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**Economic Commission for Africa
Subregional Office for West Africa**

**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior
Officials and Experts**

Twenty-second session

Robertsfield, Liberia, 8-10 May 2019

**Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and
Experts for West Africa on the work of its twenty-second session**



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I. Introduction

1. The twenty-second session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was held from 8 to 10 May 2019 in Robertsfield, Liberia, with the technical, logistical and financial support of the Government of Liberia. The theme of the session was “Demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa: challenges and policy actions”.

2. Two ECA statutory documents were reviewed, namely, the report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Subregional Office for West Africa in 2018-2019 and the outlook for 2019-2020, and the report on progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The twenty-second session of the Committee also provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the economic and social profile of the subregion and ECA initiatives in support of efforts by the various countries to promote regional development and integration. The session further served as a forum for discussions on the Liberia country profile prepared under the structural transformation, employment, production and society (STEPS) framework, and on measures that should be taken to leverage demographic trends with a view to promoting development and strengthening the capacity of West African countries to capture the demographic dividend. Lastly, the session made a number of recommendations relevant to the development of West African countries.

II. Attendance

3. Present at the session were representatives from the 15 States members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The following regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations were also represented: ECOWAS, West African Economic and Monetary Union, Mano River Union, African Development Bank, Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa, President’s Delivery Unit of Kenya, African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development and United Nations Development Programme in Liberia. Details of the participants may be found in the list of participants circulated under the symbol ECA/WA/ICSOE/22/01E/INF/1.

III. Opening ceremony

4. The opening ceremony began with four statements, which were delivered by the Acting Director of the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa, Bakary Dosso; the Acting Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in Liberia, Pa Lamin Beyai; Rock Comahoué (Benin), in his capacity as outgoing Chair of the twenty-first session of the Committee; and the Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Liberia, Samuel Tweah, who delivered the official opening address.

5. Mr. Dosso presented the main reasons for choosing the theme of the session. He said that the region, which had a population of 377 million in 2018, equivalent to 30 per cent of the population of Africa as a whole, was experiencing an annual population growth rate of 2.7 per cent and that that figure would double every 25 years. Just over 200 million people, or 53.5 per cent of the population, lived below national poverty lines, a fact that clearly demonstrated the magnitude of the challenges facing the subregion. The countries of the subregion therefore needed to reform their macroeconomic and financial frameworks, invest in human capital,

address infrastructure deficits and improve the business climate in order to achieve a positive and sustainable reversal of current trends. Success lay in the capacity of national leaders to launch, at the earliest opportunity, and to monitor and evaluate the various programmes to which they had committed themselves with a view to transforming their respective countries and the continent as a whole.

6. Mr. Beyai underscored that the challenges facing the subregion were immense. He stressed, however, that the organizations of the United Nations system stood ready to assist all the countries in which they operated so that they could harness the demographic dividend. To achieve that objective, it was critical to sustain momentum towards regional integration in the short, medium and long term so that the young population of the region became an effective force for development, peace and security.

7. Mr. Comahoué recalled that participants in that session had praised the dynamism of the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa and had thanked ECA for the various forms of support that it provided. At the same time, they had acknowledged that the transformation of the Subregional Office as part of the ongoing ECA reform process into a centre specialized in demographic dynamics for development would have an impact on its organization and operation. He therefore warmly welcomed the decision to select “Demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa: challenges and policy actions” as the theme of the twenty-second session. He recalled that ECA had issued several reports, organized meetings and provided numerous advisory services during the mandate of the previous Chair and encouraged it to continue its efforts to assist subregional institutions and member States. He pointed out that, according to the conclusions of the report on the activities of the Subregional Office, it appeared that all the activities carried out since the twenty-first session, held in 2018, had bolstered the reputation and influence of the Office with its main customers and partners.

8. Mr. Tweah commended ECA for its continued support for his country and the wider subregion, and particularly the support it was providing to facilitate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. He expressed the hope that the participants would formulate strong recommendations in the areas of education, agriculture and finance, which he believed should also be submitted to parliaments so that they could help inform national policies. Indeed, such recommendations should be communicated not only to the annual Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, but also to legislators and other stakeholders in order to achieve the greatest possible impact.

9. The opening ceremony was followed by a performance by a cultural troupe from Liberia, which was attended by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Macroeconomic Policy and Economic Research, Kofi Apraku, and the ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender, Siga Fatima Jagne.

IV. Election of the Bureau

10. Participants elected the Bureau as follows:

Chair:	Liberia
Vice-Chair:	Nigeria
Rapporteur:	Benin

V. Adoption of the agenda

11. The representatives of member States adopted the agenda as presented by the secretariat without amendment.

VI. Presentations and discussions

A. Report on the subregional profile of West Africa

12. In its presentation, the representative of ECA noted that economic growth in West Africa had accelerated from 2.4 per cent in 2017 to 3.2 per cent in 2018, owing to expanding oil production in Ghana and Nigeria, a dynamic services sector, domestic demand and infrastructure investment. That trend was expected to continue in 2019, with economic growth predicted to reach 3.4 per cent. The performance of the subregion in the social domain was likely to be below par, however, and it would remain vulnerable to risks stemming from international events, domestic civil and security disturbances, climate variability and demographic challenges, which could hinder social and economic progress in the short and medium term. Appropriate solutions needed to be found to those problems and, to that end, efforts should be made with a view to managing population dynamics more effectively in order to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend. Stakeholders also needed to mobilize additional domestic resources, strengthen the resilience of economies by adopting policies to promote economic diversification and transformation, and improve the business environment.

13. The discussions focused primarily on the importance of modernizing the agricultural sector, promoting infrastructure development, encouraging the growth of the private sector, reducing gender inequality, investing in human capital, creating more decent jobs, strengthening trade among ECOWAS member countries and accelerating the process of launching a single currency. The representatives called on ECA to deepen its analysis of the security situation and its impact on the socioeconomic performance of countries and to update selected macroeconomic data on countries, giving priority to national sources wherever possible.

B. Report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Subregional Office for West Africa in 2018-2019 and the outlook for 2019-2020

14. The secretariat presented the report on the activities of the Subregional Office for the period from July 2018 to May 2019. In line with the previous report, the focus was on changes that had been or were likely to be initiated and the expected impact of those changes on outcomes. According to the report, the activities carried out had, on the whole, enabled the Office to increase its influence over policy, gain credibility and win the trust of stakeholders, consolidate its accountability mechanisms, deepen its culture of learning and strengthen its operational effectiveness. The report underscored that the weakness of national statistical systems and the threatening economic, sociopolitical, institutional and security context in the subregion were stumbling blocks that constrained the activities of the Subregional Office. It was likely that the Subregional Office would face increasing demand for assistance in 2019 and 2020 owing to its expertise on demographic dynamics and the modalities in which they could be leveraged to promote development. The Subregional Office would continue to support efforts by member States in the subregion by helping them to develop national strategies that would enable them to take full advantage of the Agreement Establishing the

African Continental Free Trade Area, assessing progress towards the structural transformation of their economies and monitoring and evaluating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

15. Participants thanked ECA for the various forms of support that it provided and asked for more information on specific countries in which it had undertaken activities. Discussions focused, in particular, on the format of the report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Subregional Office, the recommendations addressed to ECA that had been formulated at the twenty-first session of the Committee and progress achieved in relation to a number of continental-level projects. In particular, participants sought information on the Africa regional integration index, support for the development of national strategies pertaining to the African Continental Free Trade Area and the impact of that free trade area on West African economies, the proposed single currency and the prospects for ECOWAS enlargement. They expressed regret that the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, which had been conceived to facilitate implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063, was still in a test phase in certain countries, almost four years after the adoption of Agenda 2030, and urged ECA to conclude the development process and make the toolkit available at the earliest opportunity.

C. Report on progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

16. The secretariat presented the draft 2019 report on progress made by the countries of the subregion towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Unlike the 2018 report, which had very much focused on the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2019 report also assessed progress towards the achievement of the corresponding targets of Agenda 2063. The scope of the report was somewhat limited, however, primarily because of a lack of relevant data. As a result, it had not been possible to cover all the indicators of the two Agendas. In terms of outcomes, it appeared that, as a result of the public policies implemented by the States of the subregion, the majority of countries had made encouraging progress in the areas of maternal and child health, access to safe drinking water, the promotion of renewable energy sources, and wealth creation leading to an expansion of the middle class. There were still widening gaps, however, in the areas of poverty alleviation and malnutrition, quality of education, gender and income inequality, sanitation and decent housing, environmental preservation, civil registration and the mobilization of domestic resources. In addition to underperformance in those areas, the subregion suffered from a cross-sectoral deficit in the financing and financial autonomy of national statistical systems. The secretariat concluded by highlighting a number of new developments that were relevant in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

17. At the end of the presentation, participants discussed the degree to which the data analysed were consistent with data provided by States, the appropriateness of the indicators analysed in relation to the particular circumstances of individual States, the number of countries considered in the analysis of certain indicators, the degree to which the analysed data reflected realities on the ground and the degree to which the data set forth in the tables and graphs were consistent with the analysis contained in the report. Participants also noted differences among base years, which made it difficult to compare countries. They called for progress to be assessed in relation to established targets, noted that an analysis of performance prior to 2015 was of little relevance and called for more in-depth analysis by country and by indicator.

D. Report on continental initiatives of the Economic Commission for Africa

18. The secretariat outlined highlights of the work of ECA at the continental level and the capacity-building opportunities offered to member States by the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning. Referring to the report presented by the Executive Secretary of ECA at the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, held in March 2019 in Marrakech, Morocco, the secretariat highlighted areas in which ECA had recently provided support at the continental level. That support had been provided to member States primarily in the areas of development planning, the alignment of national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, economic diversification and industrialization, gender, the demographic dividend and statistics. The secretariat provided participants with information on the Institute, including on its mandate, governance institutions and statutory activities, in addition to information on the number of people who had been trained by the Institute since 2018, the research activities it had conducted, the course catalogue that had been adopted by the technical advisory committee in 2018, current training and research activities relating to the African Continental Free Trade Area, training courses that were currently offered by the Institute or would be launched in the near future and proposed initiatives and programmes relevant to the subregion.

19. Participants took note of the activities of ECA at the continental level, including those related to capacity-building. A number of countries welcomed the fact the Institute offered tailor-made training. Member States commended the goals of the Institute, whose road map included the training of a critical mass of civil servants from the various countries. The modalities for selecting Institute focal points and the criteria for awarding scholarships were also explained to participants.

E. Special session on regional integration

20. Representatives heard a presentation by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Macroeconomic Policy and Economic Research on the efforts of ECOWAS to achieve integration. The Commissioner started by highlighting the efforts made by ECOWAS in the field of peace and security and the tangible results that had been achieved in a number of countries, including Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and, to a lesser extent, Mali. ECOWAS worked on the premise that good governance was a key element in all efforts to promote peace, security and development. He then outlined the significant strides made by ECOWAS towards the establishment of a single currency by 2020. Those included the establishment of a multilateral surveillance mechanism that ensured that States moved forward in a coherent manner. The Commissioner noted the erratic nature of economic growth, which adversely affected regional indicators from one period to the next. He concluded his presentation by outlining the next steps on the road map for the establishment of an ECOWAS single currency and drew attention to the efforts of ECOWAS in other relevant areas to promote development in West Africa.

21. Discussions focused on the modalities for implementing the single currency and for financing the ECOWAS Community Development Programme, which consisted of seven flagship projects.

F. Round table: demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa – challenges and policy actions

22. The round table was moderated by the Acting Chief of the Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development of the Subregional Office for West Africa, Amadou Diouf, and took

the form of a panel discussion involving the ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender, Siga Fatima Jagne; the Coordinator of the Regional Centre for Generational Economics and the Centre for Research in Applied Economics and Finance at the University of Thiès (Senegal), Latif Dramani; the Executive Director of the National Population Council of Ghana, Leticia Appiah; the General Director of Planning at the Ministry of Planning of the Niger, Mainassara Assouman; Sanjo Faniran, from the Ministry of Budget and National Planning of Nigeria; and Oumy Ndiaye, from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Cooperation of Senegal.

23. The panellists based their discussion on a background note that emphasized, inter alia, that development efforts would prove ineffective unless economic policies were implemented in tandem with appropriate social policies and that, notwithstanding the significant economic performance achieved by most countries in the subregion in recent years, West Africa still faced significant social challenges. The subregion had a population with a large proportion of young people. Indeed, 44 per cent of people were under 15 years of age, and their numbers were growing fast, at an annual rate of 2.7 per cent. To exploit that demographic dividend, which stemmed from population structures and trends in the subregion, it was imperative to commit to large-scale investments to improve reproductive health and ensure access to longer-term and high quality education, in particular for girls. It was also crucial to strengthen economic opportunities, especially for women and young people, with a view to creating more jobs for those sectors of the population.

24. The panellists then discussed the most appropriate policies and measures to harness the demographic dividend and how those policies and measures should be integrated into national development plans. The discussion focused, in particular, on the concepts of transition and the demographic dividend, the demographic experiences of developed countries and countries in South-East Asia, the relationship between population dynamics and security in the region, contraceptive policies and ongoing initiatives in West Africa relevant to demographic challenges, including employment policies, strategies to promote small and medium-sized enterprises, and projects for capacity-building of youth and women. Representatives of Cabo Verde, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal shared the experiences of those countries in connection with the formulation of national policies and measures to harness the demographic dividend and the integration of those policies and measures into their national development plans.

25. From the discussions, it emerged that strategies to harness the demographic dividend must include a subregional dimension that should be implemented, inter alia, through community-level policies adopted by the ECOWAS Commission. Those strategies must also provide for targeted actions to combat sexual abuse and human trafficking, including actions to protect and uphold the rights of children, in addition to awareness-raising activities to bring about changes in behaviour and initiatives to increase school enrolment rates and create opportunities for girls. Improving civil registration systems was deemed crucial, as it not only strengthened the right of populations to civil identification but also facilitated development planning, including policies to strengthen human capital.

G. Launch of the structural transformation, employment, production and society profile for Liberia

26. In its presentation, ECA noted that the Liberian economy was highly undiversified. The economy remained highly dependent on the primary sector, which had accounted for approximately 70 per cent of total gross value added between 2010 and 2017. Over the same period, the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy had accounted for 11.4 per cent and 17.9 per cent of gross value added, respectively. The share of total gross value added contributed by different

sectors and industries had remained relatively steady since the early 1990s, which suggested that only a relatively slow structural transformation of the economy was taking place. In addition, the economy was very dependent on exports of unprocessed or minimally processed iron ore and rubber, which accounted for approximately 70 per cent of the country's exports. As for social trends, although progress had been achieved through the implementation of development initiatives, fertility rates remained high, the demographic transition was taking place slowly and many people had only limited access to basic social services. To address those challenges, further efforts were needed to ensure the successful implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018–2023 and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

27. Participants commended the decision of ECA to make use of data from national sources when conducting analysis. They expressed regret that the submitted document made no reference to the main determinants of fertility. They stressed that, in assessing unemployment rates, it was important to consider the particular circumstances of African countries, where informal employment was the norm. With regard to the economic and social performance of Liberia, they noted the lack of investment in the agricultural sector and the fact that social spending accounted for only a very small proportion of the national budget. Participants also took note of the efforts of the Liberian authorities to enhance outcomes through the implementation of the country's national development plan. They appealed to external partners to support efforts by Liberia to revitalize its economic and social fabric, inter alia, by supporting youth education programmes and capacity-building initiatives to facilitate implementation of the national development plan.

H. Report of the expert group meeting on the theme “National capacities and mechanisms for assessing progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: state of play, challenges and prospects in West Africa”

28. The participants took note of the report of the meeting.

VII. Recommendations

29. The Committee made the below recommendations.

Report on the subregional profile of West Africa

ECOWAS should:

- Intensify discussions with a view to elaborating a subregional strategy on economic diversification
- Eliminate the constraints impeding the adoption of the common external tariff.

Member States should:

- Develop strategies to modernize agriculture and put in place a long-term agricultural financing plan.

Report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Subregional Office for West Africa in 2018-2019 and the outlook for 2019-2020

ECA should:

- Limit the use of paper in the production and dissemination of working and information documents for the sessions of the Committee
- Enhance the alignment of the report with ECA strategic priorities;
- Support efforts by member States, upon their request, to strengthen their production of vital statistics
- Ensure that greater attention is given to poverty and disability in analysis and research carried out by the Subregional Office, in the spirit of Agenda 2030 and the pledge to leave no one behind
- Enhance coordination with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank in the production of the Africa regional integration index.

Member States should:

- Prioritize the issue of civil registration and vital statistics.

Report on progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

ECA should:

- Support countries' efforts to rebase their gross domestic product (GDP) figures with a view to enhancing comparability between countries
- Support Member States in their efforts to take ownership of Agenda 2063 in collaboration with the African Union Commission.

Member States should:

- Provide reference years for Sustainable Development Goal indicators
- Rebase their GDP figures;
- Enhance communication among national statistics offices and ministries responsible for planning and economic oversight in order to achieve greater consistency between statistics and policy analysis.

Round table: demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa – challenges and policy actions

ECA should:

- Facilitate efforts by the Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development to generate knowledge that will support States in the formulation of fiscal policies to harness the demographic dividend.

ECOWAS and member States should:

- Integrate population dynamics into development policies with a view to ensuring that wealth generated is used to address the social needs stemming from population growth
- Give greater attention to the schooling of girls in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies.

Report on continental initiatives of the Economic Commission for Africa**ECA should:**

- Work with subregional partners, including the West African Economic and Monetary Union and ECOWAS, to develop a tailor-made, medium-term vocational training programme, to be coordinated by the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, on the basis of an assessment of priority training needs in the subregion
- Plan and facilitate the organization of a round table that would bring together development partners to facilitate the mobilization of adequate financial resources for the implementation of a regional vocational training plan.

Member States should:

- Clear their arrears in financial contributions to enable the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning to meet the growing training needs of countries, which must be addressed to sustain implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063
- Design tailor-made courses to train a critical mass of civil servants at the national level.

Launch of the structural transformation, employment, production and society profile for Liberia**ECA should:**

- Take into account in its analysis of social conditions the key factors that promote high fertility
- Take into account the particular circumstances of African countries, which are characterized by widespread informal employment, when conducting labour market assessments.

Report of the expert group meeting on the theme: “National capacities and mechanisms for assessing progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: state of play, challenges and prospects in West Africa”

30. The Committee took note of the report of the expert group meeting and endorsed it.

VIII. Date and venue of the twenty-third session of the Committee

31. Nigeria and Ghana both offered to host the twenty-third session of the Committee, which would take place in 2020. The venue and date would be determined at a later date by ECA, in collaboration with the host country authorities.

IX. Closing ceremony

32. Following an address by Mr. Dosso, the Deputy Minister of Finance and Development Planning of Liberia, Tanneh Brunson, delivered the official closing address.

33. In his remarks, Mr. Dosso emphasized that fruitful discussions had taken place and that the topics discussed over the previous three days had been of great significance to the subregion. It was clear that countries were extremely interested in strategies to harness the demographic dividend. He appealed to member States to integrate population dynamics into their national development plans and budgets. He assured participants that ECA, acting through its recently established Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development, would strive to generate knowledge and tools to help member States formulate and implement public policies that could promote capturing the demographic dividend. Before concluding his remarks, he expressed his gratitude to the President of Liberia, George Weah, and to the Government and people of Liberia for their kind and warm hospitality and for the excellent arrangements that had been made for the statutory meeting of ECA. He concluded by thanking the ECOWAS commissioners for their active participation in the session and for sharing strategic information on ECOWAS development programmes.

34. Ms. Brunson began by thanking all the participants. She said that the three-day session had provided a forum for open discussion and the sharing of enriching experiences on the theme “Demographic dynamics for sustainable development in West Africa: challenges and policy actions”, and she underscored that the demographics of the subregion, which had a very young population, meant that there was considerable potential for economic transformation. Citizens and leaders therefore had a responsibility to ensure that sufficient resources were invested in the training and development of young people, who constituted the greatest asset of the subregion. She expressed the hope that the many challenges identified in the Liberia STEPS profile for 2019, which was being finalized, would be successfully addressed prior to the issuance of the country’s next STEPS profile, including through the provision of data that would allow better monitoring of progress achieved at the national level.
