

# West Africa: Support to the ECOWAS Commission

Promoting political and economic integration in the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) through strategic management advice

## Challenge

West Africa is one of the least developed regions in the world. Despite the great ethnic, cultural, linguistic and economic heterogeneity, West African countries face similar development policy challenges. Regional integration, as well as the cooperation of states in economic, political and social issues in a limited geographical area, is regarded as an important building block for development in Africa. The guiding principle is that integration creates larger markets and thus showcases opportunities and allows competition – with positive effects on employment and consumer orientation.

Following this guiding principle, the West African Economic Community (Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS) was formed in 1975, with a view to promote economic cooperation between Member States. Since its inception, ECOWAS has steadily expanded its mandate to include cultural, social and political aspects such as conflict prevention, management and resolution, and the strengthening of civil society organizations.

The ECOWAS through its Commission can look back at several achievements such as the free movement of ECOWAS citizens. However, the Commission is still building its own institutional capacities. This is necessary in order to accelerate the regional integration process amongst Member States and thus contribute to the development of the countries.

Project Name	Support to the ECOWAS Commission
Commissioning Party	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Implementing Organisation	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Project Area	15 ECOWAS Member States in West Africa
Executing Body	ECOWAS Commission
Period	01.03.2014 – 28.02.2019
Contribution	32,9 Million Euro, with 10 Million Euro Co-Funding

SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS



## Solution approach

The project supports the ECOWAS Commission in three closely related areas which include:

- Organisational Development of the Commission,
- Trade and Customs,
- Peace and Security.

In the area of **organizational development**, the project strengthens the strategic orientation of the ECOWAS Commission and the establishment of a regional monitoring and evaluation system for programmes implemented by ECOWAS. In addition, the project supports Human Resource management of the Commission.

In the area of **trade and customs**, the project advises on the further development and implementation of the Common External Tariff as well as the reform of procedures for the free trade of local products across the region. In addition, it supports the development of a regional tax policy.

In the area of **peace and security**, the project supports the engagement of civilian experts in the framework of the peacekeeping efforts of the ECOWAS Standby Force. The project also advises the ECOWAS Commission on long-term election observation and the strengthening of the ECOWAS Early Warning System.

Conference Hall at the ECOWAS Commission Head Quarters, Abuja, Nigeria  
ECOWAS Election Observation, April 2014, Guinea-Bissau

Pg 2: Port of Dakar, Senegal

Training of ECOWAS Human Resource Department, Abuja, Nigeria





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## Effects in numbers ...

The Heads of State and Government endorsed the ECOWAS Community Strategic Framework 2016-2020 (CSF) which was supported by GIZ. The CSF has helped to define political priorities of the ECOWAS integration process. A new aspect is an increased participation of civil society organizations and private-sector actors in the negotiation of standards and procedures, such as the ECOWAS Early Warning System and the harmonization of tax rates.

13 of the 15 ECOWAS Member States have implemented the Common External Tariff which has been in force since 2015. The project has trained more than 2,600 customs officials and freight forwarders to ensure the correct application of tariffs. In addition, the Customs Administrations can make use of a standard reference book of the new tariffs.

Since 2014, the number of regional products free of duty has doubled (870 products in 2014, 1,767 products in 2016). Thanks to German assistance, the registration of regional companies and products for duty-free trade within ECOWAS takes 63 days, instead of 90 days as was previously the norm. In addition, more than 3,000 people from public administrations and the private sector have participated in the information events for the registration of the free movement of goods across the region.

Since 2015, ECOWAS has deployed 57 long-term election observers. Since then, 10 national elections have taken place across the region. The observation of the process, not only on the election day itself, but also in the months preceding it, has helped to settle potential conflicts. The project supported both the concept of long-term election observation missions and the deployment of long-term election observers.

## ... and in Stories

**More transparency for customs tariffs in West Africa:** With the introduction of the Common External Tariff, both international and local operators can rely on uniform tariffs for importation into the region. With the publication of tariffs on the websites of the customs authorities, customs clearance becomes a determinable factor for entrepreneurs importing goods into the region.

In addition, the new tariffs have created incentives for the processing industry in the region. Goods and machinery needed for the production of local goods can be imported at a lower tariff than goods directly intended for sale to consumers. For example, medicines produced and packaged in Nigeria can be sold at a lower price than finished medicines imported from Europe, even if the packaging material and the active ingredients have been imported.

This creates local workplaces and allows the population access to affordable medication.

**Peaceful elections in Nigeria:** Long-term election observers found out prior to the presidential elections in Nigeria that just about 30% of the requested electoral cards were issued. In addition, it was recommended that there should be a signing of a peace agreement between the two main political parties: the PDP and APC. ECOWAS urged the shift of the elections by 6 weeks to adequately address identified irregularities. The day before the elections, 80% of the electorates had collected their voting cards from the issuing offices. The political parties, PDP and APC signed a peace accord in which they reaffirmed their commitment to the peaceful conduct of the elections. Ultimately, the presidential elections on 26 March 2015 were largely peaceful. For the first time a sitting president was not re-elected since the end of the military rule in 1999. As a result, the opposition candidate Mohammadu Buhari took office in May 2015.

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