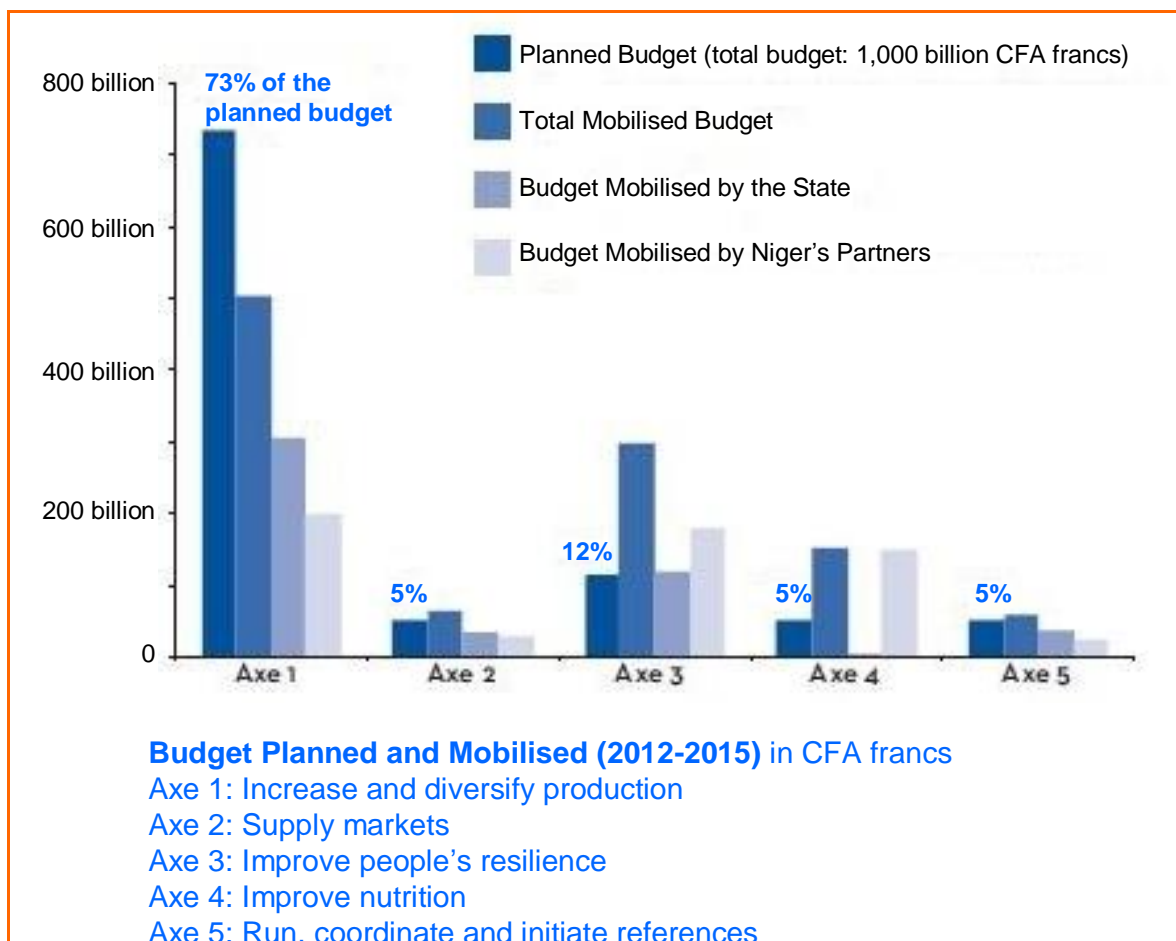
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**Incomplete set up of the institutional scheme.** Several bodies have been set up to facilitate ECOWAP implementation. A Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food was created in 2011 and housed within the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development in Lomé to receive financing destined to implement the RAIP. However, this fund is not yet functional. Until it is, ECOWAP implementation relies on specific arrangements for each programme, which slows the process and makes it more complex. A Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) was also created in 2010 to steer implementation of the RAIP. It has been operating since 2013. A 'Consultative Committee for Agriculture and Food' representing member States, professional organisations, regional cooperation bodies and the technical and financial partners was also created: it is to be consulted for all questions related to ECOWAP implementation. The Inter-Departmental Committee for Agriculture and Food, in charge of studying issues that involve several departments of the ECOWAS Commission and are seen as strategic for trade and fiscal issues, is not yet functional at its intended level. A group of technical and financial partners was set up (ECOWAP Group). Finally, the Food Crisis Prevention Network is a food crisis watch, prevention and management system that meets regularly.

### **III. What Successes, Difficulties and Debates After a Decade of ECOWAP?**

Analysis of the outcome is limited by several factors. ECOWAP was adopted in 2005, and the significant programmes were implemented starting in 2009. It is therefore too early to measure its impacts on regional agricultural performance, particularly as there are currently no monitoring-and-assessment systems able to estimate the advancement and impact of the NAIPs and the RAIP. In addition, there are a multitude of other agricultural and food programmes in the region,

which do not fall under the ECOWAP framework. It is difficult to determine ECOWAP's contribution to the dynamics underway with precision. This section therefore seeks to identify the shifts that have taken place in the region as regards the targets that ECOWAP set without however taking a stand on ECOWAP's precise role in these shifts. It also identifies a certain number of points of discussion.



**Example: Planned and Mobilised Budget in Niger's NAIP in 2013**  
 Source: Grain de Sel No. 59-62, based on Niger's presentation during the workshop on NAIP advancement status (June 2013, Ouagadougou)

### A. How Much Have Production and Productivity Increased?

**Increased production of several strategic products.** Agricultural production, notably cereal production, has increased in the region. Cereal production increased by 59% between 2000 and 2012. The largest increases were in rice (+98%) and maize (+130%). A significant increase has also been recorded for livestock and poultry (+48% for cattle and small ruminants, +85% for poultry, and +59% for pigs). Other value chains such as the dairy industry and fishery products for instance, however, are struggling to follow this trend.

**Little improvement in yields.** Despite the aim of intensification, the rise in production volumes is mostly due to increases in the amount of land under cultivation and herd sizes. Only rice and maize seem to be exceptions. Between 2000 and 2010, 71% of the increase in paddy rice

production can be attributed to higher yields (2.9% annual growth over the period).

**Supply outstripped by demand.** The pace of production growth is, what is more, struggling to keep up with the increase in demand. Thus, dependency in food imports has risen considerably in recent years, notably for certain staple products such as cereals, milk and meat. The region's agrifood trade balance, which was in the black when ECOWAP was adopted, recorded a shortfall of approximately 3 billion dollars over the 2008-2011 period under the dual effect of increased volumes and import prices.

### B. How Has Intra-Community Trade Improved?

**Regional trade on the rise.** Although not well documented, trade is said to have increased in recent years among countries in the region. With an average commercial value of more than 200 billion CFA francs, cattle tops the list of agro-pastoral regional trade. Nigeria, the zone's main producer and consumer, followed by Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, concentrate a large share of agricultural trade.

**Strategies above all national.** Despite these

changes, there are still many barriers to the agricultural and food trade (taxes, border red tape and hassles, different standards, etc.) that hamper the integration dynamic. More fundamentally, most NAIPs are built on visions that favour the national space and take regional complementarities into little account. In the livestock sector, for example, all the coastal countries—who currently buy from the major livestock countries in the Sahel—display national self-sufficiency targets.



### C. How Has Food Security Improved?

**Food security improved.** The calorie supply per capita has greatly improved in West Africa, in most countries exceeding the threshold of 2,500 kilocalories per capita per day. The rate of undernourishment has dropped, falling from 16% to 7.5% in Benin, from 40% to 22% in Sierra Leone, from 26% to 21% in Burkina Faso, and from 23% to 10% in Senegal between 2005 and 2015 for example.

**A still-critical situation.** Despite this progress, food and nutrition insecurity remains particularly high in

### D. What recognition for family farms?

**Progress for family farmers and herders.** The large networks of family farmers' (ROPPA) and herders' (APSS and RBM) organisations confirm that their positions are better heard today in regional debates, making it possible to keep the attention on family farming whereas many States are tempted by a model focusing more on agribusiness. Herders and pastoralists are better recognised and their rights are better taken into account in land law, at least on paper. A 'cattle feed' component was also included in regional reserves in response to advocacy by herders' networks. In countries, the participation of farmers' organisations is more diverse.

**An ambiguous position between agribusiness and family farming.** ECOWAP's vision counted primarily on modernising family farming, but it did not exclude other forms of private sector investment. In countries, this vision is sometimes controversial. Often, NAIPs see family farms in the framework of social

management of the sector (lessen poverty among rural households, increase their food security and capacity to overcome shocks) whereas technico-economic performance (supply markets and export) is expected of agricultural businesses. This has consequences for concrete investment choices, land policy, farmer financing strategy and even value chain structuring.

**Little investment for family farming.** According to a study by ROPPA, APSS and RBM, 20% of the credit allocated to economic sectors goes to agriculture, of which only 2% to family farms. Similarly, based on IFPRI data for Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso, Oxfam notes that most countries' agricultural budgets are devoted to a limited number of programmes focusing mainly on large farms. In the area of livestock, several governments opt to support semi-intensive periurban operations to the detriment of pastoral and agro-pastoral systems.

**Too little protection?** According to farmers' organisations, this rate is too low to allow local value chains to develop. FOs had, what is more, requested a rate of 50%. Above all, several key products have not been placed in this fifth tariff band, notably rice (10%) and milk powder (5%). For example, China (65%), India (70%-80%) and East African countries (75%) apply higher tariffs to rice. The ECOWAS States justify this decision by the need to meet demand from consumers, but inexpensive imported products (half the price for milk) compete heavily with local value chains.

### E. The External Trade Regime's Adoption Conditions

**'Differential' protection of agricultural products.** ECOWAP initially came out in favour of higher protection of agriculture than of other economic sectors. The 15 countries' common external tariff, which came into force in 2015, has a fifth tariff band with customs duties at 35%, in which most agricultural products have been placed. It also offers the possibility of setting safeguard measures for agricultural products recognised as highly strategic and exposed to outside threats and allows countries to justify the application of specific customs duties to products recognised as highly sensitive.

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### F. What Capacity to Federate Agricultural Initiatives?

**A lack of convergence between regional organisations.** Coordination between ECOWAS and WAEMU has made progress in the area of agriculture. Common regulations have been adopted, notably harmonising standards. Nevertheless, there is still some overlap and even competition between regional organisations. WAEMU's agricultural policy is still implemented through specific programmes on subjects equivalent to those covered by ECOWAP. What is more, in 2014, WAEMU, under the influence of the FAO that is nonetheless a major player in ECOWAP, adopted a ten-

year Community Programme to transform agriculture for food and nutrition security that calls for a 'paradigm shift' after noting the failure of past approaches (including the NAIPs). In addition, some institutions, whose leadership and procedures are deemed less constraining by donors, are on the rise again. This is the case with CILSS, which is implementing a growing share of regional-scope programmes and projects. Some are implemented by the ECOWAS Commission's delegation but others have barely involved ECOWAS bodies in their design.

**Limited alignment by donors.** For their part, the financial partners have come together around an ECOWAP donors' group. Efforts to map their interventions have been undertaken. However, this group is struggling to play its federating role. The World Bank, African Development Bank and Chinese overseas aid, for example, attend few of this group's meetings. The mapping exercise is difficult because donors' actions generally cover some ECOWAS countries, one or another aspect of a RIAP programme, and different timescales. Some donors confuse a 'regional approach' with the sum of different interventions conducted over several countries. Nearly 90% of programmes identified in 2013 did not specify to which RAIP targets they could be assigned. In these conditions, the ECOWAS Commission and the RAAF are unable to coordinate the ensemble of projects, some of which are furthermore little aligned with ECOWAP's orientations. Some financial partners are even reluctant to entrust ECOWAS with implementing programmes, which are in practice undertaken outside the RAAF.

**NAIP steering difficulties.** All these limitations are also found within countries. The effort to map donors' activities has sometimes been attempted but runs up against the same difficulties, and single windows pooling all resources are far from having been set up. The NAIPs also struggle to be the steering hub for agricultural policies. In several countries, the direction of disbursements does not necessarily follow initially identified needs. In some countries, there are parallel initiatives, such as in Senegal where the NAIP sits alongside another national document, the Programme for Accelerated Agricultural Development (PRACAS), that gives a

different order of priority for value chains than the one given in the pre-existing NAIP.

**The multiplication of parallel initiatives.** Finally, many initiatives continue to be driven by donors and international organisations: the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) initially launched by the European Union, the World Bank's 'Sahel Strategy', the Scaling Up Nutrition movement and even the Aquila Food Security Initiative, etc. These initiatives claim to want to align with local policies, but they often tend to lead the region away from its initial priorities and the principles of coordination and alignment. Indeed, their activities (accompanied by financial support) 'force' the ECOWAS Commission to incorporate them in the ECOWAP dynamic, which requires additional coordination efforts that no partners are inclined to finance.

**Financial and policy weaknesses.** Several factors can explain these difficulties. The lack of monitoring-and-assessment for actions and the weaknesses in activity maps limit the possibility of coordinating and redirecting activities and funding. In addition, ECOWAS has not fulfilled its financial pledges regarding the agricultural and food sector because it has had to face other safety and health priorities. Thus, the regional fund has not yet been filled. Deprived of this financial investment, ECOWAS has lost some of its capacity to pull partners along. In some countries, the NAIPs are still technical documents that do not have all the necessary political weight: the Ministries concerned are invited to sit on NAIP steering bodies but often send representatives who do not have decision-making powers.

## Conclusion

**Institutions under construction.** What conclusions can we draw about the first ten years of implementation of the West African regional agricultural policy? While regulatory aspects have made considerable progress, incentive-based public policy instruments (intensification support, market regulation, promotion of safety nets, etc.) have turned out to take much longer to implement. The weakness of regional and national institutions undoubtedly explains these difficulties in part. The Directorate of Agriculture, the Environment and Water Resources has a staff of approximately 40 people in three divisions. As a comparison, the European Commission's Department of Agriculture alone is divided into 13 divisions subdivided into 54 units employing a total of 1,200 civil servants—a sign of the priority given to the agricultural sector.

**National sovereignty.** The process's slow pace and difficulties also serve as a reminder that West Africa contains strong geographic disparities that, while they do form complementarities that justify regional integration, also hinder this integration. Between coastal and Sahelian countries, between

the Nigerian giant and smaller countries, diverging interests do not always facilitate a common policy. Next, given the high health and safety risks in the region, governments still rarely see the regional space as reassuring and a factor in development. This makes it all the more difficult for them to renounce their national sovereignty in such a sensitive area.

**Reassert the policy vision.** Despite the slowness of the process, farmers' organisations continue to express their commitment to ECOWAP and demand that it be the federating framework for agricultural and food initiatives in the region. This commitment is undoubtedly largely linked to the truly participatory process that led to ECOWAP's elaboration and the strong policy vision expressed in 2005. Along the way, technical aspects seem to have won out over the policy vision. To advance in the coming years, this vision will undoubtedly need to be reaffirmed, fine tuned and given roots, going beyond declarations of intent. This will require regional organisations to clarify their respective mandates and, with donors' participation, give

RAAF and the Regional Fund their full strength. For governments, this will require clarifying those areas over which they wish to keep control and those over which they are ready to give up some of their sovereignty in order to better fit together in the regional space. More than a policy, ECOWAP is a process of agricultural transformation and interplay among stakeholders.

During the **Global Forum 'Review of Achievements of ECOWAP+10 and 2025 Outlook'** held in Dakar in November 2015, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to ECOWAP while insisting on the need to take more fully into account certain aspects, such as youths, livestock, rice and value chains. They insisted on the need for cooperation between countries on shared value chains.

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