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## West Africa

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### III. West Africa



The sub-region witnessed ups and downs on the political front. General elections were held successfully in Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Niger, in addition to local elections in Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Cape Verde. On the negative side, there were two alleged coup attempts in Mauritania, a military mutiny in Guinea-Bissau and the occasional arrest of opposition leaders in Mauritania and Guinea. Political stalemate continued in Togo. The violence in Côte d'Ivoire, however, continued to be West Africa's biggest headache, with former Liberian rebels intervening in the conflict, persisting political tension between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso and economic dislocation from migrants fleeing from the war-torn country. Incidental benefits from trade diversion and capital flight to other West African countries hardly compensated for this situation. Violent exchanges between the Ivorian army and French peacekeepers led to a massive exodus of Europeans and the thorough

isolation of the Ivorian government. Political instability by and large lessened in the forest region of the southwest, as Sierra Leone struggled to come to terms with its post-conflict situation, while Guinea-Bissau and Liberia continued their transition to normal civilian rule. Guinea witnessed, as a result of economic crisis and cross-border ties with Liberia, several violent uprisings, but with both government and the various opposition groups pulling back from the brink at the last moment. Partly as a result of the return to some degree of normality in Guinea-Bissau, the conflict in Senegal's Casamance region lost most of its intensity, leading to a peace agreement between the government and the secessionist movement in December. Violence in various forms (communal, criminal or involving militias) continued to characterise Nigerian politics and society, without apparent risk of complete state disintegration. Some Sahelian countries were troubled by the activity of the Algerian-based 'Groupement Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat' (GSPC), in addition to highway banditry and, in Niger, some rebellious actions by Tuaregs. GSPC activity encouraged further military intervention by the US in a range of countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger as well as Chad), in the form of US military aid and training for these countries' armed forces. Finally, West Africa's economies were impacted by high oil prices and locust plagues in the Sahel. Growth rates ranged from a low 2.6% in Guinea to a high 6.5% in Burkina Faso, but in most cases this was not enough to offset the effects of high petrol prices or to keep pace with population growth.

### **Electoral Politics, Transitions and Threats of Coups**

General elections took place in three countries, with **stabilising effects** for the political system in two of them, Ghana and Niger. The electoral contest in Ghana (7 December), while leading to victory for the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the re-election of its leader, President Kufuor, was fairly balanced in its outcome. The main opposition party, the National Democratic Congress, won 94 seats in parliament against the NPP's 128, thus further consolidating a two-party system. Niger, too, maintained a degree of political (but not social) stability, with the successful staging of municipal as well as presidential and parliamentary elections. These were marked neither by the chaos of the previous elections nor by a serious deterioration of relations within the political class, such as the country experienced during the 1990s. In fact, the victory of incumbent President Tandja in two rounds (16 November and 4 December) represented the first renewal of government by truly democratic means in the country's post-colonial history. The success of legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau proved more contentious. As the first step in a two-year transition process following a bloodless coup on 14 September 2003, the parliamentary elections (28–30 March) saw some disturbances at polling stations and the **contestation of the results** by the second biggest of Guinea-Bissau's three main political parties. However, an ECOWAS delegation gave its approval to the way the polls were conducted and, after its intercession, all parties agreed to respect the outcome.

Cape Verde, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone held **local elections**, in the last case as part of the transition process that began after the return, under UN administration, of peace in 2002. These polls proceeded peacefully, except in Nigeria, where local elections had to be postponed in some states because of strife and violence. Generally, these elections, which completed the election marathon begun in 2003, were marked by low turnouts, violence and fraud. While they confirmed the dominant position of President Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party, the legal battle over the outcome of the 2003 presidential contest continued throughout the year, with his challenger vainly asking for an annulment on the basis of vote rigging. Other countries in the sub-region went through **post-electoral periods** (Mauritania, Guinea) or faced the typical issues of a run-up to electoral contests (scheduled for 2005 or later), such as the revision of electoral codes (Burkina, as in Niger) or voter registers (Benin, but also Ghana) and the realignment of opposition parties (Gambia). Cabinet reshuffles, some of them more eventful than others, took place in Guinea, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali and Sierra Leone, while the governments of Burkina and Togo successfully played on divisions within the opposition. In the latter country, speculation about the presidential succession was encouraged by rumours of the ill health of the head of state, President Eyadéma, West Africa's longest incumbent ruler. However, similar concerns ceased to be an issue in Guinea, where the health of President Lansana Conté appeared to have stabilised.

As in Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone, politics in Togo could be said to be marked by some sort of transition process as the European Union negotiated a roadmap for democratisation with the government as a precondition for the resumption of aid, though with little sign of a genuine breakthrough by the end of the year. Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire also continued to be governed under **transitional arrangements** ahead of planned elections in 2005. In Liberia, this involved the inclusion – as a result of the peace agreement that ostensibly ended the civil war in 2003 – of members of all warring factions in the cabinet and ministries, leading to general dysfunction in government and the nomination of some 40 presidential contenders for the 2005 elections. Similar steps proved impossible in Côte d'Ivoire as a result of complete lack of agreement between the government of President Laurent Gbagbo and allied groups on the one hand and rebel groups in the north and west on the other over disarmament, reconquest by the government of national territory and constitutional reform that would enable Gbagbo's main rival, Alassane Ouattara, to stand for president.

Mauritania saw the partial renewal of its senate (9 April) through elections, but without discernible benefit for the political stability of the country. Twice the government announced it had foiled **coup attempts** (9 August and 28 September), claiming on the first occasion that the instigators were Mauritanian army officers based in Burkina Faso and, on the second, blaming the alleged ringleader of a failed coup attempt in 2003. Army officers were arrested, as were the members of opposition parties who were accused of collusion, leading to a mass trial of those accused of plotting the overthrow of the government. In

Guinea, opposition leaders were similarly arrested on a coup charge, followed by their release without further legal steps. No such events took place in other countries in the sub-region, although Guinea-Bissau witnessed a military mutiny leading to the **assassination** of the joint chief of staff (6 October) and what was seen as the government's capitulation to the mutineers' demands on a range of corporate issues. Burkina Faso saw the conviction of ringleaders accused of a coup attempt the previous year.

### **Violence, Conflicts and Security**

**Nigeria**, rather than better publicised Côte d'Ivoire, was the sub-region's most violent country. Communal conflicts, fed by disputes over land and grazing rights and by ethnic and religious divisions, continued to fray the fabric of this complex, multicultural society, precariously held together by the centralising forces of the Nigerian federation, i.e., the armed forces and the distributive mechanisms for the country's expanding oil revenues. In addition to communal conflicts, the country was again struck by violent acts of armed militias, especially in the southeast. These began either as movements claiming to defend the birthright of an ethnic group – usually by demanding a bigger share of oil revenues and/or an end to oil pollution – or as vigilante groups fighting the combined effects of crime and inefficient policing. However, in recent years they have themselves degenerated into criminalised gangs, headed by veritable warlords trying to carve out personal empires. This development in turn has led to fighting among rival militia groups, in addition to their preying on civil society. These activities, together with high levels of gang violence and the violent practices of secret cults in the south, coastal piracy targeting the oil industry, highway banditry and, in the northeast, attacks by members of an Islamic sect, have contributed to the **general banality of violence**, with violence being used as an instrument to settle scores or 'resolve' conflicts. In this context, both police and the armed forces managed to maintain law and order only by employing the most brutal force themselves.

Thus, between February and July, Plateau State was struck by massive violence between farmers and nomads and, especially, between Muslims and Christians, which spilled over into the northern city of Kano, leading to the deaths of hundreds of people, the creation of tens of thousands of refugees and the declaration of a state of emergency in the state. In Adamawa State, similar clashes took place, leading to the displacement of 4,000 people. Nationwide, the federal authorities registered some **800,000 internally displaced persons**. Combined gang, militia and state violence in the oil-producing areas of the southeast had by mid-September claimed the lives of some 500 people. The maintenance of law and order took a heavy toll on the country's poorly paid, corrupt and inefficient police force, which itself allegedly killed more than 400 armed robbers between January and April alone. However, few if any manifestations of violence in West Africa's most populous state spilled over into neighbouring countries. Since they did not have sub-regional implications, they did not attract much international attention.

Conversely, the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire and the reluctance of its southern political class and northern-based rebel forces to fully implement the **Linas-Marcoussis** agreement of 2003 continued to draw in neighbouring, sub-regional and international actors (see below). While the rebel forces of the northern 'Forces nouvelles' were affected by a violent leadership conflict, the government of national reconciliation, which had come into being as a result of Linas-Marcoussis, failed to function as a result of a power struggle between President Laurent Gbagbo and (rebel representative) Prime Minister Seydou Diarra. In addition, the refusal of the rebels to disarm without a constitutional reform that would allow Ouattara's presidential candidacy, the desire by southern politicians to reconquer the north by violent means, the interference by armed militias in Abidjan, obstructiveness by the National Assembly and boycotts of government meetings by parties of the opposition made for **complete political deadlock**.

The first major crisis erupted on 25–26 March, when a **demonstration by opposition parties** was violently **repressed** by government forces and its allied militias, resulting in 120 fatalities, 274 people wounded and 20 disappearances, according to UNCHR estimates. This appalling government act was surpassed only by the decision of government forces to go on the offensive against the rebels in November. In the course of its attacks, French troops, interposed between government and rebel forces, came under fire from government planes, leading to several casualties. In reprisal, the French destroyed the entire – a couple of fighters plus helicopters – Ivorian air force, which led to a massive **witch-hunt** against French and white people generally by militias in Abidjan, which invaded homes, destroyed and looted property and raped several women. As a result, most French citizens (9,000, the largest French community in sub-Saharan Africa) were evacuated to Europe and Western embassies closed, leaving only 1,000 white people behind and an Ivorian leadership at rock bottom as a result of international censure and isolation.

By contrast, the **sub-region's biggest meddler**, Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaoré, again remained untouched, despite his record of subversive support for rebellions in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. He even improved his diplomatic position (with Paris, if not others) by hosting the 10th Francophone summit (26–27 November).

While no violence, save that resulting from the rising crime rate, was recorded in **Sierra Leone**, unemployment among young ex-combatants remained a potential security threat. On the whole, however, the political process continued on its logical non-violent, post-peace agreement course. In **Liberia**, UN peacekeepers finalised the disarmament process of the former warring factions, although they were unable to prevent the sale of heavy weapons to parties in neighbouring countries, notably Côte d'Ivoire. Several hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees continued to live in camps, waiting to return to their homes. While the training of a new Liberian police force was one further step in the transition to normal civilian government, evidence of mounting corruption in the political class did not point to a fundamental departure from past practice. **Guinea**, besides witnessing various popular uprisings in protest against rapidly deteriorating living

conditions, was confronted with a sudden rise of youth gangs and militias in the capital. Potentially the most dangerous incidents from a sub-regional perspective, however, took place in the southeastern forest region, around the town of N'Zérékoré (17 June), where local ethnic communities with cross-border ties with kindred groups in Liberia engaged in fighting. This was halted by Guinean security forces, which arrested large numbers of people, including Liberian ex-combatants. The long-standing secessionist conflict in the **Casamance** area of southern Senegal came to a possible end with the signing of a peace agreement on 30 December between the Senegalese government and rebels of the MFDC ('Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance'), though not without some leaders of the movement distancing themselves from the deal. It was unclear whether local leaders of the MFDC, an extremely fragmented organisation, would support the agreement. Its true significance, therefore, remained unclear, although diminished support for the MFDC in Guinea-Bissau, itself halfway along an uncertain transition process marked by an unruly military, helped towards reducing the importance of this conflict.

Finally, the Sahelian countries, were faced with some **GSPC cross-border activity**. In terms of the frequency and intensity of the violent exchanges between GSPC fighters and the government forces of Mali, Niger and Chad, this was a conflict of marginal importance. However, because the Islamic fundamentalist agenda of the GSPC drew in the US, these conflicts developed a broader significance. US training of the Mauritanian, Malian, Nigérien and Chadian armies in counter-insurgency techniques and the provision of military materiel (all-terrain vehicles, desert warfare equipment) had the potential not only of raising the military capabilities of the region's national armies but also, as part of the same process, of **militarising relations** between states and non-state actors. Banditry in northern Mali and Niger proved ominous in this respect, especially in Niger, where it might be related to the dissatisfaction of some Tuaregs with their share in the country's political system.

### **Human Rights and the Rule of Law**

In several countries, members of the **private media** were **harassed**. Even in Senegal, which markedly improved its stance on human rights by abolishing the death penalty, the editor of a newspaper writing about alleged corruption in the customs service and judiciary was arrested on charges of publishing confidential, false and politically sensitive information. The editor was released after a couple of weeks in jail, but his arrest led to a one-day strike by private newspapers (12 July). Although the Senegalese media continued to enjoy comparative press freedom, this case somewhat detracted from the human rights award presented by an American NGO to President Abdoulaye Wade for his former role as an opposition politician and his mediation of regional conflicts. The situation was much worse, however, in Gambia, where an **editor** was **assassinated** (16 December) after criticising a draconian new press law. Though the government condemned the murder and denied a link

between it and tighter media regulations, journalists staged a one-week protest strike. A foreign journalist in Côte d'Ivoire was probably murdered after his **disappearance** on 16 April, this event following the murder of a French journalist the previous year. Similarly, in Togo an editor received death threats after publishing articles on an exiled opposition group and on Eyadéma's possible retirement – in spite of the introduction of a more liberal press code. In Burkina on 13 December thousands of people demonstrated as they had done every year, to protest the murder of a well-known journalist in 1998. The case, in which the president's brother and presidential guards were suspected of being implicated, again failed to come to trial. Less serious forms of harassment took place in Niger and Benin. Finally, in Nigeria, media harassment was more severe, with the government, irritated about foreign reporting, prohibiting local radio and television from relaying live transmission of news broadcasts from foreign stations. A magazine critical of the president faced the confiscation of its computers and copies of its publication, in addition to brief detentions of some of its journalists and the besieging of its offices by security agents.

Endemic **corruption** again elicited government campaigns throughout the sub-region, but generally without making headway in combating this widespread phenomenon. Nevertheless, Gambia, a small country, witnessed court cases against and dismissals of several high-ranking officials as part of a government-run campaign dubbed 'Operation No Compromise', though neither the president nor MPs were forced to testify in the courts. These cases went further than government action in Mali and Nigeria, for example. In the former, a case of embezzlement of ministerial funds worth CFAfr 2.6 bn led to few concrete moves, while in Nigeria – predictably, again judged by Transparency International to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world – not a single prominent figure was sentenced, despite 500 people being held in custody in various corruption cases. Racketeering by police in Benin led to a blockade in September by lorry drivers protesting against the extortions. As in Nigeria, judicial corruption presented special problems, leading to a court case against some 100 magistrates on charges of embezzlement. The judiciary in Benin was, moreover, embroiled in a dispute with the executive over the latter's interference in the judicial realm, a dispute that resulted in a magistrates' strike on 9–11 June.

Reports by the 'Fédération internationale des Droits de l'Homme', criticising the practices of the justice system in both Benin and Togo, were flatly rejected by both governments. In both cases, the charges involved the use of **torture and extra-judicial killings**, the latter phenomenon also being on the rise in Nigeria. In Togo, however, there was a slight improvement in the general human rights situation as a result of foreign pressure, with political prisoners (but also ordinary criminals) receiving a presidential pardon (17 August). In **Sierra Leone**, two of three major **trials** began in a special UN-assisted court against some of the perpetrators of the worst human rights violations during the civil war, including the former rebel RUF. The court also wished to try Charles Taylor, the former Liberian leader now living in exile in Nigeria, who was heavily involved in the Sierra Leonean war. However, the Liberian government did not back this initiative.

### Cooperation and Conflict: Sub-Regional Dimensions

The principal issue in regional cooperation was the war in Côte d'Ivoire. The most important development from a sub-regional perspective was the decision by the UN Security Council to deploy a peacekeeping force, UNOCI, totalling over 6,000 troops. While this decision could be interpreted as flowing logically from the Linas-Marcoussis truce, to a considerable extent it symbolised the inability of sub-regional actors to end the deadlock in the Ivorian conflict. UNOCI troops joined the separate French 'Licorne' force (4,000 men). The troops provided by ECOMICI (ECOWAS Mission in Côte d'Ivoire) were integrated with the UNOCI force. The ECOMICI force consisted of contingents from Senegal, Niger, Togo, Benin, Mali and Ghana and initially totalled some 1,200 men who had been ordered to monitor the ceasefire. This mandate was later extended to ensure respect for the ceasefire and protection of civilians. For this purpose, ECOWAS decided to provide an additional 2,000 men. With ECOMICI's integration into UNOCI, it was decided the force would be joined by troops from Angola, Chad and Bangladesh.

Despite growing UN involvement, ECOWAS continued to try to resolve the crisis, with the ECOWAS chairman, President John Kufuor of Ghana, vainly attempting on several occasions to bring the warring sides closer together. Thus, a **mini-summit of ECOWAS leaders** was convened in Abuja on 20 June at which heads of state from Nigeria, Ghana, Togo and Niger, in addition to the president of Gabon, pressured President Gbagbo to work towards a breakthrough. The talks were described 'frank', and Gbagbo agreed to get in touch with his independent Prime Minister Seydou Diarra. The ECOWAS mediation and security council, at its 12th ministerial meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, lauded the outcome of the mini-summit, even though it led to few concrete results. Then, an extraordinary ECOWAS summit was convened in the Ghanaian capital Accra on 29–30 July, at which all Ivorian parties met with ECOWAS leaders, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the presidents of Gabon and South Africa. The conference, dubbed **Accra III**, confirmed the objectives of Linas-Marcoussis but again failed to achieve a breakthrough. On 4 November, President Obasanjo, chairman of the AU Assembly, convened an emergency summit in Abuja in response to the **aerial bombardment of French troops**. After Gbagbo's representative walking out in anger, West African leaders concurred with a UN arms embargo, in effect underlining not only the isolation of the Ivorian regime but also the inability of continental and sub-regional organisations to resolve the crisis. Thousands of Ivorians, meanwhile, fled across the border into Liberia.

Although there was little coordination among existing peacekeeping missions in these countries (including Sierra Leone), Ghana managed to secure a deal with Liberia and UNHCR on the voluntary repatriation of 42,000 Liberian refugees. Guinea and Liberia also improved their relations in the wake of the 2003 peace agreement in Liberia, despite the fighting in N'Zérékoré, southeastern Guinea, involving Guinean security forces and, among others, Liberian ex-combatants. Ties between Guinea and Sierra Leone also

improved, although here, too, security issues impinged on diplomatic relations. Guinean troops continued their occupation of the small border town of Yenga, inside Sierra Leone, not in order to press a claim but because of security considerations. The Yenga issue was discussed by Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia at the summit of the **Mano River Union** in Conakry (18–20 May), which also focused on wider issues of **border security** among the three neighbours. **Relations between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina** continued to be hamstrung by the Ivorian conflict and by alleged Burkinabè involvement. In June–July, Burkina complained of the continued maltreatment of Burkinabè migrants in Côte d'Ivoire (350,000 of whom had returned home in the course of the civil war), in addition to alleged airspace violations by Ivorian aircraft. The latter charge was given little credence by European diplomats, but showed that relations between the two countries continued at an all-time low. Elsewhere in the sub-region, resolution of the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over sovereignty of the **Bakassi peninsula** (awarded by the International Court of Justice to Cameroon) made little progress. Although the Nigerians agreed to withdraw their troops, they backtracked at the last moment, asking for a postponement. With most Bakassi inhabitants in favour of union with Nigeria, Nigerian politicians opposed withdrawal, claiming that this required a change to the constitution and a UN-supervised referendum on the peninsula. This stood in marked contrast to the ease with which both countries had exchanged a couple of villages along their common border the previous year.

ECOWAS also mediated the political conflict in Guinea-Bissau in the wake of the parliamentary elections of 28–30 March. An **ECOWAS fact-finding mission**, involving among others the organisation's Executive Secretary Ibn Chambas, managed to persuade all political parties to abide by the electoral outcome, thus contributing vitally to the successful conclusion of the country's transition process.

General ECOWAS policy on defence and security went a step further with a one-day summit in January at which it was agreed to introduce a **peace fund** to meet the financial requirements of ECOWAS peacekeeping undertakings. Its initial seed money was \$ 5 m. Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal made their contributions and other member states, as well as donors, were expected to follow suit. With some 1,400 troops in Côte d'Ivoire at the time and some 3,000 troops forming part of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the organisation searched for ways to put its military interventions on a more solid footing. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons again caught the organisation's attention, and a conference in Abuja (22–24 March) sought ways to reinforce the ECOWAS **Moratorium** on the Exportation, Importation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa (1999). The small arms unit inside the executive secretariat in Abuja was charged with coordinating initiatives on small arms with other international organisations, including the UN, SADC and several NGOs. So far, 13 of 15 member states have established national commissions to execute and monitor the moratorium's provisions. The UN Security Council pledged, at a special session held on 25 March, to support the organisation in its efforts to tackle the problems of arms trafficking, in addition to related issues such

as child soldiers and mercenaries. A top-level meeting between ECOWAS and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) was held in Abuja on 31 May in a bid to strengthen cooperation in the field of peace and security, and resulted in a memorandum of understanding to promote sub-regional democracy, good governance, peace and stability and improve ECOWAS capacities in conflict prevention. This was also the subject of a workshop in Ghana on early warning within the ECOWAS system, which recommended the improvement of communications equipment and analytical capacity in the organisation's four zonal bureaux for conflict prevention (in Banjul, Monrovia, Ouagadougou and Cotonou).

In more traditional vein, the ECOWAS defence and security commission sought to enhance the organisation's peacekeeping capacities by agreeing, at a meeting in Abuja on 17–18 June, to establish a standby unit of 6,500 highly trained and equipped soldiers as part of a **rapid reaction force**. The standby unit would comprise 1,500 soldiers to be known as the ECOWAS task force, to be possibly boosted by another 3,500 troops to form a brigade, with the remaining 1,500 constituting the reserve force. It was planned that the task force would be deployable within 30 days, while the brigade would be deployed and be self-sustaining within 90 days. The brigade would be made up of soldiers from pre-determined units. The ECOWAS executive secretariat would define funding needs, operational procedures and requirements, including for the logistics depots in Mali and Sierra Leone. This development was in conformity with the policy of the AU, which on 20–21 January adopted a plan for an African Standby Force (ASF; see the general chapter) made up of sub-regional brigades. However, it also followed on the decision of the ECOWAS defence and security commission to have member states pledge army units to constitute a permanent ECOMOG (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group), as envisaged in the ECOWAS Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. Since this decision had been taken back in July 2000, the current development also pointed to a lack of genuine progress in this area. Moreover, without financial and logistical support from Western donors, it would be difficult to get the sub-regional brigade up and running, this being quite apart from member states' caution about establishing sub-regional military bodies that could impinge on the security of their regimes. In this respect, the Canadian government pledged Canadian \$ 4.5 m to ECOWAS for its peace fund, among other things.

Coordination of AU and ECOWAS policy was facilitated by the election of Nigeria's President **Obasanjo** as this year's **AU chairman**. Ghana's president and ECOWAS chairman John Kufuor has so far maintained good relations with his Nigerian colleague. However, in practice, Obasanjo devoted a lot of time to the Darfur crisis rather than purely West African issues.

Other forms of sub-regional cooperation included the signing of a general cooperation agreement between ECOWAS and the smaller Francophone 'Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine' (UEMOA) headquartered in Ouagadougou. The agreement

should help to prevent duplication of effort in relation to economic integration, an outcome made more desirable by plans by Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Guinea to establish a **second monetary zone** in West Africa, with a common currency to be called the 'eco', in addition to the West African CFA zone operating under the auspices of UEMOA.

### **Socioeconomic Developments**

The decision to establish this second monetary zone in the sub-region had been taken in 2000. At a conference among Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone held in Conakry on 3 September, it was observed that fulfilment of the required convergence criteria left much to be desired. While the summit agreed that the West African supervisory financial authority would be located in Nigeria and the monetary zone's secretariat in Guinea (with the interim precursor of the projected bank to work from Ghana), the stated objective to inaugurate the monetary union by July 2005 appeared **illusory**. In reality, it was UEMOA that was, according to the IMF, the furthest along the path to sub-regional integration, with its common currency tied to the euro and, since 2000, a customs union and a common external tariff. Thus, the two monetary unions, projected and real, pointed again to the **lack of economic integration at the level of ECOWAS** as a whole. Moreover, these *organisational initiatives ignored the difficulties inherent in integrating non-complementary economies that are tied into an uneven dependency relationship with the global economy and disregarded the cross-border traffic taking place in the sub-region's substantial informal sectors*. Thus, ECOWAS leaders in July – as a sign of lack of progress – again pledged their commitment to the ECOWAS trade liberalisation scheme, reaffirmed implementation of the programme on the free movement of goods, services and persons (the last issue made acute by the flight of economic migrants from Côte d'Ivoire) and promised to work towards the removal of all non-tariff barriers.

NEPAD, it was hoped, could make economic cooperation more tangible. On 20 March, ECOWAS leaders met with the president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, in Accra to review the integration process and the implementation of the NEPAD agenda. An **Accra Short-term Plan of Action** was adopted that would focus on three principal concerns, i.e., establishment of an ECOWAS-wide free trade area and customs zone by 2007, along with improved market access for West African exports; NEPAD-encouraged infrastructural projects in the areas of energy, transport and communication; and peace and security measures. The World Bank earmarked \$ 450 m for such sub-regional projects, part of which would be spent in the ECOWAS sub-region. The bank also formed a joint task force with ECOWAS to monitor implementation of the plan of action.

**Economic performance** ranged widely across the sub-region. The highest real GDP change, according to the IMF, was registered in Sierra Leone (7.2%) and the lowest (1%) in Guinea-Bissau, with the sub-regional average around 4.5%. The rise in consumer prices reached an average of around 4.5%, but with Guinea (Conakry) and Nigeria into double

digits and Ghana and Gambia still hovering around 6%. While one should be cautious about the reliability of these statistics, it is noteworthy that Côte d'Ivoire still achieved a GDP growth rate of 1.7%. With the government largely in control of the raw materials and the infrastructure generally intact, the country remained the main economy in the sub-region's CFA zone, even though the percentage of people living below the poverty datum line has increased in recent years from 38% to 44%. Guinea certainly performed worse than in previous years. Economic performance in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau remained very poor as well, with one out of three living under the poverty line, despite a relatively favourable climate and ecology. Nevertheless, this figure was again dwarfed by that of Sierra Leone, again last on the Human Development Index (HDI), with 70% of its people living in absolute poverty. By contrast, Senegal and Ghana had generally good years in socioeconomic terms, although the former was still rated 157 of 177 countries on the HDI. Its peasant population was hard hit by a **devastating locust plague**, which also descended on Mauritania (with nearly half its population under the poverty line, according to UNDP), Mali and Niger. In the last-mentioned country, the plague led to a record grain deficit that did not bode well for the coming year. Nigeria, the sub-region's economic superpower, still ranked 151 on the HDI, a rating that underscores the difficult living conditions faced by most Nigerians. High petrol prices, however, while hitting many countries in the sub-region hard, increased Nigeria's income and heightened expectations of a better future in several other (coastal) states where oil reserves have been found or anticipated (Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Liberia). Other good news came from **cotton**. The WTO rejected US subsidies to American cotton farmers as distorting international trade – a ruling whose effects on the sub-region's cotton producers (Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina and Benin, with a total of 10 million people dependent on the crop) was not immediately clear (see the general chapter).

HIV/AIDS, while marked by lower infection rates than in other sub-regions (3.5% to 4.5% of adults against a Sub-Saharan total of 7.4%, though on the basis of very tentative figures), continued its onward march. The fastest rise in absolute numbers occurred in Nigeria (5% adult prevalence in 13 states), while the highest adult prevalence in percentage terms was in Côte d'Ivoire, at 10.7%. Ivorian statistics on this tend to be more reliable than elsewhere and underscore the **relationship between conflict – often including sexual violence and exploitation – and HIV/AIDS infection rates**. Thus, in recent years the infection rate in the southwestern forest region has generally approached Southern African levels.

With rising fuel prices, **social conditions** were very difficult in many countries, making the planned achievement of Millennium Development Goals questionable. High petrol prices led to protests in Guinea and Nigeria. Strike action by workers and students protesting working conditions or access to educational facilities took place in Mali and Benin.

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