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**Presentation on the theme of the twenty-first session  
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## **Regional integration in West Africa: challenges and prospects**

## Key messages

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a tool for driving African industrialization, economic diversification and development. It will help to promote the type of trade that produces sustainable growth, creates jobs Africa's youth and establishes opportunities for nurturing businesses and entrepreneurs on the continent. It is worth noting that Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Sierra Leone did not sign the AfCFTA, but are nonetheless bound by ECOWAS' common external tariff.
- Macroeconomic convergence criteria, as defined by ECOWAS, are far from being fulfilled by all its member States. This constitutes a major challenge for the attainment of the objective of a single currency in West Africa. Less than two years from the 2020 deadline for the introduction of a single currency in the ECOWAS region, a Presidential Task Force adopted an updated road map to meet the deadline.
- Infrastructural integration encounters many challenges in West Africa. Under its Community Development Programme, ECOWAS identified seven (7) regional priority projects with the potential to boost economic and social integration. The estimated cost in 2016 of the 7 projects was US \$ 12.45 billion to complete the project. However, their implementation is lagging due to lack of resource mobilization.
- With regard to peace and security, while West Africa has a strong conflict prevention capacity, the ECOWAS military involvement in conflict management remains weak due to poor logistical and financial capabilities. The region is now faced with growing challenges, including the increasing threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism. A strong military response is necessary to curb security threats, but it must go hand in hand with a development response and a durable coordination mechanism.
- Mobility is a key aspect of the ECOWAS Community and contributes substantially to regional integration as well as being a driving force of economic and social development. Nonetheless, challenges of mobility, be it irregular migration, the outbreak of infectious diseases or the harmonization of education and labour regulations need to be addressed to further strengthen the Community.

### I. Introduction

1. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established, on 28 May 1975, by the Lagos Treaty, which brought together all the countries of West Africa. It is the oldest Regional Economic Community (REC) in Africa<sup>1</sup>. It constituted a major building block in the adoption the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) in July 1980 as a necessary development strategy based on the full utilization of the region's resources in building self-reliant economies. The other objective of the LPA was the establishment of an African Economic Community by the year 2000.
2. The objectives assigned to the ECOWAS by this initial treaty were, at the beginning, essentially economic in focus: to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity, accelerated and sustained economic development of member States through effective economic cooperation, and the progressive integration of economies. Several initiatives undertaken after the establishment of ECOWAS helped to strengthen its institutional architecture and to deepen its common policies, thereby resulting in significant achievements

<sup>1</sup> Establishment dates of other RECs : ECCAS (1983), IGAD (1986), AMU (1989), SADC (1992), COMESA (1994), CEN-SAD (1998), and EAC (2000)

in the sub-regional integration process. A revised Treaty signed in Cotonou in July 1993 goes well beyond economic matters to establish cooperation in the political and security domains, and to grant the Community powers to sanction, indicating a desire to make ECOWAS an active player in international arena in Africa and worldwide (ECA, ECOWAS at 40, 2015).

3. The march towards regional integration in West Africa has been marked in recent years by several regional, continental and global dynamics that must be examined to assess their impact on the specific objectives of regional integration in West Africa, namely: trade integration, monetary integration and the unification of financial markets, coordination of sectoral policies, and cooperation in the political and security domains.
4. The present issues paper provides an assessment of regional integration in West Africa, beginning with an overview of the state of regional integration as evaluated through the African Regional Integration Index. It goes on to provide an analysis of challenges and prospects in key dimensions of regional integration. Finally, the paper puts forward policy issues and key questions for discussion.

## II. Status of regional integration in West Africa: an overview

5. Currently there are eight RECs, which are formally recognized by the African Union, and with varying degrees of integration (Table 1). ECOWAS has the most far reaching integration framework, except for the single market regulations in the East African Community<sup>2</sup>, which allows the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services, ECOWAS has the most far reaching integration framework out of the remaining RECs.

Table1: Status of regional economic integration, by regional economic community

Regional Economic Community	Customs union	Free trade area	Single market	Number of countries implementing a freedom of movement protocol	Economic and Monetary union
EAC	✓	✓	✓	3/5	✗
COMESA	✗	✓	✗	Burundi and Rwanda have committed themselves to the protocol	✗
ECOWAS	✓	✓	✗	15/15	UEMOA (8 countries)
SADC	✗	✓	✗	7/15	✗
ECCAS	✗	✓	✗	4/11	CEMAC (6 countries)
CEN-SAD	✗	✗	✗	Unclear	✗
IGAD	✗	✗	✗	No protocol	✗
AMU	✗	✗	✗	3/5	✗

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2017). Assessing Regional Integration in Africa VIII: Bringing the Continental Free Trade Area About.

<sup>2</sup> The East African Community is comprised of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

6. According to the Africa Regional Integration Index<sup>3</sup>, ECOWAS is the second most integrated REC in Africa in the areas of free movement of persons, trade integration, productive integration, financial integration and macroeconomic policy convergence, and regional infrastructure and interconnections. Within ECOWAS, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Senegal have the highest overall rankings, each reaching an overall score of more than 0.6 out of a maximum 1. On the other end, the Gambia, Cabo Verde, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea all score below 0.5. The full ranking for ECOWAS member States can be seen in table 2.

Table 2: Regional integration ranking: ECOWAS

	Overall ranking	Trade integration	Regional infrastructure	Productive integration	Free movement of persons	Financial and macroeconomic integration
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	1	2	12	7	1	7
<b>Togo</b>	2	7	3	2	1	6
<b>Senegal</b>	3	3	13	4	1	3
<b>Niger</b>	4	8	8	9	1	1
<b>Ghana</b>	5	4	2	3	1	12
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	6	9	6	14	1	2
<b>Benin</b>	7	11	14	8	1	8
<b>Mali</b>	8	6	15	12	1	5
<b>Nigeria</b>	9	1	7	10	1	13
<b>Guinea-Bissau</b>	10	10	9	15	1	4
<b>Gambia</b>	11	14	4	1	1	10
<b>Cabo Verde</b>	12	12	1	13	1	9
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	13	5	11	6	1	14
<b>Liberia</b>	14	15	10	5	1	11
<b>Guinea</b>	15	13	5	11	1	15

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2017). Assessing Regional Integration in Africa VIII: Bringing the Continental Free Trade Area About.

<sup>3</sup> The Africa Regional Integration Index is a joint production of the African Union, the African Development Bank Group and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, for more details see also [www.integrate-africa.org](http://www.integrate-africa.org).

### III. Regional integration in West Africa: key dimensions

#### A. Trade integration

7. On trade integration, 44 African Union (AU) member States signed the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) on 21 March 2018, in Kigali, Rwanda. Six other AU member States signed the Kigali Declaration thereby signifying their commitment to sign the AfCFTA Agreement after necessary national consultations have taken place. The AfCFTA, a flagship project of the AU Agenda 2063 for “The Africa We Want”, could play a key role in advancing the development prospects of the ECOWAS. It is therefore key for experts to examine how the region can benefit from the opportunities offered by the AfCFTA to overcome the challenges it is facing and to create pathways for transformational change and sustainable development. (ECA, SEPS Diagnostic analysis, 2018). The AfCFTA offers a perspective of regional integration for ECOWAS member States which reaches across West Africa and offers trade integration with neighbouring countries and beyond. An important aspect is that Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Sierra Leone did not sign the AfCFTA, but are nonetheless bound by ECOWAS’ common external tariff.<sup>4</sup> ECOWAS exports to the rest of Africa increased from 6.3 percent in 2007 to 11.7 per cent in 2014. Intra ECOWAS export remained stable at 10.5 percent during the same period (ECOWAS, 2015).

#### B. Macroeconomic Policy Convergence and Establishment of a Monetary Union and a Single Currency

8. The idea of creating a single currency within ECOWAS was launched in May 1983 by the Conference of Heads of State and Government (Decision A/DEC./6/5/83 relating to the proposal to establish a single ECOWAS Monetary Zone). In 1987, the Heads of State and Government of the Community member States, by Decision A/DEC.2/7/87 relating to the adoption of an ECOWAS monetary cooperation programme (EMCP), expressed their desire to create a single monetary zone within ECOWAS. Delays in implementation of the intermediary targets towards regional currency prompted the Conference of Heads of State of ECOWAS, in Abuja on 15 June 2007 to request the ECOWAS Commission to review the monetary integration process with a view to accelerating the launch of the regional monetary union. This ultimately led the ECOWAS Convergence Council to adopt the roadmap for the ECOWAS single currency in 2020, in May 2009 (ECA, ECOWAS at 40, 2015). The adoption of this roadmap seeks, through the implementation of planned activities, to transform the ECOWAS region into an optimum currency area, one in which it would be beneficial to establish a single currency. Such an area can group several countries or may involve a few regions of a larger country. Defining an optimum currency area requires identifying the conditions under which the benefits of participation in a monetary union outweighs the associated costs. member States were then invited to develop and submit multi-year convergence programmes to ECOWAS and the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA).
9. Less than two years from the attainment of the targeted deadline for the single currency, the pre-requisite conditions to achieving the goals contained in these programmes, notably the macroeconomic convergence criteria have only been partially achieved (table 3). A presidential task force comprised of the Heads of State of Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Niger and Nigeria has been put in place to advocate for this monetary agenda. An updated road map was adopted in Ghana at the meeting of the presidential task force. It is important that West

<sup>4</sup> <https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/34033-pr-indication20of20signing20authority20-20updated20final20final20docx.pdf>

African experts be informed of the new road map and examine the potential implications of the ECOWAS common currency.

Table 3: Primary and secondary macroeconomic convergence criteria compliance (%) 2005-2016

Country	Benin	Burkina Faso	Cabo Verde	Côte d'Ivoire	Gambia, the	Ghana	Guinea	Guinea Bissau	Liberia	Mali	Niger	Nigeria	Senegal	Sierra Leone	Togo
<b>Primary rank criteria</b>															
Budget deficit $\leq$ 3%	50	25	0	75	16.7	8.3	66.7	41.7	91.7	33.3	25	83.3	0	16.7	25
Inflation rate $\leq$ 10%	100	100	100	100	100	25	33.3	100	91.7	100	91.7	41.7	100	25	91.7
Budget deficit financed by the Central Bank $\leq$ 10%	100	100	100	100	58.3	66.7	75	100	100	100	100	91.7	100	66.7	100
Gross Reserves in months of import $\geq$ 3	100	100	100	100	83.3	75	16.7	100	33.3	100	100	100	100	91.7	100
<b>Second rank criteria</b>															
Public debt/GDP $\leq$ 70%	100	100	0	100	0	50	83.3	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	66.7
Nominal exchange rate variation $\pm$ 10 %	100	100	100	100	83.3	66.7	66.7	100	100	100	100	66.7	100	83.3	100

Source: ECA (2018)

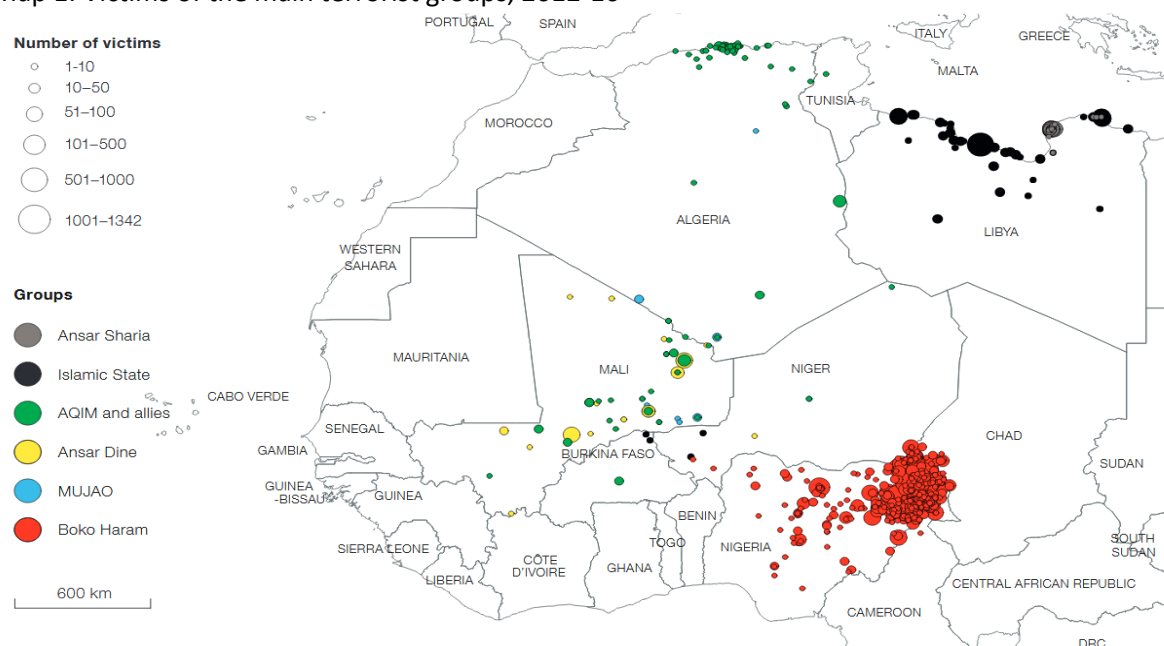
### C. Peace and security

10. The consensus among experts is that ECOWAS achieved major accomplishments in conflict prevention. ECOWAS's work on democracy, especially election monitoring, is an area of success. An arguably crucial component of conflict prevention is the early warning system, ECOWARN, operated by the ECOWAS Early Warning Department. The major challenges in terms of security the Community currently faces are terrorism, transnational crime, particularly people and small arms and drug trafficking and piracy. Transnational trafficking in people, drugs, small arms and light weapons (SALW) and other illicit goods contributes to regional insecurity and continues to undermine state foundations by challenging the progress towards good governance and the implementation of the Rule of Law. In 2006, ECOWAS adopted a Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), their Ammunition and Other Related Materials and launched a small arms initiative (ECOSAP) (a capacity-building programme) to assist member States and civil society organisations in dealing with the proliferation of SALW. Unfortunately, few visible results have come out of these initiatives, as mentioned in the UNODC support Action Plan 2016-2020, largely due to weak border controls and a generally weak security apparatus.
11. Piracy affects all ECOWAS member States, either directly or indirectly, through ports for their trade, with an escalation in the Gulf of Guinea. In the first quarter of 2018, the Gulf of Guinea recorded 29 incidents, which makes 40 per cent of worldwide piracy attacks in this period.<sup>5</sup> Strategies (such as the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy in 2014) have been defined and measures taken to reinforce maritime security, but many constraints (obsolete naval ships, weak naval defence systems, obsolete maritime aircraft, lack the essential radar to monitor states maritime domains, corruption of operators) impede on the efficiency of the undertaken actions.
12. In the area of terrorism although significant progress has been made, especially in the fighting against Boko Haram in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, the region remains frequently subject to terrorist attacks, predominantly in the Lake Chad area, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (see also map 1).
13. While ECOWAS has a strong conflict prevention capacity, its military involvement in conflict management remains weak due to low logistical and financial capabilities as was exemplified by the difficulties in deploying the ECOWAS mission MICEMA in Mali during the political crisis of 2012 or in the fighting against Boko Haram in Nigeria.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1244-pirate-attacks-worsen-in-gulf-of-guinea>

Map 1: Victims of the main terrorist groups, 2012-16



Source: Walther (2017)

Note 1: The groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are Al-Mourabitoun and Those Who Sign in Blood. Only violent events attributed to an identified perpetrator are taken into consideration.

Note 2: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

#### D. Infrastructure integration

14. The ECOWAS Infrastructure development agenda is guided by Goal 5 of the Community Strategic Framework 2016-2020, which has the ambition to expand and improve infrastructural facilities within the Region. Several programmes, projects and activities are tailored towards achieving this goal and to promote integration, support growth in regional trade, free movement and accelerate economic diversification. Some of the ECOWAS projects are in tandem with continental infrastructure development agenda such as the African Union's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) or other initiatives like the Alliance for the Sahel for which Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are members and which strives to double energy access during the period 2018- 2022.
15. Notwithstanding, the efforts made to promote infrastructure development, the region still faces important infrastructure deficits (EBID, 2016). In transport, road cover remains low (4.7 km of road per 100 km<sup>2</sup> against 6.8km for the entire continent) while roads are the most widely used mean by which freight and passengers move across countries in the region. Moreover, the railway network has a limited interconnection (of the 10,188km of rail network only 6 out of 12 of the national networks are for sub-regional use) and as such has very limited impact on the trade inside the Community. While the domestic demand for air transport is growing, this sector shows weak capacity to meet the needs expressed. The maritime ports of the region lack essentially berth depth to handle large container ships.
16. Concerning energy, low-cost energy resources are unevenly distributed across the fifteen (15) member States of ECOWAS and there is very limited energy production in some countries, whilst the region is resource rich with hydropower, oil and gas reserves. The ECOWAS has the



lowest electricity consumption in the world, standing at less than 150 kWh per capita against the Sub Saharan average of 500 kWh and South Asia's average of 650 kWh (EBID, 2016).

17. The major challenge with information and communications technology (ICT) is the very limited internet penetration in the sub-region, of around approximately 3 percent (EBID, 2016). Nonetheless, the ICT sector has witnessed considerable transformation and development within ECOWAS over the last few years, with the introduction of new technologies and new services like optical fibre as a transmission medium in the networks.
18. To respond to the challenges of infrastructural integration in the sub-region, the ECOWAS Commission established the Project Preparation and Development Unit (PPDU). The aim of this initiative is to strengthen the Commission's capacity to prepare and package projects to speed up the delivery of infrastructure development. More specifically the PPDU's objectives are to conduct a number of regional infrastructure studies which are complementary to and in line with the PIDA; establish a Fund for the development and the financing of ECOWAS transport and energy sectors (FODETE); develop a partnership /cooperation agreements for projects implementation; and facilitate the implementation of key regional projects (Dakar-Abidjan-Lagos Highway, Dakar-Bamako railway modernization, extension of the West African gas pipeline, rural/peri-urban electrification).
19. ECOWAS has identified seven (7) regional priority projects under its Community Development Program (CDP) which suffers from lack of funding. The total cost of the seven projects is estimated at US \$ 12.45 billion (ECOWAS, 2016). These are:
  - a) construction of the 2x3 highway Lagos-Dakar lanes (in two phases, the Abidjan-Lagos sections of 1028 km and Abidjan-Dakar of 3000km);
  - b) the Cotonou-Niamey-Ouagadougou-Dori-Abidjan railway loop and the Ouangolodougou-Bamako railway section;
  - c) the project for the creation of the Sealink shipping company;
  - d) the 225kV and 330kV interconnection project for the West African power grids (Nigeria-Benin-Burkina, Ghana-Burkina Faso-Mali-Guinea);
  - e) the construction of solar and wind power plants in ECOWAS member States;
  - f) the regional program for the implementation of the Rice Offensive in West Africa (with a component of realization of boreholes for use food and agriculture), and;
  - g) the creation of six hours specialized referral hospitals and a Regional Centre for Disease Surveillance and Control of ECOWAS (CDSC / ECOWAS).

#### **E. Social affairs and mobility**

20. Factor mobility, including freedom of movement for people is an important aspect in the integration process. Since human capital for example is embodied in people, their mobility is essential to support knowledge diffusion within the Community and support balanced economic development. In addition, higher degree of labour mobility can also help mitigate the adverse effects of asymmetric shocks which may arise within a given area.
21. In the ECOWAS region, the most visible action already undertaken to increase mobility is the suppression of visas among the fifteen (15) member States. Although this is a good initiative to increase mobility, it might be insufficient if policies, touching on health, education or labour market are not mainstreamed in both national and regional agendas.
22. On health, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), West Africa is both a hotspot for emerging infectious diseases and a region where the burden of zoonotic diseases is

particularly high. Emerging and re-emerging diseases at the human-animal-ecosystems interface are occurring with increased frequency. Of the 55 registered disease outbreaks that occurred in Africa over the last decade, 42 took place in West Africa.<sup>6</sup> These include highly contagious diseases that cross borders easily and have the potential to rapidly evolve into pandemics.

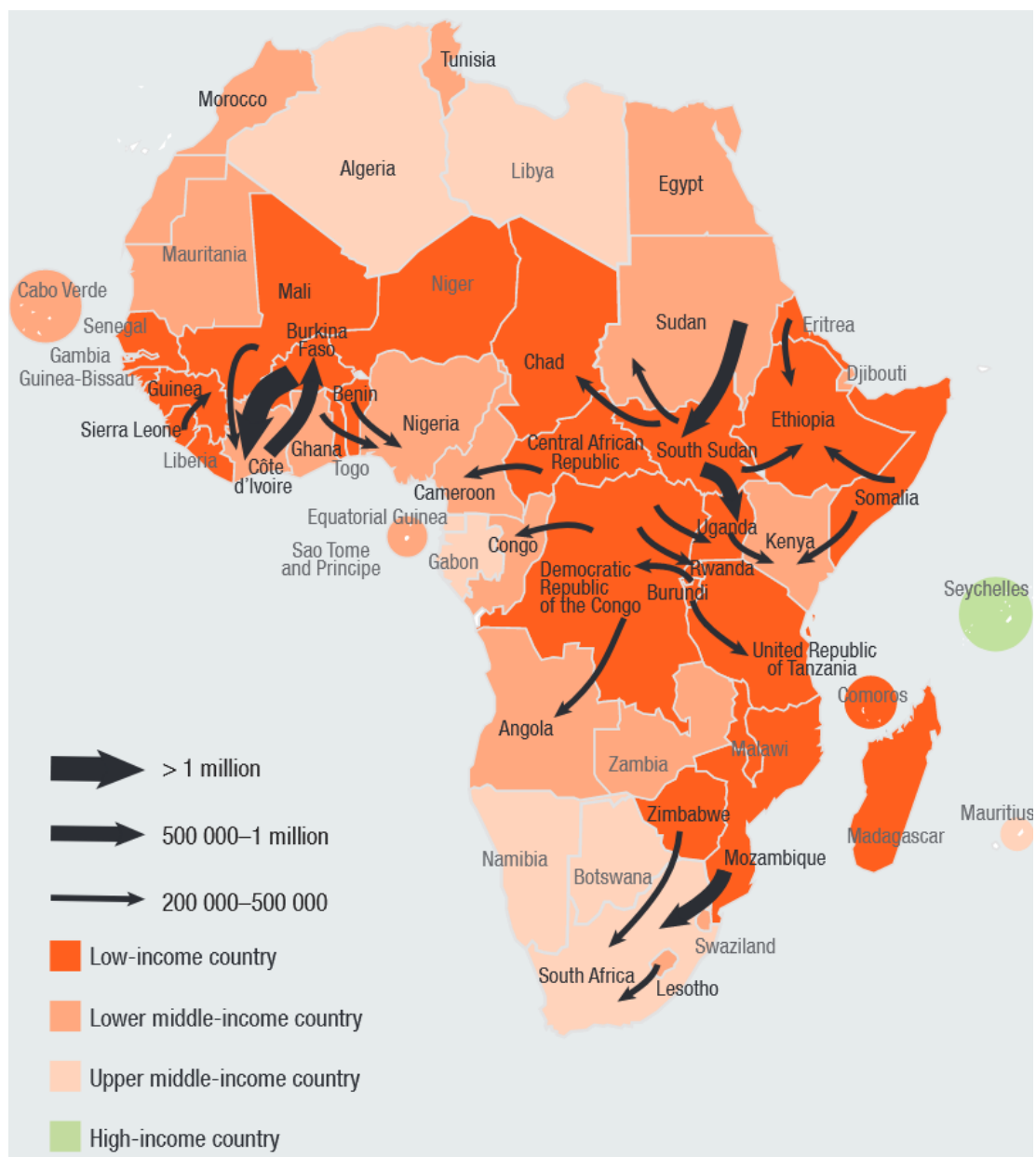
23. Transmissible diseases (such as Ebola or Tuberculosis) can quickly diffuse across countries and have detrimental effects on development as recently seen during the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak which affected Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. This outbreak led to restrictions on the free movement of people and goods in some parts of the region and resulted in a negative impact on these countries. This epidemic resulted in more than 11 000 cases of deaths within the region between 2014 and 2016 and an important loss of production- over 12 percent of the countries' combined outputs (World Bank).<sup>7</sup>
24. ECOWAS' health specialized institutions (such as the West Africa Health Organization (WAHO)) have weak capacities to monitor and predict epidemics within the region. Even if emphasis has been put on the control of communicable diseases in the WAHO's regional Health Strategic Plan 2016-2020, concrete actions to build epidemics surveillance and prevention capacities for the region are limited.<sup>8</sup>
25. On education, ECOWAS intends to move towards stronger alignment of regional education systems and support the mutual recognition of diplomas and certificates from institutions within the region. This might help to promote workforce mobility and the exchange of ideas through academic networks and sound policies. In this vein countries must provide stronger support to the ECOWAS Technical and Vocational Education Training Strategy for Skills Improvement and Employability (ETSSIE). They must also support and take ownership of the ECOWAS Nnamdi Azikiwe Academy Mobility Scheme (ENAAMS). The scheme aims to develop an academic mobility system for students and teachers (including those from the diaspora) and encourage institutions to put in place language immersion programmes to promote student and teacher mobility in the region.
26. Migration is shaping economies and societies in West Africa and given the attention the migratory route towards Europe currently receives, some perspective is needed. Niger is a major migration hub for irregular migration towards Libya and Algeria and onwards to Europe. This type of migration raises many issues, such as the risk of death, due to dangerous routes across the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea, the unstable political and security situation in Libya, as well as human trafficking including sexual exploitation, child trafficking. This represents a situation of potential brain drain from the educated youth, but offers a perspective of increased remittances to the region.
27. UNCTAD (2018) is showing, that in 2017 a total of 53.4 percent of the total stock of African emigrants are migrating within Africa. This value rises to 71.7 percent for West Africa and shows that migration is predominantly an intra African phenomena for ECOWAS countries. For example, Côte d'Ivoire alone has a stock of 1.2 million migrants residing in its territory in 2017. OECD and ILO (2018) estimate the contribution of migrants at 19 percent to Côte d'Ivoire's economy in 2008. Map 2 shows the main intra-African migratory flows, highlighting that West Africa is one of the regions of Africa with the highest level of intra-regional migration.

Map 2: Main intra-African migration corridors, stocks in 2017

<sup>6</sup> <http://documents.banquemonddiale.org/curated/fr/765151485797373436/pdf/ITM00194-P159040-01-30-2017-1485797370635.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.ebola-sitrep.ebola-summary-20160511?lang=en>

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Source: UNCTAD (2018)

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations

#### **IV. Policy issues and key questions**

The following questions are to be considered for discussion:

- a- How can West African countries ensure that their trade integration arrangements are in line with the African Continental Free Trade Area? What are the implications for existing trade and economic partnership agreements? What are the implications of the situation where some ECOWAS member States have not signed the African Continental Free Trade Area?
- b- What is the new road map and what are the potential implications of the ECOWAS common currency? How can the African Continental Free Trade Area potentially influence this process?
- c- How can regional integration ensure peace and security in West Africa? What areas of cooperation of member States is of key importance? How can the ECOWAS improve its logistical and financial capability to better respond to the security challenge in West Africa?
- d- Can the ECOWAS community expect better results from the PPDU compared to the previous initiatives in infrastructure integration? How can the issue of financing the seven regional priority projects identified by ECOWAS be addressed?
- e- How can the initiatives undertaken by the ECOWAS community better address issues related to mobility, protect the rights and status of regular migration and strengthen cooperation in the health, education and labour sector in West Africa?

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