

Subregional Office for West Africa

**Twenty-first Session of the Intergovernmental
Committee of Experts (ICE) for West Africa**

**Cotonou, Benin
27-29 June 2018**

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committee of experts for West Africa**

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I. Introduction

1. The twenty-first session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE) for West Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was held from 27 to 29 June 2018 in Cotonou, Benin, with the technical, logistical and financial support of the Government of the Republic of Benin. The theme of the meeting was “Regional integration in West Africa: New Challenges and Prospects”.

2. This theme was chosen in a context marked by the potential expansion of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to include more countries. It is also marked by the proximity of the 2020 deadline set by ECOWAS for achievement of the common currency. Further, this choice also comes in a new era for the African continent and the ECOWAS subregion, with the official launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in Kigali, Rwanda in March 2018.

3. Three ECA statutory reports were reviewed, namely the reports on the activities of the Subregional Office for West Africa, on the implementation of regional and international programmes and on subregional initiatives in West Africa. The twenty-first ICE session provided an opportunity for the participants to exchange views on the economic and social profile of the subregion and on ECA initiatives in support of regional development and regional integration of West African countries. It has served as a forum for discussing the challenges and prospects of regional integration in West Africa, as well as for disseminating the Benin STEPS profile. In concluding, the session made recommendations relevant to the development of West African countries.

II. Attendance

4. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following ECOWAS member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The regional economic communities (RECs) and the following intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) were also represented: Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), Monetary Agency for West Africa (WAMA), West African Development Bank (WADB), African Development Bank (AfDB), and Economic and Statistics Observatory of sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT).

III. Opening ceremony

5. Four statements were made at the opening ceremony, namely: (a) Mr. Dimitri Sanga, Director of the West Africa Office of ECA; (b) Mr. Siaka Coulibaly, United Nations Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Benin; (c) Mr. Soabou Diallo, outgoing Chairman of the twentieth ICE and Director-General of the Economy and Planning for Burkina Faso, and (d) Mr. Abdoulaye Bio Tchané, Minister of State in charge of Planning and Development for the Republic of Benin, who delivered the official opening speech.

6. In his address, the Director of the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa (SRO-WA), Mr. Dimitri Sanga, expressed his gratitude to the authorities of the Republic of Benin for their commitment to regional integration and their continued support for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Mr. Sanga explored the major West African challenges, including its potential expansion to include more countries – given the number of applications

for membership under examination — the implementation of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff adopted in 2015, the impact of AfCFTA on the subregion, the common single currency programme, and the security challenges in the Sahel zone. Before wishing fruitful discussions expected to lead to relevant recommendations, Mr. Sanga emphasized the importance of focusing on the immense energy, mining, agriculture and human potential of the region and the need to harness them for the benefit of West African populations.

7. For his part, Mr. Siaka Coulibaly, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Benin, renewed the commitment of the United Nations System to support West African countries in their daily development efforts, and especially in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in synergy with their national development plans. He emphasized the importance attached to the “One UN” spirit by the United Nations System in country support efforts.

8. Mr. Soabou Diallo, outgoing President of the twentieth ICE, Director-General of the Economy and Planning of Burkina Faso, lauded the performance of the Office, measurable not only in the magnitude of the actions carried out since May 2017, but also in the state of implementation of the recommendations of the last ICE. Mr. Diallo noted the consolidation of support actions for ECOWAS countries, the development of 6 country profiles that covered all 15 ECOWAS countries as part of this knowledge production initiative, and ongoing actions to strengthen regional integration. On the latter, the analyses of the Sahel region and the accession process of some ECOWAS countries, in particular Morocco, were positively appreciated.

9. Finally, in his opening address, Mr. Abdoulaye Bio Tchané, Minister of State in charge of Planning and Development for the Republic of Benin, welcomed the choice of Burkina Faso for this session of the ICE. He commended the relevance of both the central theme on regional integration and the different sub-themes that were to be addressed. The Minister of State evoked the unwavering conviction and commitment of Benin to regional integration. In this regard, he pointed out the resolute decision of Benin to open its borders to all African nationals, making Benin the second African country to adopt such a measure after Rwanda. The Minister of State emphasized the priority given by Benin to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the structural transformation of the Beninese economy, which is one of the pillars of the Government Action Programme currently being implemented. Before declaring the meeting open, the Minister of State hailed the ECA interventions for Benin and urged delegates to seize the opportunity for exchanges offered by the ICE to put in place relevant recommendations to guide policymakers for a better future for the West African subregion.

IV. Election of the bureau

10. The meeting elected by acclamation the following officers:

President: Benin

Vice President: Ghana

Rapporteur: Burkina Faso

V. Adoption of the agenda

11. Delegates from member States adopted the agenda as presented by the secretariat without amendment. See annex II.

VI. Programme of Work

A. Report on the subregional profile of West Africa

12. The ECA presentation noted the economic recovery in West Africa, with a growth rate of 2.6 per cent in 2017 compared to 0.3 per cent in 2016. This trend is expected to strengthen in 2018, with a growth rate estimated at 3.5 per cent. The subregion is underdeveloped by global standards and has particular challenges in the areas of education, poverty and gender development. The analysis shows a low diversification rate with a slight shift from agricultural production activities to services and exports, with about 80 per cent concentrated on mineral products and precious metals and stones. Finally, the presentation reminded participants of the difficult security context in the subregion but also took note of the progress made in terms of good governance and the improved business environment.

13. Discussions focused on the need to strengthen the analysis of country experiences with the status of economic diversification and gender development, in terms of equality. Participants also emphasized the need to broaden the approach to the environment, as well as to establish value chains for commodities. The question of financing infrastructure in view of the difficulties with regional interconnection was also raised. Delegates questioned some statistics on poverty, gender mainstreaming and the focus on equity. They also invited ECA to deepen their analyses of the security situation and to highlight the underperformance of certain countries based on specific indicators, such as education, while showcasing the ongoing national efforts and policies.

14. ECA clarified the issues raised, and took note of the recommendations and suggestions to strengthen the analyses. It also invited countries to submit their contributions on economic diversification for inclusion in the document.

B. Report on the ECA capacity-building proposal for Africa: supporting States to build resilience and security and intensify development activities

15. The presentation made by the Institute of Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) largely covered training activities, the number of staff trained, the selection mechanism for the candidates, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure the best impact on capacity-building at country level.

16. It was pointed out that the training offered at IDEP was consistent with the strategic directions embedded in the 2030 and 2063 Agendas. Among the main strategic initiatives implemented, it should be noted that online training has been launched, the planned strengthening of which will make it possible to respond more broadly to training requests.

17. The discussions focused on the need to broaden training opportunities in specific areas such as public-private partnerships and development financing in general, the method of selecting candidates, and a greater representation of Portuguese-speaking countries in training.

Countries also encouraged IDEP to continue its collaboration with universities and research centres for the training and mentorship of students.

18. The representative of IDEP addressed the concerns raised and suggestions made. He particularly pointed out that the method of selecting candidates ensured not only selection of the best profiles but also for getting the final approval of the competent authorities. He noted the importance of getting training requests and highlighted the ongoing response in terms of the strengthening of e-learning and encouraging countries to develop specific training at the national level.

C. Report on the implementation of the SRO-WA work programme in 2017 and outlook for 2018

19. The secretariat presented the report on the activities of the Office for the period from May 2017 to June 2018. The report emphasized the changes already underway and those likely to come into effect, in terms of the expected results. In particular, it showed that the activities carried out had, on the whole, enabled the Office to increase influence over policy, gain credibility and confidence, consolidated its accountability mechanisms, deepened its culture of learning and strengthened its operational efficiency. The report underscored that the weakness of national statistical systems as well as the threatening economic, sociopolitical, institutional and security context in the subregion were stumbling blocks constraining its activities. It acknowledged that during the period 2018-2019, SRO-WA would continue to support implementation of subregional initiatives and the capacity-building of member States and regional economic communities, especially in improving statistical systems, and increasing familiarity with the use of modeling tools for policy planning and integrated monitoring of development agendas. The secretariat pointed out that the transformation of the Office into a Center of Excellence specializing in Demographic Dynamics for Development (DDD), decided under the ongoing reform within ECA, would affect its organization and operations.

20. Delegates commended the dynamism of SRO-WA and thanked ECA for the comprehensive support provided. They recommended caution on the use of social networks to assess the influence of ECA, as such means could not provide detailed information on subscribers or compare the work of the Commission with the performance of other institutions or organizations. In addition, they noted the need to strengthen strategic partnerships, particularly with non-state actors, the private sector and non-governmental organizations.

21. A number of prospective activities were proposed by the delegates on the convergence mechanism, in the context of revising the bases by which countries calculated their gross domestic products (GDPs) and the membership of countries joining the continental free trade area.

22. ECA noted the suggestions and recommendations made and renewed its commitment to strengthen its interventions in response to the specific needs of countries. It cited ongoing initiatives to strengthen the partnership with non-state actors, including the creation of a division in charge of private sector development.

D. Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

23. The secretariat presented its 2018 report on West Africa's progress with achieving the 2030 Agenda Goals. Before presenting the progress of each country by goal and target and

major challenges, the report reviewed its methodology, data sources and main limitations, particularly in terms of data availability.

24. It was noted that in the last decade, West African States made encouraging progress in the area of maternal and child health, access to safe drinking water, promotion of renewable energies and the wealth creation reflected by the expansion of the middle class. However, there were still wide gaps to be filled in the fight against poverty and malnutrition; the quality of education; gender and income inequality, sanitation and decent housing; preservation of the environment, civil registration, and mobilizing domestic resources. In conclusion, the report summarized the major cross-cutting challenges, including the inadequate funding for national statistical systems and the lack of autonomy of the national statistics offices.

25. To complement this presentation, Benin shared its experience with implementation of 2030 Agenda.

26. Following the presentation, delegates noted the recurring shortcomings of the national statistical systems, underlining that the assessment of indicators was often based on pre-2015 data that were already covered by the Millennium Development Goals. They further noted the divergencies in comparing indicators and targets, in a context where countries have different priorities. Some countries, such as Liberia, still facing the consequences of the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015, were late in domesticating the Sustainable Development Goals, making it difficult to measure achievement of targets. Delegates also requested information developed on best practices for achieving the Goals, as well as the inclusion in the document of country performance tables for the various indicators.

27. ECA took due note of the recommendations and suggestions made.

E. Round Table: "Regional Integration in West Africa: New Challenges and Prospects"

28. The march towards integration in West Africa has been marked in recent years by various forms of regional, continental and global dynamics, which deserve to be examined in depth to assess their impact on the specific objectives of regional integration. Implementation of the AfCFTA agreements, for example, will probably not be easy in the ECOWAS zone (especially because of common external tariff) as some member countries of the community had not yet ratified them. Other important dynamics deserving special attention concerned the matter of the single currency, for which a presidential task force had recently been created; community infrastructure with the recent establishment of the Unit of Preparation and Project Development (PPDU), peace and security, social affairs, and the mobility of persons and goods and services that is essential to increasing the volume of economic activities within the community.

29. The discussions that followed the presentation made it possible to concur, regarding the single currency, the importance of deepening reflection on the convergence criteria, especially on the conditionalities attached to them for changeover to the single currency. Consideration of a mechanism to include indicators of real convergence was also proposed. Participants also discussed the process of setting up AfCFTA, accompanied by impact studies and wide consultations with the various stakeholders (population, parliamentarians, private sector) before entering the negotiation phase. Discussions also focused on the links between security and regional integration. The statistics examined in this regard have highlighted the lack of direct links between these two issues. The delegates also shared the ECOWAS experience and

performance in conflict management. Finally, delegates emphasized the need to remove the various barriers to the effective free movement of people and goods to derive maximum benefit from AfCFTA and the ECOWAS Customs Union.

F. Report on the continental initiatives of ECA

30. The ECA presentation focused on the revised strategic framework of the Commission for the 2018-2019 biennium. It presented the ECA vision, the strategic directions, the programme focus, the core functions and the Commission's performance measurement framework. The evolution of the global and continental environment justified the revision of the strategic framework. The goal of ECA is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic and social development in support of Africa's accelerating economic diversification and structural transformation. The work of the Commission is guided by the African Union Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The five strategic areas of ECA were identified: (a) to strengthen the position of ECA as a leading institution based on its unique position and role in providing comprehensive solutions to the continent; (b) to find sustainable development solutions to accelerate the economic diversification and industrialization of Africa; (c) to create innovative solutions to finance sustainable, human, physical and social infrastructure for a transforming Africa; (d) to provide solutions to cross-border issues, with a focus on social inclusion; and (e) to find regional solutions as contributions to global governance issues, as well as develop knowledge to defend and manage the challenges of the next generation in Africa.

31. Delegates took note of the ECA revised strategic framework, the areas of intervention and support, and the channel for sending requests for assistance to the Executive Secretary of ECA. Some countries have expressed their willingness to send new requests for assistance and support to ECA, particularly Côte d'Ivoire (strengthening of the project management system). Countries such as Burkina Faso, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau have also shown query intents.

G. Special Session on Regional Integration

32. Subregional organizations such as AFRISTAT, OMVS and BOAD shared their recent experiences in regional integration and country support. AFRISTAT spoke about the implementation of its 2017-2021 strategic work programme and the various initiatives under way in its 22 member States, particularly in terms of support in the follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals development of harmonized price indices, and revision of the bases for calculating GDP. The AFRISTAT representative also emphasized the priority that should be given to strengthening statistics, the need for which should be covered in national budgets. The OMVS representative highlighted major programmes that contribute to strengthening regional integration, including the hydroelectric dams of Manantali, Diama and Felou and implementation of regional programmes. He also noted current initiatives in multimodal transport on the Senegal River. Finally, the BOAD representative focused on two major initiatives, namely the integration projects and public-private partnerships. He informed participants of the expanded role of BOAD, initially limited to the WAEMU countries, but which now functioned at the level of the ECOWAS countries. The Institution could in fact finance projects that could impact a non-WAEMU country upon justification of its integrating nature. With regard to the public-private partnership, a unit had been set up to strengthen this mode of financing, while preserving the interests of the countries.

H. Launch of the Benin STEPS Profile

33. The joint statement by ECA and the United Nations Children's Fund noted that the Benin economy lacks diversification and its structure has changed very little since the 1990s. Its GDP is mainly fueled by agriculture, commerce and manufacturing. These sectors provided the most employment to the population at the national level (78 per cent in 2015) but exhibited low labour productivity. As a result, the quantity of precarious jobs available in the economy was significant (62 per cent of workers have a monthly income below the general minimum wage). Moreover, the strong population growth in the country (3.5 per cent) poses social challenges (education, health, urbanization, etc.) and is exerting significant pressure on the state budget, thereby affecting the quality of public services offered to the population. The specific constraints of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors are not contributing to structural transformation.

34. Delegates praised the quality of the Benin STEPS profile, with its in-depth analyses in the areas of production, employment and social issues. They questioned the relevance of the statistics on employment and the specific reforms to support the process of structural transformation of countries, as well as the need to ensure a participatory process and ownership in the process of developing the document.

I. Report of the Expert Group Meeting on "The Implications of the Growth of ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area"

35. Delegates took note of the report on the meeting.

VII. Review and adoption of conclusions and recommendations of the meeting

36. The Rapporteur read the draft conclusions and recommendations to the participants. After extensive debate and the inclusion of the proposed amendments, the meeting adopted the recommendations presented in annex I.

VIII. Date, place and theme of the next ICE meeting

37. The next ICE meeting for West Africa was set for 2019 in Liberia. Mr. Sosthène Gnansounou, Deputy-Director of Cabinet of the Minister of State in charge of Planning and Development for the Republic of Benin will chair the ICE bureau until the next session. The date of the next session would be fixed by ECA in agreement with Liberia. ECA would also communicate the theme of the next ICE before that date.

IX. Closing ceremony

38. A vote of thanks was read on behalf of the participants. This motion thanked the Government and people of Benin for their warm welcome and treatment of the participants. The motion also thanked the Director of the ECA/SRO-WA and the secretariat which supported him during the deliberations.

39. The closing ceremony featured two addresses. The Director of SRO/WA, Mr. Dimitri Sanga, reiterated his thanks to Benin and to the delegates for the good organization of the meeting, the quality of the debates and the relevance of the recommendations, which undoubtedly would enlighten the decision-makers, at both national and subregional level, in

responding to the challenges of development and integration. In his closing remarks, the Director of Cabinet of the Ministry of State in charge of Planning and Development for the Republic of Benin stressed that the Cotonou meeting had been very fruitful and he reaffirmed Benin's commitment to subregional integration and partnership for development.

Annex I

Summary of recommendations

40. The ICE requests the member States, the RECs/IGOs and ECA to undertake the following actions:

(a) Report on the subregional profile of West Africa

ECA:

- Deepen and broaden the analyzes of country experiences with economic diversification;

ECOWAS:

- Take appropriate measures to deepen subregional integration, especially in the areas of interconnecting infrastructure, trade integration and production integration;

Member States:

- Strengthen efforts for the development of value chains on products in the subregion with a view to reducing exposure to price fluctuations for raw materials and to increasing domestic value added;
- Ensure the proper implementation of the various economic diversification initiatives domesticated into the national development agendas under implementation in the countries.

(b) Report on the ECA Capacity Building Proposal in Africa: supporting States to build resilience, security and development

ECA /IDEP:

- Strengthen the mechanism for selecting candidates and for measuring the impact of training on capacity building in the countries.

Member States:

- Promote IDEP-specific training requests to better respond to country needs and increase the number of beneficiaries;
- Ensure the regular payment of financial contributions to IDEP.

(c) Report on implementation of the SRO-WA work programme in 2017 and the outlook for 2018

ECA:

- Promote exchange of experiences among the countries, based on best practices seen in West Africa

- Strengthen support for national statistical systems, and accelerate the use of new bases for calculating GDPs.

ECOWAS and member States:

- Joint review of convergence criteria in the context of GDP realignments;

(d) Report on implementation of the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals

ECA:

- Support countries to improve the quality and collection of data to measure progress towards Agenda 2030 and 2063 adequately;
- Make available the Joint Agenda 2063 and 2030 Tracking Kit to States and strengthen their capacity in this area.

Member States:

- Provide the statistical systems with the necessary resources to ensure domestication of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to better assess progress in achieving the objectives of Agenda 2030;
- Make recent data available with the support of development institutions to enable timely monitoring and evaluation of the Goals;
- Strengthen statistical systems and domestication of the Goals for a better assessment of the progress made in achieving the objectives of Agenda 2030.

(e) Round Table: "Regional Integration in West Africa: new challenges and prospects"

ECA:

- Support countries in carrying out impact studies and making their regulatory and legal frameworks comply with **AfCFTA**;

ECOWAS and member States:

- Eliminate obstacles to the effective free movement of goods and people and strengthen subregional interconnection infrastructure;
- Strengthen the common peace and security apparatus with regard to security threats in the subregion;
- Strengthen the mechanism of prior consultation and involvement of the actors directly concerned by the establishment of AfCFTA (population, private sector, parliamentarians) before the negotiation phase.

(f) Report on the continental initiatives of ECA**ECA:**

- Widely disseminate the ECA revised strategic framework for the 2018-2019 biennium to sensitize member States and other stakeholders on the Commission's current areas of focus;

ECOWAS, other IGOs and member States:

- Align requests to ECA within its programme intervention areas, and with its revised strategic framework for 2018;

(g) Special session on regional integration

- Take into account the initiatives of subregional organizations in support of regional integration, in particular those of OMVS, BOAD and AFRISTAT;

(h) Benin STEPS profile launch**ECA:**

- Strengthen the participatory process and master STEPS development.

Member States:

- Strengthen statistical systems to provide in-depth analysis in the production, employment and social domains;

(i) Report of the Expert Group Meeting on "the Implications of the ECOWAS expansion potential and the African Continental Free Trade Area "

The ICE took note of the report of the meeting of the Group of Experts and endorsed it.

Annex II

Agenda of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts

1. Opening ceremony
2. Election of the Bureau
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work
4. Review of statutory reports
 - (a) Report on the implementation of the ECA SRO-WA Programme of Work for 2018 and the outlook for 2019
 - (b) Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
5. Round table: “Regional Integration in West Africa: New Challenges and Prospects”
6. Presentations on the continental initiatives of ECA
7. Special session on regional integration
8. Launching of the STEPS profile of Benin
9. Review and adoption of the recommendations of the Experts Group Meeting on “the implications of the potential expansion of ECOWAS and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)”
10. Review and adoption of the ICE recommendations and report
11. Date and place of the next ICE meeting
12. Miscellaneous
13. Closure of the meeting