

Proposed Terms of Reference

Theme 6: Development through integration

The issue of regional groupings has been source of concern in Africa for a long time. Political decision-makers started conducting experiments on regional groupings during the colonial period. In addition to France's experimentations such as French West Africa (AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (AEF), the East African Community was established by the British in the 50s and brought together Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

After independence, these experiments were extended to the other regions of the Continent and more than fifty regional cooperation and integration organisations were established. This trend has been accelerated by the ongoing globalisation process and the challenges of the nation-states to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Presently, Africa has more than 14 Regional Economic Communities (REC), five (5) of which have been selected by the African Union as regionalisation bases for the development of the Continent, notably: ECOWAS, ECCAS, COMESA, SADC and AMU.

With regard to trans-State regionalism, which is an important development factor, the achievements are still inadequate due to the reluctance of the leaders to give up part of their national sovereignty. As a result, speeches on the importance of integration are still vague. These speeches are becoming more and more emotional by making reference to the historical and cultural values only, whereas regional building should rather enable the Continent to better find solutions to the problems, which individual countries cannot provide.

Considering the constraints relating to the excessive balkanization of Africa and the need for the African countries to come together in order to speak with one voice and have greater weight in the international scene, only integration can enable the Continent to better cope with the current economic and financial crisis.

In order to tackle all these issues in detail, the issue of development through integration should enable to propose, at the end of the seminar, new integration approaches with special emphasis on the advantages, costs and benefits of trans-State regionalism for the countries and the populations.

To that end, the required work involves, after brief presentation of the ongoing regional processes, giving special attention to the following main issues:

What can be considered today as regional integration achievement in West Africa?

Is it the growth in population movements and trade flows as a result of the implementation of the Protocol on free movement of persons and goods?

How can we estimate the ECOWAS achievements after 35 years of existence?

How can we reconcile the formal and informal forms of integration in order to promote regional building, especially with regard to the initiatives for the establishment of several financial institutions of regional dimensions (for example banks, insurance companies...) and space transformations resulting from the process of cross-border trade networks based on analyses conducted in recent years by OECD's Sahel and West Africa Club and other institutions like the Centre for Regional Analysis and Social Studies (LARES) and ENDA DIAPOL ?

What is the impact of external shocks like globalisation on the evolution of the regional integration process in West Africa?

What are the factors favourable to regional integration?

Do they involve the current difficulties for the nation-states to serve as development bases (market constraints, inadequate borders, difficulties for the Member States to have quality equipment and infrastructure and to promote real development and competitiveness centres)? What would then be the adequate spaces for regional integration? Etc ...

How can the economic, political and institutional challenges that Africa is faced with serve as justifications for the search for economic and monetary integration?

How can we redefine the development objectives in order to ensure that they are more in line with the regional integration process?

Considering the need to start from regional integration in order to ensure development in West Africa, what are the obstacles that prevent us from moving forward?

Do they involve issues relating to integration cost, advantages and benefits and income losses relating to imports of food products like frozen chicken and meat, etc. from the international market?

Do they involve difficulties relating to ensuring coherence between national policies and regional integration objectives?

Is it the lack of reliable integration pillars? What should be the appropriate pillars on which this integration could be based in West Africa?

Is it the lack of integration projects or the definition of priorities that may have general consensus?

How can the lack of adequately attractive regional centres, in order to ensure that regional integration is a living reality, be considered as an obstacle to integration?

What is the impact of the monetary issue on the regional integration process, especially on nominal and real convergence policies and issues of budgetary arbitration in the Member States? Is it possible to establish budget federalism in ECOWAS? What would be the advantages and challenges? Etc.

How to initiate future debate on the role of institutions in order to eventually arrive at the transformation of the existing regional structures into real federations of States?

How can lack of leadership of regional dimension be an obstacle to regional integration building in West Africa?

These are several issues we would want to see addressed in this document on development through integration by taking into account the existing scientific, political and economic achievements on regional experiments undertaken in the world.

In any case, the required work should make relevant recommendations and provide new prospects and prepare a roadmap on the various steps that should be taken in order to make regional integration a concrete reality.

Nevertheless, the author of this paper is expected to have free, progressive and new thinking on this worrying and unavoidable issue in order to get Africa out of the situation of underdevelopment.