AFRICAN ORGANIC PRODUCT AND THE EU:  
STATUS, REQUIREMENTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND AU-EU  
INITIATIVES  


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Introduction: the agricultural challenge

Agriculture is the first economic sector in sub-Saharan Africa, on which 60% of the population depend for their livelihoods. It is also a sector under pressure from degradation of natural resources, long-term underinvestment, and high levels of expectation. With the benchmark figure of a 70% increase in production needed to feed a global population of 9.3 billion by 2050 it is clear that a heavy responsibility lies on African agriculture.

Agricultural systems must meet three primary challenges: to produce enough food and deliver it through distribution chains to the people; to create wealth in particular higher incomes for smallholders; and to conserve natural resources in order not to compromise future production capacity. In considering these challenges, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the right to food has underlined the need to adopt agro-ecological systems that utilise natural processes, traditional knowledge, and techniques, varieties and breeds that are adapted to the local environment.

Organic farming meets many of the criteria of agro-ecological systems and has the particular advantage of production standards around which producer groups, extension services, and support systems can be built. It also yields a clearly identified product that can be marketed on the basis of the agricultural methods used. The challenges to the widespread development of organic farming in Africa are considerable, but it has potential to significantly contribute to increased production, higher incomes, and conservation of natural resources.

1 Responsibility for the text rests solely with authors. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the African Union Commission nor of the European Commission. This paper was produced with the assistance of Giel Kattenbelt and Hans-Christian Beaumond of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission.


3 See Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter to UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, Sixteenth session, 20.12.2010, A/HRC/16/49
**EU is main partner for African exporters of organic products**

European consumers account for an estimated 48% of the EUR 40 billion global demand for organic products\(^4\). Consumers of organic product are looking for guarantees on how the product has been farmed and processed. They want to reconnect with the farmer and producer. For this they are prepared to pay a premium price. In the coffee sector this premium has been calculated as an additional 15% for organic certified coffee, and 20% when organic is combined with a *fair-trade* certificate (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Coffee price (US¢/lb) showing organic and fair trade (FT) premiums, Jos Algra, 2011](image)

Africa has about 1 million hectares under organic production, some 3% of the world total land area of 37 million hectares that is certified organic\(^5\). But the potential is much greater due to the relatively low use of synthetic inputs and low-input farming and pastoralism. In terms of sustainability and adoption of organic systems, the non-use of synthetic pesticides in particular is an asset that facilitates the transition to organic certification and the prospect of access to high-value added markets.

The EU remains the leading export partner for African countries in the ACP group. Official data for trade in agricultural goods is not recorded separately for organic and non-organic, but for all agricultural products the EU is the destination for over 40% of exports (Figure 2). There are good arguments for increasing African exports to other destinations like other high income markets or the emerging economies of Brazil, China, India and Russia, and even stronger arguments for intra-African trade to grow. But for the foreseeable future the EU is the main reliable partner for ACP-African exports of agricultural product.

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\(^5\) 2009 data, FiBL/IFOAM 2011.
Figure 2. Export of agricultural goods from ACP African States to main destinations.

**African Union – European Union initiative**

Building on this high-volume trade in agricultural products, in 2010, AU Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, H.E. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, and her EU counterpart, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dacian Cioloş, launched an initiative to cooperate in the field of agricultural policy. Initial work has focussed on labelling and quality schemes that offer potential to African farmers to secure a greater share of the value added from their product. Organic farming has featured prominently in this initiative. In July 2011, a seminal workshop, ‘Building strategies for Africa: Adding-value through organic agriculture’ was held in Brussels bringing together officials and stakeholders, certifiers and producers as well as international organisations.

Among the findings of the Brussels Workshop, the potential of organic systems to benefit smallholder farmers was highlighted. By adopting organic systems, smallholders

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6 African Union Commission / European Commission, 4th College-to-College Meeting, Joint Declaration, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 8.6.2010, ‘We will also explore new areas of cooperation in agriculture, such as geographical indications, organic farming, and strengthen farmers organisations in order to exchange best practice and to reinforce local capacity to elaborate effective agricultural policy framework.’


7 African Union Commission / European Commission, 5th College-to-College Meeting, Joint Declaration, Brussels, Belgium 1.6.2011: ‘We recognise the importance of organic farming and we will build on the process to establish an African organic farming platform. In this context, we welcome the Organic Farming workshop in July 2011 as a good opportunity to exchange best practices and guidance in support of the development of sustainable organic farming systems in Africa.’


who are organised in an association, can increase productivity by adopting the organic method. The relatively low outlay for inputs helps to avoid capital requirements or debt risk incurred by adopting a high-input high-output conventional model.

The Workshop noted that accessing the EU market requires a scale of operation to supply sufficient quantity to interest international buyers. It also necessitates third-party certification, which comes at a cost.

The Workshop heard that nascent organic markets within Africa are growing and consumers becoming aware of the benefits of the organic production method. However, to a large extent local markets could not sustain a significant price premium available on the international market. This put the spotlight on alternatives to third party certification, and in particular the participatory guarantee systems developed and promoted in particular by IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements.

There are clearly two avenues for the African organic sector, as for farmers in any part of the world: the international, in this case exporting to the EU, and local and regional markets.

**Reaching the EU market**

The essential buyer demand for organic product imported to the EU is that the product meets EU requirements to enable the valuable ‘organic’ designation and logo to be used in selling the product in the EU. Authorisation is always based on the twin pillars of an accepted standard and adequate verification system that guarantees compliance with that standard. There are currently in operation three mechanisms, all based on the principle of equivalence between respective standards and control systems:

1. **Country listing**\(^9\): among African nations, Tunisia figures on the EU’s list of countries whose national organic system has been examined and found to lay down an equivalent standard and sufficient guarantees of control. Organic product from this system is then accepted as organic on the EU market without further certification. To be eligible for country listing, there needs to be in place a public organic standard and official supervision of the controls. The controls may be, and frequently are, carried out by private control bodies, but under official regulation and inspection.

2. **Control body listing**\(^11\): individual control bodies or certifiers are listed if they can show that the standard applied and control procedures are accredited to be equivalent to the EU system. The first list under this relatively new system was published on 6.12.2011. It included UGOCERT for organic plant product and

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\(^9\) IFOAM resources on participatory guarantee systems (PGS) are available on their web-site: http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs.html


processed product of Uganda, and CERTISYS, a Belgian-based certifier that is now authorised for organic plant product and processed product of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Senegal. The next round of applications is underway and should be adjudicated by mid-2012. The list will be regularly updated by the European Commission.

3. Individual authorisations managed by EU Member States: these authorisations concern specified product from particular sources and may only be granted for a single season or even a single trade. The system necessitates multiple and frequent applications by operators. But it is crucial for African exporters as it currently governs by far the greater proportion of organic product exported to the EU. The system will continue until 1.7.2014. After that date the more efficient country and control body listings that give greater predictability and security to operators will be the only mechanisms applied.

All agricultural product certified under one of these three systems may be marketed under the ‘organic’ designation and equivalents in other languages of the EU including ‘biologique’ and ‘biológico’, as well as diminutives like ‘bio’ and ‘eko’. The EU logo (Figure 3) may also be used to market the product, provided that the control body number is mentioned next to the logo and that an indication of the place of farming of the product is clearly stated. African organic product is often marketed in combination with fair-trade labelling and with origin prominently displayed. These additional tools convey more precise information to consumers about the product origins and attributes, underlining intrinsic strengths held by in African organic product that can be exploited in the EU market.

![Figure 3. EU organic logo](http://www.fao.org/organicag/doc/glorganicfinal.pdf)

### Developing African production and markets

Turning to local and regional markets within Africa, the AU-EU Workshop concluded that the AU should take the institutional lead in promoting and developing continental strategies for organic farming. In particular, smallholder participation could be facilitated by formation of producer groups and adoption of participatory guarantee systems in place of more costly third-party certification.

The development of official standards in Africa should take account of international norms, notably the CODEX Alimentarius Commission Guidelines for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods\(^\text{12}\), which serves as the international standard. The development of a single standard, legally applied in the East African Community is notable as the first multi-country legally-binding organic

\(^{12}\text{http://www.fao.org/organicag/doc/glorganicfinal.pdf}\)
standard after the EU standard. It also represents a first effort to develop official standards that are relevant for the producers and consumers in Africa.

**Action plan for Africa**

Momentum for the development of the organic sector across the continent is maintained by the AU. Following a resolution of the AU Agriculture Ministers, meeting in Lilongwe, Malawi, in 2010, the AU adopted a decision to promote the development of sustainable organic farming systems. The AU specifically called for cooperation with international partners and the creation of a platform of policymakers and stakeholders to assist progress.

The AU Commission has written the draft ‘Ecological Organic Agriculture Action Plan for Africa’, highlighting in its title the link with an agro-ecological approach, to provide a road-map for implementing the AU decision. The goal of the AU Action Plan is to integrate organic agriculture into national agricultural policies and production systems by 2020. It comprises 6 themes or pillars:

- Research, Training and Extension
- Information and Communication
- Value Chain and Market Development
- Networking and Partnerships
- Policy and Programme Development
- Institutional Capacity Development

This ambitious blueprint for development of the organic sector was discussed at several key meetings in 2011, including an inception workshop in Thika, Kenya, the AU-EU Brussels workshop, and the ‘International Conference on Ecological Organic Agriculture’ in Nairobi. The Action Plan should now be opened to comment by governments and stakeholders in Africa, with a view to its full implementation.

**Mainstreaming organic policy**

Agriculture is at the centre of the global policy agenda. Sadly, it took extreme market volatility and the food price crisis of 2008 to achieve that. For many in the EU and in the AU, agriculture had never gone away. CAADP the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme was established by the AU in 2003. A majority of countries have now developed and signed the CAADP compacts (strategic agricultural development plans) based on technical analysis and with the close involvement of stakeholders. Compacts cover four areas – sustainable land and water management; market access; food supply and hunger; and agricultural research. Overall CAADP’s objective is to ‘improve food security, nutrition, and increasing incomes in Africa’s

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largely farming based economies. Countries commit to spending at least 10% of national budgets per year on the agricultural sector and aim to raise productivity by at least 6% per year.

The European Commission and other development partners have sought to improve policy coherence and coordination by working through CAADP. In 2007 before the commodities price crisis, the European Commission adopted its policy, ‘Advancing African Agriculture – Proposal for continental and regional level cooperation on agricultural development in Africa’. This committed the European Commission to support the AU’s CAADP. In 2011, agriculture and food security, with energy policy, were highlighted as top priorities for the European Commission in its development policy (‘Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change’).

The main vehicle for AU-EU cooperation is the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, which is operated through eight thematic partnerships. In order to bring greater coherence to the treatment of agriculture, at its expert-group meeting in Brussels in March 2012, officials from both institutions recommended focussed treatment of all agriculture topics under a single partnership. In addition the experts recommended that policy and support programming in agriculture should in future be channelled via CAADP, with the aim of bringing greater coherence in initiatives for Africa’s first economic sector.

Given its leading role in forging agricultural cooperation between the AU and EU, organic farming featured prominently in the conclusions, including a call to participate in the Lusaka conference and to consult on the AU action plan.

Development support

The refocusing on CAADP underlines the necessity for stakeholders to ensure that organic farming is integrated within the national agricultural policies that result from CAADP compacts. Support from development partners for a particular agricultural action depends in large measure on the extent to which stakeholders have been successful in integrating organic and agro-ecological actions within each national and regional agricultural policy.

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16 http://www.caadp.net/about-caadp.php
See also G8 L’Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security, 10.7.2009, L’Aquila, Italy, paragraph 11. http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/LAquila_Joint_Statement_on_Global_Food_Security%5B1%5D%5D0.pdf
19 http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/africa-eu-strategic-partnership
21 ‘It is strongly recommended to consider agriculture as a stand-alone partnership focusing on developing a value-adding cluster within CAADP framework covering SPS issues, standards, quality certification building on organic and GI initiatives, processing industries and trade.’
22 Ibid. ‘Implementation of the second African Organic Conference (AOC2) scheduled for Lusaka in May 2012 is on track. Africa and EU will present and promote the AU Action Plan on Organic Agriculture at the conference.’
In order to assist the evaluation of projects for organic farming, the European Commission has produced a dedicated guidance document (Information Note) to support funding proposals in organic farming. The Information Note is intended for officials dealing with development programming. It describes the opportunities and potential for organic farming. It will raise awareness of the potential of organic farming to contribute to goals, such as food security, sustainability, economic development, and climate change mitigation. However, the Information Note can only assist the process once governments and regions have adopted their own agricultural programmes and strategies to include organic farming.

**Building EU relations with African regions**

The EU also has a significant relation with each African region with whom Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are being negotiated. These agreements are designed to use trade to promote African development and are built on the pillars of full market access to the EU for the ACP-Cotonou countries as well as regional integration. Ratification of an Eastern and Southern African (ESA) EPA is currently in train, which will bring into force the first African EPA.

In each negotiation, agriculture is a key sector – for example some 80% of all goods exported by the East African Community (EAC) to the EU are agricultural products. In addition to tariffs and trade, extensive agricultural cooperation chapters are under discussion.

The EPAs will provide a legally binding framework for EU relations with each region (or part of a region) that wishes to join. African partners that ratify these agreements are guaranteed duty-free quota-free access to the EU market for all products, including agricultural products, as part of a wider partnership with the EU and neighbouring countries.

**Conclusion**

Cooperation between the AU and EU has raised awareness of policymakers of the potential for African organic production. Development is needed both to access the EU market and to foster growth in the nascent African markets. These distinct markets need appropriate instruments in particular in relation to controls. For product intended for local and regional markets, participatory guarantee systems can be more appropriate and feasible than third party certification.

Agricultural policy initiatives are increasingly being channelled through the CAADP framework for reasons of coherence and effectiveness. It is therefore becoming more important for organic farming to be mainstreamed into national and regional policy.

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22 Economic Partnership Agreements are under negotiation with West Africa, Central Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC-EPA states), the East African Community, and Eastern and Southern Africa covering the 4 who have ratified the first EPA as well as other ESA states.

23 The contracting parties to the initial ESA EPA are Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and the EU.
The EU is also in the process of developing formal relations with regions by means of the EPAs. These include commitments on agricultural cooperation as a central element of that partnership.

Future development of organic depends on coherence: stakeholders have an opportunity now to mainstream organic farming into national and regional agricultural policies and help ensure the growth of the sector.

Further information

Africa-EU Strategic Partnership: http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/

African Union, Rural Economy and Agriculture website:
http://au.int/en/dp/rea/

European Commission organic farming website:
http://www.organic-farming.europa.eu