



ECOWAS COMMISSION
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Deutsche Gesellschaft
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Support to the ECOWAS Commission in the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Improving the framework conditions for implementing the AfCFTA Agreement in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Challenges

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is actively committed to fostering regional economic integration. In 2018, all member states of the regional economic community signed the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to promote trade across the entire African continent and creates a united African market of 1.3 billion people. ECOWAS has been working toward finding common negotiating positions for its member states in the AfCFTA negotiations and to develop strategies for the implementation of the agreement in the region.

A major challenge lies in the holistic implementation of the AfCFTA within the ECOWAS. While the current institutional and regulatory framework reflects significant advancements in regional integration, it needs to be further developed to align with the intricate demands of the AfCFTA. In addition, ECOWAS member states face varying degrees of difficulties in implementing the agreement at the national level due, in particular, to a lack of technical expertise. Importantly, both the private sector and public authorities struggle with a lack of transparent and up to date information on regional and continental trade regulations.

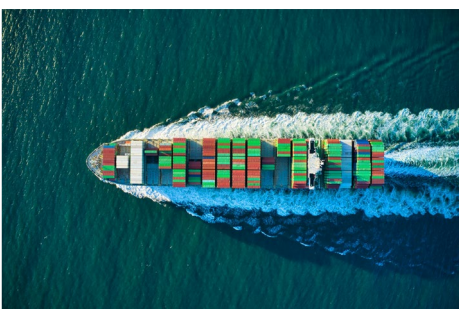
Approach

The project aims to support ECOWAS in the implementation of the AfCFTA by strengthening critical implementation frameworks. The approach is multifaceted, which means that the project offers advice on processes at continental, regional and member state

Project title	Support to ECOWAS in the implementation of the AfCFTA
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implemented by	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Project region	ECOWAS with a particular focus on Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire
Political partner	ECOWAS Commission
Overall duration	01/2023 – 12/2025
Financial volume	EUR 5 million

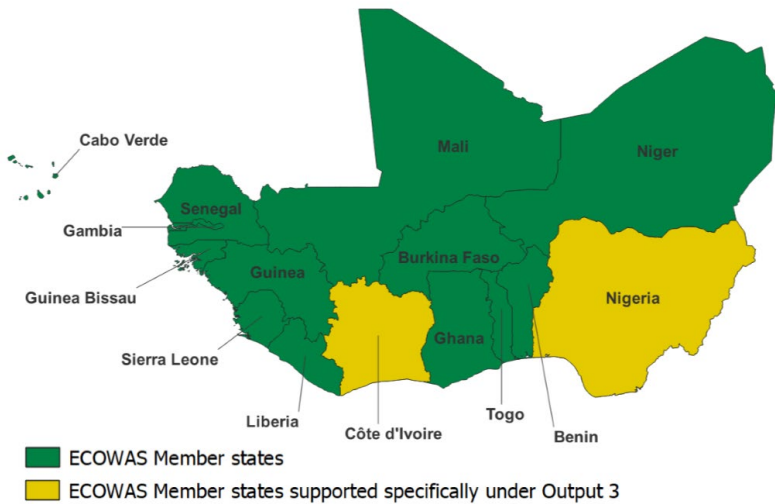
level. By collaborating closely with the ECOWAS Commission and member states, the project supports the finding of coordinated ECOWAS negotiating positions on the AfCFTA and the development of a common AfCFTA implementation strategy in the region.

In addition, the project directly supports the member states in removing barriers to trade, for example by developing instruments such as the Interconnected System for the Management of Goods in Transit (SIGMAT) and the electronic certificate of origin, thus deepening regional integration. By actively engaging the private sector, the project aims to ensure that the needs of private sector actors, and in particular those of small and women traders, are taken into account in the implementation of the regional and national strategies. To improve their access to information, the project supports the development of user-friendly trade information portals at member state and ECOWAS level.



Left: Container ship

Right: Documentation for export procedure in Benin



has to be run on my product.” She remains optimistic: *“There is a lot of opportunity. The trade volume in Africa is very little. But if we can dot all the i’s, we can trade amongst ourselves in Africa.”*

Key results

The project is aiming to achieve four key results:

- **Improved regional coordination:** The member states’ positions in AfCFTA negotiations are better coordinated in order to ensure a unified representation of ECOWAS interests.
- **Streamlined implementation processes:** The coordination among member states on technical design of the legal framework for AfCFTA implementation is strengthened.
- **Strengthened technical capacities:** The authorities of ECOWAS and the member states are equipped with stronger technical competencies and a better understanding of the benefits of the AfCFTA.
- **Enhanced information access:** The private sector, public authorities and the civil society have better access to the trade regulations and market opportunities in the ECOWAS region, particularly those under the AfCFTA, thus promoting trade in the region and on the continent as a whole.

Success Story

Dr. Blessing Irabor is the president and CEO of the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT) Nigeria. She is advocating for *“the advancement of women in international trade”* and increasing the access of women to trade-related information.

The project supports stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to ensure that their interests are taken into account in the AfCFTA negotiations and the regional and national AfCFTA implementation strategies. Dr. Blessing Irabor points out: *“OWIT Nigeria has been sitting at the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) making sure that most of the policies that are coming up are gender-neutral. OWIT is sitting with the Ministry of Trade Negotiation Office on the AfCFTA women and youth committee because we are part of the people that made recommendations in the drafting of the women and youth protocol. [...] The AfCFTA has a lot of prospects for women and we can only achieve these prospects if we prepare these women for it.”*

She further explains that *“80% of women in Nigeria do not know what AfCFTA is all about.”* The project therefore supports awareness-raising campaigns for traders, particularly female traders, and promotes the updating of national and regional information portals in order to improve traders’ access to up-to-date information on applicable trade procedures.

Dr. Blessing is herself an entrepreneur who is active in international trade and struggles with the lack of available information and standardization: *“At times I get to the border of Cotonou, they will tell me no this standard is Nigerian standard, it is not the same here, so I now have to either pay or another test*



President and CEO of Blissomo International Ltd. (BIL) and president of the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT), Dr. Blessing Irabor at the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) meeting on cross-border trade and port competitiveness in 2023.

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