

ECOWAS

ECOWAS: Conclusion

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Chart 30: Conclusion and Recommendations

The relevance of ECOWAS as a REC is increasingly being questioned, especially given the threat of withdrawal from the bloc by three member countries (Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso). The challenges that confront the region are enormous, including the insecurity that threatens stability. Other governance challenges, particularly with election quality and credibility as well as corruption, continue to plague the region. The inability of member states to transform their economies, diversify their exports, reduce poverty and inequality whilst improving living standards poses danger for ECOWAS. These challenges are worsened by the impacts of climate change.

The analysis shows that while the region has made progress and will continue to make progress on the Current Path, it is not transformative enough to address the structural challenges. Without aggressive interventions, ECOWAS will not achieve its targets of inclusive and sustainable development that would translate into peace and prosperity for all its citizens by 2050.

Thus, rigorous and targeted socio-economic policy interventions in the areas of demographics and health, education, agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing, trade, financial flows and governance need to be undertaken to improve the region's current development trajectory.

Specifically the region should:

- Address the numerous security challenges by improving its joint security taskforce through the operationalisation of the ECOWAS Standby Force Unit to fight terrorism and violent extremism. Security services in member countries should collaborate and partner regarding intelligence gathering and information sharing to be more effective in combating the various security threats.
- The Commission should sanction member states which breach their constitution or amend it to their advantage, as would be the case during military takeovers. Similarly, the Commission should go beyond the election observer report to sanction leaders that commit election fraud and other electoral offences to inspire confidence in electoral processes. For instance, leaders who are alleged to commit electoral fraud should not be eligible to contest for chairmanship of the Commission.
- ECOWAS leaders should improve their commitment to fighting corruption through institutional reforms and provision of resources to anti-corruption institutions and agencies in their countries.
- Leaders should ensure proper natural resource management and value addition to improve revenues from these resources.
- Diversify the ECOWAS economy from the traditional agriculture and commodity exports to other sectors such as tourism and creative arts. This will increase revenues and reduce vulnerability to international commodity fluctuations and external shocks.
- Ensure that all barriers hindering free movement of people and goods are removed to promote regional trade and integration through the full operationalisation of the ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme.

- Ratify and ensure the full implementation of the continental free trade agreement.
- Pursue the ECOWAS vision of monetary union through the creation of the ECO to facilitate trade among member countries.
- Commit to joint infrastructure projects to reduce the cost and time of travel among member countries and facilitate connectivity and accessibility across the region.
- Ensure the rapid formalisation of the economy to improve government revenue. This can be achieved by reducing the cost of internet access and various bottlenecks associated with business registration and regulations.
- Rely on its huge renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro to gradually phase out reliance on fossil fuel for its energy needs. This will help promote growth while ensuring that environmental concerns are addressed. ECOWAS should implement its white paper on the West African Power Pool and, through the ECOWAS Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority, promote a regional electricity market to facilitate energy exchange.
- Address land tenure issues through land reformation policies to enhance security of tenure to promote large scale farming.
- Provide incentives to young farmers and facilitate commercial agriculture.
- Invest in agriculture by providing and improving storage facilities, fertilisers, seedlings and irrigation facilities to increase agricultural yield.
- Implement targeted free education and school feeding programmes at basic levels to increase enrolment.
- Improve the quality of education alongside offering vocational and technical training as opposed to the singular focus on academic teaching so evident across many countries in the region.
- Address youth unemployment through youth empowerment programmes, vocational training and entrepreneurial skill acquisition programmes.
- Improve the business environment to attract FDI into different sectors.

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Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. He has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

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