



ECOWAS COMMISSION

Review Report on Progress towards Sustainable Development in West Africa¹

Key Messages



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Development

¹ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

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Key Messages on Review Report on Progress towards Sustainable Development in West Africa

The overall objective of the Report is to produce a well-informed Review Report on progress towards sustainable development in the West Africa sub-region as an input to the Africa Report to Rio + 20. To effectively review the performance, it is important to review the policies, strategies and programs undertaken by the countries and the extent to which sustainable development principles are incorporated in them and also their performance. To do so, it is instructive to evaluate institutional frameworks that have supported the efforts at sustainable development. Other emerging issues and green economy were also discussed.

Strategies and Institutions for sustainable development

The main priority sustainable development issues for the sub-region converge on ensuring that the wellbeing of the people in terms of eradicating poverty in the long term. Countries' National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSDs) contain priority issues on the 3 pillars of sustainable development. The prioritized ones include growth and development; utilities, education, health and employment, natural resources exploitation and climate change.

Two generations of PRS were recognized. The second generation of PRSs showed significant improvements over the first ones in the formulation of sustainable development strategy process. The key sustainable development issues included country ownership and commitment; integrated economic, social and environmental objectives across sectors, territories and generations; broad and effective participation and partnerships; capacity development and enabling environment and means of implementation.

The analysis showed that the most difficult aspect of formulating sustainable development strategies but most important was integration of the three pillars. Many countries employed Cross Sectoral Planning Groups (CSPGs) to undertake the harmonization. These CSPGs were different from Sustainable Development Committees (SDCs) and an indication that the integration was not probably done. The CSPGs have not been trained in the concept of sustainable development and its integration.

A model integration was proposed. The sectoral groups form the sustainable development committees. These sectoral groups will be key in developing sectoral strategies. While sectoral strategy is being formulated, the group will trace all the linkages of policies, projects and programs on other sectors and anticipation of other related sectors strategy on the sector's strategy. These are then identified and this will be done for all sectors. All sectoral strategies have the inter linkages identified. When all sectoral strategies are sent to the Planning Commission or Unit, it is these CSPGs or SDCs from the various sectors that will do the integration.

Many countries owned the process of NSSD formulation and involved broad participation. Effective participation was a challenge but planning units are learning and improving the situation. The major issue that needs to be addressed is the development of Long Term Development Strategies (LTDS).

Monitoring and evaluation are key to the success of strategies. Countries used different sets of indicators to monitor all the pillars of sustainable development depending on countries own needs and capacities. One monitoring tool that was absent was the need to monitor expenditures on projects and programs. This is a major problem not only for strategy monitoring but for all activities in the sub-region.

Countries should be assisted to develop and implement sustainable development strategies, especially long term ones that embody the key characteristics of NSSDs. Planning institutions should be staffed with capable people and be independent from the political process. It is important to build their capacities.

Institutional frameworks, laws, regulations, conventions, customs and practices are essential for efficient working of sustainable development strategies. Regional, sub-regional and national institutions are important to achieving sustainable development. In terms of sustainable development, national institutions are paramount. ECA/ECOWAS/AfDB through their mandates (workshops, publication, roundtable conferences, funding, etc.) have been assisting countries in the various pillars of sustainable development.

Following recommendations from Rio and WSSD, most countries have put in place various forms of institutions and strengthened others to assist in formulating sustainable development strategies. More specifically, countries have either put in place Committees for Sustainable Development to mainly assist in integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. They are also to monitor and evaluate the progress in the implementation of sustainable development.

Representation on NCSDs is broad-based, however, representation from the social sector related ministries and social sector related entities such as trade unions, parliamentarians, indigenous people, farmers, women and youth groups are absent. The constraints include inadequate institutional capacities, funding and human. One strategy to improve the functioning of NCSDs is fora for experience sharing, information exchange and networking. To do this, capacities of ECA-SROSs and ECOWAS should be strengthened to ensure that they contribute effectively to the implementation process.

Assessment of strategies

The assessment of the economic, social and environment pillars of sustainable development shows that the sub-region has done quite well in resuscitating the growth of the economies. Despite this good performance, the well-being of the population and the environmental health is seriously threatened. The economic aspect is not being maximized while the social sector has serious challenges. The environmental balance is on the negative. On the whole, the development pattern of the economies is not on a sustainable development path. This is due to the fact that a

balanced integration of the pillars in our strategies is not done. Furthermore, the formulation of short term rather than long term strategies has been a major constraint to sustainable development.

Suggestions made to accelerate the sustainable development pace include treating all the three dimensions of sustainable development as equally important through inter-sectoral approach. Many institutions have been established and there is need to build their capacities. Building databases for monitoring, evaluation and lesson learning while coordinating mechanisms to reduce duplication of effort and creating beneficial linkages are essential. Above all, the need for transparency, accountability and discipline through the enforcement of rules and regulations are of prime importance.

Transition to a Green Economy and Emerging Challenges

The transition to a green economy encompasses undertaking green policies, strategies and programs in all sectors of the economy. In the end, a green economy is a sustainable development economy. The initial cost of investment in the transition to green economy in certain sectors of the economy appear to be beyond the reach of many ECOWAS countries but it is a necessity. Commitment to a transformation to a green economy includes enforcement of laws, regulations, mobilizing resources for investments, strengthening the human resource base and embarking on effective research and development efforts. A shift to a green growth path in areas such as energy and transportation requires major structural changes in systems dependent on infrastructure, technology and financial assistance, which are beyond the reach of many ECOWAS countries and the support of the international community is needed.

Since the Rio Conference, a number of challenges that impact on sustainable development in West Africa have been intensified. Most of these challenges are not new but there exist substantial evidence to suggest that the intensity of their impacts have increased and therefore pose fundamental challenges to the sustainable development of the sub-region. These issues include climate change, desertification, coastal erosion, energy crisis, water scarcity, lack of transparency in the management of mineral/oil resources, biodiversity and ecosystem loss, food insecurity, relevance of education to developmental needs, youth and graduate unemployment, globalization, urbanization.

Countries in the sub-region need to take a long term view of development and incorporate all these issues into their sustainable development strategies. By undertaking an integrated approach to development, most of these challenges will be addressed.