

PATHWAY FOR ECOWAS TOWARDS THE 2050 AGENDA

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1. Introduction

The importance of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) is becoming increasingly pronounced, as they are vital for helping member countries to navigate the highly stormy and precarious global economic environment. Generally, RECs are formed to foster economic cooperation among, and aid development of member countries and cooperating region. RECs are made up of trade, monetary or financial unions, with trade union (integration) often being more visible (Flandreau and Maurel, 2001; Mongelli, 2008).

Formed on May 28, 1975, by the Treaty of Lagos, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the oldest REC in Africa¹. The Community comprises all the 15 West African countries made up of five Anglophones and 10 Francophones. The core mandate of the Community is the promotion of cooperation and integration among member states, economic and political stability, and to increase economic opportunities for its peoples and their level of well-being. Since its establishment, ECOWAS has recorded some remarkable achievements across socio-economic and political sphere in the West African region. However, the level of achievement has been constrained by several internal and external factors. Cognizance of this, several efforts have been (and being) put in place to modify and re-evaluate the Commission's Strategies.

In this paper we make an overview of the governance structure and notable milestone achievements as well as shortcomings of the Commission. The paper also reviews the implementation of the just elapsed ECOWAS Vision 2020 with a view of drawing lessons towards the success of new Vision 2050. Further, the paper draws on experts group opinions for charting a pathway for ECOWAS future.

2. Objectives and Governance Structure of ECOWAS

Article 3 (1) of the 1993 revised establishment treaty of ECOWAS states the main aims of the Community as, “to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent”².

To achieve its aims, the Community set out 15 objectives/targets which were meant to be implemented in stages. These are:

- a. the harmonisation and co-ordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities;
- b. the harmonisation and co-ordination of policies for the protection of the environment;
- c. the promotion of the establishment of joint production enterprises;
- d. the establishment of a common market through liberalisation of trade among Members, adoption of a common external tariff and a common trade policy vis-a-vis third countries; and the removal, between Member States, of obstacles to the

¹ The African Union (AU) recognizes 8 RECs in the continent: Arab Maghreb Union (UMA -1989), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD - 1993), East African Community (EAC - 1999), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS - 1983), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS - 1975), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD - 1996), and Southern African Development Community (SADC - 1992).

² <https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Revised-treaty-1.pdf>

- free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, and to the right of residence and establishment.
- e. the establishment of an economic union through the adoption of common policies in the economic, financial, social and cultural sectors, and the creation of a monetary union;
 - f. the promotion of joint ventures by private sector enterprises and other economic operators, in particular through the adoption of a regional agreement on cross-border investments;
 - g. the adoption of measures for the integration of the private sectors, particularly the creation of an enabling environment to promote small and medium scale enterprises;
 - h. the establishment of an enabling legal environment;
 - i. the harmonisation of national investment codes leading to the adoption of a single Community investment code;
 - j. the harmonisation of standards and measures;
 - k. the promotion of balanced development of the region, paying attention to the special problems of each Member State particularly those of landlocked and small island Member States;
 - l. the encouragement and strengthening of relations and the promotion of the flow of information particularly among rural populations, women and youth organisations and socio-professional organisations such as associations of the media, businessmen and women, workers, and trade unions;
 - m. the adoption of a Community population policy which takes into account the need for a balance between demographic factors and socio-economic development;
 - n. the establishment of a fund for co-operation, compensation and development; and
 - o. any other activity that Member States may decide to undertake jointly with a view to attaining Community objectives.

The objectives Community's objectives are anchored around 11 fundamental guiding principles³. Over the years some of the above specific objectives (targets) have been achieved, some are in the process of implementation whilst others are still yet to be initiated.

2.1 Governance Structure

The complexity and diversity of Member States require a proper governance framework for operationalization of the Community's activities and programmes. Consequently, ECOWAS is governed by its Authority of Heads of State and Government. The Authority is the apex governing body for the Community, and it is responsible for the general direction and control of the Community and takes all measures to ensure its progressive development and the realisation of its objectives. The Authority Chairperson is usually elected for a one-year term.

³ <https://ecowas.int/fundamental-principles-2/>.

Aside the Authority of Heads of States, ECOWAS’s governance structure also composed of seven main Institutions:

- Council of Ministers, which oversees policy implementation
- Commission (Secretariat until 2006), which carries out all executive functions
- The Specialized Technical Committees
- Community Parliament, which represents all the peoples of West Africa
- Economic and Social Council, which considers economic and social matters
- Community Court of Justice, which interprets the ECOWAS Treaty and adjudicates on matters arising out of obligations under ECOWAS law
- The ECOWAS Investment and Development Bank (EIDB)

And the following specialized agencies

- The West African Health Organization (WAHO)
- The West African Monetary Agency (WAMA)
- The Intergovernmental Action Group Against Money Laundering West Africa (GIABA)
- The Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF)
- ECOWAS Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERERA)
- ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE)
- The West African Power Pool (WAPP)
- ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC)
- ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority
- The West Africa Institute (WAI)

3. Notable Milestones and Low-Points of the Community

In this section, we review some notable achievements of ECOWAS based on its objectives. The Table 1 below provides a checklist matrix of level of achievements of relating to the two core objectives of the Community. Evidently, on the face value, tremendous achievement has been recorded, however, subjected to critical evaluation it is discovered that many grounds are yet to be covered.

Table 1: Mapping of objectives with achievements

Objective	Achievement	Remark
Promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS); • Common External Tariff (CET); • Guaranteeing free movement of people with common ID card and right of establishment; • West Africa Common Industrial Policy • Private Sector Development Strategy • Regional Policy Investment Framework (2007) • Regional Competition Policy Framework 	Many of the policy documents face implementation issues

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECOWAS Sports Policy 2010-2020 • , among many others 	
Maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among Member States	Consolidation of Peace and Security in Member States through ECOWAS Peace Fund ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECOMOG operations 1999 - ECOWAS missions in Mali in 2012 - ECOMIG 2017 - Humanitarian assistance and Socio-Economic Recovery and Reintegration - Rehabilitation and Equipping of Prosthetics/Handicap Center in Guinea Bissau - The ECOWAS Volunteers Programme 	Peace, security and political stability are still very much threatened in some Member States

Gauging the performance of West African region within the ECOWAS framework using basic macroeconomic indicators further buttresses that the aspirations of the Community for building a prosperous region is far from being achieved.

a. Trade among Member States remains low

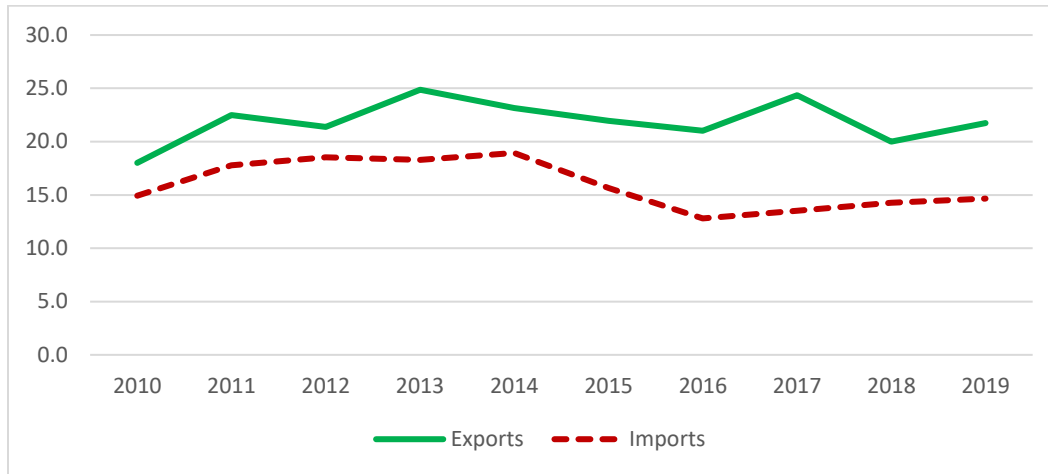
Despite long history of trade integration in the West African region, volumes of intra-regional trade in goods and services among countries remained at low ebb. The ratio of exports among countries within the region to their total exports to the rest of the world rose slightly from 18.0 in 2010 to 21.7 percent in 2019, while intra-regional imports averaged 15.9 percent over the period (Figure 1). The general phenomenon of low intra-regional trade among West African countries, and between them and other SSA countries could be attributable to existence of several non-tariff barriers (NTBs) such non-tariff trade measures, infrastructural deficits (gaps), other trade-related transaction costs (inefficient regional transportation network and custom procedures, slow financial transaction clearance among others). In addition, exports are primarily directed to advanced and industrialized parts of the world. Production in the region is also subject to imported intermediate inputs derived from Europe, North America, and Asian countries.

b. Economic growth is slow and uneven in the West African region

The low level of intra-regional trade has been accompanied by relatively fair economic performance compared to other African regions. West African region has witnessed consistent positive real per capita GDP growth since 2010 with a regional average of 2.3 in 2019, as against negative growth recorded in other sub-regions of Africa (Figure 2). The regional growth performance is due to sustained impressive growth in such countries as Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea Senegal, and Sierra Leone among others (Figure 3). The relative fair performance notwithstanding, growth is still low and not enough to bring about rapid development in the region.

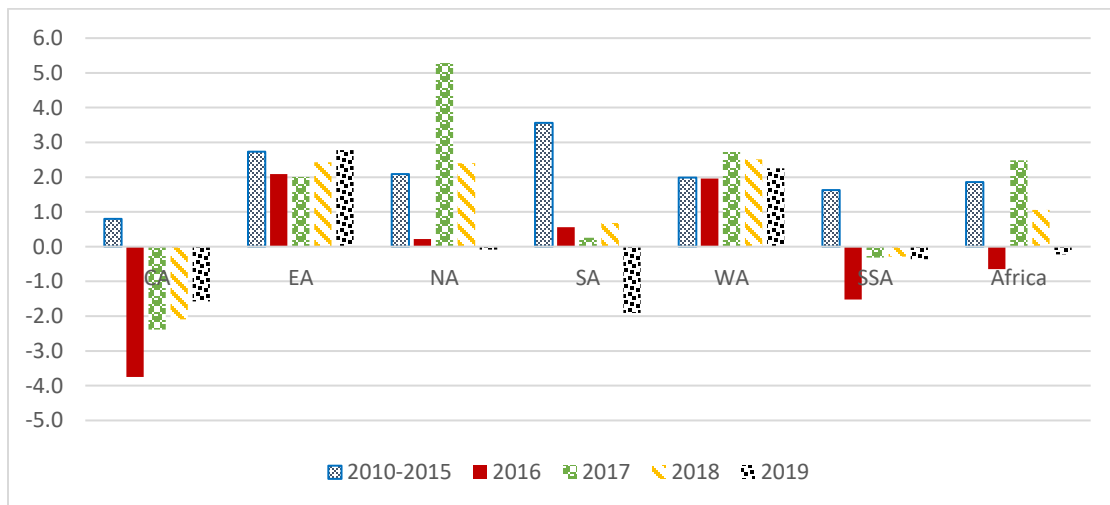
⁴ [Achievements – ECOWAS Peace Funds](#)

Figure 1: Intra-regional trade among West Africa countries (%)



Source: Computed from IMF Direction of Trade Statistics

Figure 2: Africa regional real GDP per capita growth rates (%)



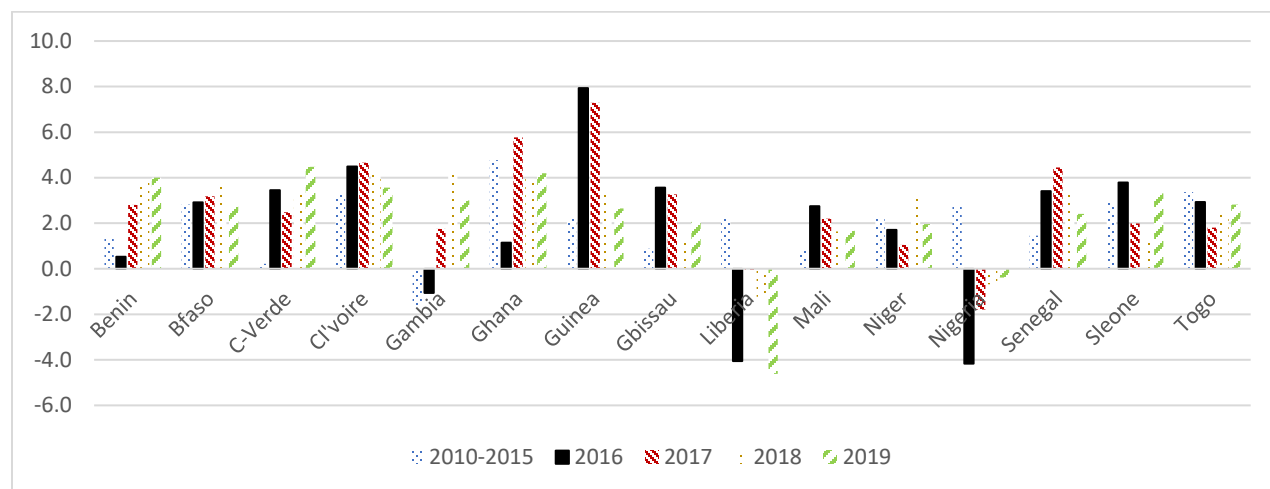
Source: World Development Indicators, November 2020

c. Low employment-to-population ratio and slow employment growth

One major issue in the West Africa is the inability of economic growth to translate to improved employment generation, as majority of countries in the region suffers from the ‘Jobless growth syndrome’ associated with many African and developing countries.

Average employment-to-population ratio in West Africa hovered around 31.5 percent in 2019 (Table 1). Across countries, Liberia had the highest employment-to-population ratio of 43.8 and Senegal with the lowest of 24.3 in 2019 (Table 2). In terms of growth in employment, Nigeria had the highest of 4.4 percent while Cape Verde had the least of 1.9 percent

Figure 3: Real GDP growth rate in West Africa



Source: World Development Indicators, November 2020

Table 2: African regional employment-to-population and employment growth rate (%)

	2010-2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2010-2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Africa	34.9	34.6	34.6	34.8	35.0	2.3	2.3	2.7	3.0	3.0
SSA	36.5	36.3	36.4	36.6	36.8	2.6	2.4	3.1	3.3	3.2
Central Africa	35.7	35.7	35.7	35.8	35.9	2.9	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3
Eastern Africa	41.9	42.5	42.7	42.9	43.1	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.2
Northern Africa	28.3	27.5	27.1	27.0	26.9	0.9	1.9	0.5	1.5	1.8
Southern Africa	28.8	29.3	29.5	29.5	29.1	2.6	2.4	3.1	3.3	3.2
West Africa	32.4	30.8	30.9	31.2	31.5	1.5	1.0	3.0	3.8	3.7

Source: Computed from UN population estimates, Nov 2020 and ILO ILOSTAT Estimates, Nov 2020

Table 3: West Africa employment-to-population and employment growth rate (%)

	Employment-to-population					Employment growth rate				
	2010-2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2010-2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Benin	39.1	39.4	39.6	39.8	39.9	2.5	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2
Burkina Faso	34.8	34.3	34.6	34.9	35.1	1.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.4

Cabo Verde	36.3	37.2	37.4	37.7	38.0	2.2	1.7	1.7	2.1	1.9
Côte d'Ivoire	31.0	31.1	30.1	30.2	30.3	2.4	2.3	-0.9	2.9	2.9
Gambia	29.4	29.8	30.0	30.1	30.2	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.3
Ghana	39.8	39.9	40.5	40.6	40.7	1.8	4.0	3.8	2.6	2.5
Guinea	32.6	32.8	33.0	33.1	33.3	2.5	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.4
Guinea Bissau	39.8	40.1	40.3	40.4	40.5	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.8
Liberia	42.3	43.3	43.4	43.6	43.8	3.1	4.3	2.9	2.9	2.9
Mali	34.5	33.9	33.7	33.8	33.9	3.1	2.3	2.4	3.4	3.4
Niger	37.6	35.9	35.9	36.0	36.0	2.3	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.0
Nigeria	30.5	27.6	27.8	28.3	28.8	0.9	-1.6	3.1	4.5	4.4
Senegal	24.2	24.1	24.2	24.3	24.4	2.2	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
Sierra Leone	32.4	32.4	32.5	32.7	32.8	1.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.6
Togo	33.4	33.4	33.2	33.3	33.4	3.1	2.0	2.0	2.9	2.8
West Africa	32.4	30.8	30.9	31.2	31.5	1.6	1.0	3.0	3.8	3.7

Source: Computed from UN population estimates, Nov 2020 and ILO ILOSTAT Estimates, Nov 2020

4. The Vision 2020 and Lessons for 2050

4.1 The ECOWAS Vision 2020

Cognizant of its shortcomings and the need for better performance, ECOWAS has consistently tried to strategize and re-strategize through evaluation of its programmes and activities. Hence in June 2007, the Conference of Heads of State adopted the ECOWAS 2020 Vision with the ambition of transforming ECOWAS "*from an ECOWAS of the States to an ECOWAS of the Peoples*", "*a democratic and prosperous community*".

The Vision 2020 was anchored on five (5) pillars known as Strategic Objectives (SOs) and 16 Strategic Directions (SDs) as shown Table 4:

Table 4: Strategic Objectives and Decisions of ECOWAS Vision 2020

Strategic Objective	Strategic Direction
SO1: Make ECOWAS a People's Community that is fully inclusive of women, youth and children	SD1: Strengthening cultural diversity for development and social progress
	SD2: Strengthening community citizenship and solidarity
	SD3: Promoting inclusion and strengthening social cohesion
SO2: Make ECOWAS a secure, stable and peaceful region	SD1: Strengthening regional peace and security
	SD2: Strengthening human security in the region
	SD3: Prevent, manage and resolve conflicts
SO3: Anchor the culture of democracy and good governance and	SD1: Strengthening democratic governance
	SD2: Consolidate the rule of law and justice

respect for the rule of law and fundamental freedoms	SD3: Promoting respect for fundamental rights
SO4: Make ECOWAS a fully integrated and interconnected economic zone	SD1: Consolidate the Free Movement of People and Goods (FMGP) and accelerate market integration
	SD2: Accelerating monetary union and economic and financial integration
	SD3: Intensify infrastructure development and inter-connectivity
SO5: Create the conditions for the transformation of economies and the sustainable development of peoples	SD1: Ensure human and social development
	SD2: Valuing human capital and knowledge development
	SD3: Strengthen environmental sustainability and the fight against climate change
	SD4: Fostering sustainable economic growth and development

The 2020 Vision was the first real foresight and planning exercise at the regional level. It thus provided a framework for the regional integration process and the establishment of programmatic tools. Between 2011 and 2020, the ECOWAS 2020 vision was operationalized through the development and implementation of two main strategic plans, namely the Regional Strategic Plan (RSP) 2011-2015 and the Community Strategic Framework (CSF) 2016-2020. Implementation of the 2020 Vision (2011-2020) was marked by major changes at the global level that are not without effect on the dynamics of ECOWAS.

Vision 2020 Implementation Challenges

Laudable and much achievement recorded, the Vision was constrained by major implementation challenges. These are:

- i. weak collaboration between ECOWAS structures and non-state structures (the private sector and civil society organizations);
- ii. weak coordination and steering, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and poor resource allocation;
- iii. the need to assert ECOWAS leadership in terms of impetus and commitment to the implementation of community measures in member countries.

Other challenges of the Vision are:

- iv. poverty and poor access of the population to basic social services;
- v. poor quality of social services;
- vi. demographic pressure on scarce resources;
- vii. slow economic integration and inadequate infrastructure;
- viii. increasingly pronounced climate change;
- ix. terrorism which greatly weakens Member States' economic and social development;
- x. pandemics; and
- xi. weak human development and social progress.

All the above limited the implementation rates for the Vision's RSP and CSF frameworks, with 36.8% for the RSP and 55.32% for the CSF respectively.

4.2 The ECOWAS Vision 2050⁵

The development of the new Vision 2050 is predicated on the retrospective analysis of the 2020 Vision. The retrospective analysis focused on four themes: i) Demography, human capital, social development and migration; ii) Geopolitics, governance, peace and security; iii) Environment and natural resources; iv) Growth, structural transformation, economic infrastructure and partnerships; and iv) Economic and monetary integration, infrastructure and partnerships.

Given the baseline scenario “Africa’s Torch”, the 2050 Vision statement is

“A fully integrated Community of peoples, living in a peaceful and prosperous region, with strong institutions and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, striving for inclusive and sustainable development”

The Vision is an improvement over the 2020 version, and it has Five (5) Pillars and Strategic Objectives, and 16 Strategic Orientations, with different identified/targeted areas of intervention for achievement of the objectives

Pillars	Strategic Objectives (SOs)	Strategic Orientations (SORs)
Pillar 1: Peace, Security and Stability	SO1: Making ECOWAS a secure, stable and peaceful region	SOR1: Strengthen regional peace and security
		SOR2: Strengthen human security
		SOR3: Prevent, manage, and resolve conflicts
Pillar 2: Governance and Rule of Law	SO2: Anchoring Democratic Culture and Good Governance and Respect for the Rule of Law and Fundamental Freedoms	SOR1: Strengthen democratic governance
		SOR2: Consolidate the rule of law and justice delivery
		SOR3: Promote the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms
Pillar 3: Economic Integration and Interconnectivity	SO3: Make ECOWAS a fully Integrated and Interconnected Economic Region	SOR1: Consolidate the free movement of people and goods and accelerate market integration
		SOR2: Accelerate monetary union and economic and financial integration
		SOR3: Intensify infrastructure development and enhance interconnectivity
Pillar 4: Transformation, Inclusive and Sustainable Development	SO4: Create the Conditions for Economic Transformation and Sustainable well-being of the People	SOR1: Promote human and social development
		SOR2: Leverage human capital and skills development
		SOR3: Strengthen environmental sustainability and the fight against climate change
		SOR4: Promote sustainable economic growth and development

⁵ For details of the Vision 2050 see https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Vision2050_EN_Web.pdf

Pillar 5: Social Inclusion	SO5: Make ECOWAS a Community of Peoples fully inclusive of women, children and youth	SOR1: Strengthen cultural diversity to promote development and social progress
		SOR2: Strengthen Community citizenship and solidarity
		SOR3: Promote inclusion and strengthen social cohesion

The 2050 Vision also focuses on some cross-cutting issues including women-gender, youth-employment, climate change – Resilience, and capacity building. Implementation of the Vision is also hinged on five guiding principles:

- Leadership and Political Will:
- Ownership and Shared Responsibility
- Complementarity and Subsidiarity
- Transparency and Accountability
- Sustainability

5. Looking Ahead and Pathway for Success of Vision 2050

Drawing from the lessons and experience from Vision 2020 and the current challenges within the region, it is imperative ECOAWS put in place certain success factors for the 2050 Vision. These include:

- create a connection between regional organizations and local structures;
- promote agriculture and industrialization;
- bring West Africa into the global economy;
- develop the private sector and improve the business climate and competitiveness;
- Develop the Energy Sector (the energy production of the African continent is equivalent to that of Spain);
- bridging institutional deficiencies and addressing political, social economic and cultural challenges;
- harmonize sectoral policies;
- resource mobilisation, cooperation and strategic partnerships
- put in place the institutional reforms that guarantee political stability and peace in the region; and
- programming, monitoring and evaluation

6. Conclusion

ECOWAS as a foremost REC in Africa has made remarkable impact in terms of regional development and uplifting people's welfare in West Africa. However, the achievement of the Community has been hindered by peculiar factors. This has made the Community to strategize and re-strategized over the years with respect to implementation of its programmes and policies. The launch of Vision 2020 in 2007 was a giant step towards re-defining and re-shaping the Community's activities. Although some notable

milestones were recorded within the Vision 2020 framework, implementation challenges constrained the success record of the Vision.

Given the lesson of experience from Vision 2020, ECOWAS launched the Vision 2050 which is an improvement over the earlier version. This paper has been able to put together critical success factors and pathways for a result-oriented implementation of the ECOWAS Vision 2050.

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