



“72 hours of milk” action for fair milk, 8–10 April 2019 in Brussels



“72 hours of milk” demonstration before the European Commission, 10 April 2019 (Credit: Tineke d’Haese / OXFAM)

Milk is a source of income for many pastoralists in West Africa. However, with the dumping by European companies of milk powder and particularly so-called “milk” powder with palm oil added to it, the local milk sector in West Africa has been struggling to compete. As there are different Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) negotiated by different countries in Africa, milk powder imported to West Africa has only a 5% tariff whereas the dairy sector in Kenya is protected by a 60% tariff on milk imports. Although the focus of this action week was on solidarity between West African and European dairy farmers to present a common voice to the European Union (EU), CELEP was able to share experience with dairying in Eastern Africa as a counterpoint. The short film “Milk campaign: Let’s not export our problems!”

explains the issues about the importance of supporting local and fair milk for livelihoods in rural regions. See also the [brochure](#) on this topic.

CELEP used the opportunity of these events to distribute printed copies of the dairy policy brief “[Pastoral dairying in Eastern Africa: how could Europe support it?](#)”, which it had prepared in 2018. The meeting also offered an excellent occasion to advocate for pastoralism at the EU level, as local milk in West Africa comes mainly from (agro-)pastoralist production systems. Also because policy targets in the EU – including European Commission officials and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) – are similar for both Eastern and West Africa, joining this action gave a boost to CELEP advocacy toward the EU.

Day 1: 8 April

On [Day 1](#), the focus was on development of the local dairy value chain in West Africa, with presentations from civil society organisations, dairy cooperatives and also a private dairy company. The aim of the event was to highlight the potential of (agro-)pastoralist dairy systems in West Africa and to illustrate this with specific examples of successful projects/programmes. The different presenters discussed how the local dairy hubs were not operating at full capacity but could expand if there were more market demand for local milk. They described how local fresh milk was being out-competed by inexpensive imported milk powder. The representative from the private dairy company, Tiviski, described how it had attempted to get approval to export camel milk products to the EU, but this had been denied.

Day 2: 9 April

The roundtable on [Day 2](#) brought together MEPs with representatives from the European Commission’s Directorate General (DG) Trade, DG Development Cooperation (DEVCO) and DG Agriculture along with representatives from peasant associations, pastoralist groups and other civil society organisations to discuss the implications of the European “milk” powder exports. For example, on behalf of pastoralists, Mr Dodo Boureima represented the West African network [Réseau Billital Maroobe](#); Mr Ibrahima Aliou and Ms Hindatou Amadou represented the Association for the Promotion of Pastoralism in the Sahel and Savanna ([Association pour la Promotion de l’Elevage au Sahel et en Savane – APESS](#)), and Amadou further leads the African “[My milk is local](#)” campaign.

The impassioned debate brought forward issues such as how important dairy is for the livelihoods of women in particular and how pastoralists and other livestock keepers are challenged in gaining a decent income from their milk production. African representatives from Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mauritius were engaged in this debate.

On behalf of CELEP, Dr Margareta Lelea from the [German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture \(DITSL\)](#) gave a presentation about the small-scale dairy sector in Kenya, where the milk sector is protected with a 60% tariff. However, steps still need to be taken to maintain and promote small-scale milk producers and distributors. She emphasised how, for the promotion of pastoralist livelihoods, recognition of the importance of both the formal and informal sector is necessary for local milk. Furthermore, milk produced by pastoralists and smallholder farmers is more ecological because it does not rely on fossil fuels to bring grain feed to livestock. Rather, the extensive livestock production systems can be described as “solar-powered”. In this era of climate change, we need to support political-economic systems that allow for adapted food production strategies that create livelihoods and use locally available resources.

Ms Sieta van Keimpema from the European Milk Board (EMB) shared a proposal for a Market Responsibility Programme that would prevent the overproduction of milk in Europe and associated sub-production costs – and would also have the potential to reduce dumping of European milk in West Africa. The proposal offers a win-win situation for local milk producers on both continents.

Day 3: 10 April

The morning of Day 3 started with a press conference in Brussels with West African and European dairy producers making a joint statement on fair milk and rural livelihoods. Despite the Brexit talks that were happening in Brussels concurrently, the organisers of “72 hours of milk” still managed to put up a demonstration in front of the EU buildings. There was a symbolic cooking competition, where a well-known chef made crepes using real whole milk and the “milk” powder that is sold in West Africa. This powder is a byproduct of making butter. To this skimmed milk powder, the less expensive palm oil is added before the “milk” powder is sold in West Africa.

Tractors came to occupy the public space in front of the European Commission to declare the urgency of paying attention to agrarian politics. Sculptures of cows were painted with the flags of West African and European countries. Speeches were given about the need for policies that support local milk and that this local milk is vital to the wellbeing of people living in rural areas in both Europe and West Africa. Dairy farmers travelled from Germany and the Netherlands to take part in the action.

While searching for solutions to support local and fair milk, the participants raised questions to confront the global agricultural agreements regarding who sets the rules determining the trade of food – and what it means for rural areas when food is treated just like any other commodity. In 2015, the World Trade Organization at the Nairobi Meeting agreed to liberalise the global dairy markets – and this affects everyone producing milk, including pastoralists.

Report by Margareta Lelea and Koen Vantroos

See also: “Brussels to Africa: don’t cry over our spilt milk”