

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN WEST AFRICA

"A STUDY IN FRUSTRATION"?

Franziska Porst

Long before regional integration was recognised as the ideal method to foster economic growth and preserve peace, it had already existed in West Africa in the form of the great dynasties of the precolonial era. It was subsequently shaped both by the influences of the colonial powers and by the search for a special African path towards integration. Since independence, West Africa has experienced a veritable wave of regional organisations being established, but only few proved viable. The two most significant ones are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU, Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine).

While ECOWAS is much more prominent in public debate as a regional economic community recognised by the African Union (AU) and as a negotiating partner of the EU in the negotiations over a regional economic partnership agreement, the smaller WAEMU, all of whose almost exclusively francophone member states also belong to ECOWAS, on closer inspection proves to represent a considerably more advanced project of West African integration. The integration endeavours within ECOWAS, on the other hand, which is far more heterogeneous in linguistic and economic terms, have repeatedly faltered and have not shown much progress in spite of several attempts at reform.

Besides the region's inherent problems, such as the chronic fragility of several states, recurring armed conflicts, democratic deficits, weak political institutions and poorly diversified economies that mostly depend on raw material



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exports, the very co-existence of ECOWAS and WAEMU carries the risk of acting as an obstacle to integration in West Africa. There is therefore an urgent need for the policies of ECOWAS and WAEMU to be harmonised. After a formal cooperation agreement between the two regional organisations had already been signed in 2004 and a Joint Technical Secretariat (*secrétariat technique conjoint*) had been set up, the convergence of ECOWAS and WAEMU seems to have finally picked up speed last year.¹

PHASES OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

There have been at least three identifiable phases of regional integration in total. In the precolonial era, the areas between the Atlantic Coast, Lake Chad and the Gulf of Guinea were dominated by huge multi-ethnic kingdoms with fluid boundaries, in which people and goods could travel in absolute freedom. This included the Ghana Empire in the 11th century, the Mali Empire in the 14th century, the Bornu Sultanate in the 16th century as well as the Songhai dynasty, which extended across a vast territory comprising present-day Niger, Mali, Senegal, northern Burkina Faso and southern Mauritania.

Colonisation ended this phase of pre-modern regional integration; the European powers broke up the West African empires and restructured them in their own interests. This involved the drawing of – frequently arbitrary – boundaries, which still determine the map of the African continent today. In addition to dividing the colonised territories into smaller, more easily administered units, the colonial era entailed a further phenomenon: the creation of new regional entities. Where conditions allowed, the European powers set up regional organisations, in which they merged their colonies. The purpose was not to encourage horizontal cooperation between the colonies, but to establish vertical links between the metropolises and their

1 | Cf. Djénéba Traore and Mathias Vogl, 2013, "Three questions to Christophe Joseph Marie Dabiré – WAEMU Commissioner for the Regional Market, Trade, Competition and Cooperation", *WAI-ZEI Regional Integration Observer*, No. 2, Vol. 1, 19-20; "Sommets UEMOA et CEDEAO: 'Dakar tournant important dans l'avancée du processus d'intégration économique dans la sous-région', Mankeur Ndiaye", *Dakaractu*, Pressafrik, 24 Oct 2013, http://dakaractu.com/_a54114.html (accessed 16 Dec 2013).

protectorates. France, in particular, played a leading role in this. It had conquered almost all its West African territories from Senegal as of 1659 onwards. These initially became part of the *établissements français du Sénégal*, before French West Africa (Afrique occidentale française, AOF), the federation of French colonies in West Africa, was finally founded in 1895. This was the framework in which France implemented the first policies for the economic coordination of the eight colonies amalgamated in the AOF.²



WAEMU headquarters in Ouagadougou: The convergence of ECOWAS and WAEMU has finally picked up speed. | Source: Sputnikilt ©①②.

Decolonisation and the subsequent collapse of colonial federations such as the AOF illustrated the negative impact of the fragmentation of (West) Africa resulting from the colonial era. After the loss of the unifying structures of the colonial administration, the independent African states faced high levels of economic and political disunity.³ Consequently, the third phase of regional integration, which then began, was motivated by political and ideological

2 | Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie, "Bilan de l'intégration régionale en Afrique", May 2013, 22, http://afrique.apf-francophonie.org/IMG/pdf/2013_05_regAfrique_integration.pdf (accessed 3 Dec 2013).

3 | Benedikt F. Franke, "Competing Regionalisms in Africa and the Continent's Emerging Security Architecture", *African Studies Quarterly*, No. 3, Vol. 9, 2007, 32-33.

objectives while also involving practical reasons. The latter included mainly the desire for protecting African self-determination against persistent attempts at (neo-)colonial interference. It was also hoped that regional cooperation would help to overcome the fragmentation of the African continent and enable the founding of stable states that were also economically viable. The guiding political principle for this phase of integration was pan-Africanism, which had promoted the unity of the African states and its citizens as the only path towards genuine political and economic autonomy since the first Pan-African Congress in 1900.

West Africa is the part of the continent that took the earliest and most numerous steps towards integration. This is due to a number of different factors. On the one hand, the experience of slave trade, which was particularly vivid in people's memory in West Africa, had produced a political consciousness that was compatible with the ideology of pan-Africanism. This manifested in the idea of "oneness in

Kwame Nkrumah advocated rapid and comprehensive unification of the continent and included all the descendants of slaves living outside Africa in this as well.

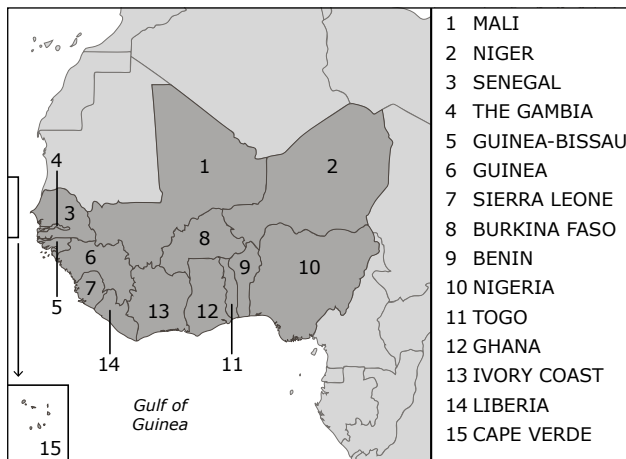
experience", i.e. the unity of Africa and its citizens through the shared experience of slavery. Kwame Nkrumah, for instance, the first president of the newly founded Republic of Ghana and a pioneer of (radical) pan-Africanism, advocated rapid and comprehensive unification of the continent and included all the descendants of slaves living outside Africa in this as well. The return of these descendants to the West African lands of their ancestors further enhanced the emancipation of West Africa compared to other regions of the continent.⁴ The existence of the West African empires in the precolonial era also represented an important historic reference point for the advocates of regional integration.

During the course of the last sixty years, over 42 regional organisations were set up or planned in West Africa. Most of them aimed at greater economic cooperation, overlapped geographically and were extremely short-lived. Only four larger organisations still exist today: the Conseil de l'Entente, the Mano River Union, ECOWAS and

4 | John Igue, "Economic Integration in West Africa", in: Corsino Tolentino and Mathias Vogl (eds.), *Sustainable Regional Integration in West Africa*, ZEI Discussion Paper, 2011, 36.

WAEMU. The Conseil de l'Entente emerged in 1959 from a successor organisation to the AOF and comprises Ivory Coast, present-day Burkina Faso, present-day Benin and Niger. Togo joined in 1966. The organisation aims at furthering economic cooperation between the five member states. However, until the recently initiated revitalisation attempts by the President of Benin Boni Yayi, the Conseil de l'Entente has been lingering on the side-lines. The Mano River Union, founded in Sierra Leone in 1973 and comprising Ivory Coast, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, has had a chequered history. The original aim had been to strengthen economic cooperation between the countries along the Mano River; but it ceased operation during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and was not re-established until 2004. The most important and comparatively most successful regional organisations of West Africa are ECOWAS and WAEMU, which will be described in greater detail below.

Fig. 1

ECOWAS member states

Source: Own presentation.

ECOWAS

On 28 May 1975, the heads of state and government of 15 West African countries signed in the Nigerian capital what is referred to as the Treaty of Lagos, thus founding the Economic Community of West African States. ECOWAS currently has 15 member states: Benin, Burkina Faso,

Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Cape Verde joined in 1976, while founding member Mauretania left ECOWAS in 2000 to join the Arab League.

Goals and Operation

The aims of ECOWAS defined in the founding treaty (article 3, clause 1) are to promote economic cooperation and integration in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, to maintain and enhance economic stability, to foster relations among member states and to contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent. Economic independence of the member states ("collective self-sufficiency") is to be achieved through the creation of a common trading bloc. To this end, a gradual development is envisaged, progressing from a free trade zone to a customs union to a common market.

The highest decision-making body is the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the member states, which determines the principles of ECOWAS policy and monitors the progress of the integration process. This body appoints an ECOWAS Chairman and the President of the ECOWAS Commission from among its members. Decisions must be taken unanimously and are binding. The remit of the Council of Ministers, which meets twice a year, includes the day-to-day implementation of the decisions of the Authority and monitoring of the institutions further down the line. It is composed of two ministers from each member state, one of whom must be the minister responsible for regional integration.

The 120 members of the ECOWAS Parliament, which has a purely advisory function, were to be elected directly by the ECOWAS citizens.

As the administrative body of ECOWAS, the Commission, which bore the title of Executive Council until 2006, is responsible for managing day-to-day operations and for implementing the decisions of the Authority and the Council of Ministers. Originally, the 120 members of the ECOWAS Parliament, which has a purely advisory function, were to be elected directly by the ECOWAS citizens. However,

during a transition period, which has still not come to an end, the ECOWAS MPs are nominated by the parliaments of the member states.⁵

The ECOWAS Court of Justice has the task of overseeing the construction, interpretation and implementation of primary and secondary legislation. Its establishment was already envisaged in the founding treaty (originally as a tribunal, cf. article 11), but did not receive new impetus until the reform of the treaty in 2007. The Court of Justice comprises seven judges, and it is meant to be independent from the ECOWAS member states and institutions. Since 2005, natural persons and legal entities have had the right to petition the Court, which means it can also prosecute violations of human rights.⁶ All the ECOWAS bodies are based in the Nigerian capital Abuja.

The establishment of the ECOWAS Court of Justice was already envisaged in the founding treaty, but did not receive new impetus until the reform of the treaty in 2007.

State of Integration

The first major ECOWAS achievement in terms of integration consisted of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, which was initiated in 1976 and made West Africa the only region on the continent where free travel without a visa and the right of residence and establishment within all member states are guaranteed. Apart from this achievement, ECOWAS' attention was taken up with a deteriorating security situation over the next few years, which made further integration measures difficult. The onset of the civil war in Liberia in 1989 finally represented a decisive turning point in ECOWAS' history, in that it led to the controversial and ground-breaking decision to deploy a peacekeeping force (the so-called ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, ECOMOG) in one of the member states, thus going far

5 | The change to the direct election of ECOWAS MPs and further measures to strengthen the Parliament were originally planned to take place by 2010. However, this deadline passed without a new deadline being set. Cf. "West Africa: ECOWAS Parliament seeks more powers", All Africa, 24 Apr 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201304241395.html> (accessed 6 Dec 2013).

6 | Cf. Ademola Abass, "Ecowas and the Regional Integration Experiences in the World", *WAI Critical Analysis and Action Strategies*, No. 2, 2013, 11-13.

beyond the original scope of the regional organisation's remit, which involved areas of economic policy.⁷

All in all, the progress ECOWAS made in terms of integration was very disillusioning, which is why an attempt was made in the nineties to revitalise it through a revision of the founding treaty. The Revised Treaty was approved in 1993 in Cotonou; it replaced the Treaty of Lagos and put ECOWAS on a new legal footing. New bodies, namely the ECOWAS Court of Justice, Parliament, and Economic and

At an economic level, the Revised Treaty included the aim of creating an economic and monetary union. The relevant measures involved the elimination of domestic customs duties.

Social Council, were created as consulting and monitoring institutions intended to act as counterbalances to the ECOWAS Commission (Executive Council until 2007) and to give a supranational dimension to an organisation that was strongly inter-governmental in character. At an economic level, the Revised Treaty included the aim of creating an economic and monetary union (cf. chapter 9 of the ECOWAS Treaty). The relevant measures involved various programmes for the elimination of domestic customs duties by setting a common external tariff, harmonising economic and financial policies as well as creating a common monetary zone in conjunction with a common central bank.⁸ At the same time, the aims defined in the founding treaty were expanded. These now explicitly include cooperation in the areas of education, science and technology, taxation, culture, legal matters, the environment, tourism, health, etc. In addition, article 4 of the Revised Treaty envisages central principles such as good governance, democracy, observance of human rights, protection of regional peace as well as equitable distribution of the benefits and costs of economic cooperation

7 | After the intervention by ECOMOG in Liberia, ECOWAS peacekeeping forces were also deployed in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) and during the first phase of the war in Ivory Coast (2002-2004), and they subsequently formed the core of a UN peacekeeping mission. Cf. Kenneth Omeje, "The achievements and challenges of ECOWAS in security regionalism in West Africa", *WAI-ZEI Regional Integration Observer*, No. 2, Vol. 1, 2013, 8.

8 | George Osuwu, "Factors shaping economic integration and regional trade in West Africa", in: Rike Sohn and Ama Konado Oppong (eds.), "Regional Trade and Monetary Integration in West Africa and Europe", *WAI-ZEI Paper*, No. 6, 2013, 11; Essien Abel Essien, "A record of regional integration in West Africa", *WAI-ZEI Regional Integration Observer*, No. 2, Vol. 1, 2013, 2.

across all members. The existing cooperation in the area of conflict prevention and management, which had been based purely on protocols, was defined as a further ECOWAS remit in article 58 of the Revised Treaty and subsequently brought into primary law.⁹ There is therefore an obvious trend towards the formal widening of the areas of competence of the regional organisation, which had previously focused on economic integration. In doing so, ECOWAS – like the EU before it – takes account of the realisation that market integration cannot work effectively without the harmonisation of relevant sectoral policies. The ECOWAS experience further demonstrates how closely linked socio-economic development and peace are and that economic integration measures in a fragile and conflict-prone environment such as that of West Africa therefore also requires cooperation in the area of security policy.

With the widening of its areas of competence, ECOWAS takes account of the realisation that market integration cannot work effectively without the harmonisation of relevant sectoral policies.

Challenges

The impact of the Revised Treaty and the resulting programmes has, however, fallen short of the high expectations and was mainly limited to declarations of intent. This culture of verbose statements of intention, repeated delays and lack of implementation within the regional organisation is, on the one hand, due to a lack of political efficiency of both the ECOWAS institutions and of its member states generally. On the other hand, there is also frequently simply a lack of political will to implement decisions made at an inter-governmental level at the national level.

Non-tariff trade barriers such as poor infrastructure and insufficient legal security thus still represent major challenges to genuine market integration.¹⁰ The implementation of the economic and monetary union is also still

9 | The security architecture emerging within ECOWAS was underpinned in 1999 through the creation of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security. This mechanism includes various instruments and institutions for cooperation in the area of security policy, such as the early warning system ECOWARN and the ECOWAS Standby Force. Cf. Omeje, n. 7, 10.

10 | Cf. Claudia Rommel, "Barriers to Intra-Regional Trade in West Africa", in: Tolentino and Vogl (eds.), n. 4, 36.

pending. The poor record of economic integration has a particular impact on intraregional trade, which has still not passed the ten to 15 per cent mark in the ECOWAS region, while it is around 60 per cent in the EU, 40 per cent in North America and 30 per cent in the ASEAN region.¹¹ The majority of ECOWAS states have also lingered persistently at the bottom of the ranking of the UN Human Development Index over the last three decades (Fig. 2).

Not only have the populations of the ECOWAS states seen little benefit from the regional integration process to date, they were also hardly involved in the decision-making during the first three decades. The lack of long-term regional development planning is also a matter of concern.¹² For these reasons, a further reform was initiated in 2007, in the course of which the institutional structures of ECOWAS were transformed and the strategies and concepts of the organisation were revised. The Executive Council was transformed into a commission and its executive powers were strengthened. The most important document was the so-called ECOWAS Vision 2020, which envisages the transformation from an "ECOWAS of nation states" into an "ECOWAS of peoples". The purpose of this was to achieve active participation in the integration process on the part of the ECOWAS citizens and the private sector.¹³ However, a greater effect on civil participation than a mere change in name would be achieved by the strengthening of the role of the ECOWAS Parliament and the implementation of direct elections by ECOWAS citizens. According to the personal opinion of a Burkinabe ECOWAS MP, this young institution, which carries so many hopes, has so far shown to be a "toothless tiger".

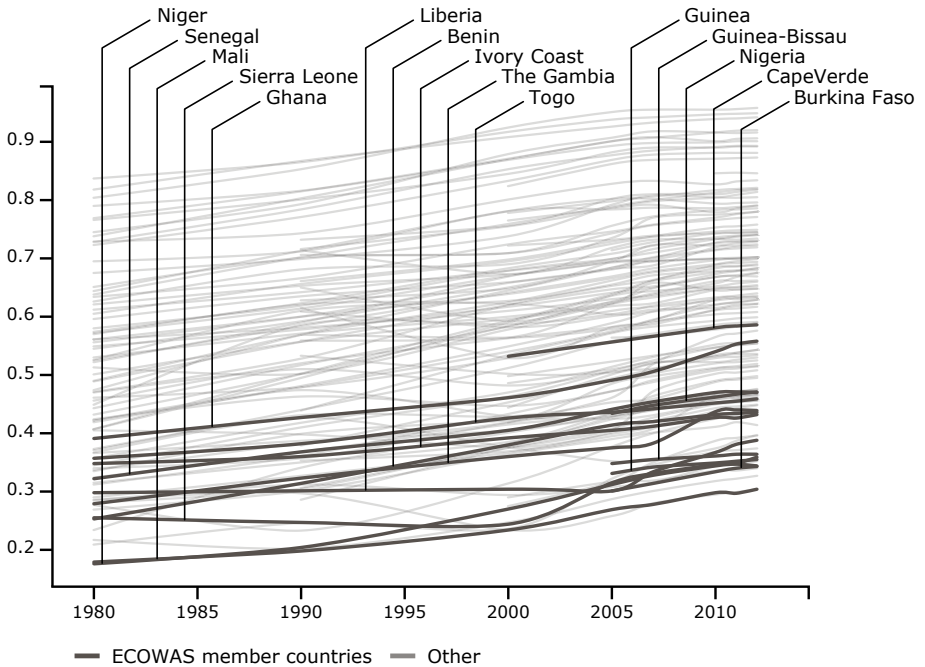
11 | Osuwu, n. 8, 2013, 11; "Déficit d'infrastructures, l'obstacle des barrières non tarifaires au commerce régional en Afrique", Groupe de la Banque Africaine de Développement, 30 Oct 2013, <http://afdb.org/fr/news-and-events/article/infrastructure-gap-non-tariff-barriers-impediments-to-regional-trade-in-africa-12455> (accessed 2 Dec 2013).

12 | Essien, n. 8, 4.

13 | Abass, n. 6, 35.

Fig. 2

Development of the Human Development Index between 1980 and 2012



Source: „International Human Development Indicators“, *Human Development Reports*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries> (accessed 20 Jan 2014).

The common ECOWAS security policy is still proving similarly ineffective – in spite of the institutional framework that has been in place since 1999 and has been deployed sporadically in Togo, Guinea and Ivory Coast. It was in the Mali crisis that ECOWAS has most recently proved to be incapable of implementing its much-vaunted security architecture and responding militarily to complex armed conflicts with a supra-regional dimension.¹⁴ Although it had agreed on deploying a multinational standby force in northern Mali in April 2012, it did not take action until after the military intervention by the French in January 2013.¹⁵

14 | Omeje, n. 7, 10.

15 | The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), which has been operating in Mali since January 2013, consisted of troop contingents from nine ECOWAS states as well as further members of the AU and was converted into a UN peacekeeping mission in July 2013 (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali, MINUSMA).

Important member states such as Ivory Coast and Senegal showed reluctance to become involved or even refused to participate, while Nigeria's involvement, without which an ECOWAS force would not have been viable, was overshadowed by the terrorist activities of Boko Haram. Nor have the ECOWAS troops so far been able to put on a convincing show on the ground due to the glaring lack of financial resources, equipment and battle experience (particularly in desert areas). A high-ranking Pentagon official thus called the ECOWAS force "completely incapable" in April 2013.¹⁶



ECOWAS summit in January 2013: In the Mali crisis the organisation did not find a common voice. | Source: © Legnan Koula, picture alliance.

WAEMU

The West African Economic and Monetary Union was founded by the heads of state and government of seven West African countries on 10 January 1994 in the Senegalese capital Dakar. The exclusively francophone founding states of Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo were joined by the Portuguese-speaking Guinea-Bissau in May 1997. All WAEMU member states are also members of ECOWAS.

16 | Joseph Bamat, "US slams African force as Fréchet begin Mali pullout", *France24*, 10 Apr 2013, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130410-usa-slams-africa-force-ecowas-france-troop-withdrawal> (accessed 15 Dec 2013).

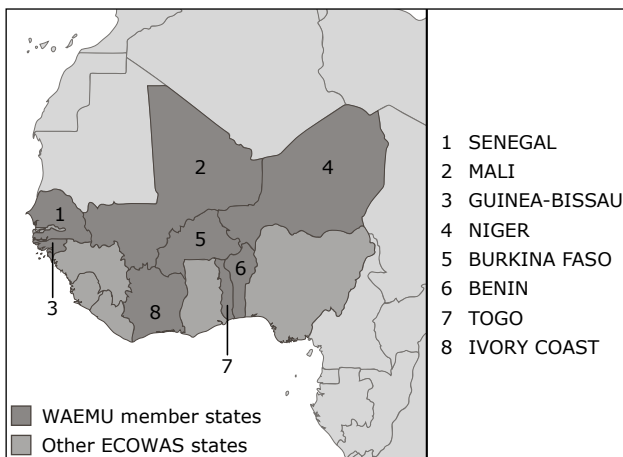
Goals and Operation

WAEMU has charged itself with the task of improving economic cooperation between its member states. Five objectives are defined in its founding treaty:

- improvement of the competitiveness of the member states in an open, competition-based market and a rationalised, harmonised legal framework;
- creation of a common market based on the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, freedom of establishment as well as a common external tariff and a common trade policy;
- convergence of the economic activities and policies of the member states through a multilateral monitoring mechanism;
- harmonisation of national legislations, where this is required for the effective operation of the common market, particularly of the tax systems;
- as well as coordination of national sectoral policies, particularly in the areas of human resources, land-use planning, transport and telecommunications, the environment, agriculture, energy, industry and mining.

Fig. 3

WAEMU member states within ECOWAS



Source: Own presentation.

WAEMU conducts its operation in a similar manner to ECOWAS. Top-level decisions are made at summit meetings of the heads of state and government, where political guidelines are decreed, which are then fleshed out in detail by the Council of Ministers. A commission is responsible for day-to-day operations. Besides this commission, there is an inter-parliamentary committee, to be replaced by a parliament in the medium term, which is responsible for the democratic oversight of the decision-making processes – albeit only in an advisory role. A court of justice supervises the construction of the community's laws and an audit court checks the financial management at WAEMU. In addition, there are specialised independent institutions such as the Central Bank of West African States (Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, BCEAO) and the West African Development Bank (Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement, BOAD). WAEMU is based in the Burkinabe capital Ouagadougou, while the BCEAO is located in Dakar, Senegal, and the BOAD in Lomé, Togo.

State of Integration

In 1962, the West African Monetary Union was founded and adopted the CFA franc in order to retain the institutional framework, which had provided macroeconomic stability up to that time.

At the time it was founded, WAEMU was far ahead of ECOWAS in terms of integration: it already had a joint currency, the CFA franc (Communauté Financière d'Afrique), and, in fact, came into being as a "by-product" of the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. The CFA currency zone was created in 1945 by the French colonial power to take over from the former colonial banks. In 1962, the by then independent francophone states in West Africa founded the West African Monetary Union (WAMU) – strongly advocated by the former colonial power – and adopted the franc in order to retain the institutional framework, which had provided macroeconomic stability up to that time. Due to the diverging economic developments in France and the CFA countries, a serious imbalance developed over time, as a result of which the CFA franc was devalued by 50 per cent in January 1994 – with serious consequences for the countries of the CFA zone. This is also the context in which the West African Monetary Union was transformed into the West African Economic and Monetary Union. The intention was that the latter was to assist with the liberalisation of the former WAMU countries and ensure

macroeconomic stability through economic integration. In concrete terms, this meant the planning of an internal market and the adoption of strict convergence criteria to keep inflation low and provide support for the economic policies of the member states.

To achieve these objectives, a customs union with a common external tariff and free movement of goods within WAEMU was realised in 2000. The trade legislations of the member states were harmonised and a common competition policy adopted. In addition, the multilateral mechanism for the harmonisation of economic policies envisaged in the founding treaty was put into practice with a convergence pact (*Pacte de convergence, de stabilité, de croissance et de solidarité*). This defined primary and secondary convergence criteria. During an initial phase, scheduled to last from 2000 to 2002, member states were meant to work towards these criteria, which were then to become binding in 2003 (postponed to 2005). In addition, WAEMU developed a common agricultural policy (*Politique Agricole de l'Union, PAU*) as well as numerous further sectoral policies, for instance in the area of transport and telecommunications, energy (*Politique Énergétique Commune, PEC*) as well as industry and mining (*Politique Industrielle Commune, PIC*).

Challenges

WAEMU does benefit from the free movement of persons and capital realised within ECOWAS; but securing the most important element of an internal market, the free movement of production factors (labour and capital) and goods still represents its greatest challenge. As already explained in connection with ECOWAS, the reasons for this are to do with the halting elimination of non-tariff trade barriers, poor infrastructure and the resulting high transport costs, as well as deficiencies in legal security.

Added to this is the low degree of diversification in the economies of the WAEMU zone and the fact that large parts of domestic trade are of an informal nature. Furthermore, there is a lack of information among citizens, business-people as well as state authorities about the regulations adopted in connection with WAEMU. These factors are

also reflected in the deplorable record of trade within the WAEMU zone. Exports within the zone make up a mere 13 per cent of total WAEMU exports, while exports to France alone amount to 14 per cent.¹⁷

Despite enhanced diversification of its partners, the WAEMU is still greatly dependent on France to this day.

Another question that arises in connection with WAEMU is that of “ownership” of the integration process. Since its inception, WAEMU has been a project strongly supported and influenced by France. Despite enhanced diversification of its partners, the regional organisation is still greatly dependent on France to this day. Not only does this continue to give rise to problems in the relationship between WAEMU and ECOWAS, it is also reflected in the sluggish implementation of decisions.

ECOWAS AND WAEMU BETWEEN COMPLEMENTARITY AND COMPETITION

When one compares the objectives of ECOWAS and WAEMU as they are described in their founding treaties, there are no obvious major differences. Both integration processes aim at market integration through macroeconomic harmonisation, complemented by coordination in specific sectoral policy areas. While the original ambitions of the two regional organisations may also have been similar, they have developed very differently (Table 1).

Although it was founded nearly twenty years later, WAEMU is now far ahead of ECOWAS where economic integration is concerned. Although one has to add that some of the measures mentioned, particularly in the areas of the free movement of persons and competition policy, have only been implemented to an unsatisfactory degree to date,¹⁸ WAEMU can be characterised as the most advanced

17 | Ibrahima Camara, “Impact des Unions Monétaires sur les échanges commerciaux: Le cas de l’UEMOA”, Conference Paper, African Economic Conference, Johannesburg, 28-30 Oct 2013, 10, http://afdb.org/uploads/tx_llafdbpapers/Impact_des_Unions_Montaires_sur_les_changes_commerciaux_Le_cas_de_lUEMOA_V4.pdf (accessed 28 Nov 2013).

18 | Yves Bourdet, “Limites et défis de l’intégration régionale en Afrique de l’Ouest”, *Country Economic Report*, No. 6, 2005, 10, <http://sida.se/Publications/Import/pdf/sv/20056--Limites-et-d233fis-de-lint233gration-r233gionale-en-Afrique-de-lOuest.pdf> (accessed 20 Jan 2014).

regionalisation process in West Africa.¹⁹ The efforts that ECOWAS has undertaken to drive forward integration have progressed furthest in the area of security. While the member states have set themselves ambitious goals in the economic area, as can be seen from the large number of planned measures, they have implemented relatively little apart from the free movement of persons and capital and the coordination of certain trade and sectoral policies. The Ghanaian geographer George Osuwu made this rather sober assessment of the record to date: "Outside of peace-keeping missions in the region, which usually reminds the people in the sub-region of the existence of ECOWAS, ECOWAS has achieved very little."²⁰

Table 1

State of integration of ECOWAS and WAEMU by comparison

Measure	ECOWAS	WAEMU
Elimination of customs duties within the community	○	✓
Elimination of non-tariff trade barriers		
Common external tariff	○	✓
Further trade policies	✓	✓
Harmonisation of trade legislation		✓
Competition policy		✓
Free movement of persons	✓	✓
Free movement of capital	✓	✓
Common currency	○	✓
Coordination of economic policies	○	✓
Sectoral policies	✓	✓
Non-economic objectives (e.g. security policy)	✓	○

✓ implemented measures ○ planned measures

Source: Bourdet, n. 18, 10.

19 | Osuwu, n. 8, 12.

20 | Ibid., 11.

However, according to the declared intentions of the heads of state and government of the ECOWAS countries, this is supposed to change. The plan was initially to extend the customs union within WAEMU, which had been in place since 2000, to all other ECOWAS states. To this end, the common external WAEMU tariff was originally to be applied by all non-WAEMU states within ECOWAS by the beginning of 2008. After there had been long delays due to the clear lack of political will of some ECOWAS states, particularly Nigeria and Sierra Leone, to adjust their high external tariffs to the lower WAEMU tariffs,²¹ the heads of state of the ECOWAS and WAEMU countries finally adopted the common external tariff and further measures to standardise customs clearance for products from third countries in May 2013 at a joint special summit in Dakar.²² If this decision were to be implemented from 2015 as planned, that would represent an important step towards the urgently required harmonisation of the policies of ECOWAS and WAEMU.

A further step towards integration, which would build on the implementation of the common external tariff, is the introduction of a common currency for the ECOWAS zone, the Eco. To this end, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) was founded in 2000, the members of which include all non-WAEMU members of ECOWAS with

A roadmap approved in 2009 now anticipates the Eco to be launched in 2015 – a deadline that is very unlikely to be kept in view of the current state of implementation.

the exception of Cape Verde. There are plans for the two West African currency zones, WAMZ and WAEMU/BCEAO, to merge in a second stage. However, the introduction of the common currency has been postponed several times because of numerous problems, particularly insufficient fulfilment of the defined macroeconomic convergence criteria within the WAMZ.²³ A roadmap approved in 2009 now anticipates the Eco to be launched in 2015 and the

21 | Bourdet, n. 18, 12.

22 | Jean Pierre Malou, "Afrique de l'Ouest: Tarif extérieur commun – La CEDEAO valide", AllAfrica, 3 May 2013, <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/201305030565.html> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

23 | Kocra L. Assoua, "The Nexus between Political Instability and Monetary Sustainability: The case of a West African Monetary Union", *WAI-ZEI Paper*, No. 5, 2013, 7.

WAMZ and WAEMU/BCEAO to merge in 2020 – deadlines that are very unlikely to be met in view of the current state of implementation.²⁴

The aim of these ambitious plans is not only to enable ECOWAS to make progress in the area of economic integration, but also to put an end to the striking lack of synergy between ECOWAS and WAEMU. The ECOWAS Treaty includes a clause according to which ECOWAS is to be “the sole economic community in the region for the purpose of economic integration”²⁵ in the long term. However, the very slow pace of the convergence in the area of monetary policy raises some doubt as to how much the heads of the WAEMU states in particular are actually committed to this statement. The reasons for their reluctance lie in differences in economic interests and in characteristics of certain ECOWAS and WAEMU member states. The trade policy of the oil exporter Nigeria, for instance, is far more protectionist than that of countries depending on imports, such as Benin and Togo. Such conflicts of interest are far more likely to arise in the considerably larger, more heterogeneous ECOWAS than within WAEMU. Yet, the homogeneity of the WAEMU countries, which facilitates decision-making and implementation, is – above all – cultural. Apart from the Portuguese-speaking Guinea-Bissau, all WAEMU member states are former French colonies. Besides a *lingua franca*, the colonial heritage includes similarities in areas such as education as well as legal and administrative systems, which are central for the implementation of regional integration endeavours.

Within ECOWAS, which comprises eight francophone, five anglophone and two Portuguese-speaking member states, there is no such common identity. On the contrary, there is strong competition between anglophone and francophone countries rooted in history and culture. ECOWAS was originally meant to help overcome this competition by integrating existing regional initiatives. One observer commented on the signing of the Treaty of Lagos in 1975

24 | There is a fundamental controversy over the usefulness of introducing a common currency for ECOWAS and WAEMU. Cf. Bourdet, n. 18, 14 et seq.

25 | ECOWAS Treaty, chapter 2, article 2; cf. similar section in the preamble of the WAEMU Treaty, in which the founding states express commitment to the goals of ECOWAS.

with the jubilant statement that this was a major first step to bridge the rift between anglophone and francophone countries.²⁶ The opposite was, in fact, the case. ECOWAS was unable to shake the reputation of being an expression of the hegemonic ambitions of Nigeria, which is by far the largest member state with over half the economic output

France, which still had considerable influence over its former colonies, had a very critical view of the course followed by ECOWAS, namely loosening the links with the former colonial powers in favour of "collective self-sufficiency".

of the ECOWAS zone and approximately half its total population and dominates the regional organisation politically and economically. Ivory Coast in particular, which has the largest economy among the francophone countries, was hostile towards ECOWAS from the beginning.

Ultimately, however, smaller francophone states were too dependent on the trade with Nigeria to fend off its integration efforts in the long term. Furthermore, France, which still had considerable influence over its former colonies, had a very critical view of the course followed by ECOWAS, namely loosening links with the former colonial powers in favour of "collective self-sufficiency". The founding of WAEMU can thus ultimately also be interpreted as an expression of the lack of commitment to ECOWAS on the part of the francophone states.²⁷

The distrust and the competition between anglophone and francophone member states also manifest in the area of security cooperation.²⁸ This is the context in which one must consider the recent decision of the heads of state and government of the WAEMU members to develop a common

26 | Marc Penouil, "Le traité de Lagos efface le clivage entre pays francophones et anglophones", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Oct 1975, <http://monde-diplomatique.fr/1975/10/PENOUIL/33456> (accessed 5 Dec 2013).

27 | Franke, n. 3, 4.

28 | The frequently criticised indiscipline and lack of professionalism of the troops during the military ECOWAS interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where Nigeria contributed 80 per cent of troops and resources, were mainly attributed to Nigeria's leading role. The fact that this was rejected as French propaganda in other quarters underlines the impression of a deep rift between the anglophone and francophone areas of West Africa even further. Cf. Omeje, n. 7, 9; Issaka K. Souaré, "Regard critique sur l'intégration africaine: comment relever les défis", *ISS Paper* 140, Jun 2007, 5. This rift is also reflected in Nigeria's inability to play an important role in the conflicts of Ivory Coast and Togo.

security and peace policy,²⁹ seeing that cooperation in this area would yet again represent a duplication of the integration efforts of ECOWAS and WAEMU.



ECOWAS as an expression of Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions?
Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan at a state visit in South Africa. | Source: Republic of South Africa, Government Communication and Information System, flickr ©@@.

In conclusion, it has to be said that an examination of the current integration efforts in West Africa is inevitably "a study in frustration"³⁰ – and that this is the case despite the fact that regional integration has a long tradition there. This is due not only to the omnipresent obstacles to integration (poor infrastructure, poorly diversified economies, weak institutions, etc.), which affect ECOWAS and WAEMU equally, but also results from the relationship of the two regional organisations with each other. The persistent rift between anglophone and francophone countries hinders the integration process noticeably – particularly within ECOWAS. Overcoming this artificial divide will first of all

29 | "UEMOA: vers la mise en place d'une politique commune de la paix et de la sécurité", *Jeune Afrique*, 25 Oct 2013, <http://jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20131025090032> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

30 | Adebayo Adedeji, "Problems and Prospects of Regional Cooperation in West Africa", in: *Problems and Prospects of Regional Cooperation in Africa*, African Association for Public Administration and Management, Nairobi, 1969, 67.

require the political will on the part of the elites not to continue utilising the historic legacy of their countries to further individual interests. The call by Nigerian ECOWAS MP Kabir Garba to the citizens of West Africa to abandon the distinction into anglophone and francophone to make regional integration possible at all is a step in this direction.³¹ This will, however, require a common regional identity to act as an alternative model to the anglophone-francophone distinction. The fact that “creating” this common sense of belonging involves a long and difficult journey is demonstrated not least by the example of the European Union. In any case, such a regional identity cannot be imposed, but must be shaped in cooperation with West African civil society. This will require active citizen participation in the regionalisation process. The ambition to transform the organisation into an “ECOWAS of peoples” expressed in the ECOWAS Vision 2020 could be a first effective step in this direction.

31 | “CEDEAO: Appel à bannir les appellations anglophone et francophones”, Amevor.info, 15 Jul 2012, <http://amevor.info/?p=2437> (accessed 23 Nov 2013).