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

**Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials
and Experts for West Africa**

Twenty-fourth session

Banjul (hybrid), 10 and 11 November 2021

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



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I. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Government of the Gambia, the twenty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa was held in hybrid format on 10 and 11 November 2021 in Banjul. The theme of the session was: "Leveraging AfCFTA implementation to build forward resilient and sustainable economies in West Africa in the COVID-19 era".

2. Two statutory reports by the secretariat (the Subregional Office for West Africa of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) were reviewed, with particular focus on the potential impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. These were the reports on the implementation of the work programme of the Subregional Office for the period 2020-2021 and the report on the progress made towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. The Committee also considered the 2021 report on economic and social developments in West Africa. There was a roundtable discussion to deepen reflection on the core theme of the session. Finally, the Committee agreed upon relevant recommendations to accelerate sustainable development in West African countries.

II. Attendance

3. The 15 ECA member States that are served by the Subregional Office for West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) participated in the session. Regional economic communities and intergovernmental organizations, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority and the West African Development Bank were represented. United Nations entities, namely the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in the Gambia, and the Gambia country office of the United Nations Development Programme were also represented. Around 200 guests, including representatives of civil society organizations, took part either online and in-person.

III. Opening statements

4. At the beginning of the session, a 15-minute video clip was shown to set the context for the session. The video contained short interventions by the following: Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe, on the work being done by ECA in support of member States; the Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning of Nigeria, Zainab Ahmed, on the advantages of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for her country and for Africa in general; the Minister of Trade of the Niger, Moctar Gado Sabo, on the support provided by ECA in validating the national AfCFTA strategy of the Niger; the Executive Secretary of the national AfCFTA committee of Côte d'Ivoire, on the support provided by ECA in the formulation and implementation of the national AfCFTA strategy of Côte d'Ivoire; and young women entrepreneurs on how to better implement AfCFTA in the subregion.

5. At the opening of the session, statements were delivered by: the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Gambia, Mambury Njie; the outgoing Chair of the Bureau of the twenty-third session, David Adeosun; the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in the Gambia, Seraphine Wakana; Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe; and the Acting Director for Trade at ECOWAS, Kola Sofola, on behalf of the ECOWAS Commissioner for Trade, Customs and Free Movement, Tei Konzi.

IV. Election of the Bureau and adoption of the agenda

6. The following countries were elected by the Committee to form the new Bureau:

Chair: Gambia

Vice Chair: Senegal

Rapporteur: Nigeria

7. The Committee adopted the agenda for its twenty-fourth session with slight amendments.¹

V. Presentations and debates

A. Draft report on the implementation of the work programme of the Subregional Office for the period 2020–2021

8. The secretariat presented the report on the activities of the Subregional Office for the period from November 2020 to November 2021. In the report, it was stressed that the socioeconomic context remained fragile as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and because of sociopolitical and institutional insecurity in the subregion.

9. On the one hand, the Subregional Office will continue to consolidate the results achieved by its Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development, in particular by strengthening the capacity of member States in respect of population dynamics and budgeting to take advantage of the demographic dividend, in partnership with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning and the Regional Consortium for Research in Generational Economics. The Office also undertook to continue supporting member States to accelerate the subregional integration process and the development and implementation of national AfCFTA strategies. As part of the fulfilment of the commitments made by member countries, the Office will continue to provide substantial support in deploying and promoting the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, which will facilitate monitoring of and reporting on the realization of national development plans, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

10. The participants expressed their gratitude to ECA for the efforts made in implementing the recommendations of the twenty-third session and for organizing the twenty-fourth session in hybrid format despite the restrictions imposed to control the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted the achievements made and stressed the need to ensure that the good performance of the Subregional Office be reflected in the progress made by countries in meeting the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. They called for continued support in the deployment of the integrated planning and report toolkit, in the implementation of AfCFTA, and in the integration of demographic dynamics into development policies.

B. Draft report on economic and social developments in West Africa in 2020 and the outlook for 2021 and 2022

11. The secretariat presented the report on economic and social developments in West Africa in 2020 in the face of security, demographic and pandemic-related challenges. According to the report, average real gross domestic product (GDP) in the subregion was expected to decline by 0.9 per cent in 2020, compared to growth of 3.3 per cent in 2019. The COVID-19 crisis had thrown several economies of the subregion into recession. Six countries (Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) of the fifteen ECOWAS member countries recorded negative growth, with the worst performance being the 14.0 decline registered in Cabo Verde, which was highly dependent on the tourism sector. Notwithstanding the contraction of economic activity, the economies of the

¹ Available at <https://www.uneca.org/?q=events/west-africa/twenty-fourth-meeting-of-the-intergovernmental-committee-of-senior-officials-and>.

subregion showed greater resilience than Africa as a whole, for which average GDP in 2020 declined by 2.5 per cent. Economic growth in the subregion is expected to rebound to 3.5 per cent in 2021 and 4.9 per cent in 2022. Inflation remained under control in the countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union in 2020, below the community standard of 3.0 per cent, but reached an average of 12.8 per cent in countries of the subregion outside the Union. The average budget deficit, under the combined effects of the response to COVID-19 and the security crisis (in the Sahel in particular), worsened to 6.8 per cent of GDP in 2020, compared with 4.4 per cent of GDP in 2019. In terms of social development, the negative impact of the pandemic was likely to reverse the subregion's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. At the end of the presentation, participants highlighted the need to include in the report specific analyses of commodities and related price trends. Regarding the poverty analysis, participants emphasized the importance of focusing on income inequality and the incidence of poverty. Participants acknowledged the challenges of conducting analyses related to governance and security, which were major impediments to development in the subregion that need to be addressed. They also noted that it was imperative to bring to the attention of policymakers the persistent gaps in the education and health sectors, notwithstanding the recent progress that had been made.

C. Draft report for 2021 on progress to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

13. The secretariat presented the 2021 report on the progress made by the countries of the subregion towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Regardless of the potential negative impact of COVID-19, West African countries had, over the past two decades, made encouraging progress overall towards achieving the key targets of the 2030 Agenda by 2030. Indeed, according to ECA estimates and projections, at least 40 per cent of the countries in the subregion should achieve at least 35 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals based on the main related indicators. This encouraging progress has been mainly in the areas of extreme poverty, food and nutrition insecurity, health-care provision and inclusive education. However, the empowerment of women, the fight against the effects of climate change, governance, peace and security, access to electricity, the provision of infrastructure and sustainable industrialization constitute the dimensions where the countries of the subregion are recording the most significant underperformance.

14. The ensuing discussions focused on data and the need to strengthen the capacity of countries in respect of monitoring and evaluation. For instance, data needs in the environmental sector should be addressed with the support of development partners. Participants stressed the importance of using national data, given the divergence noted between the findings in the report and SDG's assessments of some countries². They also pointed out that the forecast made in the report had not taken into consideration the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

D. Implementation of programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the way forward in the Gambia with the support of UNDP

15. The Deputy Director for Planning at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Gambia, Ibrahima Kinteh, presented the country's progress in the implementation of programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and ongoing and future initiatives to accelerate the country's performance. The Goals have been prioritized and aligned with the national development plan through the use of the rapid integrated assessment tool. In 2018, the Goals were incorporated into the national development plan to ensure inclusive implementation of the programmes with the involvement of local communities. In addition, the capacities of national experts have been strengthened in strategic planning through the deployment of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit with the support of ECA. The Gambia has undertaken action to raise awareness and promote the successful implementation of the programmes and the national development plan. Like the other

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>.

countries in the subregion, the challenge posed by deficiencies in data needed to monitor and evaluate public policies and progress towards the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 is a major concern for the country. The Gambia is conducting a voluntary national review and a voluntary local review for 2022 with the support of development partners, in particular UNDP.

16. The Resident Representative of UNDP in the Gambia, Aissata De, shared with participants the range of substantive support provided by UNDP to the Gambia, in particular in the formulation and monitoring of development policies and programme implementation. UNDP has provided support in the formulation and reprioritization of the national development plan in the context of COVID-19, in the monitoring and evaluation of progress to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and in conducting the voluntary national review. UNDP has also placed special emphasis on the promotion of good governance and the empowerment of young people and women.

E. Panel discussions of lessons learned from the development of subregional and national strategies to successfully implement the African Continental Free Trade Area

17. Two panel discussions were held during this part of the session: one on the status of AfCFTA and regional perspectives thereon, which was moderated by the Chief of the Subregional Initiatives Section at the Subregional Office, Amadou Diouf; and the other was on sharing experiences and lessons learned in AfCFTA implementation, which was moderated by Senior Trade Expert and Professor at Cheikh Anta Diop University, Abdoulaye Seck.

18. The panellists on the first panel were: Mahlet Girma of the ECA African Trade Policy Centre; Francis Ikome of the ECA Regional Trade and Integration Division; and General Manager of the Operations Department at the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, Abdouramane Diallo.

19. Ms. Mahlet noted that the rights, provisions and obligations of AfCFTA applied to the countries that had deposited their instruments of ratification. However, there were still outstanding issues that need to be resolved. Intra-African trade was relatively low, reflecting the continued dependence of African countries on trading partners outside the continent. Moreover, African economies lacked diversification. According to recent findings by ECA, the benefits from AfCFTA would potentially be centred on intra-African trade. Through the effective implementation of AfCFTA, growth in intra-African trade would boost the continent's industrialization and diversification. ECA provided assistance to countries in the negotiation, ratification, implementation, and monitoring stages of the AfCFTA process through technical advisory and capacity-building support, and in advocacy, developing national and regional strategies, policy tools, and knowledge products, among other areas.

20. Mr. Diallo presented the various initiatives underway to support targeted countries in the implementation of AfCFTA strategies. Joint initiatives among the Islamic Development Bank, ECA and the Enhanced Integrated Framework were being implemented. The initiatives were informed by the AfCFTA national strategy priority action programmes of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger, Senegal and Togo. Mr. Diallo ended his intervention by informing the participants about the development of a study on the potential gains and opportunities that landlocked countries could derive from the effective implementation of AfCFTA.

21. Mr. Ikome emphasized, among other items, the objectives of and the value added by the subregional AfCFTA implementation strategies, highlighting the approaches used in developing them and the key lessons learned regarding the regional economic communities. He closed by drawing attention to the pivotal role of regional economic communities in advancing the continent's integration agenda, including in the implementation of strategic initiatives such as AfCFTA. Not only would they serve as the building blocks of the African Economic Community, but their free trade agreements were also envisioned as the building blocks of AfCFTA. He stressed the importance of carefully managing the interface between national, subregional and continental level commitments and realities for the successful implementation of AfCFTA.

22. The second panel was attended by experts from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. It provided an opportunity for the countries to share their experiences, best practices and challenges in the implementation of AfCFTA. They focused their exchange on the process of implementing the Agreement Establishing the African Continent Free Trade Area, from negotiations under the leadership of ECOWAS to the implementation of national strategies. They addressed the process of consultations with various actors, the establishment of institutional mechanisms (including AfCFTA national committees and sectoral organizations), and the awareness-raising and capacity-building activities undertaken to promote the implementation of the Agreement. The challenges relating to financing the implementation of national strategies, dealing with issues of structural transformation by stimulating the consumption of local products, and harmonizing regulatory and customs frameworks were also discussed by the countries. They used the opportunity to share the main highlights of their national strategies and the projects being implemented. They closed the panel by thanking ECA for its substantive technical and financial support for the formulation and the implementation of the AfCFTA national strategies.

23. In terms of the perspectives that emerged from the country's presentations, delegates requested more support in the collection of data on services and in measuring the performance of countries in services. They called for the harmonization and interconnection of customs systems and the protection of intellectual property, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises. Finally, participants emphasized the imperative to maintain the pace and move forward on the regional integration agenda in the ECOWAS subregion, notably in respect of a common currency and the effective free movement of people, goods and services. Doing so would enable the subregion to fully benefit from AfCFTA.

F. Roundtable on the central theme of the twenty-fourth session and the launch of the "Made in West Africa" initiative

24. The Director of the Subregional Office for West Africa, Ngone Diop, moderated the roundtable, whose panel was composed as follows: the Director of Trade at the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration & Employment of the Gambia, M. Ousmane Bojang; Programme Management Officer at the ECOWAS Department of Trade, Customs and Free Movement, Christopher Mensah-Yawson; the Representative in the Gambia of the International Trade Centre Raimund Moser; the Director of Studies and Strategy at the Ministry of Planning of Côte d'Ivoire, Ali Bamba; and Co-Chair of the Africa Top Initiative and Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Blossom Academy of Ghana, Joseph B. Acheampong.

25. Ms. Diop indicated that, through AfCFTA, the African Union sought to create a pan-African free trade area to liberalize the flow of goods and services, thereby increasing intra-African trade and enhancing regional development prospects. According to the 2020 edition of the *Economic Report on Africa*, AfCFTA would boost intra-African trade between 15 and 25 per cent by 2040 and increase regional income by 7 per cent, or \$450 billion, by 2035, and create a market encompassing 1.3 billion consumers.

26. The panellists shared their views and made recommendations on various critical issues, including on: (a) concrete actions to be taken by Governments to ensure the successful implementation of AfCFTA; (b) ways that AfCFTA could be used to promote the effective implementation of the "Made in West Africa" initiative; (c) the need for a well-coordinated subregional structure and strategy to ensure the successful implementation of AfCFTA; (d) United Nations support for the Gambia in AfCFTA implementation, in particular in better engaging women and young people towards rebuilding the economies of West Africa in the COVID-19 era; and (e) how businesses owned by women and young people could have a place at the AfCFTA negotiating table, bearing in mind the additional challenges that they faced.

G. Discussion of the continental initiatives of the Economic Commission for Africa

27. The Chief of the Population Dynamics for Development Section of the Subregional Office, Bakary Dosso, facilitated a discussion in which participants were provided updates on three flagship initiatives: the roll-out of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, which was presented by Tadele Agaje of the ECA Macroeconomic and Governance Division; the achievements and capacity-building programme of the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, which was presented by Thierry Amoussougbo; and the key messages of the seventh session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and information on the preparations for the eighth session thereof, which was presented by Nassim Oulmane of the Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management Division.

H. Roundtable on key milestones in accelerating regional integration for West African transformation

28. Under the facilitation of Mamoudou Sebeogo of the Subregional Office, the roundtable featured interventions by two panellists: Acting Director of ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority, Simeon Koffi; and Sekou Kanate of the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union. The panellists shared the experiences and contributions of their respective institutions in strengthening the regional integration process. In that regard, Mr. Sebeogo briefed participants on the formulation of ECOWAS Vision 2050 and the key milestone achieved with its adoption by the Council of Ministers of Economy and Planning, paving the way for its endorsement by the Authority of Head of States and Government. Mr. Kanate highlighted the development of the new strategic plan of the Commission of the West African Economic and Monetary Union for the period 2021–2025, which would be financed at the level of 92 per cent by the Commission.

I. Summary of the conclusions and recommendations of the pre-session policy dialogue on key subregional initiatives of the Subregional Office

29. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting on key subregional initiatives of the Subregional Office, held on 9 November 2021, were presented to participants in the twenty-fourth session of the Committee. The recommendations were subsequently adopted by the Committee, along with additional recommendations that were tabled and adopted at the session, as set out below.

J. Recommendations

30. Pursuant to the conclusions set out in the draft report on the implementation of the work programme of the Subregional office for the period 2020–2021, ECA should:

- (a) Strengthen the capacities of member States in strategic planning and evaluation of public policies in order to better manage the monitoring and evaluation of public development policies;
- (b) Consolidate current support for West African countries in mainstreaming the integrated planning and reporting toolkit among their development planning tools and in the implementation of AfCFTA, and integrate demographic dynamics into development policies, with special emphasis on the implementation of budgets that are sensitive to demographic dividend initiatives.
- (c) Establish a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Committee and report back at each subsequent session thereof.

31. In respect of the draft report on economic and social developments in West Africa in 2020 and the outlook for 2021 and 2022:

- (a) ECA should:
 - (i) Include specific analyses of price trends in commodities, income inequality, and poverty in terms of the trends in the number of poor people;
 - (ii) Bring to the attention of policymakers the persistent gaps in the education and health sectors, notwithstanding the recent progress made by countries;
 - (iii) Support the capacity-strengthening of member States so that they may better internalize the various subregional, regional and international strategic documents and development agendas.
- (b) Member States should:
 - (i) Address the challenges to peace and security in West Africa by tackling the governance deficits that are major contributors to instability and conflict, including issues of democratic consolidation, transparency and accountability, social exclusion and human rights violations;
 - (ii) Maximize the benefits of AfCFTA and diversify economies away from primary resources to labour-intensive sectors (e.g. agriculture, oil and mining) and create value chains in manufacturing for effective implementation of AfCFTA national strategies.

32. Taking into considerations the findings in the draft report on progress to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:

- (a) ECA should:
 - (i) Provide technical and financial support for monitoring and evaluation, including the development reporting mechanisms, and strengthen national statistical systems for proper coordination and dissemination of high-quality data to tracking performance in respect of the two agendas;
 - (ii) Fill the data gaps through the use of proxies, in particular in respect of the environment and climate change, in order to promote more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the achievement of the goals of the two agendas;
 - (iii) Consider the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in projections up to 2030 relating to Sustainable Development Goal indicators, with a view to better identifying measures to re-prioritize policies, budgets and programming as part of the decade of action to achieve sustainable development.
- (b) Member States should:

Intensify investments in infrastructure development and provide access to clean water and adequate sanitation, paying particular attention to rural and semi-urban areas.

33. In follow-up to the roundtable on lessons learned from the development of national and subregional strategies to successfully implement AfCFTA:

- (a) Member States should:
 - (i) Continue to strengthen the mobilization of technical partnerships within the framework of AfCFTA implementation, with particular emphasis on communication, training, capacity-building and conducting studies;
 - (ii) Encourage the establishment of frameworks for the promotion of intellectual property and local products.

(b) ECA should:

Support member States in improving the availability of data on trade in-services in order to better assess the implementation of national AfCFTA strategies in the subregion.

(c) ECOWAS should:

- (i) Establish a mechanism for trade facilitation and harmonization of regulatory frameworks in West Africa, similar to what is being done at the regional level through the support of the African Export-Import Bank;
- (ii) Sustain the pace of integration in the ECOWAS zone, notably through a common currency and the free movement of people, goods and services, which will boost AfCFTA implementation;
- (iii) Harmonize and unify customs and regulatory systems in the ECOWAS zone.

34. In follow-up to the roundtable on leveraging AfCFTA implementation to build forward resilient and sustainable economies in West Africa in the COVID-19 era:

(a) Member States should:

- (i) Establish a subregional framework to allow small and medium-sized enterprises to have access to subregional public procurement opportunities;
- (ii) Increase the ease of doing business by rehabilitating and building new production and marketing infrastructure that will allow the private sector (especially small and medium-sized enterprises) to benefit from AfCFTA implementation;
- (iii) Support the effective implementation of the “Made in West Africa” initiative by enhancing local productivity in terms of both quantity and quality, build subregional values chains based on the comparative advantages of the respective countries, and promote the full involvement of the private sector in the implementation of AfCFTA.

(b) ECA should:

- (i) Carry out a study to identify the main opportunities in terms of value chains in the subregion;
- (ii) Conduct a study on the informal sector with a view to formalizing the sector and increasing the tax base of member countries;

(c) ECOWAS should:

Establish at the sub-regional level a framework for the harmonization and coordination of national AfCFTA implementation strategies (e.g. a subregional AfCFTA implementation committee).

K. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the pre-session policy dialogue on key subregional initiatives of the Subregional Office during the period 2020–2021

35. The Committee took note of the main conclusions and recommendations that came out of the pre-session policy dialogue and added the following recommendations:

- (a) Implement more effectively the ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of persons across the subregion by eliminating non-tariffs barriers (NTB);
- (b) Promote local production, facilitate access to credit, and strengthen trade infrastructure;
- (c) Work with country experts to ensure a process for reviewing and validating the methodology and preliminary results of the ECA initiative to develop a dashboard to assess socioeconomic performance.

VI. Date and venue of the twenty-fifth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa

36. The delegates were invited to contact ECA to express their willingness to host the Committee's twenty-fifth session. The date will be determined later by ECA, in collaboration with the host country.
