



Nations Unies
Commission économique pour l'Afrique

LIMITED
English
Original: French

Twenty-first session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts, West
Africa

Theme:

“Regional integration in West Africa: new challenges and prospects”

27-29 June, Cotonou

Concept note



Subregional Office for West Africa

Maison des Nations Unies, 428 Avenue du Fleuve P.O. Box 744 / BP 744 Niamey, Niger Tel:

+227 20-72-29-61 Fax:

+227 20-72-28-94 Email: srdcwest@uneca.org Web site: <http://www.uneca.org/fr/sro-wa>

I. Background

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts is a body established by the United Nations General Assembly. In West Africa, it meets annually to discuss economic and social performance, based on working documents prepared by the Subregional Office for West Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA/SRO-WA). The Subregional Office for West Africa, based in Niamey, covers the 15 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Experts from these member States form the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of West Africa.

ECA, established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, is one of five United Nations regional commissions mandated to promote the economic and social development of Africa. Its five subregional offices translate its normative and analytical work into operational activities in the subregions. These offices fulfill their mandate by: (a) providing technical assistance to the regional economic communities and member States on policy harmonization, and provide guidance on meeting their specific needs; and (b) facilitating regional integration by serving as focal points for policy dialogue and information sharing between the Commission and stakeholders in the subregions.

The Intergovernmental Committee of Experts meets annually with high-level decision-makers from member States to discuss economic and social performance and make relevant recommendations. It is also the statutory framework reserved for member States to oversee the development and implementation of the Office's work programme and monitor its activities. The ICE provides guidance for the Office's programmes by ensuring that subregional priorities are included as much as possible. It also makes recommendations on economic and social development issues in the subregion. These recommendations may, as appropriate, be considered by the joint ECA-African Union meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Upon its request, the ICE is hosted every year by a member State of the subregion. The twenty-first session of the ICE will be held from 27 to 29 June 2018 in Cotonou, at the request of the Government of Benin. The central theme of the meeting is: "Regional integration in West Africa: new challenges and prospects". This ICE session will be preceded by an ad hoc expert group meeting from 25 to 26 June 2018, on the theme "Implications for potential applicants for ECOWAS membership".

II. Goals and theme of the twenty-first ICE

The twenty-first ICE will meet to discuss recent developments that may impact the economic and social development of West African countries, with a view to identifying the main challenges, and proposing guidelines for accelerating sustainable development through transformation of the economies of the subregion. To this end, participants will have to consider the statutory reports prepared by the Secretariat. All member States will consider the report on the implementation of the SRO-WA 2017 work programme and prospects for 2018, the regional profile report for West Africa, and the report on progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa.

A note on “Regional integration in West Africa: new challenges and prospects” will serve as the basis for discussions on regional integration in West Africa.

III. Rationale for the central theme of the twenty-first ICE

The meeting will be held at a time of major developments in region:

- Nigeria’s emergence from recession, leading to growth in the entire region, particularly in neighbouring countries, which are dependent on it
- Attempts to reorganize the regional bloc following the Morocco's application for membership in ECOWAS, the signing of the partnership agreement with Mauritania and the launch of negotiations for the signing of the associate agreement with Tunisia
- Finalization of negotiations for the official launch of the Continental Free Trade Area
- Acceleration of the ECOWAS monetary agenda
- Increased mobilization by the international community to meet the security challenges in the Sahel region of West Africa.

All these developments have quite an impact on the ties between the economies of West Africa, suggesting the need to shed new light on the definition of regional integration in West Africa.

The relative weight of Member States

The economies of the countries bordering Nigeria depend highly on that country, which commands 78 per cent of regional GDP and hosts 53 per cent of the population of West Africa. In 2016, growth in countries such as Niger, Benin and even Burkina Faso was affected by the recession in Nigeria. Indeed, the rebound in growth from 0.3 per cent in 2016 to 2 per cent in 2017, when the recession in Nigeria ended, is a clear indication of such dependency. The effects of these growth variations in Nigeria on the rest of West Africa have rekindled, in Benin, for instance, debate on the relevance of the country’s policy on reexport to Nigeria. In Niger, the nature of the exportable supply to Nigeria was also challenged.

Potential to expand the regional bloc

On 4 June 2017, the fifty-first ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS held in Liberia agreed in principle to the accession of the Kingdom of Morocco to the Community as follows: "The Conference agrees in principle to Morocco's

accession, given its strong and multidimensional links with the Member States. It has instructed the Commission to consider the implications of such accession in accordance with the provisions of the revised ECOWAS Treaty, and to table the findings at it at its next session". At the December 2017 session, the Heads of State set up a committee of Heads of State to continue discussions before officially confirming Morocco's membership. At the same session, where Tunisia and Mauritania were guests of honour, the associate membership agreement to mark the return of Mauritania to the Community was ratified, while Tunisia was granted observer status. The year 2017 heralded reorganization of the West African bloc.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

After months of negotiations, in December 2017, the AfCFTA was launched in Niamey.

Indeed, after several rounds of negotiations, the fourth meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade held in Niamey from 1 to 2 December 2017 reviewed and approved most of the provisions of the draft agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The agreement establishing the AfCFTA and the protocol on trade in services have been completed and approved by the ministers of trade. However, finishing touches were yet to be added to the Protocol on free movement of persons goods and services, and its annexes, and the Protocol on Rules and Procedures for dispute settlement within the AfCFTA. For this reason, the roadmap has been amended and a calendar of meetings from January to March 2018 prepared and approved by the trade ministers. Also, in March 2018, 44 countries signed the AfCFTA agreement at the Summit of Heads of State of the African Union held in Kigali. This is a major leap for the AfCFTA, insofar as its entry into force will have a great impact on integration in the various subregions of the continent, not least, ECOWAS.

The monetary issue

After two consecutive summits of the ECOWAS Presidential Task Force on the Single Currency, the gradual approach has been adopted. This will ensure that the single currency is launched in 2020, irrespective of the number of countries in the community that would be part of the monetary zone at the time of the launch. It would be possible for countries that will not be ready by 2020 to join the new monetary union later.

The Sahel issue and the challenges involved

In 2017, Sahelian States doubled their efforts to cope with the security and development challenges. In 2018, these efforts have been intensified further. While the security challenges are relatively recent, having been triggered by crises dating back to a little over a decade ago, the development challenges have existed for much longer, and are partly the reason, according to an ECA study¹, for the lingering security challenges in West and Central Africa. It emerges that the demographic issue appears to be chief among the development challenges underlying the various conflicts in the Sahel, in particular, and the West African subregion in general.

The population in all West African countries has a high percentage of young people. On average, more than 60 per cent of the people are under 35 years old. The implications of this progression are serious, considering the problems already posed by environmental stress,

¹ ECA 2017. ECA Sahel study: conflict in the Sahel region and the developmental consequences

socioeconomic exclusion and political instability in some areas. The fertility rate exceeds five children per woman in some Sahelian countries, continuing growth of an ever youthful population. In the absence of sound (albeit sometimes controversial) family planning measures, and owing to the pressure already exerted on weak systems (health, education, infrastructure), the countries are unable to convert the youth population resource they have into positive energies for development. Faced with the difficulties of entering a normal life course, receiving education and health services, and finding decent work, many young people become vulnerable and are tempted to join armed conflicts and other organized crime gangs; or may even get radicalized and join violent extremist groups. These difficulties are a key factor in the origin of conflicts and insecurity in the West African region.

In addition, West Africa is one of the subregions most affected by internal and external migration, which is exacerbated by phenomena such as rampant desertification, soil degradation and drought. While migration can cause difficulties for countries of origin, particularly in view of the constraints it may impose on agricultural development in rural areas, the pressure on urban infrastructures or the brain drain, it does have its advantages, particularly in terms of remittances from international migrants to their countries of origin.

Currently, however, government efforts fall short of their ambitions to make the most of the potential of demographic dynamics for sustainable development. This, in addition to the other phenomena mentioned above, jeopardizes the Sahel's efforts to emerge from the crisis that continues to affect neighboring countries in this region.

The twenty-first session of the ICE will be an opportunity to analyze efforts, identify shortcomings, both in terms of approach and with respect to other assessment criteria. It will also be an opportunity to discuss country efforts to put in place an innovative approach, taking advantage of their geographical proximity in all areas: trade, peace and security for development, and currency. Specific country interventions can promote experience sharing. With regard to the Committee's recommendations, they can inform countries and ECA for better support to countries to bring new content to the regional integration process.

IV. Participation

The twenty-first ICE session will be attended by delegates from 15 West African States, and senior representatives and experts from ECOWAS, the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Mano River Union and other intergovernmental organizations of the subregion. The African Development Bank, the World Bank and NEPAD will also be represented. In addition to ECA, other United Nations agencies will also contribute to making the meeting a success, as will other development partners and non-governmental organizations. Development and research institutions dealing with population issues in Africa will also be invited to contribute to the discussions.

V. ICE documentation

The following reports will be presented at the ICE session, for discussion:

- Implementation of the SRO-WA work programme in 2017 and outlook for 2018
- Economic profile of West Africa

- Progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa
- Roundtable introductory note on “Regional integration in West Africa: new challenges and prospects”

VI. Expected outcomes of the twenty-first meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts

The ICE meeting is expected to enrich and adopt the draft reports to be presented by ECA-WA, and formulate policy recommendations and strategies for decision-makers, for developing national development programmes and accelerating the regional integration process. A detailed report of the meeting will outline the presentations, debates, enhancements to be made to the documents presented, the main conclusions and the recommendations.

VII. Meeting organization and format

The twenty-first ICE will be held in plenary sessions. There will also be a round table meeting, during which reports prepared by the SRO and papers by eminent experts will be presented and discussed. The reports will be published on the ECA-WA web site <http://www.uneca.org/sro-wa/>.

VIII. Working languages

The working languages of the meeting are French and English.

IX. Date and venue

The twenty-first ICE will be held from 27 to 29 June 2018 in Cotonou. It will be preceded by an ad hoc expert group meeting, also to be held in Cotonou on 25 and 26 June 2018 on the theme: "Potential expansion of ECOWAS and implications for the AfCFTA".

X. Administrative arrangements

ECA/SRO-WA and the Government of Benin will handle all local logistics, including hotel reservations, airport reception, shuttle (transport service) to and from hotels. Further details on other administrative arrangements will be provided in the information note, which will be sent to participants who have confirmed their participation.

XI. Contacts

At ECA/SRO-WA

Please send confirmation of participation and requests for further information about the meeting to:

The Director,
 ECA Subregional Office for West Africa
 BP 744 Niamey
Niger

Scanned copies of all correspondence should be sent to Ms. Kadijatou Amadou, Administrative Assistante (Tel: +(227) 20 72 73 12; email: amadouk@un.org) and Mr. Ochozias Gbaguidi, Chief of Section and ICE21 coordinator (Tel: +(227) 20 72 73 33 and Cell: +22792195762; email : ochozias@un.org).

Benin

Mr. Gnansounou Sosthène

Deputy Director of Cabinet
gsosthene@yahoo.fr

Ministry of State responsible for Planning and Development