



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

Distr.:
LIMITED ECA-
WA/ICE.23/
Original document: French

TWENTY-THIRD (23rd) CONFERENCE OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE OF SENIOR OFFICIALS
AND EXPERTS (23rd ICE) FOR WEST AFRICA

Theme:

**“Maximizing Investments to Optimize Demographic Dynamics in a COVID 19 era: The
Imperative of Building Back Better”**

Virtual Meeting | 26-27 November 2020

Concept Note



Sub-Regional Office for West Africa

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I. Background

The Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts (ICE) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is a body that was created by the UN General Assembly. In West Africa, it meets annually to discuss the economic and social performances of countries of the region, based on reports prepared by the Sub-Regional Office for West Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA/SRO-WA). The Office is based in Niamey, Niger, and covers the fifteen ECOWAS Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Senior officials and experts from these Member States make up the West African ICE.

Created by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the ECA is one of the five UN Regional Commissions, tasked with promoting the economic and social development of Africa, alongside its mission to generate ideas and actions for the prosperity of Africa. It has five sub-regional Offices (SRO), which enable it to transform its normative work and analysis into operational activities in these sub-regions. These offices were restructured in 2019 so that they can better focus their efforts on issues concerning their respective sub-regions. As such, the Office for West Africa is specialized in Demographic Dynamics for Development (DDD).

Each year, the ICE brings together high-level decision-makers from Member States to discuss economic and social performances, and make recommendations to States and other development stakeholders. Furthermore, the ICE is the statutory framework Member States have to direct and supervise the elaboration and the implementation of the work plan of the Office. In this regard, the ICE ensures that activities carried out by the Office align neatly with sub-regional and national priorities, while making suggestions related to economic and social development in the sub-region. These recommendations are tabled before the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development for review and decision.

The ICE is hosted each year, at its request, by a Member State from the sub-region. Consequently, the 23rd Conference of the West Africa ICE, to be held in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, will take place virtually from November 26 to 27, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with the hosting country. The main theme of the ICE is: **“Maximizing Investments to Optimize Demographic Dynamics in a COVID 19 era: The Imperative of Building Back Better”**.

This ICE Conference will be preceded by an *ad hoc* and virtual meeting of think tanks enlarged to include national experts, which will take place from November 24-25, 2020 under the theme: “Generational Economics and Structural Transformation amid COVID-19 in West Africa”.

II- Objectives and theme of the 23rd ICE Conference

The main aim of the 23rd ICE Conference will be to discuss recent changes that could affect economic and social development in West African countries, in order to identify the main

challenges to be met, and propose pathways for speeding up sustainable development through the transformation of economies in the sub-region. In this light, participants will examine statutory reports drafted by the secretariat. In fact, Member States will take turns to review the report on the implementation of the SRO-WA work plan since the end of the previous Conference (22nd ICE) held in May 2019 and until September 2020, the report on the socio-economic profile for West Africa and progress report on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in West Africa. These respective reports and the accompanying discussions will consider the special context of COVID-19, which continues to have a socio-economic impact and an adverse effect on the achievement of SDGs, and consequently the sustainable development of West African countries.

An issue note on **“Maximizing Investments to Optimize Demographic Dynamics in a COVID 19 era: The Imperative of Building Back Better”** will guide discussions on the main theme for this 23rd ICE.

III- Rationale of the main theme for the 23rd ICE Conference

The meeting will take place in a context marked by the outbreak of COVID-19 since December 2019. This pandemic and its critical acceleration have greatly impacted the sustainable development of countries and affected daily life. The negative impact of COVID-19 on the global economy outweighs the intensity of the 2008-2009 financial crisis.¹ In Africa, the COVID-19 crisis has not only uncovered structural challenges faced especially in the areas of human development and economic resilience, but has also worsened economic fragility. In this respect, special attention will be directed, during this meeting, to demographic dynamics and the demographic dividend, whose evolution in Africa in general, and West Africa in particular, is a call for concern to all sustainable development decision-makers and stakeholders.

The population of West Africa is roughly estimated at 402 million in 2020, representing 5.2%² of the world’s population and 30% of Africa’s population. At the current pace of population growth (2.6% in 2020) and with an average fertility rate of 5 children per woman in 2020, West Africa’s population is expected to be four times higher before 2100.³ This rapid growth is coupled with a predominantly youthful population as evidenced by the fact that the median age in the sub-region is 18⁴. This trend points to two things: first, the imperative development of human capital to address pressures and basic needs in the areas of health, education, access to decent employment, and income. Second, it points to the urgent need to seize economic opportunities and realize the growth potential related to proper management of the available workforce. To accomplish this, one of the most appropriate responses to meet the challenge of economic

¹ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020>

² World Population Prospects 2019-- United Nations Population Division

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2019). World Population Prospects 2019. Online edition. Rev. 1.

⁴ World Population Prospects 2019 -- United Nations Population Division

transformation and sustainable development in West Africa would be relevant policies for human capital investment and maximization of the said potential, as well as opportunities to meet this dual objective, and realize the demographic dividend in optimal time limits.

The elasticity of the demographic dividend on revenue growth per capita has been estimated at 2.28%⁵. Furthermore, realizing the demographic dividend would be a giant step in the achievement of SDGs by 2030. It has generally been recognized that demographic dynamics, including progress towards the demographic dividend, directly impact most SDGs, notably poverty alleviation and food security, public health and the promotion of decent employment for all without discrimination, the empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups, as well as reducing inequalities worldwide⁶.

In this light, this meeting is an opportunity to better set Member States on the path to the maximization of investments so as to optimize demographic dynamics, in their widest sense, including population dynamics, health, education, economic growth, governance, urbanization, migration, and gender development. To this end, the goal will be to highlight funding needs and explore the main levers for resource mobilization, namely budget allocation, financial market, private sector resources, and bilateral as well as multilateral funding.

Maximizing investments to optimize demographic dynamics, while building on the momentum initiated by the African Union's 2017 road map based on harnessing the dividend through youths will be a major pillar of the COVID-19 response⁷. In fact, the pandemic has considerably impacted key determinants of the demographic dividend and sustainable development, namely health, education, growth, and governance.

As a health crisis, the epidemiological situation created by COVID-19 shows that, as of 3 August 2020, 131,680⁸ people were tested positive for COVID-19 in West Africa, representing 13.6% of all cases on the continent. This scenario shows that the impact at the sub-regional level has been relatively low for a zone that hosts 30% of Africa's population⁹. As of August 6, 2020, the fatality rate in the ECOWAS region is comparatively low with regards to the rest of Africa and the world, with a rate of 1.5% against 2.1% and 3.8% respectively¹⁰. Same as the rest of the continent, the region has relatively high recovery rates, evaluated at 69% and 65%, respectively¹¹.

⁵Olaniyani et al., 2019; Bloom et al., 2015) Bloom, David E., Jocelyn Finlay, Salal Humair, Andrew Mason, Olanrewaju Olaniyani, and Adedoyin Soyibo. (2015). *Prospects for Economic Growth in Nigeria: A Demographic Perspective*. PGDA Working Paper No. 127

Bloom, David E., Jocelyn Finlay, Salal Humair, Andrew Mason, Olanrewaju Olaniyani, and Adedoyin Soyibo. (2015). *Prospects for Economic Growth in Nigeria: A Demographic Perspective*. PGDA Working Paper No. 127

⁶ Beegle, K, and Christiansen, L. (2019) . Accelerating Poverty Reduction in Africa. Washington D.C, World Bank

⁷ "Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth" (AUC, 2016

⁸ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200803-covid-19-sitrep-196-cleared.pdf?sfvrsn=8a8a3ca4_4

⁹ UN Population Division Database, 2020

¹⁰ ECA calculations, based on COVID 19 situations reports August 2020(WAHO, WHO)

¹¹ Africa CDC, <https://africacdc.org/our-work/> (August, 2020)

The pandemic has also negatively impacted the education sector. In fact, the closure of schools from March to stop the spread of the pandemic has kept close to two million (2,000,000) students out of school¹². The sector is progressively recovering in most countries, with the holding of end-of-year exams.

Sub-regional economic growth perspectives have also been negatively impacted. The economic growth rate has been set at an average of -2% against an initial forecast of 4% in 2020¹³. The fall in economic activity was shown in the drop of household revenue, exacerbating the effect of poverty, which affects over 50% of regional households¹⁴. Nigeria, with an estimated population of two hundred million (200 million) inhabitants, representing half the population in the ECOWAS region, should experience a 0.8% drop in per capita income¹⁵.

Mindful of the negative socio-economic consequences of COVID-19, decision-makers as well as development partners, notably the UN System, deployed economic and social governance instruments nationally and sub-regionally.

National public interventions focused on immediate response measures to curb the spread of the pandemic. They were followed by support measures directed at residents, especially the most vulnerable, and the reopening of the main sectors hit by the pandemic. Regionally and internationally, key measures were implemented for closer coordination and synchronized actions, as well as advocacy to provide significant assistance to affected countries, notably in Africa.

In this respect, the ECA was on the front lines to support the adoption of a joint African stance on the debt service suspension initiative (DSSI), implement facilities for access to quality medication at affordable prices, provide an appropriate response hinged on innovative technology, as well as a special initiative to strengthen and also consider youth aspirations in the post-COVID recovery. On the sidelines in May 2020, the Office drafted an initial assessment of the impact of COVID-19 in West Africa. This was later strengthened through direct assistance to countries and sub-regional organizations (Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Niger, Togo, Guinea Bissau, Ghana, Guinea, and ECOWAS) to develop knowledge products on the socio-economic assessment of COVID-19 and the post-COVID recovery. In a bid to strengthen a coordinated response from the UN System, the Office launched an ongoing dialogue with the Africa Regional Office of the Department of Coordination (Africa DCO), while providing direct assistance to the Offices of United Nations Resident Coordinators in West Africa, enabling them to draft national plans to respond to the socio-economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

¹² ECA, SRO WA, Socio-Economic Impact of COVID in West Africa, May 2020

¹³ AfDB, *Regional Economic Perspectives for West Africa 2020*, July 2020

¹⁴ ECA/SRO WA, Socio-Economic Profile of West Africa, 2018

¹⁵ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty>

Regional actions were also taken at the ECOWAS level through notably meetings of Heads of State and Government¹⁶ and West African Ministers of Health coordinated by the West African Health Organization (WAHO)¹⁷. Tangible measures were implemented following these high-level meetings. H.E. Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, was named ECOWAS Champion for the response to COVID-19 and tasked by his peers with reviewing the epidemiological situation; strengthening the health response, intervention approaches, and post-crisis recovery plans to render health systems more resilient and the post-COVID-19 recovery response robust.

Despite the challenges and uncertainty triggered by the outbreak of COVID-19, the situation in West Africa is still marked, like across the continent, by the implementation of the African Continental Free-Trade Area (AfCFTA). In this light, the West African sub-region is singled out owing to its firm commitment reflected in its ratification of the AfCFTA Agreement by ten (10) ECOWAS countries out of fifteen. Countries are also mobilizing to consolidate their market for the achievement of the SDGs. As such, they are implementing mid-term development plans consistent with the sustainable development agenda. At the sub-regional level, the political will to engineer a brighter future for West Africans is based on the ongoing evaluation of the ECOWAS 2020 Vision and the drafting of the new ECOWAS 2050 Vision, in partnership with the ECA West Africa Office.

In conclusion, amid this ambivalent situation marked by uncertainty, progress, and the quest for resilient economies and populations, the West African sub-region still facing unrelenting security challenges, notably in terms of terrorist threats and democratic governance. Besides, it is also facing threats from climate change, which are manifested by the occurrence of floods in a group of countries (Niger, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, etc.). In Niger alone, torrential rains affected 281,000 people, destroyed 26,000 houses, and left 51 people dead¹⁸.

The theme of the twenty-third ICE Conference was chosen in light of this overall situation. Senior Officials and Experts from the sub-region will mainly discuss the need to maximize investments to optimize demographic dynamics in a bid to better involve States in more positive post-COVID-19 resilience and sustainable development outlook. Under its statutory dimension, the Conference will also be an opportunity to review the work done by the Office and spell out relevant recommendations to strengthen ECA support to efforts for development and regional integration of countries, as well as sub-regional organizations.

IV- Participation

The 23rd ICE Conference will be attended by delegates from the 15 West African States, as well as senior officials and experts from ECOWAS, WAEMU, Mano River Union (MRU), and other sub-regional Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs). The African Union Commission, the

¹⁶ ECOWAS Summits (23 April, 6 September 2020) & meetings of Health ministers)

¹⁷ Meeting of health ministers, in February and June 2020

¹⁸ <https://www.unocha.org/story/daily-noon-briefing-highlights-niger>

African Development Bank (AfBD), and other International Financial Institutions will also be represented. Besides the ECA, other agencies under the United Nations System will contribute to the success of the meeting, namely the Country Offices of the Resident Coordination of the United Nations System, other development partners, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Development and research institutions working on population issues in Africa will also be invited to contribute to discussions.

V- ICE documents

Discussions during the 23rd ICE Conference will take place following the presentation of the following reports:

- Report on the implementation of the SRO-WA's 2019 and 2020 work plan;
- Report on the socio-economic profile for West Africa;
- Progress report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in West Africa; and
- Round table issue note on: "Maximizing Investments to Optimize Demographic Dynamics amid COVID-19: A Must for a Better Recovery".

VI- Expected results from the 23rd ICE meeting

The ICE meeting is expected to enrich and adopt the draft reports that will be presented by the ECA/SRO-WA. It is also expected to submit policy and strategy recommendations to decision-makers, for the elaboration of national development programs and to speed up the regional integration process, with special emphasis on the implementation of relevant measures in response to COVID-19 and the need for the post-health crisis recovery. A detailed meeting report will summarize presentations, discussions, additions to be made to documents presented, main conclusions, and recommendations.

VII- Meeting organization, date and format

The 23rd ICE Conference will take place virtually, from November 26 to 27 2020, with plenary sessions and a round table during which reports prepared by the Office and statements from eminent experts will be presented and discussed. The said reports will be published on the ECA/SRO-WA website: <http://www.uneca.org/sro-wa/>.

This meeting will be preceded by a virtual meeting of think tanks enlarged to include national experts. The theme of the latter meeting will be: "Generational Economics and Structural Transformation amid COVID-19 in West Africa," scheduled for November 24 to 25, 2020.

VIII. Working language

The working language of the meeting will be French and English.

IX- Administrative arrangements and logistics

The ECA SRO-WA will inform participants about the logistic conditions for participation in this meeting, notably the parameters for connecting to the virtual platform. Additional information on other administrative arrangements will be provided in the advisory note, which will be sent to participants who confirm their participation.

X- Contacts

At the ECA SRO-WA

To confirm participation, request additional information, and make any other inquiry regarding the meeting, contact:

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