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Twenty-fourth Session of the Intergovernmental
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(24th ICE)

Hybrid Meeting
10-11 November 2021



THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS AND EXPERTS FOR WEST AFRICA

Statement of the conclusions and recommendations

Theme: *“Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economies in West Africa in a COVID-19 Era”*

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I. Introduction

1. At the invitation of the Government of the Republic of The Gambia, the Twenty-fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICE) for West Africa was held in hybrid format from 10 – 11 November 2021 in Banjul, the Gambia. The theme of the meeting was: "*Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economies in West Africa in a COVID-19 Era*".

2. Two statutory documents of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) were reviewed, with particular focus on the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. These were the Report on the implementation of the Bureau's work programme for the period 2020-2021 and the Report on the progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of the AU Agenda 2063. The Twenty-fourth ICE session also considered the 2021 Economic and Social Report for West Africa. There was a roundtable discussion to deepen the reflection on the core theme of the meeting. Finally, the session agreed and came up with relevant recommendations to accelerate sustainable development in West African countries.

II. Participation

3. The 15 ECOWAS Member States took part in the meeting: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Regional Economic Communities (RECs), intergovernmental organizations and international organizations; including Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA/WAEMU) were represented, while ALG and BOAD participated virtually. UN entities, namely; the Office of Special Coordinator for development in the Sahel, represented by Ms. Nwanneakolam Vwede-Obahor and UNESCO also participated as well as the Resident Coordination Office and the UNDP of The Gambia. Around two hundred guests, including Non-State actors and Women and Youth Network participated in both virtual and in-person meetings.

4. At the beginning of the meeting, a video clip of about 15mins was watched with the aim of setting the context of the twenty-fourth session of the ICE. The video presented some of ECA's interventions in support of Member States. It elicited several interventions including those of Ms. Vera Songwe, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA on ECA's support to States, His Excellency, Honourable Zainab Ahmed, Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning of Nigeria, on the advantages of the AfCFTA for her country and Africa in general, Mr. Moctar Gado Sabo, Minister of Trade of Niger, on the support of ECA on the validation of the national strategy of AfCFTA of Niger, Ms. Fofana Fatoumata, Executive Secretary of the national Committee of AfCFTA of Côte d'Ivoire, on ECA's support for the formulation and implementation of the AfCFTA in Côte d'Ivoire, and young and women entrepreneurs in West Africa on how to make a better implementation of AfCFTA in the sub region.

III. Opening Ceremony

5. Five speeches were delivered at the opening ceremony: (i) Mr. ADEOSUN, David, outgoing Chairperson of the twenty-third ICE, from Nigeria (i) Mr. ADEOSUN, David, outgoing Chairman of the twenty-third ICE, from Nigeria; (ii) Ms. Seraphine Wakana, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in The Gambia; (iii) Ms. Vera Songwe, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ECA iv) Mr. Kola Sofola, Ag. Director of Trade, on behalf of Honorable Tei Konzi, ECOWAS Commissioner for Trade, Customs and Free Movement;

and v) the opening address by His Excellency, the Honourable MAMBURY NJIE, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of the Republic of The Gambia.

IV. Election of officers

6. The meeting elected the following officers:

Chairperson: The Gambia

Vice Chairperson: Senegal

Rapporteur: Nigeria

V. Adoption of the Agenda

7. Delegates of the Member States adopted the draft agenda and the programme of the meeting with slight amendment.

VI. Presentations and Debates

A. Draft report on the implementation of the work programme of the ECA Sub-regional Office for West Africa in 2020 and outlook for 2021

8. The Secretariat presented the activity report of the Bureau for the period from November 2020 to November 2021. The Bureau stressed that the socio-economic context remains fragile as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, socio-political, institutional and security instability in the sub-region.

9. On one hand, the Office will continue to consolidate the results achieved by its Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development, in particular the strengthening of the capacities of member States in population dynamics and budgeting for the demographic dividend, in partnership with the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) and the Regional Consortium for Research on Generational Economics (CREG). The Office also undertook to continue its support to member States to accelerate the integration process in the sub-region and the development and implementation of national strategies for the agreement on the African continental free trade area (AfCFTA). As part of the fulfilment of the commitments made by the countries, the Office will continue to provide substantial support to the member States for the deployment and popularization of the use of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit (IPRT), which facilitates jointly and concomitantly the monitoring and reporting of the National Development Plans (NDPs) and both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (UA 2063).

10. The participants expressed their gratitude to ECA for the efforts made in implementing the recommendations of the 23rd session of the ICE and holding the 24th session of the ICE in hybrid format despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. They noted the achievements made and stressed the need to ensure that the Office's good performance to be reflected in the country's progress in meeting the SDG targets. They called for continued support to the current deployment of IPRT toolkit, the implementation of AfCFTA as well the integration of demographic dynamics in development policies.

B. Draft Economic and Social Report for West Africa in 2020 and Short-Term Outlook for 2021 and 2022

11. The Secretariat presented the 2021 report on the economic and social situation in West Africa in the face of the security, demographic and COVID-19 pandemic challenges. According to the report, the average real GDP growth in the sub-region is expected decreased by 0.9% in

2020 compared to +3.3% in 2019, with several economies in recession under the impact of Covid-19. Six countries (06) (Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) out of the fifteen (15) ECOWAS countries recorded a negative growth with the worst performance of -14.0 percent registered in Cabo Verde which is highly dependent on the tourism sector. Notwithstanding this contraction of economic activities in the sub-region, the economies showed greater resilience than the African average in 2020 (-2.5 percent) and the economy is expected to rebound to 3.5 percent in 2021 and 4.9 percent in 2022. Inflation remained under control in UEMOA countries in 2020, below the community standard of 3.0 percent, but reached 12.8 percent on average in non-UEMOA countries. The 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 percent of GDP in 2020 compared to 4.4 percent of GDP in 2019. At the social level, the negative impact of the pandemic is likely to reverse the sub-region's progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

12. At the end of the presentation, participants highlighted the need to include specifics analysis on commodities and related prices trends. On the poverty analysis, participants emphasized the importance to focus on income inequalities and both on trends of poverty incidence and the number of poor people. Participants acknowledged the relevant analysis on challenge related to governance and security, major impediments for the region that need to be addressed. They also raised the imperative to bring to the attention of policy makers the persistent gaps in education and health sectors, despite the recent progress made by countries.

C. Draft 2021 Implementation Report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the equivalent targets of the African Union's Agenda 2063

13. The Secretariat presented the 2021 report on the progress of the countries of the sub-region towards achieving the SDGs and the AU 2063. Regardless of the potential negative impacts of Covid-19, West African countries have overall over the past two decades made encouraging progress towards achieving the key SDG targets in 2030. Indeed, according to ECA estimates and projections, at least 40% of the countries in the sub-region should achieve less than 35% of the SDGs based on the main related indicators. This encouraging progress is mainly in the areas of extreme poverty, famine and food and nutrition insecurity, health provision and inclusive education. However, the empowerment of women, the fight against the effects of climate change, governance, peace and security, access to electricity as well as the provision of infrastructure and sustainable industrialization constitute the dimensions where the countries of the sub-region are recording the most significant underperformance.

14. The ensuing discussions focused on data and the need to strengthen the country's capacity on monitoring and evaluation. For instance, data needs on environmental sector should be addressed with the support of development partners. Participants stressed the importance to use national data, given some mis-alignment noted between the report and SDG's assessments of some countries. They also raised the limit of the report in not considering the impact of COVID 19 in the forecast made.

D. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the way forward in The Gambia and the support of UNDP

15. Mr Ibrahim Kinteh, Deputy Director Planning, from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs of The Gambia presented the country's progress on the implementation of the SDGs and ongoing and future initiatives to accelerate the country's performance. The SDGs have been prioritized and aligned to the national development plan with the Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tool. In 2018, SDGs were domesticated in National development plan to ensure inclusive

implementation of the SDGs with the involvement of local communities. In addition, the capacities of national experts have been strengthened in strategic planning with the deployment of Integrated planning and reporting toolkit (IPRT) with the support of ECA. The Gambia has undertaken awareness-raising and advocacy actions for the successful implementation of the SDGs and the national development plan. Like the other countries of the region, the issue of data deficit for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies as well as the SDGs and the 2063 agenda is a major concern for the country. The Gambia is engaged in the formulation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) and the Voluntary local review (VLR) for 2022 with the support of development partners and the UNDP in particular

16. Ms Aissata DE, The Resident Representative of UNDP in The Gambia shared with the delegates a range of substantive support provided to The Gambia, particularly in terms of formulation and monitoring of the implementation of development policies and programs. These include support for the formulation and reprioritization of the National Development Plan in the context of Covid-19, the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 as well as the production of VNR. Special emphasis is also being placed by UNDP on the promotion of good governance and empowerment of youth and women.

E. Session on Successful Implementation of the AfCFTA: Lessons Learned from the Development of Sub-regional and National Strategies

17. Two panel discussions were held during this session: (i) "Status of the AfCFTA and Regional Perspectives" moderated by Mr Amadou Diouf, Chief of the Subregional Initiatives Section, ECA/SRO-WA; (ii) "Implementation of the AfCFTA in Countries: Sharing of Experiences and Lessons Learned" moderated by Prof. Abdoulaye Seck, Senior Trade Expert, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar Senegal.

18. The panellists on the first panel were: Ms. Mahlet Girma from the ECA African Trade Policy Centre in Ethiopia; Mr. Francis Ikome from the ECA Regional Integration Division in Ethiopia and Mr. Abdouramane Diallo, Manager of the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC)/Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). The second panel was attended by experts from Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

19. From the first panel, Ms Mahlet noted that legally, the rights, provisions, and obligations of the AfCFTA apply to the countries that have deposited their instruments of ratification. However, there are still outstanding issues that need to be resolved. Intra-African trade is relatively low, reflecting the continued dependence of African countries on trading partners outside the continent. Besides, the African economies lack diversification. According to recent findings by ECA, the benefits from the AfCFTA are potentially centred on intra-African trade. The growth in intra-African trade in the effective implementation of the AfCFTA would boost Africa's industrialization and diversification. Moreover, ECA support to countries to the AfCFTA process includes negotiations, ratification, implementation, and monitoring a this through technical advisory, capacity building support in developing, national and regional strategies, policy tools and knowledge products, advocacy, among others.

20. Mr Abdouramane Diallo from ITFC presented the various initiatives underway to support countries in the implementation of AfCFTA strategies in targeted countries. Joint initiatives between the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), ECA and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) are being implemented. They are informed by the AfCFTA national strategy priority action programs of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal and Togo. M. Diallo ended its communication by informing the participants of the development of a study on the potential

gains and opportunities to be drawn by the landlocked countries in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

21. Mr. Francis Ikome highlighted among others, the objectives of Regional AfCFTA Implementation Strategies and their value addition. It also speaks to Regional AfCFTA Implementation Strategies, which have been supported by ECA, highlighting the approaches used in developing them and the key lessons learned regarding the Regional economic Communities (RECs). He closed by emphasizing the pivotal role of RECs in advancing Africa's integration agenda, including in the implementation of strategic initiatives such as the AfCFTA. According to M. Ikome, the RECs are not only the building blocks of the African Economic Community (AEC) but RECs free trade agreements (FTAs) are also envisioned as the building blocks of the AfCFTA. He stressed the importance to carefully manage the interface between national, regional and continental level commitments and realities for the successful implementation of the AfCFTA.

22. The second panel provide the opportunity to the countries to share their experiences, best practices and challenges in the context of the implementation of the AfCFTA. They focused their communication on the process of implementing the AfCFTA agreement from negotiations under the leadership of ECOWAS to the implementation of national strategies through the formulation. They presented the process of consultations with the various actors, the establishment of institutional mechanisms including the AfCFTA National Committees and the sectoral organization, the sensitization and capacity building of the main actors in 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. The countries used the opportunity to share the main articulations of their national strategies and the projects being implemented. They closed their intervention 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 on services data and measuring country's performance on services. They called for harmonisation and interconnexion of custom's system and protection of intellectual property particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The participants finally emphasised the imperative to maintain the pace and move forward the regional integration agenda in the ECOWAS sub-regional, notably the common currency and the effective free movement of people, good and services. This will enable the subregion to fully benefit from the AfCFTA.

F. Roundtable on the central theme of the 24th ICE and launch of the "Made in West Africa" initiative: "Leveraging the Implementation of the AfCFTA to Build Resilient and Sustainable Economies in West Africa in the Era of COVID-19"

24. Ms. Ngone Diop, Director of the Economic Commission for Africa Office in West Africa, moderated the round table, whose panel was composed as follows, Mr Ousmane Bojang, Director of Trade; Mr Christopher Mensah- Yawson, from ECOWAS Department of Trade, Customs and Free movement, Mr Raimund Moser, International Trade Center (ITC) representative in the Gambia; Mr Ali Bamba, Directeur of Studies and Strategy, from the Ministry of Plan of Côte d'Ivoire and Mr. Joseph B. Acheampong, Co-Chair of the Africa Top Initiative, Co-founder CEO Blossom Academy of Ghana.

25. As introductory remarks, Ms Diop indicated that through the AfCFTA, the African Union (AU) seeks to create a pan-African free trade area liberalizing the flow of goods and services, thereby increasing intra-African trade, and enhancing regional development prospects. According to the ECA 2020 Economic Report for Africa the AfCFTA will boost intra-African trade between 15 and 25 per cent by 2040 and increase regional income by 7% or \$450 billion by 2035; thus, creating a market encompassing 1.3 billion consumers.

26. The panellists shared views and contributions and relevant recommendations on various critical issues, included i) the concrete actions to be put in place by governments to ensure the successful implementation of the AfCFTA; ii) the ways that the AfCFTA can be used to promote "Made in West Africa" goods and services; iii) the need of well-regional coordinated structure and strategy to ensure successful implementation of the AfCFTA, iv) the UN support to the Gambia on AfCFTA, and in particular ways to better engage women and youth in the implementation of AfCFTA toward rebuilding the economies of West Africa, particularly in the Covid-19 era, v) How can women and youth-owned businesses have a place on the AfCFTA table bearing in mind that they tend to face more challenges especially in this COVID-19 pandemic era and overall, the concrete actions and measures need to make "Made in West Africa" effective.

G. Session on the Economic Commission for Africa's continental initiatives

27. Under the facilitation of Mr. Bakary Dosso, Chief of the Population Dynamics for Development Section of the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa, ECA informed participants on three flagship initiatives and substantive supports, namely the roll-out of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Tool (IPRT), by Prof Tadele Agaje, from the ECA Macroeconomic and Governance Division, IDEP's achievements and capacity building programme, by Mr. Thierry Amoussougbo, from IDEP and the key messages of the Seventh African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-7), as well as information on the preparations for ARFSD-8, by Mr Nassim Oulmane, Chief of Green and Blue Economy Section, at the Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division.

H. Roundtable on: "Accelerating regional integration for West Africa's transformation: Updates on key milestones."

28. Under the facilitation of Mr. Mamoudou Sebege, Economist at the ECA Office for West Africa, the round table recorded the interventions of the two panellists, Dr Simeon Koffi, acting Director of ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority, and Mr Sekou Kanate from UEMOA Commission, shared the experiences and contributions of their respective institutions to the regional integration process strengthening. In this perspective, delegates were briefed on the formulation of the ECOWAS Vision 2050 and the key milestone achieved with the adoption of the Vision document by the Council of Minister of Economy and Planning, paving the way its endorsement by the Authority of Head of States and Governments. UEMOA Commission highlighted the development of the current development of its new strategic plan 2021-2025, which will be financed at the level of 92 % by the Commission.

I. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the pre-event meeting on "Policy dialogue on key regional initiatives of the ECA Office for West Africa"

29. The conclusions and recommendations of the pre-event held prior to the 24th Session of the ICE were presented to the delegates. They were adopted during the Pre-Event ICE24 session, organised on 9th November 2021, with additional recommendations.

J. Recommendations

30. The ICE made the following recommendations:

Draft report on the implementation of the programme of work of the Economic Commission for West Africa sub-regional office for 2020 and outlook for 2021

❖ **ECA:**

- Strengthen the capacities of Member States in strategic planning and evaluation of public policies in order to allow better management of monitoring and evaluation missions of public development policies.
- Consolidate the current support to West African countries to domesticate IRPT in their development planning tools, the implementation of AfCFTA as well as integration of demographic dynamics in development policies, with special emphasis on the implementation of the budget sensitive to demographic dividend initiative.
- Establish a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the ICE experts and report back at each subsequent session.

Draft economic and social report for West Africa in 2020 and outlook for the period 2021-2022

❖ **ECA:**

- To include specific analysis of price trends of commodities, income inequalities and poverty in terms of the trend of the number of poor;
- Bring to the attention of policy makers the persistent gaps in education and health sectors, despite the recent progress made by countries.
- Support the capacity strengthening of Member States for better internalization of the various sub-regional, regional and international strategic documents and development agendas

❖ **Member States:**

- To address the challenges of 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.
- Maximise the benefits of the African Continental Free trade Area and diversify economies away from primary resource to labour intensive sectors (agriculture, oil and mining) and create value chains in manufacturing for effective implementation of AfCFTA National Strategies.

Draft 2021 Implementation Report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the equivalent objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063

❖ **ECA:**

- Provide technical and financial support for monitoring and evaluation including reporting mechanisms; and strengthen national statistical system for proper coordination and dissemination of quality data for tracking the SDGs performance;

- Fill the data gap through the use of proxies, particularly in the environment and climate change areas, in order to promote better comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the achievement of certain SDGs;
- Consider the effects of COVID-19 in the projections of SDG indicators up to 2030 with a view to better identifying measures to re-prioritize policies and budget programming as part of the decade of action
- ❖ **Member States:**
 - Intensify investments in infrastructure development and provide access to clean water and adequate sanitation, paying attention to rural and semi-urban areas.

Roundtable on: "Successful implementation of the AfCFTA: Lessons learned from the development of national sub-regional strategies"

- ❖ **Member States:**
 - Continue to strengthen the mobilization of technical partnerships within the framework of the implementation of the AfCFTA, with particular emphasis on communication, training, capacity building, studies etc. for effective implementation of AfCFTA
 - Encourage the establishment of frameworks for the promotion of intellectual property and local products
- ❖ **ECA:**
 - Support Member States in improving the availability of data on trade in-services for better assessment of the implementation of the AfCFTA strategies in the subregion;
- ❖ **ECOWAS and Countries**
 - Establish a mechanism for trade facilitation and harmonization of regulatory frameworks in West Africa, like what is done at the regional level with the support of Afreximbank
 - To sustain the pace of the regional integration agenda in the ECOWAS sub-region, notably the common currency and the effective free movement of people, good and services as a boost to AfCFTA implementation;
 - Harmonize and unify customs and regulatory systems in the ECOWAS region

Roundtable on: Leveraging the AfCFTA Implementation to Building Forward Resilient and Sustainable Economies in West Africa in a COVID-19 Era

- ❖ **Member States:**
 - Establish a regional framework to allow SMEs and SMIs to have access to regional public procurement;
 - Ensure ease of doing business by rehabilitating and building new production and marketing infrastructure to allow the private sector to benefit from the implementation of the AfCFTA, especially SMEs / SMIs
 - Following the launch of the initiative "Made in West Africa", support the effective implementation of the initiative by enhancing the local productivity both in terms of the

quantity and quality; build regional value chains based on country's comparative advantages; promote the private sector full involvement in the implementation of the AfCFTA;

❖ **ECA:**

- Carry out a study to identify the main opportunities in terms value chains in the sub-region;
- Conduct a study on the informal sector to with a view to formalizing them and increasing the tax base of member countries;

❖ **ECOWAS**

- Establish at the sub-regional level a framework for the harmonization and coordination of national strategies for the implementation of the AfCFTA (for example a sub-regional Committee for the implementation of the AfCFTA)

K. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the pre-event on the Policy dialogue on key regional initiatives of the ECA Office for West Africa developed during 2020-2021 period

31. The ICE took note of the main conclusions and recommendations of the Pre-Event session and added the following recommendations:

- Implement more effectively ECOWAS protocol on Free movement of persons across the subregion by eliminating Non-Trade Barriers (NTB);
- Promote local production and facilitate access to credit as well as strengthen trade infrastructure;
- Ensure with the country experts a process of review and validation of the methodology and preliminary results of the initiative on the dashboard on the assessment of socio-economic performance developed by ECA.

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

32. The delegates were invited to further contact ECA to express their willingness to host the 25th session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts for West Africa. The date will be determined later by ECA, in collaboration with the hosted country.

Banjul, November 11, 2021