Sale of milk is key to survival for local farmers in West Africa, but when the hungry season peaks during the rainy season, milk is discarded as there is neither capacity to store, nor to preserve it. Decades of scarce investments in the agricultural sector and lack of infrastructure coupled with the abundant availability of relatively cheap imported milk powder produced with EU subsidies, have made it very difficult for the local farmers to develop a competitive production and reap the benefits of a rising demand for dairy products in West Africa.

**A LOW PRODUCTION WHICH FAVOURS MILK POWDER**

In a region with tens of millions of cows, it is paradoxical that consumers hardly find any fresh milk on the shelves. Setting aside the social responsibility of the industrial dairies, this reality hides local production levels that are very low and very seasonal. It is often not for lack of will but because of the scarcity of the raw material that industrial dairies in the region are few to dare bet on developing products based on a supply of fresh milk.

**INDUSTRIAL DAIRIES SEEK QUANTITY AND QUALITY**

The West African dairy industry is looking to diversify supply and improve the quality and range of their products using fresh milk. At the same time, they complain about not finding enough milk or of the proper quality to fill their tanks on a daily basis. This explains why to date only few initiative have developed supply chains of local milk and that the volumes collected remain low.

**AN UNEXPLORRED LOCAL PRODUCTION POTENTIAL**

But to gain profits from local milk collection is indeed possible. It suffices to listen to the dairy farmers who are established close to an urban centre denounce the numerous refusals of purchase they face during the rainy season or the pastoralists breeders who do not benefit from any collection system to absorb the excess milk that they would like to sell during the rainy season. Similarly production gains are possible during the dry season if the milk producers’ access to agro-industrial bi-products for fodder can be secured.

**A RISING GLOBAL DEMAND FOR MILK AND LIBERALIZED MARKETS**

In an international context, there is a growing global demand for dairy products, not least in West Africa. After the lifting of the European milk quotas, European dairies expect their milk production to increase by 9 billion liters per year. About two-thirds of the increased production is to find markets outside the EU, including West Africa, which EU dairy companies are increasingly targeting.

For the European dairy companies producing milk powder, there is a balance to strike. On the one hand, they need to create short-term value for their farmers and shareholders by finding new markets for their products. On the other, they have a clear responsibility towards local farmers whose human rights their business may have a negative impact on. This demands a more long-term commercial strategy that takes into account their corporate social responsibility and considers investments in local collection.
THE AMBITION

FINDING WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS FOR THE DAIRY SECTOR IN EUROPE AND WEST AFRICA

The common ambition of the partners in the alliance is to develop a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable market for milk in West Africa that allows both small farmers and large companies to produce and deliver their products to the market. This happens in a dialogue leading to concrete initiatives between West African industrial dairies that are already involved in the sector, European industrial dairies who are concerned about their social responsibility and their long-term commercial strategy, the most forward-thinking dairy producer organisations, and finally regional political institutions, such as ECOWAS and UEMOA.

THE ALLIANCE

- Coordinated by the sustainable development NGO CARE Denmark and financed by Danida.
- Partners: CIRAD - a leading French/West African research institution.
- Billital Maroobe Network - a regional pastoral farmer organisation representing 500,000 West African pastoralists
- The Danish Agriculture and Food Council representing the farming and food industry in Denmark
- Copenhagen Business School - one of the largest business schools in Europe.
- Arla Foods – the third largest dairy cooperative in the world – has since joined the alliance.

CONCRETE RESULTS

- The consequences of the reformed EU agricultural policy on households in West Africa are documented.
- Local milk producers, dairy industries in West Africa and in Europe are aware about the consequences.
- The positioning of national dairy umbrella organizations is reinforced.
- Industrialized dairies in West Africa and European dairy enterprises are equipped with the tools and knowledge to undertake socially responsible business in the region.
- Consumer confidence and loyalty in dairy products ‘made in Sahel’ is improved and fair prices for small-scale producers are negotiated.

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