



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

ECA/WA/ICE/23/01E
Distr.: General
18 January 2021

English
Original: French

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

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

Twenty-third session

Held online, 26–27 November 2020

**Report of the twenty-third session
of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials
and Experts for West Africa**



A.21-00055

I. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the twenty-third session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa was held by videoconference on 26 and 27 November 2020. The theme of the session was: “Maximizing investments to optimize population dynamics in the context of COVID-19: the imperative to build back better”.

2. Two statutory documents of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) were reviewed, with a particular focus on the potential impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, namely: the report on the implementation of the Office’s programme of work and the report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of Agenda 2063. At its twenty-third session the Intergovernmental Committee also considered the report on the economic and social profile of the subregion and continental initiatives by ECA in support of sustainable development and regional integration efforts. In addition, the session included a round-table discussion to look in greater depth at the central theme of the meeting. The session concluded with recommendations relevant to the development of West African countries.

Attendance

3. All 15 member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took part in the meeting, namely: 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, intergovernmental organizations and international organizations were also represented: ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the Mano River Union, the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority, the Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), the Niger Basin Authority, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development, the West African Development Bank, the Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA), the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS), the West African Monetary Institute (WAMI), the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD), organizations of the United Nations system with offices in the Niger and the United Nations Resident Coordinator Offices of Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. More than two hundred participants attended the session.

4. In order to contextualize regional development and to convey a better idea of the Office’s responses to the issues before it, a five-minute video film was shown. The film was followed by several statements, including by the Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe, on ECA support for countries; the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Gambia, Mambury Njie, on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and support received from ECA; the Director of Foreign Trade at the Ministry of Trade of Côte d’Ivoire, Kaladji Fadiga, on ECA support for the African Continental Free Trade Area; the Commissioner in charge of macroeconomic policies and economic research at the ECOWAS Commission, Kofi Konadu Apraku, on the Commission’s leadership and support in the management of the pandemic and on ECA support for the ECOWAS Commission. The founder of the initiative Fresh and Young Brains in Nigeria, Nkiruka Stella Okonkwo, and the President of the National Youth Council of Senegal, Khadim Diop, delivered statements focusing on youth employment and vulnerability in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. Opening ceremony

5. Six addresses were delivered during the opening ceremony: the first by the outgoing chair of the Bureau of the twenty-second session of the Intergovernmental Committee, Benedict Kolubah, Liberia; the second by David Adeosun, on behalf of the Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning of Nigeria, Olusola Idowu; the third by the Director of the ECA Subregional Office in West Africa, Ngoné Diop, on behalf of Ms. Songwe; the fourth by Khardiata Ndiaye Lo, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system in the Niger; the fifth by Assouman Mainassara, Director-General of Planning and Forecasting, on behalf of Aichatou Kané, Minister of Planning of the Niger; and the sixth, the opening address, by Prince Clem Ikanade Agba, Minister of State for Finance, Budget and National Planning of Nigeria.

III. Election of the Bureau

6. The following countries were elected to constitute the Bureau:

Chair: Nigeria

Vice-Chair: Niger

Rapporteur: Liberia

IV. Adoption of the agenda

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

V. Presentations and discussions

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

8. The representative of the secretariat presented the report on the activities of the Office for the period from June 2019 to October 2020. In its report, the Office stressed that the economic context had remained fragile as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the sociopolitical, institutional and security instability in the subregion. It noted the increased demand for assistance resulting from the need for economic resilience and recovery in the face of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. Working in partnership with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) and the Regional Consortium for Research in Generational Economics, the Office would continue to focus on consolidating the achievements of its Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development, including capacity-building for member States in population dynamics and budgeting that was tailored to the demographic dividend. The Office also undertook to continue rendering support to member States of the subregion in the development, validation and implementation of national strategies to take full advantage of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. In fulfilment of the commitments made by countries, the Office would provide substantial support to member States in the conduct of their 2021 voluntary national reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. The participants expressed their gratitude to ECA for the efforts that it had made to give effect to the recommendations of Intergovernmental Committee at its twenty-second session and to hold its twenty-third session, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. They pointed out that, given the unprecedented nature of the period covered by the present report, May 2019–September 2020, detailed information would be more necessary than ever on the implementation of the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Committee, the revitalization of ECA and ECOWAS support for States, in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the intensified outreach programme on Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The experts also exchanged views on improving governance in the face of the deteriorating security situation in the subregion, harmonizing the GDP rebasing process under way in the countries under the guidance of ECA and strengthening the capacities of the national observatories tracking population dynamics and the demographic dividend.

B. Report on the subregional economic and social profile of West Africa

11. The representative of the secretariat introduced the 2020 report on the economic and social profile of West Africa. According to the report, the economy of the subregion was expected to contract by 2.9 per cent in 2020, representing a growth rate 6.5 percentage points lower than the pre-pandemic forecast. That underperformance had resulted from a combination of transmission channels, including lower commodity prices, weak financial flows, reduced tourism revenues and increased volatility in financial markets. The slowdown in output growth would result in negative per capita income growth of 5.4 per cent. The medium-term outlook could be further weakened by the large infrastructure deficit, an unfavourable macroeconomic environment, adverse weather conditions, social unrest and security threats in the Sahel.

12. Following that presentation, participants highlighted the negative effects of the pandemic on the national economies of the subregion and on the subregion as a whole. They also raised concerns about the uncertainties surrounding the end of the pandemic in West Africa, before calling for a major technical and scientific mobilization effort, with the support of ECA and ECOWAS, to find appropriate solutions. Discussions revolved around the health and economic response plans developed in individual countries, including with the support of ECA. Participants suggested that an evaluation could be made of the effectiveness of those plans, with the sharing of best practices and pooling of efforts. Participants were also informed of the various actions undertaken by ECOWAS and ECA. In that context, participants proposed the establishment of a task force mandated to campaign for debt relief and renegotiation, the mobilization of financial and other institutions, the development and wide dissemination of drug procurement platforms and the coordination of health responses and interventions at the subregional level.

C. Report on efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063

13. The representative of the secretariat presented the 2020 report on progress by the countries of the subregion towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063. Overall, more than 40 per cent of the countries in the subregion had already covered more than 70 per cent of the ground towards attainment of Goals 10, 12, 13 and 15. No country, however, was on track to achieve Goals 2, 4–7, 9 and 14 by 2030. The countries had, however, embarked on reforms and programmes to strengthen governance and institutions, restore peace and security and strengthen social cohesion.

14. The resulting policies to boost domestic resources had made encouraging progress in mobilizing tax revenues, in particular in such countries as Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Togo, even though their performance was still fairly weak. Progress had also been made in terms of access to health care, through the construction and rehabilitation of health infrastructure and training, the increase in the number of health-care personnel and the implementation of free health-care programmes, in particular for children and pregnant women.

15. On the other hand, the subregion was lagging well behind in such areas as the efficiency of its consumption and production patterns, the sustainable protection and harvesting of marine and ocean resources, adaptation to the effects of climate change, access to energy, safe drinking water and adequate sanitation. Targeted and quick-win reforms were also expected to have a greater impact on the eradication of extreme poverty, the creation of decent jobs, the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of sustainable cities through well-managed urban development.

16. The ensuing discussions focused on the complexity of the pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences for the countries of the subregion and looked at the responses by ECA and ECOWAS in promoting research for development with a view to achieving greater autonomy in the supply of affordable essential products and medicines to the subregion. Representatives stressed the need for better coordination of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at the subregional level, the imperative to improve national civil registration and social protection systems and to speed up the migration of enterprises from the informal to the formal sector. In conclusion, they reiterated the imperative for decision-makers to step up efforts to carry out the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

D. West Africa in the era of COVID-19: situation, political measures, actions and prospects for building back better

17. In his statement, Léonce Ndikumanan, Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, remarked first on the complexity of the COVID-19 crisis for all States, poor and rich alike, and then proceeded to delineate the main impacts and transmission channels of the disease for Africa in general, and West Africa in particular. He pointed out that COVID-19 was likely to undermine the gains in socioeconomic development made by countries in recent years. As a result, a sharp contraction in economic growth would result primarily from the drop in commodity prices, the decline in tourism activities and revenue from the tourism sector, job losses and the tighter fiscal space. The main challenges in that area were the need to create jobs, in particular for young people, to develop the capacity to take advantage of the subregion's wealth in natural resources, to strengthen the resilience of households to shocks and to mitigate the weakness of the social protection and security system.

18. The presentation gave rise to a range of responses, focusing primarily on the extreme vulnerability of the economies of the countries of the subregion to health shocks and crises, and also their weak capacity. The problem that insufficient domestic resources were being mobilized to finance productive investment was also highlighted in the discussions. In response, representatives advocated self-sufficiency in key areas such as medicines, the fostering of good governance and a better match between training and labour market needs. They also stressed the need to reinvigorate the private sector in order to strengthen productive investment, including through innovative mechanisms such as public-private partnerships. Lastly, they agreed that the post-COVID-19 recovery must be built on new foundations to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

E. Continental initiatives of the Economic Commission for Africa

19. The representative of the secretariat presented the highlights of ECA work at the continental level, including the key messages of the sixth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, the deployment of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit at the national level, support for the improvement of civil registration systems and vital statistics, and the strengthening of the regional integration process through the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

20. The presentation on the sixth session of the Regional Forum highlighted policy options and other measures to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the framework of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. With a view to informing and preparing member States, participants provided guidance on preparations for the seventh session of the Regional Forum, scheduled for 1–4 March 2021 in Brazzaville. That meeting would focus in particular on articulating policy options and measures for a sustainable and resilient post-COVID-19 recovery and on defining an inclusive and effective pathway for the realization of the 2030 Agenda within the framework of the decade of action and delivery.

21. With regard to regional integration and establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area, ECA was aware of the challenge posed by the drop of more than \$1 billion in foreign direct investment in Africa under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In that context, however, the presentation highlighted the opportunity which the Area offered to African countries with the strengthening of intra-African trade and reviewed current activities, including capacity-building and policy dialogue with countries and regional economic communities. Lastly, ECA stressed the need to strengthen the digitalization of the economy, including the development of e-commerce, and to consolidate activities to that end.

22. Participants noted the importance of vital statistics in the evaluation of public policies and efforts to carry out the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. They also reviewed progress in the implementation of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, which offered an endogenous approach to the issue, while also stressing the need for better coordination and integration of associated activities, all under the leadership of ECA. The representative of ECA briefed the experts on fundamental aspects of the application of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. To date, 20 countries had adopted the toolkit and five others had been able to align their national policies with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Work on deployment of the toolkit was under way in three West African countries: Benin, Liberia and the Niger, while its extension to other West African countries was envisaged for 2021, in response to their requests.

F. Special segment on regional integration: fostering regional integration in the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area

23. The segment was moderated by Abdouramane Diallo, International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation/Islamic Development Bank, who took note of the presentations submitted by the ECOWAS Commission, the WAEMU Commission, AFRISTAT and the private sector of the Niger.

24. The speakers focused their presentations on the need to establish a framework for the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area in West Africa, with particular

attention to the regulation and harmonization of trade practices. During the ensuing debate, attention was drawn to the issue of access to credit on terms favourable to private sector financing, as a precondition for enabling the private sector to take full advantage of the opportunities for commercial gains and growth afforded by the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. Participants also highlighted the urgent need to upgrade the quality of transport and energy infrastructure to strengthen production activity and facilitate trade, in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area. Lastly, participants stressed the importance of data and statistics in guiding analysis, evaluation and operationalization of the Area.

G. Round table on maximizing investments to optimize population dynamics in the context of COVID-19: the imperative to build back better

25. The round table was moderated by Ngone Diop, Director of the Subregional Office for West Africa, and it comprised the following panellists: Silvère Konan, research specialist at the Felix Houphouët Boigny University in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Regional Consortium for Research in Generational Economics in Senegal; Assouman Mainassara, Director-General of Planning and Forecasting at the Ministry of Planning of the Niger; Oka Obono, University of Ibadan, Nigeria; Sadou Doumbo, Director of the Observatory of the Demographic Dividend in Mali; José Agnelo Sanchez, economic expert, Cabo Verde; and Simon Koffi, Head of the Studies and Research Division, ECOWAS Commission.

26. The panel discussion was informed by a background paper which, among other things, observed that appropriate policies on population dynamics were conducive to economic growth and sustainable development in the subregion. To that end, a multidimensional approach was required. According to the panel, countries should strengthen their tax systems and enhance the effectiveness of public spending programmes in the areas of education, health, employment, support for the private sector, environment and governance. That approach should bring together all relevant stakeholders, including governments, households and communities, civil society, the private sector, subregional organizations and development partners. The COVID-19 pandemic was a call for innovation, requiring vigorous and urgent responses from all spheres of decision-making. Accordingly, Africa must focus on the demographic issue and commitments to optimize investment in the health, education and well-being of its people, with a view to reaping the demographic dividend.

27. Following the secretariat's background presentation, the panellists shared the experiences of individual countries (Cabo Verde, Niger, Nigeria) and the subregion as a whole. At the national level, particular emphasis was placed on maximizing investment in human capital development and the involvement of communities and traditional and religious leaders. At the subregional level, attention was drawn to current initiatives to accelerate the demographic transition and support the empowerment of women and girls.

H. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the webinar of think tanks and experts on generational economics and structural transformation in West Africa in the COVID-19 era

28. Representatives were provided with a summary of the conclusions and recommendations of the webinar of think tanks and experts.

I. Recommendations

29. The Intergovernmental Committee drew up the recommendations set out below.

Draft report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Subregional Office for West Africa in 2019 and outlook for 2020

❖ ECA:

- Improve the structure for presenting the state of implementation of the Committee's recommendations, specifying the activities that have been carried out, those in progress and those that remain to be carried out;
- Consolidate support for the rebasing of countries' GDPs, with a view to harmonizing and updating the base year of national accounts in all countries in order to improve the outcome of assessment of the macroeconomic convergence criteria at the community level;
- Contribute to the capacity-building of national observatories on population and the demographic dividend;
- Support States in assessing potential impacts on their economy in the process of operationalizing the African Continental Free Trade Area.

❖ Member States:

- Strengthen national leadership in the process of formulating and implementing national strategies on the African Continental Free Trade Area, for its more effective operationalization.

Draft report on the subregional economic and social profile of West Africa

❖ ECA:

- Collect and disseminate the experiences and best practices of other countries, in terms of prevention, response and socioeconomic recovery strategies and measures in the post-COVID-19 period.

❖ Member States:

- Take measures to accelerate the process of formalization of enterprises and strengthen the system for developing employability and entrepreneurship, in particular for young people and women;
- Strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations and the empowerment of women in the face of health shocks and crises, including through the strengthening of national protection and social security mechanisms and arrangements.

Draft 2020 report on efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063

❖ ECA:

- Promote the visibility of Agenda 2063 through the implementation of a good communication and outreach strategy;

- Strengthen the technical and organizational capacities of countries in the production and dissemination of good quality and timely statistical data, in particular through the deployment of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, to ensure the better monitoring and evaluation of, and reporting on, the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 during the decade of action and delivery.

❖ **Member States:**

- Increase investment in civil registration and vital statistics systems in order to have good quality and timely statistics for the better monitoring and evaluation of public policies;
- Step up reforms and policies during the decade of action and delivery, for enhanced efficiency in consumption and production patterns, the protection and sustainable use of marine and ocean resources, adaptation to the effects of climate change, and access to energy, drinking water and sanitation services.

❖ **ECOWAS:**

- Strengthen support for efforts by member States to promote governance in the subregional context of a deteriorating security environment and increasingly frequent health shocks and crises;
- Encourage and step up support for scientific research in the States of the subregion, with a view to promoting endogenous solutions to health crises, in particular in the production of drugs, vaccines, medical inputs and equipment.

Round table on maximizing investments to optimize population dynamics in the context of COVID-19: the imperative to build back better

❖ **Member States:**

- Promote a budgeting approach that takes due account of the demographic dividend in the implementation of public policies in general and population policies in particular;
- Strengthen investment in human capital, including in such areas as health, gender and women's empowerment and child mortality;
- Significantly increase national budgetary resources earmarked for the financing of statistical systems in general and statistical production and dissemination in particular, without setting aside the continued establishment of national statistical development funds in all West African countries.

Continental initiatives of ECA

❖ Member States:

- Formally submit to ECA, through its Subregional Office for West Africa, requests for support for the deployment and operationalization of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit in the countries of the subregion;
- Engage regularly in the production of the annual voluntary local and national review reports, in particular for countries that have not yet embarked on that exercise.

Regional integration: fostering regional integration in the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area

❖ ECA:

- Encourage and coordinate efforts to harmonize the production and dissemination of statistical data in West African countries in order to meet the need for national and regional comparisons.

❖ Member States:

- Increase financing for economic infrastructure in general and transport and energy infrastructure in particular for development and trade facilitation in the context of the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area;
- Strengthen intraregional cooperation to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area.

J. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the webinar of think tanks and experts on generational economics and structural transformation in West Africa in the COVID-19 era

30. The Intergovernmental Committee took note of and duly endorsed the principal conclusions and recommendations of the webinar of think tanks and experts.

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

31. Taking into account the particular circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the secretariat proposed that the Intergovernmental Committee should conduct consultations with States to identify a host country for its twenty-fourth session in 2021. It was agreed that the secretariat would communicate the date of the twenty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee to the Bureau of its twenty-third session once the host country had been identified.