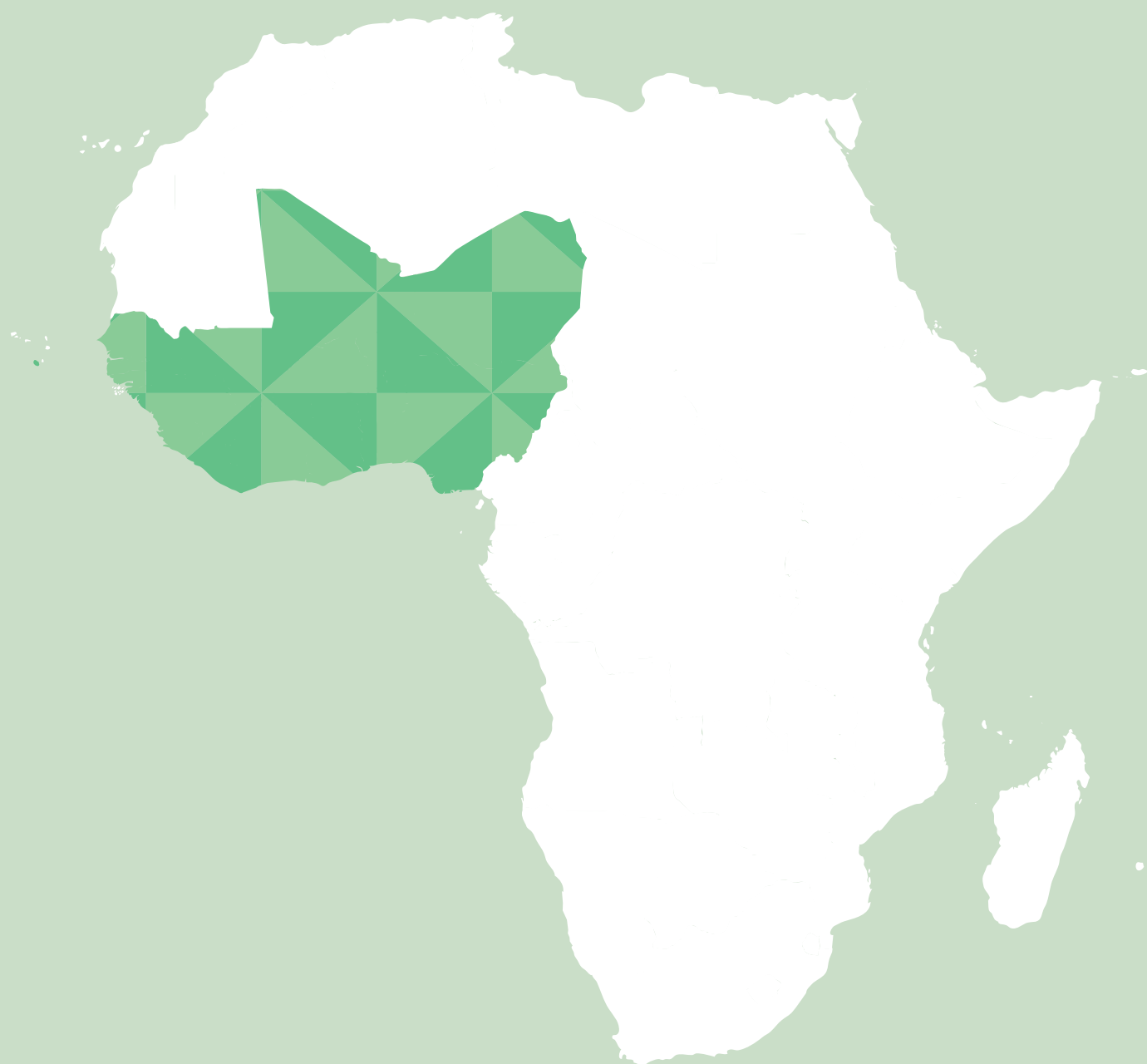


THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS)

Jean Bossuyt



ecdpm

Political economy of regional integration in Africa

The Economic Community of West African States
(ECOWAS) Report

Jean Bossuyt

January 2016



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Acknowledgements

This study is part of a broader project analysing the political economy of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities in Africa. It is funded by the Embassy of Sweden in Nairobi.

The authors acknowledge this support, as well as the contributions from the African and European experts, the peer reviewers, the Swedish Quality Assurance Group, and of course the many African partners who dedicated time and shared their insights and wisdom.

This study was coordinated by Jean Bossuyt.

Jean Bossuyt was the lead author of the ECOWAS report, with contributions from Anna Knoll and Sophie Desmidt (authors of the peace and security section related to ECOWAS in the Mali crisis), Zakaria Amar (who contributed to the section on unconstitutional changes of government) as well as Fabien Tondel, Carmen Torres and Roger Blein (who carried out the studies on agriculture and food security). Stella Sabiti participated as African expert in the mission to ECOWAS Headquarters.

The authors of this study are responsible for its content, interpretations and any errors.

Acronyms

AFAN	All Farmers Association of Nigeria
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission to Mali
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Maghreb
APF	African Peace Facility
APESS	Association des pasteurs éleveurs du Sahel et de la Savane
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ASF	African Standby Force
ATT	President Amadou Toumani Touré
ASSN	African Security Sector Network
AU	African Union
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CEEAC/ECCAS	Communauté Économique des États de l' Afrique Centrale
CEMAC	Central African Economic and Monetary Community
CET	Common external tariff
CILSS	Comité Permanent Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel
CIR-B	Comité Interprofessionnel du Riz du Burkina
COFENABVI	Confederation of National Federations of cattle-meat
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CRCOPR	Cadre Régional de Concertation des Organisations de Producteurs de Riz
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FARE	Forum of Associations Recognized by ECOWAS
EAC	East African Community
ECCAS/CEEAC	Economic Community of Central African States
ECCJ	ECOWAS Community Court of Justice
ECOMICI	ECOWAS mission in Cote d'Ivoire
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group
ECOWADF	ECOWAS Fund for Agriculture and Food
ECOWAP	ECOWAS Agricultural Policy
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECOWEP	ECOWAS Environmental Policy
ECPF	ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework
EDF	European Development Fund
EGDC	ECOWAS Gender Development Centre
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EPF	ECOWAS Peace Fund
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
ETLS	ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICBT	Informal cross border trade
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute

IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LDC	Least developed countries
MARWOPNET	Mano River Women Peace Network
MICEMA	ECOWAS Mission in Mali
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MSC	Mediation and Security Council
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NAIP	National Agricultural Investment Plan
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRDS	National Rice Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPS	Political Affairs, Peace and Security
PNSR	Programme national du secteur rural
PREAO	ECOWAS Water Resources Policy
PSC	Peace and Security Council
RAFA	Regional Agency for Food and Agriculture
RAIP	Regional Agricultural Investment Plan
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RIFAN	Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria
ROPPA	Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TCC	Troop Contributing Countries
UOFA	Union des Organisations de la Filière Avicole
UEMOA/WAEMU	Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine
UN	United Nations
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
WAEMU/UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peace building

Executive Summary

This study presents a political economy analysis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), focusing in particular on what drives and hampers this regional organisation in preventing and resolving conflicts in West Africa, and in promoting a regional approach to agriculture and food security. The report is part of a broader study that includes the African Union and four other Regional Economic Communities in Africa.

Why a political economy study of ECOWAS?

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with the formal aim of promoting economic co-operation between 15 countries with different historic trajectories (colonisation, language, and administrative cultures) yet sharing similar socio-economic conditions. During the 1980s the regional body was confronted with a large number of political crises, ranging from civil war to various military or constitutional *coups d'état*. This forced ECOWAS to fully embrace the security agenda as a 'core business'.

The region is widely recognised as a trailblazer, including for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Several crises have been effectively addressed through regional diplomacy and military intervention. Over the years, ECOWAS has sought to promote an ever-widening regional integration agenda through a wide variety of strategies, action plans and programmes. Initially the regional body functioned through a state-centric, top-down approach to promoting regional integration. From the 1990s onwards, there were deliberate attempts by ECOWAS to also spur regional dynamics 'from below' through close collaboration between institutional actors, civil society and business organisations.

ECOWAS recently celebrated its 40th Anniversary. In reviewing the track record of the organisation, most analyses concur that important achievements were obtained in different domains, including restoring peace, containing conflicts, dealing with rigged elections, facilitating the free movement of people or supporting infrastructure development (trans-coastal and trans-Sahelian roads).

Yet there is also a broad recognition that the initial aspirations have not been met. Overall progress in the actual implementation of ECOWAS policies in core areas such as trade, economic and monetary cooperation, energy and social development has been limited. There are still many obstacles to the free circulation of people (such as the existence of numerous check points, arbitrary and discriminatory treatment of citizens of other countries, migration laws) and goods (including the non-application of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, illegal tariff barriers, and non-tariff barriers). Other urgent crises remain unaddressed. The Sahel is being increasingly destabilised by cross-border crime, drug trafficking, the Tuareg conflict, terrorism and the spread of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The envisaged transition in the Vision 2020 from an '*ECOWAS of States*' to an '*ECOWAS of People*' has still a long way to go, particularly in terms of delivering tangible outcomes for citizens.

However, in assessing the performance of ECOWAS one cannot ignore the particularly harsh political, institutional and socio-economic conditions in which the integration project had to be pursued. The region ranks particularly low regarding all human development indicators. Thirteen ECOWAS countries are classified in the low Human Development category and 60 per cent of the population is estimated to live on less than one dollar a day. This brings along major shortcomings in policy and institutional capacity across the board.

This study of ECOWAS tries to provide insights that explain the implementation gap, as these may help inform, calibrate and target reforms as well as support efforts that are technically desirable and politically feasible. To do so, the study focuses on the key drivers and constraints that shape the ECOWAS agenda and influence implementation by analysing two policy areas: peace and security and food security (focusing on the agricultural sector and agro-food industries and trade). The study uses a political economy framework to answer two core questions: how do key actors and factors affect and shape the agenda setting of ECOWAS? And how do these different actors and factors influence what gets implemented and why?

Key findings of the ECOWAS study

ECOWAS was primarily created to promote economic cooperation within the region. To pursue this aim, it adopted at its inception an intergovernmental approach to governance, based on national sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of its member states. The regional commitment at that time was essentially that member states would integrate the lofty ambitions of ECOWAS in planning and directing their national (economic) policies. It resulted in a system whereby decision-making power lies exclusively with the Authority of Heads of State and Government and the ECOWAS Secretariat is merely charged with the task of executing the decisions taken by it.

Already in the early 1990s a '*Committee of Eminent Persons*' concluded that effective integration could not be stimulated under these conditions and pleaded for the adoption of a supra-national approach to governance in order to speed up decision-making and enforce compliance. In 2006 the ECOWAS Summit formally decided to carry out institutional reforms to give more teeth to the regional body, including turning the Executive Secretariat into a 'Commission' and further developing formal structures and institutional arrangements (such as the ECOWAS Parliament, the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice and a host of dialogue mechanisms with private sector and civil society organisations in various areas). ECOWAS is the only REC that was able to formally establish a Community levy, which helps to increase its legitimacy and scope for autonomous action (though member states do not always live up to their commitments and donor dependency for programmes remains high).

However, the effective and coherent use of this formal architecture has proven to be quite challenging. Decision-making power remains firmly anchored in the Authority and Council. The Commission can propose initiatives and actions plans, yet there is no shortage of examples where policy developments have been postponed despite their apparent urgency from a regional perspective; where the ratification by member states of protocols and acts incurs major delays; where agreed policies are not translated at national level or implemented in a consistent way at regional level; where decisions of the Court are neglected by member states, and so on. This suggests the ECOWAS Commission has only limited space and power to effectively contribute to the production of regional public goods.

This limited track record in implementing regional decisions, in turn, shows that ownership levels of the whole regional construct are low across the board. This is linked to the pervasive development challenges faced at national level, the limited institutional capacities, the lack of trust among member states and above all to the interests driving elite behaviour. Most of the incentives faced by national politicians are not related to regional integration. They are focused on satisfying short-term clientelist demands at national and sub-national level. The problem is compounded by the still prevailing culture of top-down decision-making – despite the existence of formal mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders. As a result, it has proven difficult to create sufficient political support for the integration process among domestic constituencies.

This overall political economy reality can be illustrated by the role of ECOWAS in core policy processes such as peace and security or food security. Though primarily a regional body focusing on economic integration, ECOWAS was forced to step into the peace and security realm in order to address wars and conflicts. The proliferation of conflicts in the region is linked to foundational factors such as historical trajectories, colonisation by different European powers, geography and natural endowments or demography. As a result, most countries in the region remain fragile states with limited social cohesion, common sense of identity or shared development vision. Inequalities are growing, increasing the chance of conflicts around access to resources and land. These material conditions explain to a large extent the chronic instability of the region as well as the generally poor levels of governance across the region.

These conditions also help to understand why powerful member states (particularly regional hegemon Nigeria) had a strong incentive to use ECOWAS to prevent the regionalisation of wars and conflicts and related collateral damage (though its leadership has recently been weakened as a consequence of domestic turmoil). It allowed ECOWAS to display a selective ability for collective action to address political crises in member states (i.e. Ivory Coast, 2010-2011). In other cases the incentives were not present to generate a timely and relevant political response (i.e. Burkina Faso, 2014) with the resulting loss of credibility in the eyes of citizens. Other case material suggests that pervasive internal governance and managerial and leadership deficiencies all along the decision-making chain hamper the delivery of concrete results (as shown in the peacekeeping operation planned for Mali which could not be effected). The proliferation of actors with their own specific interests and overlapping mandates can make the task of defining coherent regional responses daunting. The difficult relation between ECOWAS and the AU is a case in point, yet similar complications arise from the many external interventions.

The implementation gap is also visible in the area of agricultural development and food security. From 2000 onwards, ECOWAS increased its profile in promoting a regional approach to agriculture and food security, supported at the continental level by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The 2008 food crisis provided additional momentum and incentives for accelerating reforms in the region. The ECOWAS Commission has acted as convenor of multi-actor dialogue processes, developed a wide range of policy initiatives and committed significant resources to support the effective domestication of continental and regional agricultural and food security agendas. Yet the ECOWAS Commission has little power and a limited set of incentives to offer for accelerating implementation (for instance, with regard to the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, ETLS). This is linked to various factors such as (i) the primacy of national policy interests and considerations (e.g. for national food sovereignty); (ii) the hugely diverging interests among member states (e.g. Nigeria versus francophone/WAEMU states in the rice sector; and Sahel countries versus coastal countries in the livestock sector); (iii) the deep-rooted regionalisation dynamics pushed forward by state and non-state actors (operating through informal channels and networks) that challenge state territorial control and regional policies alike.

Despite strengthening private sector and civil society organisations at regional level, their bargaining power and capacity to act and influence core regional policies in a coherent and effective manner remain limited. This is closely linked to diverging interests between actors artificially classified together as 'the regional private sector'. Reference can be made to the diverging interests between importers of staple food commodities (notably rice), who constitute powerful oligopolies, have a strong influence on the political elite and extract rents from constrained local production capacities and segmented regional markets; and local producers (farmers and other operators), who are more atomised, further undermining regional-level action to support local and regional agro-food value chain development.

All this is not to say that collective action is not taking place. Yet when it occurs it does not tend to follow formalised rules and procedures. ECOWAS rather seeks to foster compliance in an indirect manner, through soft mechanisms of dialogue and persuasion. The co-existence of ECOWAS with WAEMU is a clear sign that a 'single' regional body may not be the appropriate way forward for West Africa. A multi-layered pattern of regional frameworks allows for more coherent forms of interest articulation (as reflected in the monetary union around the CFA in the francophone member states or the complementary roles played by ECOWAS and WAEMU in agriculture and food security).

Implications

These findings carry important implications for stakeholders interested in closing the implementation gap and building more effective forms of regional cooperation through ECOWAS. Key aspects for consideration relate to the level of ambition of future policies, appropriate sectors or policy areas for action, and selection of partners and stakeholders in programme design and implementation:

- Several structural factors continue to have a major influence on current dynamics and institutions. These need to be properly recognised and incorporated in the design of realistic support strategies. For instance, the co-existence of ECOWAS and West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) is an illustration of the various historical trajectories of the countries. Grand schemes aimed at merging the two bodies or working out a rational division of labour are likely to encounter major difficulties. The evolution and relevance of both structures will depend on the policy issue at stake and related capacity of the regional bodies involved to generate collective action.
- The cases addressed in this study indicate that the set of incentives and capacity for meaningful regional action tend to vary greatly according to sectors and even sub-sectors of intervention. In peace and security, coalitions were possible between 'willing' member states (generally individual Heads of State) and the Commission. This facilitated application of the existing regional arsenal of norms and tools. In the agricultural domain, the regional trigger proved less powerful to defining a shared vision, providing powerful incentives to member states to implement CAADP/ECOWAS plans or challenging the predominantly national focus on policy-makers. This huge diversity of political economy contexts calls for a much more down-to-earth and tailored approach to promoting regional integration dynamics. It also implies making use of critical junctures while diversifying the possible 'entry points' for regional action (sometimes smaller informal alliances of member states or specialised regional structures are better conducts to get political traction and action).
- While there is space for multi-actor approaches to regional policy formulation and implementation, there are also constraints hampering the ability of non-state actors to play a positive role as 'norm entrepreneurs' or 'drivers' of regional integration agendas. Beyond major challenges of capacity, organisation and funding, regional networks may end up being 'too close for comfort' (this danger of co-optation stems from the deeper nature of state-society relations in the region, often characterised by dependency and clientelist relationships). Yet one should avoid over-simplifications. 'Regional' actors can be identified in different policy domains that are acting on principles and beliefs about regional identity. With targeted institutional support they could be further enabled to demand specific regional reforms 'from below' through coalitions sharing similar interests.
- The study shows how ECOWAS is often not performing its role according to a clear set of formal, transparent and institutionalised rules respected by all. The Commission rather follows an *ad hoc* path, looking for windows of opportunities to play the role of an informal broker or foster compliance, in close

alliance with 'willing' or 'reformist' states and through '*soft mechanisms*' of dialogue and persuasion. Future institutional support programmes could try to strengthen formal and informal interfaces, dialogue mechanisms and coordination structures with member states as well as with the AU at different levels (as a key condition for more effective collective action). They could also seek to further enable ECOWAS in its role as a credible and accountable broker—equipped with the necessary political intelligence to know when and how it can usefully intervene.

- The external influence on the regional integration process is huge, firmly engrained in history and reflected in a proliferation of external actors often intervening at cross-purposes. In such a crowded arena, it is not easy for ECOWAS to carve out its own space and deliver added value (including towards the AU). Despite the existence of own resources, levels of aid dependency are high, particularly for regional programmes. The main challenge for donors is to align much closer to the real political economy dynamics prevailing in a given sector or policy area (linked to power relations, incentives and interests) rather than towards formal players and processes.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why this study of the ECOWAS?

Enhancing regional integration and cooperation have long been high on the agenda for African countries, regions and their organisations. There is wide recognition that regional cooperation is vital to tackle development challenges that cannot be solved at a national level. Many such inter-state problems affect poor people's lives in areas ranging from human security, mobility, rural livelihoods, trade, infrastructure, to environment and climate change. Often such cross-country or regional problems have a particular impact on women, for example in the case of informal cross-border trade and violent conflicts. Over the years, this has resulted in commitments, policy documents and strategies, with many partners providing financial and other support. Yet policy-makers and partner country representatives and non-state actors frequently express frustration with progress.

This is no different for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). While the initial drive to create ECOWAS in 1975 was economic integration, the regional body has, over its almost 40 years of existence, had to deal with a high number of political crises, ranging from civil war to various military or constitutional *coups d'état*. These circumstances forced ECOWAS to fully embrace the security agenda as a 'core business' during the 1990s. Several crises have been effectively addressed through regional diplomacy and military intervention. The region is widely recognised as a trailblazer, including for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). From 2000 onwards, ECOWAS increased its profile in promoting a regional approach to agriculture and food security, supported at the continental level by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The 2008 food crisis provided additional momentum for accelerating reforms in the region. While progress has been achieved, structural bottlenecks hamper effective regional approaches.

This study seeks to unpack some of the reasons explaining the track record of ECOWAS in both policy areas. The report does this by adopting a political economy analysis approach.

1.2. Why a political economy analysis?

Analysing and understanding the complexities in regional processes have posed many problems. Sometimes the analysis is misguided by a too narrow focus on one dominant regional model, such as the European Union (EU). In other cases, the analysis gets side-tracked as it considers regional organisations to be the sole drivers for regional integration.

Rather than focus on best-practice or normative models, a political economy analysis is open to the multiple actors and forms of regional processes, whether they are managed or driven by formal regional organisations, or by state and non-state actors operating from different countries. The political economy approach is dedicated to analysing how and why multiple actors and factors interact in a particular regional context, and the effects they have on change and development processes. In particular, the analysis focuses on how power and resources are distributed and contested in regional contexts. This includes an interest in the effects that global actors and factors have on the incentives of the regional and national level actors.

Such an approach aims to get away from judging ECOWAS in terms of what it 'should' look like and 'should' be doing but rather focus on what it is doing and why. By examining the different actors and factors that affect the way ECOWAS works, this study therefore aims to provide an improved understanding of

what is technically desirable and politically feasible, as well as help identify the types of partnerships or coalitions that support regional cooperation and regional integration in West Africa.

1.3. Methodology of the study

1.3.1. A five-lens framework

In all regional dynamics, basically five sets of political economy actors and factors interact with one another and shape or influence the incentive environment, behaviour and ideas, as well as the distribution of resources, rents¹, and power. Hence, this study proposes a five-lens approach to unpack these five sets of actors and factors. It builds on a combination of political economy tools of development practitioners who have started to pay more attention to the analysis of political context and processes at country level, and more recently at the level of sectors or particular policy challenges. The latter usually involves a more fine-grained analytical approach. Given the impact of global drivers on regional dynamics and the national political economy, the five-lens framework also integrates and adapts elements from an OECD tool developed for analysing the dynamics of international drivers.²

The first political economy lens identifies **foundational or structural factors**. These are factors that are mostly embedded in geographic, historical, demographic and economic characteristics in a country or region. Their influence may be hard or impossible to change.

A second lens looks at **institutions**, in this context understood as *rules of the game*. These can be formal, written or codified rules (in legal texts, etc.), but also informal practices, which are associated with norms, beliefs, customs, etc. These are usually more difficult for outsiders to notice and understand, as they are not written down. Context specific combinations of formal and informal institutions – and the way they interact – are important for a comprehension about why a particular institutional form is effective in a particular context, and why the same institutional form is dysfunctional in another context.³

Thirdly, **actors, incentives and agency** need to be factored into the analytical framework. Actors or stakeholders are the individuals and groups that are most relevant to the object of analysis by supporting reforms, opposing it or undermining it. Actors will vary in their ability to exercise agency or their capacity to act and make choices, largely according to their economic, political and social power). The interactions between institutions and foundational factors create incentives to which these actors respond. Ideas, beliefs, leadership capabilities etc. also help explain the types of *interests*⁴ these actors pursue, and the potential for change, or the stickiness of the *status quo*.

A fourth political economy lens draws the attention to **nature and technical features of specific sectors or reform areas** that can have political implications that differ accordingly (Foresti et al, 2013; McLoughlin

¹ Rents can be understood as income that is additional to market based profits (from monopoly trading, from subsidies, from owning scarce resources, corruption and aid) and wages.

² The political economy framework for analysing global drivers on the domestic political economy was developed by the OECD and points to the importance of analysing external variables such as ??????????????(OECD, 2011). Other political economy frameworks (national and sector/thematic) have been compiled by DfID, EC, Sida, World Bank and others.

³ Example of how formal and informal institutions influence one another: formal traffic rules in a context where there is a culture of compliance with rules and regulations have a different result on road safety than the same rules in a context in which the informal rules of the game are essentially about breaking these traffic rules. In the latter context, one needs a range of other formal institutions to ensure compliance of behaviour of road users in order to obtain road safety, with extra costs involved to finance a thicker institutional environment.

⁴ 'Interests' are understood in a somewhat broader sense, including also values, norms and ideas that often shape the way actors perceive their interests – and how these are best served.

and Batley, 2012). Technical features of a particular sector influence incentives and interests that the providers, users and politicians face and the accountability relations between them. To illustrate, infrastructure has a different appeal to political leaders than social services such as education. In certain contexts, rural roads may have a stronger appeal to politicians, than say investments in cross-border transport infrastructure as they may attract more rural voters by visibly engaging with rural road construction.

A fifth lens focuses on **external factors** that affect the domestic political economy and the regional dynamics and organisations. Global trade, investment patterns, climate change, even the preferences and attitude of consumers in (rich) markets can influence the incentive environment in which domestic and regional actors operate. Unlike foundational factors, these external factors can abruptly change and are less deeply ingrained in the institutions that they influence. Of particular interest to the six case studies are international relations, and particularly the volumes and ways in which donors support the AU and regional programmes.

1.3.2. Approach of the ECOWAS study

This report is part of a broader study, with five more reports on the African Union (AU), the East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). All cases follow the same approach, which involved a workshop with the research team on the joint methodology and further discussion with the African Union and representatives of the RECs in Addis Ababa (October 2014). It involved desk study, participation in conferences and workshops, and three field visits during which structured interviews were taken with key informants.

Due in part to their novelty, analyses of the political economy of regional organisations such as the REC remain relatively novel, so are subject to limitations. Carrying out political economy analysis necessitates access to data, information and previous analyses that are often not readily available. Further, choices must be made regarding scope and focus, while on-going research can be overtaken by events. Rather than being exhaustive, this study therefore points to important political economy dynamics that are indicative of the way ECOWAS works with a view to providing insights for a range of interested stakeholders, including policy makers and their partners.

Limitations of the study included difficulties accessing reliable information on internal informal political economy dynamics within the ECOWAS. While field visits were carried out to ECOWAS headquarters and Burkina Faso (for the case study on food security), the duration of the missions were short (amongst others for budget reasons). This hampered our ability to delve deeper into political economy dynamics or to meet key players (e.g. relevant staff of the ECOWAS Gender division were all absent during the visit to headquarters). The study on the role of private sector actors in regional approaches to value chains relies on documentary analysis and interviews (as time and budgets were not available to carry out a meaningful mission). Given the challenges accessing reliable information in the internal political economy dynamics, the study has been careful not to interpret internal ECOWAS political economy trends unless triangulation of findings was possible.

The report was peer reviewed by a Quality Support Group, which combined independent academic expertise, as well as the comments of several staff from the Embassy of Sweden.

A separate synthesis report provides a summary of the six reports. It formulates ten statements and presents the key findings on the political economy of regional organisations in Africa, which further help

identify the most important implications for different stakeholders with an interest in supporting or nurturing regional dynamics.

1.4. Scope and structure of the ECOWAS analysis

Three criteria in particular informed and oriented the discussions on the selection of the themes or sectors for the study of the AU and the five RECs. These criteria include 1) policy relevance of the theme/sector, 2) research feasibility, and 3) insightfulness and/or comparability of the evidence, findings and storylines.

After applying these criteria, peace and security and food security – and more specifically the development of the agricultural sector and related agro-food policies - were selected as themes for further analysis. Both domains are core priorities for ECOWAS where a regional approach could add value. It was expected to find sufficient material to carry out both sectoral analyses.

The remainder of the study is organised as follows:

- Section 2 looks at ECOWAS characteristics in general terms, focusing particularly on the structural and foundational factors that affect ECOWAS policy choice and implementation, followed by the formal and informal institutions and how these frame the functioning of the organisation.
- Sections 3 and 4 zoom in on the two thematic areas under analysis. They will link the common regional factors identified in the previous section with sector-specific institutions and how they affect the behaviour of various key actors involved in policy formulation and implementation. This will include an analysis of the different dynamics taking place between countries within the region, within some key countries and with the AU.
- Section 5 concludes with the main findings, and potential policy implications.

2. General ECOWAS features

Before looking at the political economy dynamics in the two focal areas, it is useful to briefly reflect on the priority agenda pursued by ECOWAS in recent years and the general level of success achieved in implementation.

2.1.1. Main policy priorities of ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with the formal aim of promoting economic co-operation within the region. Four stages were envisaged for the process of regional integration, i.e. the creation of a Free Trade Area, a Customs union, a Common Market and, finally, an Economic Monetary Union. In 1993 the Treaty was revised with a view to incorporate new common objectives in the political, security, social and cultural domain. Building on its experiences with restoring peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, ECOWAS adopted in 1999 an innovative protocol: the *'Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security'* to be complemented in 2001 by the above mentioned protocol on *'Democracy and Good Governance'*. Both protocols conferred a clear (and quite unique) mandate to the regional organisation to be a guarantor of peace and a guardian of the effective application of democracy and human rights norms in a region with a relatively large number of fragile states.

Over the past decades, ECOWAS has sought to promote an ever-widening regional integration agenda through a wide variety of strategies, action plans and programmes. Initially the regional body followed a state-centric, top-down approach to promoting regional integration. From the 1990s onwards, there were deliberate attempts by ECOWAS to broaden its overall approach with a view to also spur regional dynamics *'from below'* through close collaboration between institutional actors, civil society and business organisations. These shifts reflected the weakness of many members to shoulder a state-centred approach. They were reinforced in recent policy documents such as the ECOWAS Vision 2020: *'Towards a Coordinated and Participatory Regional Response'* (2010) the *'people-centred'* Regional Strategic Plan and the *'Strategic Plan 2011-2015'*. The latter document spells out six priorities: (i) promote good governance, justice and upgrade of the conflict prevention, management, and resolution mechanism; (ii) promote the development of infrastructure for a competitive business environment; (iii) sustained development and cooperation in the region;⁵ (iv) deepen economic and monetary integration; (v) reinforce institutional capacity; (vi) strengthen the mechanism for integration into the global market.

In recent years ECOWAS has spent considerable political energy and budgetary resources to the first strategic priority, i.e. peace and security and democratic governance, following the various crises that erupted in Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso. Another priority was the adoption of a common external tariff (CET). After long and protracted negotiations (based on technical as well as political economy considerations) (de Roquefeuil, 2013), the region managed to put the final touch on its CET that entered into force in January 2015. This should allow ECOWAS to become a full-fledged customs union, a significant achievement in light of its regional integration agenda.⁶ Following the food crisis of 2008, the regional body strengthened its policy framework and committed to accelerate the implementation of policy measures and investments in the areas of agricultural development and food security. The agricultural sector and food security have also been high on the agendas of internal trade liberalization and the CET, to facilitate intra-regional trade flows from food surplus areas to deficit areas and to protect regional producers

⁵ This broad strategic priority includes references to enhancing agricultural development and food security/mitigation of food crises.

⁶ The whole process of concluding a CET was further complicated by the fact that a subset of member states already had a CET of their own in the framework of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

and processors from low international prices. The Ebola crisis also seriously put to test the whole regional response capacity.⁷

2.1.2. Overall progress

ECOWAS is celebrating its 40th Anniversary. In reviewing the track record of the organisation, most analyses concur that important achievements were obtained in different domains, including restoring peace, containing conflicts, dealing with rigged elections, facilitating the free movement of people,⁸ supporting infrastructure development (trans-coastal and trans-Sahelian roads) or associating civil society and business associations to the regional integration process.

Yet there is also a broad recognition across the board (ECOWAS Commission, member states, citizens, private sector, donors, etc.) that the initial aspirations have not been met. There is no shortage of statements by political elites, research or policy analyses all claiming that regional integration is “*a must*” (particularly for the smaller and landlocked states). However, the overall progress in the actual implementation of ECOWAS policies in core areas such as trade, economic and monetary cooperation, energy and social development has been limited. There are still many obstacles to the free circulation of people (such as the existence of numerous check points, arbitrary and discriminatory treatment of citizens of other countries, migration laws) and goods (including the non-application of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, illegal tariff barriers, non-tariff barriers).⁹ Beyond acute conflicts that dominate the agenda, other urgent crises remain unaddressed. The Sahel is being increasingly destabilised by cross-border crime, drug trafficking, the Tuareg conflict, terrorism and the spread of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The envisaged transition in the Vision 2020 from an ‘*ECOWAS of States*’ to an ‘*ECOWAS of People*’ has still a long way to go, particularly in promoting the idea of regional integration, encouraging bottom-up approaches or delivering tangible outcomes for citizens.

However, in assessing the performance of ECOWAS one should duly factor the particularly harsh political, institutional and socio-economic conditions in which the integration project had to be pursued. The foundations at national level to construct a regional identity, a shared vision on the future and effective implementation capacities were and remain particularly fragile. This inevitably shapes and sets limits to regional integration processes.

In Chapter 2, a more detailed analysis is provided of the main political economy factors that help to explain the main policy choices and overall levels of performance of ECOWAS in pushing forward the integration agenda.

2.2. Foundational factors

A focus on long-running foundational factors embedded in history, geography, state formation processes, region building and culture are necessary to get a fuller picture of those elements that may contribute to regional processes, or that may block regional cooperation and integration.

⁷ Both ECOWAS and AU were criticised for not assuming a leadership role at the outbreak of the epidemic. The three worst affected countries (Liberia, Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone) resented the lack of regional solidarity and support.

⁸ With the adoption of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons (1979) ECOWAS managed to eliminate visa requirements for citizens from the region and to establish a biometric passport in 13 out of the 15 member states (with the exception of Gambia and Cabo Verde). However, the application of tools guiding free movement can be counterproductive, as seen in a country like Niger, now used as an illegal migration channel from the sub-region into Europe.

⁹ Examples are the refusal to accept valid documents, the prohibition to import particular goods, the corrupt behaviour of policy or customs agents, etc.).

Key foundational factors that are particularly relevant for regional cooperation/integration -in the sense that they either create opportunities or lead to major constraints for effective action at regional level- include:

- *The impact of colonial heritage.* This includes first and foremost the Francophone/Anglophone/Lusophone divide, which continues to affect many areas of integration. The huge ethnic, linguistic and religious divisions make it difficult for the post-colonial elites to mobilise people around a common national project, let alone a regional perspective. This heritage also includes a variety of hugely different administrative and bureaucratic traditions, which complicate dialogue, collaboration and institutional development processes. Porous national borders facilitate the uncontrolled move of populations seeking better economic opportunities, trans-border flows of food products through informal channels as well as the spread of small arms. Although the region suffered less from Cold War dynamics (e.g. compared to Southern Africa) there have been constant and ongoing interferences from Western (ex-colonial) powers in their respective geographic areas to defend geopolitical (N'Diaye, 2011) and or economic interests.¹⁰ The co-existence of ECOWAS and West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) – with partly overlapping and/or competing mandates - is an illustration of the various historical trajectories of the countries involved and wider political processes with deep roots (i.e. the power struggle between France and Nigeria and the use of WAEMU to counteract Nigerian dominance). Despite recent moves to enhance complementarity and a division of labour in particular policy domains, there is still much confusion and duplication. While security issues were long the exclusive domain of ECOWAS, WAEMU is expanding its capacity in this area, based on its experience during the crisis in Ivory Coast and under the impulse of a key informal alliance of Sahelian states, composed by Mali, Niger and Burkina (who share common cultural and historic bonds allowing them to undertake collective action in specific areas). This example of an informal alliance shows that the colonial heritage can also be a factor propelling regional cooperation based on similarities between countries.¹¹
- *Systemic poverty.* The region ranks particularly low regarding all human development indicators. Thirteen ECOWAS countries are classified in the low Human Development category and 60% of the population is estimated to live on less than one dollar a day. This is compounded by the demographic growth, rapid urbanisation, massive youth unemployment and environmental degradation (Atta-Asamoah and Aning, 2011). The paradox is that many of these countries are rich in natural resources and (largely for this reason) have enjoyed high growth rates in recent years.¹² Yet the “zero-sum” approach used by political elites to control economic rents and natural resources does not allow for inclusive development approaches (Alao, 2011). This, in turn, contributes to the ongoing fragility of the social contract and related notions of statehood, citizenship, democracy or governance.
- *Natural complementarities and factor similarity in economic structures.* Agro-climatic conditions vary widely among West African countries. As a result, there are marked strong complementarities in agricultural production and sizeable agricultural trade flows between coastal countries and the countries from the Sahel and the Sahelo-Sudanian zone as well as between coastal areas and sahelian areas within countries. The latter typically export coarse grains (millet, sorghum) and livestock. The (coastal) Guinean zone and the lower Sahelo-Sudanian zones export maize, rice,

¹⁰ See the important private sector interests of France in its “*pré-carré*”, particularly in Senegal and Ivory Coast).

¹¹ In a similar vein, the presence of an ethnic group in a trans-border area might contribute to regional economic integration and cross-border cooperation. This form of locally-based, bottom-up cross-border cooperation is actually the object of a current programme of the Sahel and West Africa Club.

¹² Examples of substantial GDP increases are Sierra Leone (20%), Niger (11%), Ivory Coast (8,2%) and Ghana (7,5%).

roots, tubers and tropical fruits. Furthermore, the drought- stricken nature of the countries in the region creates pressures and opportunities to undertake collective action in water management. This is reflected in the creation of specialised regional structures such as the '*Volta Basin Authority*' and the '*Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Senegal*'. At the same time, there is a huge factor similarity in economic structures in the large majority of member states – based on the export of primary products and the import of manufactured goods - lead to lack of trade complementarities and low levels of intra-ECOWAS trade.¹³ It creates disincentives to trade liberalisation among weaker and more protected economies as they fear the economic bulldozer power of the more solid economies (Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana). The characteristics of the productive sectors, notably the widespread informality of private operators, the small scale of producers and traders, and low value addition, combined with numerous obstacles to trade, helps to explain the prevalence of 'informal cross border trade' (ICBT), representing 20% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Nigeria and 75% in Benin (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2014). As in other regions, integration has focused on import tariffs. It has proven more difficult to address politically contentious issues such as services and other behind-the-border issues, investment, competition policy and government procurement (ACBF, 2014).

- *The common security threats.* While ECOWAS was primarily created to promote economic co-operation, the conflicts and political instability in the region forced the organisation to address these '*negative externalities*' by taking on board a lead role in peace and security matters. More than in other regions security thus became a 'driver' of regional integration.
- *Nigeria as a 'hegemon' and motor.* Through the size of its population and economic power, Nigeria has always enjoyed a hegemonic position in the region. Furthermore, the country has developed a strategic culture in its foreign policy predisposing it to interventionism in regional affairs. The country tends to see armed conflicts in the region as a 'fire next door'. As a result of this position, Nigeria has long been the motor behind regional integration in ECOWAS, particularly in the field of peace and security.¹⁴ However, this perceived dominance of Nigeria should be nuanced. It has been argued that Nigeria's "manifest destiny" as hegemon is more about influence than actual power. According to Bach, the country's power as a regional hegemon is eroded by the "*deep regional imprint left by trans-frontier networks that focus on Nigeria but operate independently of territorial affiliation*" and equally by the "*fluidity and fragility of region-building as much as problems of statehood and governance within Nigeria*" (Bach, 2007). On the trade front, the country has often adopted inward looking and protectionist stances, which have until recently slowed down the market integration and custom union processes of the ECOWAS. Nigeria's failure to contain the Islamist insurgency is hampering Nigeria's contribution to ECOWAS operations.¹⁵ All this may turn Nigeria into a fragile giant rather than a driver of regional integration processes.

¹³ This is a phenomenon to be observed across the continent (in 2011 total intra-Africa trade represented 11,3% of Africa's total trade with the world).

¹⁴ The financial and military dependency on Nigeria has less positive side effects as well. It makes it difficult for ECOWAS or member states to raise major security or governance issues affecting Nigeria (e.g. the muted criticism in the ECOWAS election observation in the 2007 Nigerian elections or the reluctance to put the troubles in Northern Nigeria on the agenda).

¹⁵ For instance: Nigeria was forced to reduce its troop contribution to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) because of the need to combat Boko Haram.

2.3. Institutional factors, actors and incentives

A key institutional feature of the ECOWAS construct is the existence of quite sophisticated formal rules in the form of protocols, strategies and institutional arrangements. The formal rules describe the respective powers of the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads and States and Government. They give the Commission an explicit role in carrying out the integration agenda in a proactive manner. A growing web of interfaces seeks to link ECOWAS officials to national actors (e.g. at the level of resident Ambassadors, the ministers involved in the Council meetings, as well as national agencies). Protocols determine the authority and scope of action of the ECOWAS Parliament and the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice (ECCJ). There are formal consultations mechanisms with civil society and the private sector, providing institutionalised opportunities to influence policy-making or participate in regional interventions, e.g. the monitoring of elections by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Like other RECs, ECOWAS opted at its inception for an 'inter-governmental approach' to governance, based on the primacy of principles such as national sovereignty and non-interference. It resulted in a system whereby decision-making power lies exclusively with the Authority of Heads of State and Government and the ECOWAS Secretariat is merely charged with the task of executing the decisions taken by it. Already in the early 1990s a *'Committee of Eminent Persons'* concluded that effective integration could be not stimulated under these conditions and pleaded for the adoption of a supra-national approach to governance in order to speed up decision-making and enforce compliance (Lokule and Osuntogun, 2013). It took until 2006 before the ECOWAS Summit formally decided to carry out institutional reforms to give more teeth to the regional body. The move took place in 2009 when the Executive Secretariat was turned into a 'Commission' with a President, a Vice-President and a group of Commissioners (that would steadily expand) dealing with dedicated policy domains. The new structure de-emphasised the adoption of conventions and protocols as preferred law making tools (because they usually incur major implementation delays due to lengthy ratification procedures) and opened up the possibility to issue acts and decisions directly applicable in member states.

Yet the effective and coherent use of this formal architecture and related rules has proven to be quite challenging. Decision-making power remains firmly anchored in the Authority and Council. The Commission can propose initiatives and actions plans, yet there is no shortage of examples where policy developments have been postponed despite their apparent urgency from a regional perspective; where the ratification by member states of protocols and acts incurs major delays; where agreed policies are not translated at national level or implemented in a consistent way at regional level; where decisions of the Court are neglected by member states, and so on. This suggests the ECOWAS Commission has only limited space and power to effectively contribute to the production of regional public goods. Below, this contention is further elaborated by looking at some critical processes within ECOWAS.

2.2.1. Agenda setting

Over time ECOWAS has developed some tradition of involving relevant stakeholders as well as experts in policy-making processes. ECOWAS became the first REC to grant observer status to civil society organisations (CSOs), including business associations, at its meetings. In 1996 it was decided to establish the *'Forum of Associations Recognized by ECOWAS'* (FARE) to engage in more structured forms of dialogue with stakeholders and democratise the process of regional integration (Iheduru, 2013a). This holds particularly true for the 'first generation' of civil society networks that emerged following the dismantling of single party-states or in the wake of the huge security problems affecting the region. Among these pioneer organisations one could find national centres for the promotion of democracy and governance as well as regional networks such as the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP),

the Africa Security Sector Network (ASSN), the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET). Their initial mandate to raise awareness and advocate alternatives shifted over time, as they engaged more deeply with regional and global issues. Some of them remained outspoken in their critique of prevailing approaches to regional integration or security, to a point of being excluded from participation. Still others, such as the Centre for Democracy and Development in Nigeria and WANEP became effective ‘partners’ and ‘legitimizers’ of the democracy and conflict management processes within ECOWAS (Iheduru, 2013b: 144-145).

However, while there is space for multi-actor approaches to policy formulation, there are also political economy constraints hampering the ability of non-state actors to play a positive role as ‘norm entrepreneurs’ or ‘drivers’ of regional integration agendas. Beyond major challenges of capacity, organisation and funding, regional networks may end up to be ‘*too close for comfort*’ by playing a supportive role with regard to policy reforms imposed from the top and geared at defending narrow interests. The danger of co-optation stems from the deeper nature of state relations in the region, often characterised by dependency and clientelist relationships between organised private sector actors, politicians and bureaucrats at national level and in the interactions with ECOWAS. Yet one should avoid over-simplifications, such as the pervasive view that organised businesses are just profit seekers. A recent study highlighted ways in which these actors have acted on principles and beliefs about regional identity and forged effective policy coalitions that made a difference in the orientation of regional integration processes.¹⁶ Chapter 4 will look in more detail at how private sector actors influence key regional agendas in the realm of agro-trade policies and food security.

2.2.2. Implementation and institutionalisation

The continuing prevalence of an intergovernmental mode of operation in the ECOWAS institutions ought not be surprising considering the foundational factors of the organisation; in particular, the strong attachment to national sovereignty and the mistrust among member states. This drastically reduces the space for autonomous action by ECOWAS following a clear set of formal and institutionalised rules. It obliges the Commission to follow a more *ad hoc* path, by looking for concrete windows of opportunities to push forward regional agendas in close alliance with ‘willing’ or ‘reformist’ states that have a set of particular interests to defend on specific issues at a given moment in time. Examples can be found in the area of peace and security where the regional body managed to optimally exploit the formal possibilities offered by the Treaties and Protocols while making alliances with member states that had core interests to defend in regional peace and security matters (see Chapter 3).

Yet in other circumstances, the political economy conditions were not favourable for using the formal rules and norms. A recent example is the attempt of President Compaoré in Burkina Faso to obtain another mandate by changing the constitution. As will be detailed in Chapter 3, the formal systems available at the level of ECOWAS were not activated in a transparent and above all, timely manner in this particular case. The muted response by ECOWAS in the initial phase (i.e. before the downfall of the President) was interpreted as giving Compaoré *de facto* a green light from above to go ahead with his controversial reform. Evidence suggests that Compaoré got this treatment because of his status as regional mediator and strong ally of powerful and befriended member states. Yet events forced ECOWAS to review its initial stance but in the meantime, the damage was done in terms of the ECOWAS image and credibility. This example shows how the formal rules in ECOWAS are still not owned and above all, institutionalised. This ought not be surprising considering the strong personal relations between leaders in a region characterised by highly presidential regimes. There is some kind of a “*syndicat de chefs d’Etat*” at work that may interfere in formal decision-making processes at regional level.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis see: Iheduru, 2013b.

The limited track record in implementing regional decisions suggests that ownership levels of the whole regional construct are low across the board. This is linked to the pervasive development challenges faced at national level, the limited institutional capacities, the lack of trust among member states and above all to the political economy factors driving elite behaviour. Most of the incentives faced by national politicians are not related to regional integration. They are focused on satisfying short-term clientelist demands at national and sub-national level. In such a context, the regional pathway is less attractive, amongst others because the cost and benefits accruing from integration processes remains unclear, especially in specific sectors – the true arenas where interests, incentives, power games and coalitions become visible. The problem is compounded by the still prevailing culture of top-down decision-making – despite the existence of formal mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders. As a result, it has proven difficult to create sufficient political support for the integration process among domestic constituencies.

2.2.3. Compliance

ECOWAS officials interviewed stressed that ensuring ownership or domestication of regional policies is a key challenge across the board. However, as a further illustration of the limited supranational mode of governance, the regional body has limited means to enforce the effective implementation of policy commitments at national level – except in the areas of peace, security and governance (through the above mentioned Protocols of 1999 and 2001) and assumedly in trade (with the CET). There are few signs that ECOWAS has tried in recent years to put the issue of enforcement upfront on the agenda. There does not seem to be a *'champion'* or coalition of actors within ECOWAS with sufficient power and interest to impose discipline through existing or new institutions. A recent study comparing compliance mechanisms in EAC, ECOWAS and SADC analyses three types of conditioning factors for compliance (i.e. legal and institutional coherence, demand for regional integration and leadership). ECOWAS scores relatively low on each criterion for reasons such as limited institutions with supranationality, incomplete contracts, culturally/politically constrained dispute settlements, limited trade and industry relations and weak leadership (GIZ, 2014). Evidence collected in this study confirms the lack of clear demands for regional integration, reflecting the limited ownership of the regional construct by the 'people' and the challenges faced by key stakeholders to express voice, engage in regional policy process or demand accountability (see case study on private sector involvement in agricultural development and food security in Chapter 4 below). The lack of effective compliance mechanisms also serves the interests of many actors and creates plenty of opportunities for patronage, profitable deals, corruption, etc.

The point was furthermore made that ECOWAS rather seeks to foster compliance in an indirect manner, through 'soft mechanisms' of dialogue and persuasion. On the one hand, this implies strengthening direct relations and coordination with member states Ministers during Council meetings and on the other, deepening interactions at national level with political actors and implementing agencies. It is expected that such contacts and interfaces might facilitate the effective communication and implementation of regional initiatives while ensuring that ECOWAS decisions are informed and fed by member states' agendas and concerns. In the same logic, ECOWAS has sought to strengthen the role of the 'regional' ministries in member states by setting up new ECOWAS offices. Due to cost implications, the Council decided upon a gradual implementation approach with offices first being established in Togo and Burkina Faso, with three other countries following suit in 2015: Niger, Sierra Leone and Gambia.

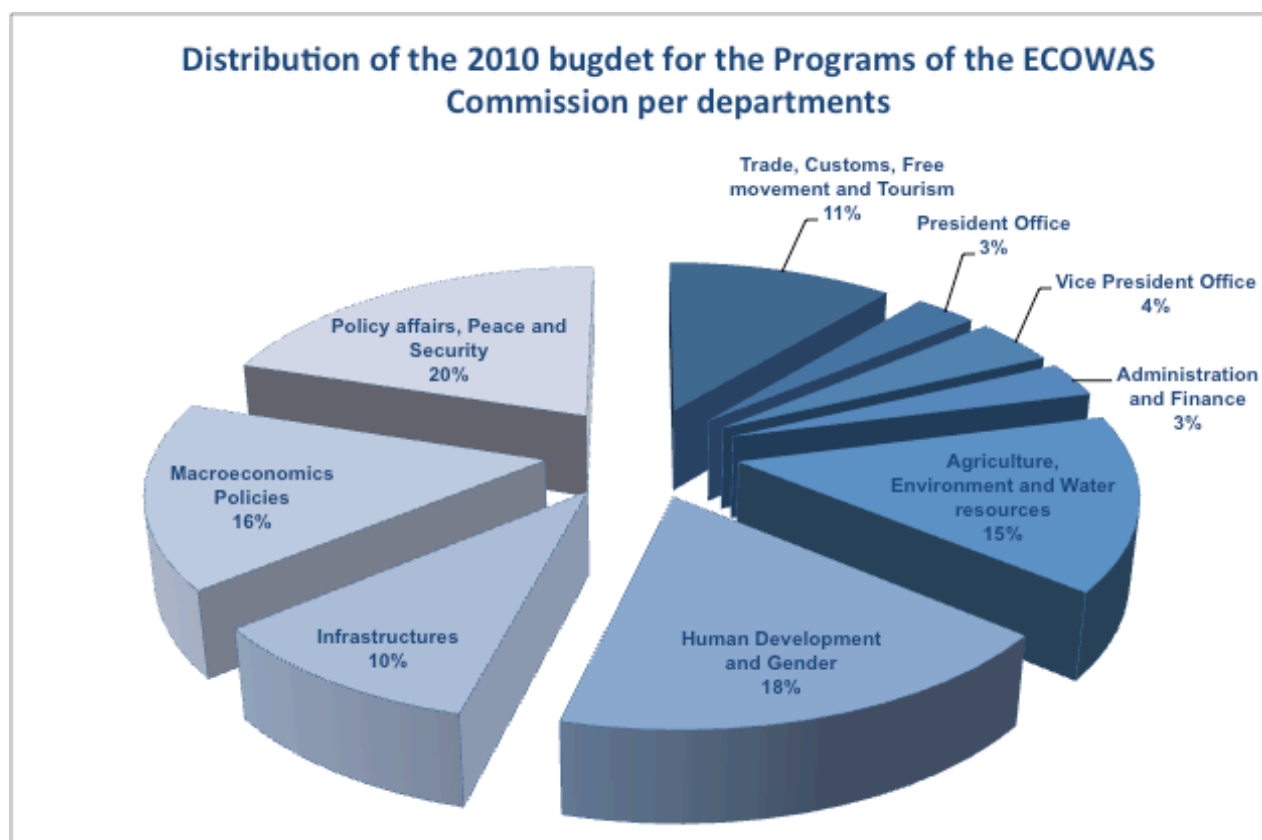
Another key organ to ensure enforcement is the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice. Established in 1991 to interpret the ECOWAS Treaty and hear contentious cases brought by member states and institutions on Community law, the Court's mandate has since been widened. It now includes considering cases brought by individuals or CSOs (e.g. on human rights violations). This has inspired several national/regional CSO movements to file lawsuits against individual member states. The Court has heard

cases involving the right to education, due process, the rights of women and children, slavery and the application of penal law (related to the trial of Hisenne Habré by Senegal).¹⁷ However, the effectiveness of the ECCJ has been weakened by problems of accessibility and costs (upstream) as well as non-compliance of its judgments by member states (downstream).

2.2.4. Resource allocation—or the political economy of the budget

ECOWAS, though not a wealthy region, is the only REC that has been able to put in place (since 2000) a self-financing mechanism - a 0,5 levy on the value of all goods imported into the region, to be collected by member states and paid into a dedicated ECOWAS account. The existence of such a system of own resources creates policy space for ECOWAS and provides some legitimacy to its institutions.

Figure 1: Distribution of the 2010 budget for the Programs of the ECOWAS Commission per departments



ECOWAS receives substantial amounts of donor funding but these resources are dedicated to programmes, and *not* primarily to funding the structures and operational costs of the Commission itself. In 2011 WAEMU and ECOWAS were the wealthiest and most financially autonomous intergovernmental institutions in Africa (ahead of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), SADC, EAC and AU). The ECOWAS budget was \$265.5 million, 80% of which comes from the community's own resources. ECOWAS's own contribution to ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) exceeds the Maputo ratio:¹⁸ 15% of its total budget. For the allocation of resources, see visual below regarding the 2010 budget.

¹⁷ To give an indication of its work: between January 2006 and June 2007, the Court received 26 applications and organised 66 sessions (IHRDA).

¹⁸ In 2003, the Heads of State of the AU agreed during the Maputo summit to devote at least 10% of their national budget to agriculture.

However, on second analysis, things look less rosy. There are major difficulties to properly mobilise the Community levy. There is also a contribution system to the overall budget of ECOWAS but several member states have accumulated chronic arrears. This further skews internal power relations (Nigeria and Ivory Coast pay a major chunk of the bill) while increasing donor dependency. It also proves difficult to attract additional contributions of member states for specific crises occurring in the region (e.g. the ECOWAS Solidarity Fund for the Fight against EBOLA).

Furthermore, the process of designing, approving, executing and accounting for the budget is highly informal. According to Spierling (2011), *the “ECOWAS budget [...] remains largely a matter of secrecy and the whole is impenetrable...”*.

2.2.5. Accountability

There are relatively few formal rules regarding internal governance and accountability systems at the level of the ECOWAS institutions. The Commission has to report to the Council, yet beyond that point it is difficult to identify governance and accountability relations between Organs as well as effective mechanisms to check performance and ensure accountability. It is also hard to find relevant data and analysis on the quality and actual functioning of the governance systems and rules within the Commission. There is an annual ‘Performance Evaluation Report of the ECOWAS Commission, yet it is mainly an administrative and technocratic review of what was done and achieved in the past year. The scant available evidence points to the existence of rather weak accountability systems, as reflected in the lack of monitoring mechanisms, transparent procurement procedures and practices as well as poor financial accounting – a flaw also causing major concerns among donors, including the EU. The Vision 2020 called upon the establishment of codes of conduct for public officials (e.g. the declaration of assets on assumption of office). It also requires leaders to be accountable for their citizens and to demonstrate a high level of integrity in the management of public resources. Yet these laudable exhortations do not seem to have had a concrete follow-up so far. The ECOWAS Parliament’s role is purely advisory and consultative. It does not perform traditional parliamentary functions such as legislative work, approval of the budget or oversight.

These flaws are not merely linked to capacity problems. They are the product of political economy forces at the level of member states that have a vested interest in allowing many ‘grey zones’ in the process of making decisions, allocating funds or providing downward accountability to citizens. The limited involvement of parliamentarians is linked to their marginal status, unfavourable incentive structures, inefficient internal procedures and their dual role (as members of both national and regional assemblies). In recent years there has been an ongoing dialogue to extend the powers of Parliament, a reform that appears to be in the final stages of approval. Yet it remains to be seen if the new dispensation will also address the current structural disincentives for an effective oversight role by the parliament. All this clearly indicates that the ‘people’ dimension remains very fragile in the overall ECOWAS construct.

2.2.6. Ownership and sustainability

The levels of loyalty of the various member states to the regional body are not easy to assess as solid empirical evidence is missing across the board. The huge presence of fragile states (with limited resources and capacities) hampers strong regional involvement. From available material, it appears that Nigeria is often the best pupil in the class. Considering its political, economic and human clout it has, the country could probably decide to go it alone - as it would be able to exercise similar power and influence without being part of a REC. But there are several examples of Nigeria giving priority to West African unity above national interests, as with the adoption of the ECOWAS Customs Union.

Another criterion to assess ownership levels is the degree of investment in institutional and capacity development at both regional and national level. ECOWAS is open about its limited success in this area. Thus the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 acknowledges the contribution of earlier (donor-supported) capacity development initiatives. Yet it also recognises that “... *institutional capacity building has not enjoyed considerable ownership within the institutions of the Community... The many capacity building initiatives have not been fully implemented, hence the desired impact is yet to be felt. Within the Commission, work methods and processes of both technical and support departments, including the use of support departments, have not improved significantly. A planning and programming system is yet to be instituted and the budgetary programme is not aimed at a results-based management system. Entrenched strategic thinking is a necessary condition for making progress on the economic integration process within the Community and integrating the Community itself into the global market*” (ECOWAS, 2011). In 2012, the ECOWAS Commission launched a study on its organisation, structure and procedures, to inform the drafting of an institutional reform plan. For the moment being the only institutional reform carried out has been the increase of the number of Commissioners to 15. Levels of strategic thinking, institutional development and capacities for the management of regional integration processes tend also to be very low at national level. Typically, across the region, the ministries in charge of ECOWAS do not occupy a power position in the hierarchy and tend to be poorly resourced. These structural capacity deficits have clear political economy foundations, reflecting a limited elite commitment to effective regional integration.

2.4. Inter-regional dynamics

In the previous sections, the role and influence of various actors has already been touched upon. In order to avoid duplication of analysis, the focus here will be on two additional ‘actor’ issues:

- The politics of sub-regional groupings.
- Evolving relations with the AU.

The issue of rationalising the architecture of regional organisations (with its corollary of competing membership) for greater efficiency and improved regional outcomes also plays in West Africa. Two major players dominate the scene, ECOWAS and WAEMU, both of which seek to increase trade integration and policy coordination among their members. Analysis concurs that both have different strengths reflecting their specific mandates, historic trajectory, institutional development as well as political economy factors (e.g. the special link with France in monetary policies). In terms of track record, WAEMU has achieved monetary union (CFA zone) and has done better in economic integration. ECOWAS has demonstrated a greater capacity to foster policy coordination and compliance in political matters (peace and security and democratic governance).

As all members of WAEMU are also part of ECOWAS, the latter has enjoyed more visibility and attention when dealing with regional integration issues (other than monetary issues) in West Africa. It has often been declared or assumed that it is just a matter of time before the WAEMU is absorbed by ECOWAS. Yet there are no signs that this is going to happen soon and for some strong reasons, such as the stability provided by the CFA to participating member states. While in many areas both organisations are trying to work out collaborative arrangements and collective action, there are no indications that a sole regional body is a realistic scenario for the future. If anything, a move can be observed whereby WAEMU takes on board regional topics long reserved to ECOWAS (such as peace and security). The ‘*ECOWAS-centric*’ approach has also made it difficult to see other sub-regional dynamics at work, based on specific coalitions of interest and often using informal channels. An example of such a sub-system is the informal alliance between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger within WAEMU. Also in the area of food security, these informal sub-regional

blocks can be seen. Sahelian countries are most exposed to food shortages and are therefore expected to have a greater incentive to cooperate at regional level. Yet they generally tend to opt for collective action arrangements along the lines of informal sub-regional blocks. This informal collaboration is more about defending markets for similar products than for accessing food.

Another key aspect of inter-regional dynamics is the relationship between ECOWAS and the AU. The analysis and field consultations conducted in the framework of this specific study are aligned to the findings contained in the AU report produced under PERIA. Relations between the two structures are often 'uneasy' as a result of a combination of factors, such as mistrust, the need for autonomy and own profiling, information and communication flaws, unclear division of roles (despite increasing efforts to coordinate, amongst others through the establishment of REC Liaison officers in Addis Ababa) and missing links in the institutional arrangements that regulate the participation of RECs in AU decision-making processes (e.g. in the field of Peace and Security).

Underpinning these ongoing tensions are two closely inter-linked political economy factors. First, the prevailing power relations between the two bodies, reflected in the notion that RECs are the '*building blocks*' of the AU. In practice, this has often been translated in a hierarchical way whereby the AU sees the RECs as subordinate bodies. The resulting top-down approach is resented by both regional and national actors and influences the way concrete cooperation schemes materialise in the field. Second, the issue of task division is a major source of tension, as both bodies compete for leadership, profile, visibility and funding. From an ECOWAS perspective, there are recurrent calls to use the criterion of 'comparative advantages' as a tool to delineate roles and responsibilities. This is, for instance, the case when conflicts arise in the region and ECOWAS claims a protagonist role based on its comparative advantage in terms of proximity and the direct stakes involved.

2.5. External factors

West Africa has always been a region that was open to the world for geographic and historic reasons. It is an arena in which a wide and expanding set of actors have left their mark. This applies first and foremost to European powers. As colonisers they had a defining influence on shaping both the borders of West Africa (Berlin Conference, 1885) and the political, institutional, administrative and linguistic nature of the various states (France, UK, Portugal) as well as the regional set-up (see the divide between ECOWAS and WAEMU). After independence, France sought to defend its major foreign policy, military and economic interests in its "pré-carré" (or former colonial countries) by maintaining deep relations with the francophone elites involved (an highly unbalanced and opaque partnership, reflected in the so-called "Francafrique").¹⁹ The role of France in setting up the WAEMU and ensuring the existence of a monetary union around the CFA should also be stressed. The region was also tied to Europe through successive aid and cooperation frameworks signed with the European Community and later European Union (Yaoundé agreement, Lomé Conventions and Cotonou Agreement). The impact of all this has also been huge at the regional level, with expanding levels of support to regional integration, through the European Development Fund, as well as the conclusion of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

Behind this, many EU member states have also been providing substantial aid (including humanitarian and food aid) in response to rampant poverty and governance challenges faced by the region over time or in

¹⁹ This did not facilitate the relationship with hegemon Nigeria, as reflected in the tense relations both countries have had over past decades.

pursuit of economic interests.²⁰ The security dimension has equally been a powerful driver of European involvement, as reflected in the many political crises that countries underwent (see case studies on Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso below). In recent years, Europe is confronted with the implosion of the Sahel region and a host of other major problems linked to the proximity of the region (migration, drug trafficking, etc.).

The international financial institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund) have shaped the economic policies of the poverty-stricken region, particularly through the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s. Multiple reports indicate that this has had an impact to reduce the 'policy space' of West African countries to define their own strategies.

Over the last decade, the field of actors has been widening with the massively expanded role of China, following similar economic interests and recipes as in other parts of the world and to a lesser extent with the other BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). A less well-known, yet increasingly important influence is the role played by Arab countries through generous funding to befriended Muslim countries, accompanied with strategies to strengthen the position of Islam in this part of the world.

2.6. Cross-cutting issues: Gender

Over the past two decades ECOWAS has deployed a proactive approach to addressing gender issues. This is no luxury, considering the pressing gender issues that exist across the region (ECOWAS Parliament, 2010). Yet documentary analysis suggests the gap between policy ambitions expressed at regional level and effective progress on the ground remains huge.

With the help of ECOWAS Department of Social Affairs and Gender as well as the '*ECOWAS Gender Development Centre*' (EGDC), a directorate established in 2003, ECOWAS has organised a wide range of conferences and seminars at various levels on gender issues. The policy framework has expanded hugely. A particular focus was given to promoting new thinking and practices on how to mainstream gender issues in all areas, strategies and programmes. ECOWAS has a longstanding tradition of dealing with gender issues in peace and security matters. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) has a section on women, peace and security and the Department of Social Affairs and Gender has been implementing activities on 'Woman, Peace and Security'. This is a challenging task, as it touches upon changing the mindset of many key actors in the sector (especially in the military). The mainstreaming effort has recently been undertaken in other core policy areas such as trade, migration or climate change. Another key objective pursued by ECOWAS is to foster a greater social, economic and political participation of women in decision-making. The work of the Gender team is centred at on policies and subsequent capacity building programmes, and does not include, as to date, a focus on developing gender sensitive programmes at the community level.

Within the framework of this study, the sector of agriculture and food security has been chosen to go a bit deeper into analysing the work of ECOWAS in terms of gender mainstreaming. The main regional policy initiatives in this area (ECOWAP, 2006, RAIP), make an explicit reference to the participation of women in regional agriculture policy processes and related institutional development plans. Like in the sector of peace and security, strategic partnerships have been concluded with leading civil society organisations at regional level who take part in the ECOWAS preliminary meetings.

²⁰ Spain, for instance, has displayed an active role, particularly at regional level, driven by political and economic considerations (migration, fisheries).

Nevertheless, the ECOWAS 2011-2015 strategic plan recognises that *"Gender mainstreaming has not been accorded priority in the ECOWAS programmes"*. It re-emphasises the critical importance of gender mainstreaming in objective 4: *"Human development, provision of adequate social infrastructure and gender mainstreaming are all part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). [...] Gender issues have taken the centre-stage in development thought and processes, so the whole integration process would require carrying everybody along"*.

In recent years, several initiatives and programmes have been launched to pursue this objective. In May 2012 Ghana hosted a four-day ECOWAS Regional Workshop to examine the role of women in the search for food security in West Africa and determine what intervention ECOWAS could put in place to address the challenges regarding gender disparities in the agricultural sector and ensure food security, in particular for the RAIP prioritised value-chains: rice, cassava, maize, livestock and fisheries. It is also worth mentioning regional programmes such as AGIR,²¹ the GROW campaign around ECOWAP+10,²² the Alliance for Convergence and Coordination of Climate Smart Agriculture Initiatives,²³ the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) Project²⁴ or the 'Feed the Future' initiative.²⁵ Furthermore, ECOWAS has sought to consider critical gender issues (e.g. in terms of access) in sectors linked to agriculture, such as energy.²⁶

It was not possible to ascertain in the framework of this study the impact of all these regional meetings, declarations and action plans. From a political economy perspective, four factors seem to have a major influence of the dynamics regarding gender issues. First, ECOWAS undoubtedly has an incentive to push forward this agenda as it can show to be more than an economic project and address concrete issues that link up well with its stated ambition to be a regional body of 'people'. Second, civil society is an important actor in policy formulation and implementation of regional gender policies. Third, the role of external actors should equally not be underestimated. Their influence goes beyond providing funds to regional initiatives, with the related risk of bringing policy agendas to the fore that not necessarily 'owned' by the various regional/national actors. Linked to this, the drivers within the ECOWAS Commission appear to have limited power, leverage, resources and capacity to induce an effective uptake at the level of member states. This situation also prevails in other departments, yet the 'soft nature' of gender issues may render the position of the Commissioner in charge even weaker (compared to other key players dealing with peace and security matters or trade/economic cooperation).

²¹ AGIR seeks to strengthen the gender dimension in food and nutritional strategies and policies

²² The GROW campaign believes that it is time that ECOWAS pulls its weight to influence the agenda of its member states around four key issues, one of them being: Equitable access to land for rural women: *"Contrary to popular belief, rural communities are willing to be agents of change for women farmers to effectively enjoy their rights of access to resources and participate in decision making for the development of the whole potential of the rural world. Let's offer them the opportunity to act by removing traditional and societal constraints that limit women's access to land. This space should be negotiated within communities while adopting incentive policies, from national to ECOWAS levels"*

²³ In June 2015, ECOWAS and core partners launched this Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture, which includes gender issues as one of the 4 priority areas of work.

²⁴ This regional project supported by ECOWAS, NEPAD and Spain will provide funds for the Business Incubator for African Women Entrepreneurs (BIAWE) Project, which nurtures the business ventures of rural African women operating primarily in the area of agriculture. The Project will support initiatives in economic capacity building, promote rural entrepreneurship and develop agricultural resources.

²⁵ With the support of the USAID (2011-2016) this initiative aims to assist countries in West Africa to achieve the MDG 1, namely eradicating hunger and extreme poverty. Focused on agriculture, environment, health, trade and investment, the programme also addresses cross-cutting issues such as adaptation to climatic variability, improved market access for farmers and traders, improved food and nutritional security, gender issues, capacity-building and partnership development.

²⁶ See the 2015 ECOWAS Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access.

3. ECOWAS in the area of peace and security and governance

The previous section described the factors that have turned security issues - with their corollary of democratic governance - into a core business of ECOWAS. This section goes on to consider the factors that have shaped the choice and implementation of ECOWAS policies in this area. Beyond a generic analysis, this section presents two concrete case studies to further illustrate the dynamics at work:

- It first looks at the factors that influenced ECOWAS' ability to respond effectively as a REC towards the crisis that unfolded in Mali (2012) and to cooperate with the AU under the APSA structure as well as with other actors.
- The second case study examines how ECOWAS sought to play its role as 'guardian of the treaties' regarding democratic standards, by focusing on two recent crises in Ivory Coast (November 2010-April 2011) and Burkina Faso (2014) resulting from attempts by incumbent leaders to manipulate the constitutions in order to ensure a new term in office.

3.1. Sector characteristics

ECOWAS was created to promote economic cooperation within the region. It adopted at its inception an intergovernmental approach to governance, based on national sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of its member states. The regional commitment at that time was essentially that member states would integrate the lofty ambitions of ECOWAS in planning and directing their national policies. The same logic prevailed in the initial 1978 and 1981 defence and military protocols. They were primarily designed as 'regime protection strategies' to serve the interests of ECOWAS leaders and to 'insure' them against both external and internal security threats (Francis, 2009: 92).

Though primarily an economic union, ECOWAS was forced to step into the security realm in order to address wars and conflicts and avoid the regionalisation of domestic wars. By the mid 1980s, several member states realised that the mechanisms focused on protecting the national sovereignty were not adequate to deal with cross-security challenges "*grossly inadequate to meet the challenges of an increasingly interdependent region in which ripples of refugee flows, disrupted infrastructure, the proliferation of weapons and the export of violence, were felt far beyond national borders*" (Musah, 2011: 153). Hence, the 1990s saw the development of a quite impressive formal architecture to facilitate regional peacekeeping, peace support operations and conflict management interventions. It started to function under the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) with military and peacekeeping operations in Liberia and subsequently also in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast.

Several milestones are worth noting in building up this policy and institutional infrastructure:

- Building on earlier regional initiatives on peace and security, the first landmark document is the 1999 Protocol relating to the '*Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security*'. It established a '*Mediation and Security Council*' (MSC), composed of nine member states that would be able to decide with majority rule upon all required measures and possible sanctions (including military interventions in member states). Article 10 of the protocol authorises all forms of intervention. Article 25 permits the Council to be active "*when and where a democratically elected government is overthrown or will be overthrown*". This clearly amounts to introducing a strong element of supra-nationality into the system based on the principle that a viable

regional community may demand the partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the Community within the context of a collective political will.

- A second key milestone is the 2001 Protocol on *'Democracy and Good Governance'*. It explicitly formulates democratic requirements for member states - or a set of constitutional convergence principles: division of powers, free elections and participation, civil control of armed forces, freedom of press and assembly, protection against discrimination and *"zero tolerance for power obtained by unconstitutional means"*. The possibility of intervening in the case of coups against a democratically elected government is underlined in Article 45, which already provides for a spectrum of incentives and sanctions to be applied.
- This architecture has been further refined by the *'ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework'* (ECPF), ratified in 2010. The ECPF identifies two approaches to conflict prevention: (i) operational prevention, which entails the use of early warning/actions, mediation, conciliation, preventive diplomacy and, if necessary, the preventive deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force; and (ii) structural prevention as part of peace-building activities, such as the promotion of political and institutional governance or socio-economic development. In the West African context, this is the first time a link has been established between the two approaches.

Within the ECOWAS Commission, the Office of the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) is responsible for peace and security issues and also oversees the Directorate for Early Warning and Monitoring Centre (ECOWARN). The operational arm consists of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), which is a building block of the African Standby Force (ASF) under the Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

ECOWAS continues to be the only regional organisation that regularly threatens Members States with military intervention in the case of norm violation and has also effectively used the various institutions and tools to intervene in a range of conflicts in the last two decades. There have been interesting political economy reflections as to why member states agreed on such innovative Protocol as the 1999 military intervention 'Mechanism' - with potentially far-reaching implications. One recent analysis (Hartmann and Striebinger, 2015) argues that it was a combination of (i) the will to curb negative externalities from earlier wars; (ii) the choice by hegemon Nigeria and democratising states at that moment to 'lock in' the ongoing democratic development at regional level; (iii) the desire by autocratic member states to give some legitimacy to their regimes by signing the protocol while *"at the same time expecting that it would not be enforced"* (idem: 77).

Decision-making processes on peace and security matters depend largely on the dynamics between member states and the use of their regional body. In this respect, the following pointers can be derived from documentary analysis and interviews with officials of the PAPS in Abuja:

- With regard to the drivers of action, available research and Interviews conducted for this study of officials in the ECOWAS Commission suggested that it depends on the conflict whether governments get active through the Mediation and Security Council.
- Nigeria has been the key player in this whole process, activating the Mechanism, assuming political leadership and fitting an overwhelming share of the bill of peace operations. This preparedness to take the lead on regional security matters is a longstanding principle of Nigeria's foreign policy. This general interest in peace and security is in some crisis situations reinforced by specific national

interests (e.g. in the Guinea Bissau crisis). However, regional powerhouse Nigeria has lately been more inward looking rather than strongly taking a leadership in the region. In the past internal conflicts such as Boko Haram have been 'off-limits' for the ECOWAS Commission and member states aimed to ensure that it remains that way –thus conforming the limited power of ECOWAS to undertake autonomous action Officially ECOWAS needs an invitation for such involvement. However, as regards Boko Haram, ECOWAS, the AU and affected member states increasingly display an interest to join forces as the terrorist group also poses wider regional threats. Nigeria and its neighbours have agreed to set up a joint military operation under the umbrella of the AU.

- Experience also indicates that the challenge of reaching unity on issues of peace and security often arise out of opposing positions which fall along the cultural-linguistic divide (Elowson and MacDermott, 2010: 43).
- Even though there are at times tensions between ECOWAS member states due to different positions and interests, to the outside ECOWAS manages to uphold unified positions publicly and can have a fairly strong and principled response (as further explored in the case of sanctions for Malian actors).

3.2. ECOWAS and the conflict in Mali

With this background information on sector characteristics in mind, this section explores the actors and factors that influenced the way ECOWAS addressed the conflict in Mali, which unfolded in 2012. ECOWAS has been heavily involved in the recent crisis in Mali alongside the AU, the United Nations (UN) and a number of other actors, such as the EU and its member states and other regional bodies, especially through mediation and planning and contributing to the peace support operations. The analysis will focus on the ECOWAS response following the 'coup' until the period that the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was created and deployed in 2013. The response to Mali illustrates the opportunities and gaps in the functioning of ECOWAS as well as in current cooperation framework with the AU.

3.2.1. Context of the crisis

The 2012 crisis in Mali evolved in a context of an area that has faced interlinked environmental, developmental, security and governance challenges for a long time. People in the Sahel engage in cross-border trade networks as a survival mechanism. This informal economic ecosystem relies on weak structures of the state, lack of security provision, collusion of administration with criminal networks, support and use of Islamist groups as well as porous borders. This system provides livelihoods for large parts of the population in the region.

The north of Mali is only thinly populated. The regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu though geographically comprising 2/3 of Mali, only host about 10% of the population. The northern population – especially the Tuareg - built up grievances over time, due to lack of cultural rights, lack of political autonomy and a lack of government investment in development in the North, which in the past led to rebelling against the government. Since independence, power has been in the hands of southern ethnic groups, which neglected the North. Negotiations with Northern groups in the early 1990s and between 2006-2009 (with the mediation support of Algeria) achieved a fragile peace through a promise for greater regional autonomy, more inclusiveness of the Tuareg in the military as well as increased state aid for northern

regions. Yet, implementation moved slowly and the government did not live up to its commitments, further adding to grievances.²⁷

Amadou Toumani Touré – President of Mali from 2002 onwards and heading the country until the coup in 2012 – also did not pay much political attention to the North due to economic and political conveniences.²⁸ He seemed to rely on a network of other actors to keep control of the northern parts of the country. Security provision was achieved not through government oversight but through outsourcing state functions to opportunist local elites, manageable armed factions and militias (Boukhars, 2012). This system - shaped by the political elite - benefitted ATT's administration and wealth was accumulated through informal channels of patronage. Government officials had linkages with political patrons and criminal entrepreneurs that were tied to criminal networks and groups like Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM). Against this background, three main armed Islamist groups thrived in northern Mali: Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al Dine and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

3.2.2. The ECOWAS response

Initially, after the military coup in March 2012, ECOWAS engaged both in a mediation process to re-establish constitutional order by appointing the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, in order to re-establish constitutional order, and planned for the deployment of the ECOWAS standby force coined as the ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA). Sanctions were imposed to increase the pressure on the coup leader Sanogo. That, together with the mediation, successfully led to the establishment of an interim civilian authority and the signing of the Ouagadougou peace agreement.

The planning of the ECOWAS mission, with the mandate to restore territorial integrity, protect and support republican institutions²⁹, the planning of the ECOWAS mission never took off due to a number of obstacles. First, the military junta and transitional government were reluctant to allow the presence of a regional force in Mali and had not been consulted beforehand. Divisions within the army denied ECOWAS a single point of contact for planning and dialogue. Second there was no international consensus on the way forward, especially agreement with Algeria was lacking. Third, in the absence of financial and logistical support from the international community, it was difficult to deploy the envisaged mission. From June 2012 onwards, the AU started to play a more active role, realising that establishing a continental African-led mission could overcome Algeria's reluctance to cooperate. Together with the Malian government, ECOWAS, the core countries of the region including Algeria, and other international actors such as the EU and the US, a harmonised plan of operations for an African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) was developed, which ECOWAS adopted, and which the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) endorsed in October 2012. This plan was submitted to the UN Security Council, which – after initial reservations and a request for more detailed operational plans – authorised in December 2012 through Resolution 2085.

²⁷ Even with the new government after the coup these issues and challenges remain. According to Lindell and Mattson (FOI, 2014), Mali's political elite in Bamako is not willing to make concessions or sacrifices to the north. Perceptions in the South of groups in the north being responsible for the uprising influence in how much politicians are willing to comply with claims from the north.

²⁸ In August 2011 – ATT's launched a Special Plan supported by funders such as the European Union - the 'Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development' - yet it renewed tensions between the South and the North over a plan that included provisions on reconstituting military presence in the North, which the Tuareg saw as a violation of earlier agreements (Algier Accord of 2006).

²⁹ ECOWAS leaders decided to fast-track the deployment of the ECOWAS Standby Force Mission in Mali in line with article 25 of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

3.2.3. The interaction between formal institutions, actors and agency

How did the interplay between formal institutions, actors and agency work out in the ECOWAS intervention in Mali? To grasp this, a political economy lens can be applied to critical decisions taken during the unfolding crisis (for an overview of the key phases of the process see box 1 below).³⁰ The analysis will focus in particular on (i) the use of the existing early warning system; (ii) mediation attempts; (iii) the planning of military action; and (iv) the mobilisation of funding.

Box 1: Key phases of the process and related policy responses

- March 2012 – June 2012: ECOWAS initial response (from ‘coup d’état’ in March 2012 to June 2012) was a regional one articulated by ECOWAS and with the aim to deploy in a fast-track manner an ECOWAS Standby Forces Mission in Mali (MICEMA).
- June 2012 – January 2013: The AU shows more active involvement, AU and ECOWAS are planning for an African-led response termed AFISMA (which however is mainly built up of ECOWAS troops but aims to receive wider legitimacy through AU approval and UN SC authorisation).
- January 2013: France launched operation Serval, which aimed to break the offensive of the armed insurgents and achieved the regaining of control over Mali’s northern cities.
- From March/April 2013: Deployment of AFISMA and UN Planning for deployment of MINUSMA whose aim was to put in place a multidimensional, integrated peace and stabilization mission in Mali.

(i) Early Warning System

ECOWAS has an Early Warning System (ECOWARN) that is operated by the Early Warning Directorate in the ECOWAS Commission. To feed the system with relevant information, there are field monitors (who collect information but do not have a role to alert) as well as ‘focal points’ in each Member State (usually two state representatives and one civil society representative separately) who are responsible to provide information to ECOWAS. Analysts in headquarters then complement this information with open sources and provide weekly reports as well as reports on specific incidents. Once information is processed by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate, it is then passed to the internal ECOWAS hierarchy for determining further action. There also exists an early warning system at the continental level under the APSA, bringing different Early Warning Staff of RECs together every three months in order to create a sharing community that may help to avoid competitive or secretive approaches to gathering relevant information

So far the systems, but how did they function in the Mali case? Analysts have pointed to a major gap between the existing systems and their effective utilisation at the level of the AU and ECOWAS. In both cases, the early warning mechanisms failed to detect the governance problems and the full extent of fragility in Mali prior to the 2012 crisis. The following flaws could be identified, many of which have clear roots in political economy factors:

- The field monitoring did not work optimally. The indicators provided by the government focal point did not lead to a classification of the situation as ‘red’ prior to the outbreak of the conflict – despite alarming signs such as the advancement of rebels from the North towards Bamako. Interviews conducted stressed that government interests were such that it was decided not to properly report these challenges when providing data to the Early Warning System through the focal points. For example, when rebels were already advancing towards Bamako and indicators should have been flagged as ‘red’, the government did not want to admit the severity of the situation. As a result, the flow of information was fragmentary, surrounded by political sensitivities and in the end, of little use.

³⁰ Theroux-Benoni, 2013.

- ECOWARN had its own sources to become aware of the severity of the situation in the North. Yet there was no platform to discuss it with the government in Mali. There were no ears in the Malian government that listened to it or that led to a response. As one interviewee stated: “*We were flagging things but then [were] just waiting without being able to do much.*” This is precisely the reason why the Early Warning System of ECOWAS now moves more towards an ‘Early Response system’ as well to encourage actual action to act upon information. The Unit in ECOWAS knows about the difficulties and political sensitivities to sometimes get governments to act and engage in preventive action. Yet the aim is to alter over time this attitude through (a) renewed funding opportunities of projects (e.g. also mediation) based on the indicator warning/flagging and (b) framing it as “*supporting the country in carrying out governance functions that it wants to do anyway*” rather than as something to act upon because ECOWAS as external party tells them to do so.
- Even with a good set of indicators and adequate information, not all conflict as well as response dynamics and triggers can be captured or predicted. This requires the analysis of some more structural indicators (In AU terms ‘horizon scanning’) and the study on a long-term basis of the indicators that lead to violence and tensions. In the case of Mali, the problem was not knowledge but turning knowledge into action.

ECOWAS inability to prevent coups from happening and trigger action through early warning has been highlighted as a sign that ECOWAS “*remains predominantly a responsive rather than a proactive security actor*”.³¹ Yet there is a willingness, particularly at the level of the ECOWAS Commission, to learn lessons from past experiences. The current Early Warning System of ECOWAS is being reformed to overcome the problems encountered. With the support of USAID, a reform is ongoing that seeks to: (i) decentralise the regional warning system; (ii) alter the incentives for government to provide early information; (iii) increase the number of monitors; (iv) replace the government-driven national focal points by leaving the responsibility to reporting on indicators only to research institutes and WANEP; (v) ensure effective national responses to early warning reports or alerts through a newly created ‘National Agency for Response’; (vi) involve liaison officers as bridge between the National Response agency and ECOWAS HQ; and (vii) extend the analysis to human security issues (this is not only in line with the ‘people-centred’ approach of ECOWAS but can also help to manage sensitivities of member states regarding reporting on political matters. These institutional changes may, as such, not suffice if strong regime interests are at play in a given situation. Yet they broaden the circle of actors involved in the process as well as the linkages with ECOWAS. Such an altered institutional set-up may at least create new opportunities for more adequate responses. The process, focused on improving the early warning part of the chain, is still in its early days of implementation so it is too soon to assess its effectiveness.

(ii) Mediation attempts

After the military coup in Mali, ECOWAS followed a two-track strategy: diplomatic efforts/mediation as well as military planning.

The diplomatic response was initially monopolised by ECOWAS. It appointed Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso as mediator to work towards a civilian transitional government, new elections and negotiations between the Malian government and the groups in the North. The choice of Compaoré has been a debatable one and has been described by some as a major error of casting due to the fact that Compaoré himself achieved power through a coup. Yet several factors influenced this choice:

³¹ The Guardian, May 2012.

- Burkinabe diplomacy and mediation were essential in securing the resignation of Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) – a demand by the military junta to start negotiations.
- Burkina Faso had clear interest in restoring stability in neighbouring Mali.
- Compaoré had a longstanding track record in mediation in francophone countries and some weight in the region.
- At the time of the Mali crisis, the Francophone countries called the tune, occupying crucial posts (i.e. President Ouattara from Ivory Coast as Chairman of ECOWAS and the Commission President K. Ouedraogo from Burkina Faso, a close political ally of Compaoré).

After Compaoré was mandated, he had a free hand in the process of conducting negotiations with little institutional ECOWAS oversight and with limited transparency. Interviews pointed out that it almost looked like ECOWAS was outsourcing its mediation to Burkina Faso. This led to criticism in the Malian capital on the mediation process and the way the disputed political arrangements for the transition had been agreed upon. Algeria was also sceptical of the role of Blaise Compaoré as mediator.

Despite these criticisms, the mediation combined with pressure through sanctions showed that ECOWAS played an important role in the first response transition towards a civil interim administration. ECOWAS officials are of the view that its mediation was a driving force behind the restitution of constitutional order. Other factors also helped, such as the strong principled stance of ECOWAS and the issuing of sanctions towards Mali. ECOWAS remained firm and clear about its principles and put in place sanctions (total embargo including freezing of the accounts with the help of WAEMU, which was fully aligned on this matter with ECOWAS).

Concerning mediation between the government and rebel groups in the north, ECOWAS was initially leading negotiations through Compaoré as well, yet was supported by countries like Mauritania and Algeria which have an interest in Mali. In the beginning Algeria was more reluctant to take up a mediatory role after a decade of tense relations with Mali during the government of President Touré. Yet, it increased its engagement after its own security situation was under attack (e.g. through the gasfield attack in Amenas in Algeria's South). The US as well as France also pushed Algeria to help in achieving reconciliation between different groups, though its role was at times ambiguous. Increasingly, Morocco also became an active actor. Both Morocco and Algeria hosted talks between the government and rebel groups throughout 2012. In the mediation process, ECOWAS acknowledged that they couldn't move ahead without involving other countries such as Algeria in the mediation process. After Operation Serval by France in 2013 (see below) France and ECOWAS were more open towards Algerian mediation.

(iii) ECOWAS planning for military response

Besides the mediation, strong focus was put on military response. Immediately after the coup ECOWAS started planning for a military involvement in Mali. This is rather puzzling given the extent of lack of trust between all the players with an interest in Mali and the region, the wider regional dynamics of the conflict involving countries outside of ECOWAS and the challenges of setting up a military operation amounting to desert warfare in an area where ECOWAS is less familiar.

The drive of ECOWAS to show a presence and quickly organise a military response can be explained by several factors. Most of them are related to specific ideas about the role of ECOWAS under the APSA and interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity that decision-makers in ECOWAS hold:

- ECOWAS prides itself with being most advanced with regards to peace and security and it wanted to show relevance and capacity to intervene timely and effectively, amongst others with its regional Stand by Force.
- In the case of Mali, the ECOWAS Commission was of the view that according to the principle of subsidiarity, it is up to the REC to lead the response, for reasons of proximity, knowledge of the context and direct interest in restoring political stability. In this view, the AU and the UN should be supportive actors (mainly in terms of resources), respecting regional leadership and prerogatives.
- There are historical reasons (linked to ECOMOG operations in the 1990s in Liberia and Sierra Leone) why ECOWAS looks more on the military side of things and other components – such as comprehensive political strategy come in later.

Yet the whole process did not proceed smoothly. A variety of factors and actors hampered the planning of a peace operation mission. First, ECOWAS started to plan initially without an official request from the Malian transitional political actors. The view of the junta in Mali was rather that the Malian army needed logistical support and training rather than a regional force in the country. Yet, ECOWAS decided to fast track the ECOWAS Standby Forces Mission. Only later in September 2012, after international pressure did the Malian transitional government send a formal request to ECOWAS as it sought to ensure transitional safety for institutions and restore Mali's territorial integrity. Second, when the Commission started its planning, political commitments from member states were hard to obtain. The envisaged troops were not available - they were either deployed with other UN missions or in a conflict deemed of higher priority than Mali. The ECOWAS plans were clearly based on unrealistic assumptions. Several member states had other concerns than to engage upfront in the Mali crisis. A case in point is Nigeria - usually a dominant player. The country was too much entangled with Boko Haram security issues at home to play a leadership role. It may also have resented the Francophone grip on the whole crisis. Third, ECOWAS also had to face other interpretations of what should be done and was under many external influences and factors that constrained their margins of manoeuvre. All these factors led to a systematic postponement of action and to the cancellation of the ECOWAS plans for a MICEMA operation altogether.

(iv) Funding of ECOWAS (peace and security) response to Mali

The 1999 Protocol created the ECOWAS Peace Fund (EPF) as part of its Peace and Security Architecture. It has three operational windows: (i) Prevention and Early Warning; (ii) Humanitarian Assistance; and (iii) Peace support operations. In principle, 5% of the ECOWAS Community Levy goes towards the EPF, but in reality ECOWAS faces challenges to receive the money. The largest share of funding comes from donors, particularly the EU. Since the window for Peace Support Operations is usually under-funded, ECOWAS relies on special donor pledging conferences.

In the case of Mali, challenges arose because there was no dedicated budget for the intervention within ECOWAS and there is not a separate flexible pool of money 'waiting' for a crisis and to be used. The EU stepped in, though it was reportedly faced by a dilemma on how best to channel the funds. Ultimately it decided (under high-level pressure from France) to provide the funds attracted through the African Peace Facility (APF) directly to ECOWAS for troop contributions to AFISMA –a move that was not appreciated by the AU. The EU also provided funding directly to ECOWAS (about US\$34m). In addition, an international Trust Fund was created (AFISMA trust fund) through which donor countries pledged. Also here, a turf-war took place on who is to manage the trust fund (with AU and ECOWAS being contesters) with AU later taking a lead role. Problems equally arose with the administration of funds, particularly when AFISMA was "re-hatted" to the UN-coordinated MINUSMA. It was unclear who would reimburse ECOWAS Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) for costs incurred. This could reflect badly on credibility of ECOWAS and reduce the incentives for member states to commit troops in future for operations in the region. Not

surprisingly, calls are getting louder that there needs to be a clear system or mechanism to settle all outstanding liabilities before a mission is re-hatted from REC to AU or to UN.³²

3.2.4. Actors, external players and their incentives

The African Union thus got more involved from June 2012 onwards which led to joint planning and the renaming of MICEMA to AFISMA. The AU was able to bring other actors of the wider-Sahel in a broader coordination forum,³³ to act as a bridge between ECOWAS and the international community. Between ECOWAS and the AU no discussions on an appropriate division of labour took place and no common agreement was found on the way forward was found. The differences in views and interests over the lead of a mission to Mali and the questions of who was in the lead for a response led to significant tensions between the two bodies.³⁴

Among the non-African actors France played an important role in these initial phases. As a long term supporter of ECOWAS and a player with major interests in the region, it wanted to see to what extent ECOWAS could show leadership and deliver value for money. It therefore initially backed ECOWAS to drive the process. Later, after its own Operation Serval, France pushed for an international response at the level of the UN. The US maintained initially that renewed democratic elections should precede any military action in Mali, but was more open to an African led-military intervention so long as it is well-planned, well-resourced and has the support of all states in the region, including those that are not ECOWAS members.

In January 2013, Islamist fighters advanced forcefully towards the south and defeated the Malian army in Konna.³⁵ Since AFISMA was not ready to be deployed, the Malian government requested French assistance. On the same day France pushed the UN Security Council to adopt a declaration describing the events in Mali as a 'threat to international peace and security' so to legitimise France's military action, called 'Operation Serval'. Some discussion took place to what extent Operation Serval has wakened the AU's and ECOWAS' leadership in the crisis. Yet, ECOWAS as well as Nigeria were openly grateful for the intervention by France knowing that they could not have stopped the terrorists as effectively as France did.

3.2.5. Conclusion

The building of the ECOWAS architecture for peace and security coupled to promoting respect for governance standards is an ongoing process that is nourished by each new response to crisis situations. ECOWAS has shown a preparedness to reflect on past experiences. Thus, it organised a '*Mali After Action Review*' that produced a report with valuable lessons and recommendations. However, observers fear there will be no concrete follow-up as the main priorities for reform are not spelled out clearly. Yet there are driving forces within and outside the Commission that may use it in the current revisions of the Protocols.

In the case of Mali, ECOWAS obtained buy-in from (Francophone) member states for mediation efforts, yet there was less cohesion at the time of planning for military reasons. For several key member states, incentives were lacking to engage in a military operation, partly because elites were confronted with a set of pressing domestic challenges at home. The whole process also confirmed the complexity of operating in

³² The rehatting meant it became an UN Peace mission rather than AU-led one – then also opening up for military contingents from other countries. The existing people (police, military) in the field were re-appointed and merged in the UN mission – but not all of them and the way the rehatting was organised (not only financially) created tensions

³³ Including countries such as Chad (who contributed troops) and Algeria or countries whose political support is important (such as South Africa and Egypt) to turn the mission into a pan African effort.

³⁴ Source: interviews with ECOWAS officials.

³⁵ The jihadists could take advantage of the absence of a clear authority in Bamako, the international community's hesitation and the slow planning for a response of ECOWAS and the AU (AFISMA by then was still in planning phases) ([Oslo Forum, 2013](#)).

the fragile and fluid context of Mali and the wider Sahel, with a multitude of actors that do not necessarily trust each other and may defend a wide range of (opaque) interests.

Analysts have sought to identify some of the key incentives driving policy-makers in the Mali crisis. They include a variety of factors such as rivalries and regional patrimonial relationships, power relations, the search for regional or international recognition, economic and security interests, but also relationships between governments of empathy and animosity between heads of states.

Different views existed among the various actors not only on the character of security challenges and preferred solutions but also on who is to provide them. ECOWAS had strong incentives to assume leadership but had to recognise power realities and accept the inclusion of other players (beyond the region) as well as the take-over of military operations by better equipped and capacitated systems. It was also confronted with its own institutional limitations in terms of making a proper analysis of what is realistic and feasible, on military planning or on funding.

The Mali response highlights the tensions that exist between the AU and the RECs on “who should do what” and “to whom and how” donor funding should be channelled. The lack of good institutional mechanisms for communication between ECOWAS and AU (or the non-existence thereof) is another factor that acted as impediment for better cooperation. Aligned policy positions are difficult to achieve when RECs do not have the possibility for direct inputs at the AU decision level. Instead, competition tends to prevail. This also explains why the idea of Memorandums of Understanding between AU and RECs are not getting off the ground and is moving quite slow.

3.3. ECOWAS and the political crisis in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso

Contested electoral results and constitutional manipulation are among the most prominent sources of instability and conflict in the region. This case study focuses on how ECOWAS sought to apply its normative and institutional framework during the political crisis in Ivory Coast (2010-11) and Burkina Faso (2014). Analysing this from a political economy perspective may help to understand the factors and actors that condition the decision logic of a REC and its ability to ensure compliance with agreed democracy and governance standards.

The two cases also allow for an interesting comparative political economy analysis. In the case of Ivory Coast, it is widely acknowledged that ECOWAS acted swiftly and coherently at the beginning of the post-electoral crisis: it validated the electoral victory of the opposition candidate despite claims to the contrary by the incumbent and resolved to remove the latter from office even by military force should diplomatic efforts fail (Spierling, 2011). ECOWAS maintained its principled position even though it found itself confronted with a divided AU on this and constrained to translate its firm policy position into credible threats and actions.

A different picture can be observed in the case of Burkina Faso. Here, the configuration of power relations, interests and incentives was quite different, particularly within the region. As a result, ECOWAS did not take remedial action *before* things went out of hand, despite clear signs on the wall that a crisis was looming. After the forced departure of President Compaoré, the regional body dropped this “wait-and see approach”, an approach that was seen by many as an implicit green light for the constitutional *coup d’Etat*. The ECOWAS position evolved from a rather muted defence of the constitutional principles enshrined in its protocols to a pro-active search for an inclusive solution with all relevant actors, in particular the citizens of the country.

3.3.1. Background to the political crisis in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso

Ever since the then sitting President Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept his election defeat in November 2010, **Ivory Coast** had been hovering on the brink of another civil war. The country – the second biggest economy of the region - had been in turmoil for more than a decade as a result of a failed regime transition after the death of founding father Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Fierce political competition arose amongst his successors against a background of major divisions in the country along geographical, economic and religious fault lines. A key source of the conflict was the use made of economic and citizenship-orientated discrimination on the basis of identity and nationality (the concept of “*ivoirité*”) to exclude groups from power and access to wealth.³⁶

At the time of the 2010 election, Ivory Coast had been the site of an international peacekeeping operation since 2002, initially in the form of a unilateral French intervention (*‘Opération Licorne’*), followed by the deployment of an ECOWAS force (ECOMICI) that would be later integrated into a UN peacekeeping force (UNOCI), involving 7,000 peacekeepers by 2007. A peace accord signed in 2005 in Pretoria (South Africa) tasked the UNOCI to oversee preparations for a presidential election within a year. Yet faced with a range of political and technical obstacles the elections were postponed several times till end of 2010. The first round took finally place on 31 October, opposing Gbagbo to Alassane Ouattara, who had been banned as a candidate to previous presidential elections mainly for issues of identity and nationality. The run-off followed one month later and ended up in a standoff as both parties claimed victory. This presidential election, and the violence that followed for months confronted ECOWAS with a new type of challenge. For the first time, the regional body “... was expected to react to a post-electoral dispute within the context of a long-running, costly, multilateral peacekeeping operation” (Yabi, 2012). It was also a real test for the credibility of the whole peace and security architecture of ECOWAS. If the incumbent president would be in a position to remain in power despite a blatant manipulation of election results, it would provide an incentive for other sitting presidents in the region to use all possible means to cling to power as well.

One should also take into account the unique role of Ivory Coast as economic engine in West Africa. This is reflected in a history of deep integration with other countries in the area of trade (Ivory Coast is the port of access to several landlocked countries) as well as in the presence of a huge amount of migrant workers from poor neighbouring countries (in 2010 there were an estimated 2 million of Malians in the country). This explains why most member states were hugely concerned by the likely negative spillovers of a profound and long crisis in Ivory Coast. It also heightened the stakes to use all channels, including ECOWAS, to deal with the explosive situation (UNDP, 2011).

Burkina Faso is a poor, land-locked country whose political trajectory since independence is littered with military regimes taking over power to restore order and stability. Blaise Compaoré is a product of this tradition, taking power after a putsch against the regime of captain Thomas Sankara, his erstwhile friend. He was then ‘*democratically*’ elected (with 80% of the votes) for two seven-year terms (1992-2005) and collected two additional two five-year terms (2005-2015) as a result of a constitutional reform. In the early 1990s, Compaoré allowed for a ‘controlled process of democratisation’ – following the example of other autocratic leaders in the region. This, however, did not prevent the recurrent emergence of major contestations of the regime by mass movements, civil society organisations as well as opposition parties. They protested against the prevailing corruption, political repression (including the killing of opponents),

³⁶ Several analyses concur to argue that the ongoing crisis in Ivory Coast is primarily based on economic factors and exclusion of vast segments of society. This takes the form of discriminating Northern residents who are, or are presumed to be, immigrants from neighbouring countries. These groups provide the backbone of the Ivorian labour force –that serves the interests of local elites and foreign companies.

economic crimes,³⁷ social injustice and poverty.³⁸ Also the military troops regularly came out of the barracks to express their dissatisfaction. These political and social struggles increasingly became engrained in the conscience of citizens and led to a widening gap between those who govern and the governed.

It is in this volatile context that the question of the succession of the president, in power for 27 years, rapidly gained momentum from 2013 onwards. It reached the inner circle of the system, as historic leaders of Compaoré's political party (CDP) decide to secede and was amplified by a well-organised and increasingly vocal civil society that mobilised the population against a possible new term in office. Yet the President was determined to go for a new mandate and 'mobilised' the Assembly to modify Article 37 of the Constitution, thus allowing him to represent himself at the elections planned for end 2015. The day of the voting in Parliament, massive manifestations took place throughout the country, public buildings were set on fire, houses of the ruling elites looted and an estimated 24 people died in the protests. In the light of the escalation, Compaoré resigned and fled to Ivory Coast. The same day, a senior army officer, Zida, declared himself Head of State and suspended the constitution.

3.3.2. The political economy of crisis management in the case of Ivory Coast

The ECOWAS response

The first challenge that ECOWAS had to face in the specific case of Ivory Coast was both unusual (compared to past experiences) and highly complex: who really won the elections? Alassane Outtara claimed victory and this was supported by the Independent Electoral Commission and certified by the UN Secretary's Special Representative in Ivory Coast (who was exceptionally mandated by the UN Security Council to proceed to such a certification). Yet the Constitutional Court (whose members had been nominated by the incumbent president) overruled this result, based on the annulment of some 600,000 votes (not surprisingly coming from the pro-Outtara regions of the centre and the north). As a result, Laurent Gbagbo emerged as the winner of the contest. In such situations, the first priority for ECOWAS and other key players was to sort out the basic empirical facts on the electoral dispute. This was problematic considering the ongoing battle of legitimacy and leadership between the electoral commission and the constitutional court. Yet there was ample evidence that Outtara had won with a significant margin (54,1%) – a score that his opponent could not really put into question in a credible manner.

As a result, ECOWAS quickly moved to fully back Outtara as the legitimate president of Ivory Coast to be installed without delay. During an extraordinary meeting in Abuja early December, ECOWAS suspended Ivory Coast from the regional bloc and threatened with the use of force if Gbagbo refused to cede power. It requested the UN Security Council and other international players to adopt targeted sanctions.

Yet the bold move to consider a military intervention would soon encounter major internal obstacles of a technical and political nature. Several member states publicly distanced themselves from the decision formally adopted by ECOWAS. For some (such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin) this position was influenced by the fear that the regime and its militias in Ivory Coast would target resident nationals/migrant workers for acts of violence. Yet there were also more political economy factors at play: *"military enforcement of an electoral result could set a dangerous precedent"* in a region where the democratic nature of presidential elections leaves much to be desired (Yabi, 2012: 3). Another factor that weakened the capacity of ECOWAS to pursue a united policy response at regional level was the absence of credible means of implementing its threats. The mobilisation of the Standby Force could not be ensured for lack of financial,

³⁷ The independent press regularly exposed major instances of illicit enrichment, traffic of influence and corruption involving high officials of the régime and family members of the president.

³⁸ Examples include the food riots in 2008 or the rise of citizen movements "contre la vie chère".

logistical and human capacities as well as sufficient levels of political support within the region. Gbagbo was eventually removed from office by pro-Outtara forces, the UN and French troops (underlining the inability of ECOWAS to handle this matter autonomously).

The role and incentives of other actors

As in all regional crises, the other key player was the African Union. In this specific conflict, there was no clear alignment of positions between the continental and regional body at different phases of the process, reflecting major divisions within the AU. The position of ECOWAS to swiftly choose the side of Ouattara in the question of election results was criticised by powerful players within the AU, amongst others by former South African president Thabo Mbeki, acting as the AU mediator in the post-electoral crisis. He called for restraint and for a negotiated settlement, possibly in the form of a power sharing agreement (as he had brokered in Zimbabwe). Other voices (including President Zuma from South Africa and President Museveni of Uganda) were heard in the AU chorus to request first an investigation of the constitutional and electoral issues in the country. Yet Mbeki was soon to be replaced by Kenyan President Odinga as official broker between the two conflicting parties on behalf of the AU. Having experienced what a power-sharing agreement means in practice in his own country, Odinga advocated the idea of removing Gbagbo by force (Martins, 2011). The AU Summit in January 2011 displayed the fault lines within the AU between the group in favour of direct intervention (backed by ECOWAS and power house Nigeria) and the Southern Africa group led by South Africa and Angola (Yabi, 2012: 4). The AU would only be able to overcome this divide following a mission of an ad hoc panel of five Heads of State³⁹ in March 2011 or three months after the beginning of the post-electoral violence. A communiqué was issued by the AU endorsing the results of the run-off poll as announced by the electoral commission and certified by the UN. The AU explicitly aligned to the positions adopted since the outset by ECOWAS and the UN.

A central political economy feature of decision-making processes within the AU regarding the crisis in Ivory Coast was the rivalry between two hegemonic powers on the continent with economic clout, diplomatic influence in international circles and ambitions as global players, i.e. Nigeria and South Africa. Both countries are linked to each other through a complex web of relations that combine collaboration and competition. Building on its track record as the regional powerhouse that dominates ECOWAS and its track record in peace building, Nigeria was keen to take the lead in resolving the Ivorian crisis and profiling itself internationally as a pro-democracy force (Darracq, 2011). This explains why president Jonathan Goodluck was the key driver behind the bold and uncompromising stance of ECOWAS regarding the Ivorian crisis. At home, his position was less evident as key actors such as the Nigerian foreign affairs ministry, the business sector and voters (presidential and legislative elections were due to take place in April 2011) were less keen to engage the country in yet another conflict and (costly) military operation. On the other hand, South Africa, with its economic power, credentials as a stable democracy and an international player, also sought to play a key role in the Ivory Coast conflict. Through the AU, it tried to push forward its own views on how to resolve the conflict, based on its fairly ideological, anti-imperialist approach to foreign policy. Hence, South Africa manifested a strong opposition against external interference in sovereign processes and was sensitive to the virulent anti-French discourse of Laurent Gbagbo, also echoed by other BRICS. The conditions for a clash with Nigeria on leadership issues in conflict resolution were thus created. It is only after the unambiguously critical report of the AU ad hoc panel in March 2011 that South Africa realised that the power relations were such that it needed to align with the ECOWAS stance and those in the AU who supported direct action against Gbagbo.

³⁹ Including Aziz of Mauritania, Zuma of South Africa, Idriss Déby of Chad, Kikwete of Tanzania and Compaoré of Burkina Faso –many of whom could not really claim to have high democratic credentials.

It is also interesting to note the role played by the West African Central Bank. It blocked the transfer of funds to which Ivory Coast was entitled, amongst others in the hope to reduce the capacity of Gbagbo to continue paying the salaries of loyal military forces as well as to provide financial benefits to his domestic constituencies.⁴⁰

The role of external agencies

Considering the weight of Ivory Coast as economic giant in the region, it is not surprising that a wide range of external players sought to influence the outcome of the conflict and to politically support ECOWAS as an ally (proxy) that could help to solve the crisis. The **United Nations** was an obvious player, considering its long-standing involvement in the area as peacekeeper and formal mandate to certify the elections on behalf of the international community. While the UN mission on the ground quickly recognised the distorted election process and aligned with ECOWAS, a different ballgame developed in the Security Council. This became the arena in which several global players used the Ivorian crisis to 'fight' much wider battles. Particularly the BRICS acted as a block to impede swift decision-making and quick action. This, in turn, debilitated the overall response capacity of the African and international players involved, as contradictory messages were sent out to domestic actors and to the incumbent president who gambled that the divisions were so huge that a military intervention would not see the daylight.

France was inevitably also a major force to reckon with. Contrary to other West and Central African colonies, Ivory Coast was a 'hub' for continued French presence in the region, as reflected by a significant white settler population, the dominant position occupied by French corporations in the economy and the existence of a military base in the country. Ivory Coast was also a key part in the web of clientelist Franco-African relations. Yet the tensions between the countries got worse from 2000 onwards, particularly with Gbagbo who systematically used to accuse France of pursuing a 'neo-colonial agenda'. It ought therefore not be surprising that France swiftly aligned to the UN-ECOWAS position on the non-legitimate nature of the Gbagbo regime. It pleaded for diplomatic solutions⁴¹ and later sought to firmly embed possible French military action into the formal framework of the UN mandated peace mission (Zoumenou and Loua, 2011). This provided the necessary legitimacy to participate in a military way in the final attack against Gbagbo's besieged headquarters in the capital. Contrary to the military involvement in Libya, there was widespread approval of the French intervention.

The **United States** reacted along the lines of France by recognising Ouattara's victory, threatening Gbagbo with sanctions and refusing power-sharing deals (such as those proposed by Mbeki). The US also clearly warned ECOWAS and AU on the cost of non-alignment and the risks involved in a divided approach when it came to issue policy positions or decide on the course of action to be followed (Martins, 2011: 80). The European Union, pushed by France, was closely aligned to the positions of ECOWAS as the crisis unfolded. It issued clear political statements with regard to illegitimate seizure of power and backed the financial sanctions against Gbagbo, aimed at weakening his resolve to hold on to a military solutions and means (Giumelli, 2013).

⁴⁰ In December 2010, finance ministers of the WAEMU decided that Ouattara should get control of the Ivory Coast assets lodged in the bank. Yet the governor of the Bank -an Ivorian close to Gbagbo- found technical excuses to continue channelling funds to his 'patron'. This led WAEMU leaders meeting in Mali in January to force the governor into resigning from his job and offering Ouattara to nominate the successor. The EU was instrumental in the removal as it threatened to put the governor on the list of persons under sanctions.

⁴¹ Partly influenced by a concern to put measures in place to protect French citizens in the country.

3.3.3. The political economy of crisis management in the case of Burkina Faso

The ECOWAS response

How did ECOWAS react to the recent crisis in Burkina Faso which erupted end of October 2014? What were key political economy factors that influenced the behaviour of the institutions? To analyse this, it is useful to look at the regional responses during the various phases of the crisis.

First, it is surprising to note that ECOWAS did not intervene during the long gestation process of the crisis. Yet institutions specialised in conflict prevention such as the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) had sent out clear warnings and recommended (ISS, 2014) ECOWAS and the AU to deploy diplomatic missions with a view to call upon the authorities to respect national and regional charters as well as to broker a national consensus. Analysis suggests that there were strong reasons behind this stance:

- As a long-standing president with a track record in mediation, brokerage of political deals and peace-building, Compaoré had a regional 'status' as well as powerful friends in the region and abroad. This may help to explain why two fellow presidents, Macky Sall from Senegal and Alassane Ouattara expressed, through formal and informal channels, (veiled) forms of support for Compaoré's attempt to secure a new mandate – based on the argument that he was a major factor of stability in the region.
- Other member states did not take a position, either because they faced major serious problems at home, such as the fight against Ebola (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) or had just emerged from conflict (Mali, Guinea Bissau).
- Still other countries were confronted with the threat of a similar, imminent constitutional crisis (Togo, Benin). They obviously had an interest in adopting a low profile on the Ivory Coast case.
- Another important factor that caused ambiguity all along the process is the fact that the ECOWAS Commission was presided by a national from Burkina Faso, nominated at this post by Compaoré. This was to due to create problems of role confusion and conflicting loyalties in the prevailing informal governance culture of the region.

It should, however, be noted that a few hours before the departure and downfall of Compaoré, ECOWAS had taken note of the decision of the president to withdraw the contested constitutional reform, expressed the hope that this would allow to restore the dialogue and called upon the respect of the regional democracy rules and standards.

The second phase starts after the departure of Compaoré and the take-over by the military. At this stage, ECOWAS was able to play a more coherent and pro-active role. It reacted forcefully against possible attempts by the new military leaders to stay in power and orchestrate a flawed democratic transition (following a scenario applied elsewhere in countries such as Mauritania in a recent past). An additional incentive for ECOWAS to act swiftly was to send a clear signal to those presidents in the region that would be tempted to follow the strategies used by Compaoré. In operational terms, ECOWAS used the various instruments at its disposal, including a first joint evaluation mission of the troika (ECOWAS, AU, UN) involving the acting President of ECOWAS, conducted immediately after the fall of the regime. It was followed by a high-level mission of three Heads of State (the presidents of Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria) to broker an inclusive deal between the military and all other forces in society (the opposition parties, civil society, religious and traditional leaders). These domestic actors were united in demanding a transition period of at least a year before presidential and legislative elections would be organised – a transition to be presided over by a civilian. Pushed by this popular mobilisation, ECOWAS took a firm stance against the military in support of the handover of power to a civilian. It listened to the voice of the Burkinabe people

when the AU threatened with sanctions in case of non-withdrawal of the military. The actors in Burkina who had led the revolt massively rejected such an option and ECOWAS decided to support this position (amongst others in order to avoid imposing additional burdens on the population already severely hit by the social-economic crisis).

The role and incentives of other actors

Like ECOWAS, the African Union did not react during the rather long period that preceded the eruption of a full-fledged political crisis. This seems to have been linked to disagreements within the various AU organs as well as member states and to the ambiguous and low profile attitude adopted by ECOWAS itself. Democratic forces in Burkina and in the region reacted negatively upon the absence of a bold AU response. It confirmed the image of the AU as a 'complacent' organisation towards sitting and contested presidents.

It is only on the 3 November 2014 that the AU took an official position through the Peace and Security Council. It announced an ultimatum of 15 days to the military for a return to civilian power in the form of a consensus civilian person and threatening with sanctions in case of non-respect of the deadline. To coordinate the joint efforts of the various key regional and international actors involved, the AU designated Edem Kodjo from Togo as special envoy. Yet, also at this later stage of the process, there were divergent opinions within the AU on the position that should be adopted towards the military. While the PSC and the AU Commission were intransigent on the need to strictly apply the rules, the President of the AU (Mauritania) publicly softened this position during a mission to Burkina. This ought not surprise, as president Aziz first accessed power through a coup and then managed to be democratically elected.

WAEMU also felt the need to send a special envoy (a former Minister of Foreign Affairs from of Burkina) thus adding another layer of complexity to the process.

The role of external actors

The strategic geographic position of Burkina Faso was compounded by the diplomatic influence it exercises in the region. In two decades, president Compaoré managed to turn his country into a central 'nodal point' in the resolution of almost all conflict situations that arose. With great skills, Compaoré and his diplomats made themselves '*incontournable*' as mediators or watchdog of security issues in the Sahelian-Saharan region on behalf of foreign powers (ICG, 2013). The 2014 crisis was therefore a most critical issue for key external actors such as France and the United States – who were at risk to lose both an important ally and an African channel to solve regional conflicts.

Acting in its historic '*pré-carré*' (or 'Francafrique') the position of France was carefully scrutinised by analysts and the people in Burkina. In the run-up to the crisis, no formal positions were adopted by France, but there was little doubt that there was an implicit support for the continuation of Compaoré as Head of State as this was a reliable ally in a turbulent region, shaken up by the crisis in Mali, the rise of Boko Haram and the general insecurity in the Sahel. Yet this position could not be maintained in the light of the growing fragility of the regime, the massive mobilisations in Burkina and the growing international attention for the unfolding crisis. It led France to issue a statement just before the fall of the president basically saying that it expected Compaoré to respect the principles defined by the AU and ECOWAS charters. To soften the message and provide an alternative, France offered Compaoré the post of Secretary General of the International Organisation of the Francophony. It later on facilitated a safe departure of Compaoré and his family to Ivory Coast.

All along the process, France insisted on the need for a regular dialogue with its African partners, in particular the AU (there was clearly less trust and willingness to engage with ECOWAS in the resolution of this crisis). France aligned to the demands expressed by its African partners regarding the transfer of power to civilian authorities and the organisation of elections in a reasonable time.

This line of action was also followed by the EU (Barrios and Luengo-Cabrera, 2014) and the United States, who shared the concern for the loss of a strategic ally but had to adapt to the new political realities on the ground.

3.4. Conclusion

Both cases reveal several important insights into the way in which a regional organisation can strive to become a credible actor in securing peace and good governance standards. Applying the various political economy 'lenses', the following pointers seem relevant:

- The sheer number of crises in recent years confirms the structural fragility of the region (see section on foundational factors, Chapter 2.1). It is by definition difficult as a regional body to get engaged in security matters (Francis, 2009), yet ECOWAS has displayed a 'selective ability' for collective action to address political crises in member states (i.e. Ivory Coast). In other cases the existing institutional norms and processes did not generate a timely and credible response (i.e. Burkina Faso). This was linked to specific interests of key member states as well as to the fact that several other member states were confronted with major domestic problems that sucked away energy, capacity and incentives to actively engage in regional peace and security issues.
- The legal and institutional architecture for peace, security and governance that developed over the past two decades may not work perfectly, it has contributed over time to a "*shift in the attitudes of the regional and extra-regional actors towards unconstitutional governments*" (Zoumenou and Loua, 2011: 14). The traditional 'auto-legitimation' of coup-makers is no longer an evident thing, as there is a widespread rejection of such practices, particularly among citizens in the ECOWAS region. This is an important '*acquis*' of the regional integration process in West Africa.
- In the cases of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, it could be observed that core political institutions were key players in the creation of the conflict. In Ivory Coast, the Constitutional Court did not display minimum levels of independence and became an objective instrument in the hands of the president to legitimise his electoral '*coup d'Etat*'. In Burkina, Compaoré had no difficulties of 'summoning' parliamentarians to abide to his wish of changing (again) the constitution to formally free the way for a new mandate.
- Over the past two decades a substantial amount of programmes and resources have been dedicated to institutional and capacity development of the ECOWAS organs. Yet the overall picture remains rather sobering. There are still pervasive internal governance and managerial deficiencies all along the chain hampering delivery of concrete results. This is sharply illustrated by the major gap between the principled and bold policy decisions taken by ECOWAS during the initial phase of both reviewed conflicts and the lack of capacities and means to ensure an effective implementation of its decisions (as shown in the example of Mali).
- The crises in Ivory Coast and Burkina also clearly illustrate how the proliferation of actors with overlapping mandates as well as a specific set of interests and incentives, makes the task of defining

coherent regional responses daunting. The difficult relation between ECOWAS and the AU is a case in point, yet similar complications arise from the many external interventions. The case studies shed a light on the potential comparative advantages of ECOWAS. For instance, at this level there are less risks of being bogged down in geopolitical games (as those that unfolded in the Ivory Coast crisis within the AU or at the UN Security Council). Available analyses insist on the need for clear guidelines for a task division between the various regional, continental and global players involved. Yet the power relations are such that one should not expect rapid progress on this front.

4. The role of ECOWAS in food security

The second thematic area selected for more detailed analysis concerns food security. It is equally a critical policy domain for ECOWAS considering the acute and recurrent food crises affecting the region⁴² and the potential of agriculture for economic transformation and inclusive development. However, it should be noted that the case study does not deal with food security in an all-compassing manner. It focuses on the CAADP and the domains of the agricultural sector and agro-food industries and trade. The agenda of food security is broader, also including social safety nets, nutrition, food crisis prevention and management or resilience, which were not addressed by this case study.

Food market systems in West Africa rely heavily on cross-border trade flows between different agro-ecological zones. Recurrent climatic stress and structural trends including increasing urbanisation and the growth in non-farm sectors make intra-regional trade flows increasingly important to satisfy the consumption needs of urban centres and non-farm rural populations. West African countries are exposed to the same conditions in international agricultural markets and have similar needs to regulate trade flows between domestic and overseas markets. In addition, West African countries face similar challenges in the process of economic transformation, including low and stagnant productivity in the agricultural sector, rural poverty, the lack of employment creation, and food insecurity. Ultimately, these development problems can be attributed to similar causes, in particular governance issues in the agricultural and rural sectors. These interdependencies and common issues among ECOWAS countries justify the need for a regional approach.

The task at hand for ECOWAS is not to be the guardian of the treaties like in peace and security. On the one hand it is supposed to act as a facilitator concerned with getting the various stakeholders to agree on relevant regional policies under the framework of the AU's overarching Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Programme (CAADP). On the other hand, ECOWAS has to promote the effective implementation of these continental/regional frameworks at national level.

ECOWAS has been the first REC that was able to demonstrate early results in the uptake of CAADP. It was the first region to sign the regional compact in 2009 and it is the only region that has finalised the Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (RAIP), in 2010. The region has put in place a large number of multi-stakeholder task forces on specific themes (like food reserves and value chains) in order to identify gaps and develop investment programmes to implement the RAIP and deliver on the objectives of the ECOWAP (2005). To facilitate the implementation of the RAIP, a Regional Agency for Food and Agriculture (RAFA) and a Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food (ECOWADF) were set up.

Member states also responded to the continental programme, especially after the food crisis of 2008 that hit the region particularly hard, with food riots in four of the fourteen West African countries. Subsequently, nine countries within the ECOWAS region signed their CAADP Compacts in the final quarter of 2009 (Poulton et al., 2014).

In order to help explain the roles that ECOWAS plays and the interactions with the continental CAADP and other stakeholders this chapter looks into two cases:

- The first case looks at how the continental CAADP and the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) land at national level. It will examine how CAADP was implemented at the regional level in ECOWAS

⁴² The (revised) treaty of ECOWAS includes agriculture and food among the major areas of intervention of the REC's institutions.

and then in Burkina Faso, and how ECOWAP has been articulated with the national agricultural policy in this country and in the rice sector in particular. Both the regional agricultural policy of ECOWAS and Burkina Faso's national agricultural policy have prioritised the rice sector. As rice is both a major cash and food crop, its price is an important economic, strategic and political variable for political elites to control.

- The second case takes two important value chains – rice and livestock – into consideration and how a range of non-state actors – ranging from informal private operators to more formal private sector actors – position themselves in these sub-sectors, thereby influencing the direction and political margins of manoeuvre for regional policy choices and policy implementation in their sub-sectors, and food security more broadly.

4.1. Food security⁴³ in West Africa

Before going into the concrete case study on Burkina Faso (section 4.2) and the private sector (4.3) it is useful to briefly frame the complex and multi-dimensional policy domain of food security in the specific West African. Four major sector characteristics seem particularly relevant:

- *Food security as a pressing development and regional integration challenge.* The agricultural sector plays a key role in economic development, poverty reduction and food security in West African countries. The sector generally represents more than a third of GDP and around two-thirds of employment. It generates significant amounts of foreign export earnings. Considering the food security challenges across the continent, the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) launched in 2002 CAADP. To support the implementation of CAADP, the African Head of States pledged in 2003 through the Maputo Declaration to allocate at least 10% of national budgets to the agricultural sector (within five years). Rapid progress has been made on the CAADP process in West Africa. The West African regional institutions, the ECOWAS and the WAEMU Commissions and the CILSS (Permanent Inter-States Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel) embraced the CAADP initiative and adopted, after a consultative process, the ECOWAP (see Box 2). All this reflects a growing recognition that regional coordination is key for boosting Africa's agricultural sector. Regional integration and the development of regional agricultural markets are considered particularly vital, as most national markets in Africa are too small to attract the levels of investment required to bring transformational change to the sector. The huge impact of the 2007-2008-food crisis in West African economies further demonstrated the need to secure the food supply of ECOWAS member states and reduce their dependency on international markets.
- *A flurry of regional initiatives.* Following the 2008 food crisis, Western African regional institutions⁴⁴ have defined several programmes aimed at accelerating growth in the agricultural and food sectors. Rice has been selected as one of the strategic crops in ECOWAP/CAADP. This is reflected in the launch of a '*Regional Offensive for the Sustainable Revival of Rice Production in West Africa*', which

⁴³ Most widely accepted definition of Food Security: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit, 1996). Conceptually, food security rests on four "pillars": food availability within a territorial area, households' access to food, food utilisation (which relates to the ability of individuals to absorb nutrients in food products and other complementary factors such as access to clean water and childcare practices), and stability in food security conditions.

⁴⁴ WAEMU is an important player in this policy domain. It has developed a common agricultural policy and supports the development of value chains. Whereas ECOWAS focuses on food crops and food sovereignty WAEMU also considers cash crops like cotton, which is of high importance for several of its members. To a large extent, the initiatives of both regional bodies complement each other.

is jointly led by the ECOWAS and the WAEMU Commissions. All of the 15 ECOWAS member states have signed their CAADP Compacts,⁴⁵ developed National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs), and organised business meetings to mobilise financial resources. Out of the 15 countries, 14 have completed their financing plans; Guinea-Bissau being the exception. Thirteen member states have started to implement their NAIPs, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau being the only two countries that have not yet reached that stage. The West African regional institutions signed a '*Regional Compact*' in 2009, which was translated into a Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (RAIP) in 2010. ECOWAS is the only REC in Africa that has already started to implement its Regional Agricultural Investment Plan.

- *Structural and institutional constraints.* Several obstacles hamper the optimal utilisation of the region's agricultural potential, including limited access to inputs (improved seeds, fertiliser, modern farm equipment) and credit, lack of irrigation and major inefficiencies in domestic supply/value chains in general, high transport prices, poor infrastructure, corruption and persisting non-tariff barriers to trade, anchored mistrust preventing cooperation between countries, poor management of shared natural resources, amongst others.

Box 2: Main bottlenecks and challenges in the rice sector

- Although there have been significant productivity gains in rice production in West Africa since the 1990s, rice productivity is still significantly lower than in other regions of the world.
- Small-scale farmers, who represent the vast majority of rice producers, lack access to extension services, equipment, input and credit, and have limited opportunities to become more productive and/or diversify their production.
- The capacity and productivity of rice processing operations remains too low in many parts of the region and post-harvest losses too high, particularly where small-scale, traditional or mechanised, milling are the main technologies in use. There are very few large-scale rice millers. As a result local rice tends not to be sufficiently competitive compared with imported rice.
- The rice marketing system remains insufficiently developed and underperforming.
- There is currently limited formal/official trade in rice among West African countries, mainly due to a wide range of policy and non-tariff barriers.
- At the level of ECOWAS, local production meets less than 50% of consumption needs.
- After 2008, many West African states have strongly supported the rice sector through investments in irrigation schemes, processing and storage infrastructures, and spending on input and credit subsidies for producers (including in Burkina Faso). However, in most cases, policies and regulations discouraging effective progress in these areas remained in place (e.g. marketing activities controlled by the government, large amount of rice food aid, tax exemptions also for imported rice, etc.).

- *Need for intersectoral linkages.* Agricultural development and food security are closely linked to other policy areas. In the case of rice, this holds in particular true for *the* ECOWAS Environmental Policy (ECOWEP) and ECOWAS Water Resources Policy (PREAO). Regional Trade Policy is also a key factor for the rice sector. ECOWAS has recently established a common external tariff policy (CET), with a common tariff for rice.⁴⁶ Under the ECOWAS CET, imported rice is subject to a 10% import duty. However, countries still have sovereignty over the imposition of levies, taxes, quotas, import

⁴⁵ This includes a set of joint commitments to implement policies according to agreed-upon priorities and strategies, make investments and mobilise necessary financial resources.

⁴⁶ Before the CET, member states of WAEMU had common import tariffs among themselves but non-WAEMU West African states had different tariffs. The rice-importing countries of the UEMOA generally had lower import tariffs for rice than the Anglophone countries (Ghana, Nigeria). Nigeria, for instance, had a much higher import duty for rice than other West African countries.

ban, etc. Member countries, including Nigeria, are also allowed to continue to employ restrictive trade policies on many food and agricultural products. Experience has demonstrated that managing these linkages is not only technically complex but also politically challenging. It requires incumbent elites to ‘think and act regionally’ while their political interests tend to be primarily focused on the national level, domestic actors and short-term concerns.

- *Political factors and incentives.* There is abundant evidence about the interference of powerful ruling elites and private interests in agricultural and food security policies. These political factors tend to create a major gap between stated ambitions and actual practice. For instance: the regional agricultural policy of ECOWAS manifestly aims to tilt the balance between staple food crops and other crops in favour of the former, with the long-term goal of reaching food self-sufficiency. Yet throughout most of West Africa, much of government support to the agricultural sector traditionally has been directed to non-staple food cash crops that generate local and foreign cash earnings, which can easily be captured as rents by business and political elites (especially when state-owned enterprises are in charge of marketing and export operations).⁴⁷ Another example relates to the price of rice and other staple food commodities. These are sensitive issues for political elites. Recent research suggests that the incentives of political elites are strong “*where governments recognise they could be vulnerable to (eventual) overthrow if they do not generate broad-based benefits to [...] the poor majority*” (Poulton et al., 2014). In particular, the 2007-08 food price crisis, led to violent food riots in four West African countries (Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso). This crisis happened in the context of increasing urbanisation, with a rising proportion of non-farm households relying on markets and more prone to expressing their discontent when food prices on urban markets go up. This may explain why ECOWAS went the extra mile to revitalise the uptake of CAADP in member states (using its own funds and providing technical expertise) and why West African governments felt obliged to consider every possible short-term policy measure to mitigate the risks of further riots and conflict.

4.2. The domestication of CAADP and ECOWAP policies in Burkina Faso

4.2.1. The policy context of food security and rice in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, the agricultural sector is particularly important as it is neither endowed in significant quantities with extractable natural resources (oil, gas, minerals, etc.), except for gold, nor has it a strong manufacturing base. The importance of agriculture in Burkina Faso (in terms of value added and employment) tends to be higher than for the average West African country. Burkina Faso relies both regional and overseas imports of food to satisfy part of the food consumption needs of its population. Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the (political) economy of the country “*as a source of livelihoods for the majority of the population, of foreign exchange and of rents for the elite. There is thus some alignment of elite interests and those of the majority of the population*” (Loada, 2012).⁴⁸ This may help to explain why Burkina Faso is often praised for its agricultural performance and its capacity to mitigate ecological constraints thanks to the strong commitment of its ruling elite to promoting progressive agricultural policies and passing reforms, as shown in the cotton sector. Following the food riots in the country, ECOWAS sought to catalyse the CAADP process in Burkina Faso, meeting initial resistance as will be shown below. Rice is a key food crop in Burkina Faso, especially in urban areas. Although rice is consumed in smaller quantities compared with coastal countries, consumption has increased over time as its population has

⁴⁷ The difference between the categories of staple/non-staple with cash/subsistence is relative, as exemplified with rice.

⁴⁸ The interests of political leaders in agriculture and food security go beyond mere rents. Elites also tend to have a key interest in maintaining stability, avoiding riots and ensuring that voters (particularly in urban settings) can satisfy basic needs.

grown, household incomes have increased and dietary preferences have shifted in favour of rice, especially among the urban middle class. Burkina Faso's rice production potential is fairly good due to favourable agro-climatic conditions in several parts of the country and to a large number of farmers that are used to growing rice. Yet rice productivity is low, and compared to other West African countries, Burkina Faso is a relatively high-cost rice producer. Contrary to the main coarse grains (maize, millet and sorghum) for which Burkina Faso is close to self-sufficiency, the country is heavily dependent on international imports for rice. In order to respond to the challenges of this subsector Burkina Faso developed a '*National Rice Development Strategy*' (NRDS), as part of its agricultural and rural development policy. It aims to intensify and increase rice production, improve the quality of the final product reaching the market and strengthen stakeholder capacity in the sector.

4.2.2. Incentives, actors and interests involved in the domestication process

By definition, processes of domestication tend to be complex as they involve many steps and actors at various levels. In the case studied here, the chain involves the continental-level CAADP approach, the regional level with its ECOWAP and the national level (Burkina Faso) where agricultural policies existed before the launch of new continental and regional initiatives. The various levels in the chain are interconnected and ideally reinforce each other to achieve policy coherence, complementarity as well as an effective implementation on the ground. Yet in practice, this is not a guaranteed outcome. Continental strategies may not 'land' at regional level (because of a lack of ownership). The regional body in charge of promoting 'uptake' by member states may not adapt its facilitation work to the domestic political economy, or may not provide the right incentives – or ignore the dominant political incentives at country level – for effective domestication

Hence, the importance of applying a political economy lens to the uptake of CAADP/ECOWAP at national level by Burkina Faso in order to better understand the dynamics at work all along the chain. The analysis will focus on five core processes: (i) adopting the continental and regional policy; (ii) ensuring coherence between national and regional policies; (iii) fostering stakeholder participation; (iv) mobilising funding; and (v) ensuring action and impact on the ground.

4.2.3. Adopting the CAADP/ECOWAP framework at national level

When ECOWAS started to push for the launch and adoption of CAADP in Burkina Faso the timing was not optimal: Burkina Faso was developing its own agricultural and rural policy at the time CAADP arrived. As a result, CAADP was initially perceived as an exogenous and top-down process (Loada, 2015). There was no national ownership until the Government managed to merge the two processes in a new sectoral programme: *Programme national du secteur rural* (PNSR). The breakthrough was made possible because the document sought to combine two political logics: respect for national imperatives and agreement on the need for articulation and coherence with regional dynamics. In the Pact for the PNSR development and implementation signed in July 2010, the government committed itself to ensuring effectiveness and complementarities under the implementation of the CAADP and ECOWAP agenda. In that spirit, it also committed itself to allocate at least 10% of the national budget to the agricultural sector, a level of public agricultural expenditures that the country had already attained in the preceding years in contrast to most countries in the region. An external review of the CAADP process in Burkina Faso by NEPAD, ECOWAS, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in January 2012 generated a positive evaluation (AU, 2012).

4.2.4. Ensuring coherence between national and regional processes

Following the adoption of ECOWAP, Heads of State committed to making their national agricultural policies "coherent" with the regional agricultural policy and an action plan was established to move forward with the

implementation of the regional policy. However, as it is stated in various documents, member states should align their national policies with the regional policy. This notion of alignment of national policies with the regional policy may be misconceived as it implies a top-down approach that is not necessarily consistent with national interests and practical considerations such as the fact that in many cases national policies and programmes pre-dated the regional policy. And so expecting countries to overhaul their policies to make them fit for the regional policy in a short time span would have been somewhat unrealistic.

The regional and national rice policies' stated goals and strategies are similar (e.g., modernising farms, increasing rice productivity in a sustainable way, investing more in R&D, better managing water resources for rice production, improving quality, and generating more value added through rice value chains). However, as can be seen in the case of the rice sector as well as other sectors, when it comes to matters of interdependencies or common issues among countries, both the national and regional policies leave out potentially contentious issues related to specialisation (according to comparative advantages) or the management of trade flows in times of (food) crisis. The NRDS seems to rely on just the regional policy of ECOWAS or the policies of other institutions (WAEMU, Niger Basin Authority, Volta Basin Authority) to resolve these issues. The NRDS leaves out transnational issues such as cross-border trade of rice and the distribution systems for inputs (seeds, fertilisers, pesticides). It seems that neither the national rice policy nor the regional rice policy provide for practical interventions and policy instruments to make regional cooperation or integration concrete. The NRDS contains no specific objective related to regional cooperation or integration except for a few vague statements alluding to regional issues.⁴⁹

The second phase of the NRDS will entail the 'implementation of legislative and regulatory instruments to protect the sector'. However, no linkage is established with the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) or the ECOWAS common external tariff (CET). A recent review of Burkina Faso's rural development strategy (*Programme National du Secteur Rural*, PNSR, which comprises the agricultural policy and also the animal resources and environment sectors) conducted by NEPAD, the ECOWAS Commission and IFPRI, it was found that the PNSR does not adequately explain its connection (or the complementarities) with the regional agricultural policy and the regional agricultural investment plan, especially for market development and intra-regional trade issues.

If the weakness of coordination structures (for instance, between a line ministry dealing with the rural sector and the ECOWAS Commission's corresponding department) has hindered the formulation of joined-up regional and national policies, this situation also reflects the lack of a strategic vision for agricultural development in the region as a whole at the level of both national governments and the regional institutions as well as of critical masses of private sector interests supporting regional interventions.⁵⁰ The Rice Offensive puts too much emphasis on production and not enough on marketing and trade. According to UEMOA, this "comparative advantages approach" towards a regional rice sector development strategy is currently under study.

Another major incoherence exists between production and trade policies, In the case of rice, for example, since the 2008 food price crisis, Burkina Faso has banned rice exports and encouraged rice imports from Asia by eliminating import duties (these measures are still in effect as of the date of this report; it is not clear whether the ECOWAS common external tariff of 10% is actually levied). In practice, a significant quantity of rice is still exported out of the country informally, reflecting the existence of vested interests in

⁴⁹ Gouvernement du Burkina Faso. *Programme national du secteur rural*. 2011-2015

⁵⁰ Blein, R., and L. Stührenberg, 2014. *Pour une approche régionale des enjeux agricoles et alimentaires en Afrique de l'Ouest? Opportunités et difficultés*. Bulletin de synthèse Souveraineté alimentaire, no. 14. Inter-réseaux Développement rural et SOS Faim Belgique.

these trade circuits. This trade policy framework does not encourage production; as on the one hand it facilitates access to cheap imported foreign rice, and on the other hand, by prohibiting national rice export, it discourages the increase in production that could increase local rice farmers incomes and resilience by growing rice as both a food and a cash crop. These trade policies, (set up during the 2007-2008 crises) are hard to change, as they benefit ruling elites, strongly related to large rice importers and big traders. In effect, this trade policy framework also fragments the regional market and the ability of ECOWAS to ensure coherence between national and regional policy frameworks.

4.2.5. Fostering stakeholder participation

The continental, regional and national policy frameworks reviewed here all insist on stakeholder participation and empowerment. Yet what does that mean in practice? What are the political economy factors that can influence the quality of stakeholder participation? The case study on Burkina's domestication of the CAADP/ECOWAP framework can serve as an illustration of the dynamics at work in real-life processes.

Over time the government of Burkina Faso has become more open to having a dialogue with the various relevant categories of non-state actors. The government has displayed an openness to participatory approaches to public policymaking. For developing the PNSR, the government based the process on the principle of multi-stakeholdership. This approach, in addition to the fact that it took some time for non-state stakeholders to learn how to effectively participate, partly explains why it took time to roll out the CAADP and the PNSR. The private sector has become better organised to participate in public private dialogues. In particular, the regional farmers organisation (ROPPA), that is 15 years old this year, has relied on advocacy and capacity-building to establish its position. It has now a 5 years strategic plan to have a greater influence on the political balance, as they have realised they must strengthen the economic aspect. To deal with the issue of politics, this plan is placing increasing emphasis on multi-actor dialogue with the politicians, farmers' organisations, private operators and development partners. This is with a view to ensuring that the funding of agriculture moves in the right direction. Civil society organisations (CSOs) still struggle with major organisational/capacity constraints and are also more often sidelined for political reasons. Donors have actively supported the engagement of non-state actors and provided critical capacity support (to be able to face powerful 'technicians'). Across the region, WAEMU has contributed to the development of inter-professional organisations. The objective is to have the whole value-chain represented at national and regional level, and not only the producers, as it is the case now. Reference can be made here to the '*Comité Interprofessionnel du Riz du Burkina*' (CIR-B), a not-for-profit association created in 2001 by professionals working in the rice sub-sector (producers, processors, retailers and carriers).

In practice, the involvement of the private sector and farmers has not always been as rigorous as in the CAADP guidelines, which promote a widely consultative and multi-stakeholder policymaking. Often they have had little say in the process (e.g., last-minute invitations to validation workshops) or the consultations produced only general, ambiguous orientations, with key decisions being taken outside the realm of these multi-stakeholders consultations. In the case of the rice sector, as for other cereals, the domestic market is dominated by handful of large commodity traders. These traders are well connected to and may influence public decision-makers and regulatory authorities on national level, leading to "on the ground" dynamics and political decisions disconnected from existing regional agreements. To some extent these traders and their trade networks are able to circumvent the barriers to trade (exports as well as imports) that are set by public authorities. In these circumstances, they can use their dominant positions to extract rents from their cross-border trading activities, both from consumers, other traders and the state (in the case of public

procurement). Rice importers are connected to ruling elites, and therefore influence policy-making to defend their interests.

4.2.6. Mobilising funding

ECOWAS is the only REC that has put a significant amount of own financial resources into the design and implementation of its regional policy and investment plan. It has established a Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food (ECOWADF), but this funding agency is not operational yet. The CAADP target of 10% of public expenditures allocated to agriculture has been reached in Burkina Faso, although this has been achieved at the cost of increased dependency on donors. The share of funds from foreign agencies reached 80% of total public expenditures in agriculture in 2008 (OECD, 2010). Compared to other countries in the sub-region, the investment effort made by the government of Burkina Faso in the agricultural sector remains weak. Investments from domestic resources are estimated at 11% of total agricultural expenditures. For comparison, the shares of expenditure financed by the state are estimated at 25% in Mali, 51% in Senegal and 59% in Benin (OECD, 2012).

Financing for the PNSR is supposed to come from four major groups of stakeholders: the State, the territorial authorities, technical and financial partners, and the private sector. It is expected that about a third of the PNSR will be financed by domestic resources. This seems unrealistic considering prevailing political economy realities) the development of the PNSR required the establishment of a common basket funded by donors of about 1bn CFAF). The significant budget allocations made in recent years to support national rice production will be continued and increased. Critics say that the Government should also rely on institutional reforms and fiscal incentives to incentivise private sector investment in the rice sub-sector and strengthen its support (through subsidies) for R&D activities.

4.2.7. Ensuring action and impact on the ground

It is early days to analyse the concrete effects of all these processes and strategies, particularly in the case of the rice sector. Yet based on field observations and interviews, it appears that the CAADP/ECOWAP frameworks have '*landed*' to some extent and are creating a promising dynamic at national level. A broad range of stakeholders view the '*Rice Offensive*' as a positive evolution.

However, moving from policy to concrete action will be challenging. At the regional level, it seems that the only concrete measures taken in the rice sector in the past years come from the WAEMU (with financing from its '*Fonds régional de développement agricole*').⁵¹ ECOWAS has put in place a number of multi-stakeholder task forces on specific themes (e.g. regional food reserves and value chains) to speed up implementation of regional plans. With the same purpose in mind, specific Committees have been created and it has been decided to set up a '*Regional Agency for Food and Agriculture*' (RAFA) as well as a '*Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food*' (ECOWADF). Considering the track record of institutional development in the region it is to be feared that these new agencies and structures will lack clear mandates as well as sufficient amounts of (high-quality) staff and resources to operate effectively. Perhaps not surprisingly considering the political economy constraints mentioned above, there seems to be no regular forum for consultation and coordination among member states for the joint and coherent implementation of national/regional rice strategies – despite the critical importance of such a mechanism in terms of forging collective action.

⁵¹ They include feasibility studies for regional-level investments in the rice sector; development of irrigated lowlands in WAEMU countries with a strong rice production potential (including in Burkina Faso); research for improved seeds and replication; signing of a MOU with in cooperation with AfricaRice to develop the production of improved rice seeds and support national agricultural research systems; support to rice farmers organisations and the '*interprofession*' (platform convening all actors of the rice supply chain).

The ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS), the Common External Tariff (CET) and the regional food reserve are important achievements under the regional trade policy and ECOWAP/CAADP, although their implementation is still somewhat ineffective or has not begun yet. There has also been an important regional governance effort concerning the harmonisation of regulations for seeds (including for rice), pesticides and fertilisers, underpinned by agreements in WAEMU and ECOWAS. Yet these various policies are not easily implemented at national level, including in Burkina Faso. Informal non-tariff barriers to trade and lack of policy enforcement at national level remain in place and govern the dynamics on the ground (e.g. the difficulties to trade rice seeds in the region).

4.2.8. Case study conclusion: How can ECOWAS be a vehicle for regional integration of agricultural markets

The ECOWAS Commission has the proven institutional capacity and political leadership to lead regional agricultural policy processes, convene public sector, private sector and civil society actors to carry out multi-stakeholder consultations, and produce sound regional policies and regulations. It has been able to commit significant own financial resources to support those processes although it still relies heavily on international donors. Notwithstanding this “bureaucratic” capacity, and besides some real capacity issues to manage implementation, the ECOWAS Commission has little power and incentives to implement the ECOWAP/CAADP and other regional policies/agreements affecting the agricultural sector (for instance, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, ETLS).

ECOWAS member states, although they have usually displayed willingness to cooperate, in particular on agricultural development and food security issues when the 2008 food price crisis threatened the entire region, in reality have remained narrowly focused on national interests (often under the banner of “food sovereignty”) and reluctant to transfer decision-making power to the Commission for collective action. That is most likely a major reason why ECOWAS has been unable to adopt a coherent vision for agricultural development (including in terms of comparative advantages across countries and market integration, and also in terms of coherent regional policies across departments, notably agriculture, industry, trade and infrastructure); implement regional policies; stir countries towards a harmonisation of national policies; make regional investments; and enforce the application by countries of regional agreements/rules (for example, the Common External Tariff for agro-food goods, SPS regulations and other non-tariff measures within the regional market). In some cases, the effectiveness of the regional approach is further undermined by diverging interests among member states (for instance, Nigeria vs. francophone/WAEMU states in the rice sector; and Sahel countries vs. coastal countries in the livestock sector).

CAADP bolstered the involvement of private sector actors in policy processes at the country and regional levels, especially farmers’ organisations. The private sector along the whole value chain (also including also processors, traders and retailers) remains insufficiently organised to defend its interests and enable collective action, especially at the regional level. The diverging interests between importers of staple food commodities (notably rice)--who constitute powerful oligopolies, have a strong influence on the political elite and extract rents from constrained local production capacities and segmented regional markets and local producers (farmers and other operators), who are more atomised, further undermine regional-level action to support local and regional agro-food value chain development. By supporting public-private partnerships, federating the interests of local producers and other value chains operators regionally, with a gender sensitive approach, ECOWAS could generate increased support for strategic agro-food sectors.

WAEMU institutions remain relevant for regional cooperation for agricultural development and food security. The WAEMU Commission is effective in mobilising actors and resources in specific sectors (for instance, in the rice sector), in promoting collective action among francophone countries and balancing

interests between the latter and regional powers like Nigeria. However, the issue of overlapping mandates and duplication of efforts remain although the ECOWAS and WAEMU institutions apparently work in good collaboration. As with the WAEMU common agricultural policy, which provided a basis for the ECOWAP, ECOWAS can continue to exploit common interests and complementary competences, so as to gradually integrate both frameworks, like the CET for example and perhaps, in the future, multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships around “strategic agro-food value chains”.

The ECOWAP has provided a rallying point for donors to share information, align and harmonise development assistance around regional strategies. A formal regional agricultural Donor Working Group (DWG), which includes ECOWAS Commission staff, was set up to support the implementation of programmes under ECOWAP/CAADP. Nonetheless, because development partner representations are often spread across ECOWAS countries, information exchange between the national and regional levels is still fragmented. Moreover, donors still have in West Africa important bilateral projects and interventions related to their areas of expertise and own interests. Donor harmonization still remains a challenge.

4.3. Regional food security and the private sector – the case of rice and livestock

This second case study analyses how the private sector operates and organises after 2000, in two important value chains for food security and agricultural development, i.e. livestock and rice, in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. This provides insights into how and why sector actors may engage with national and regional level governance systems. And it may also help understand the interactions between the private sector and the ECOWAS Commission in terms of related policy processes to food security and agricultural production in West Africa.

The case study will zoom in on the following questions: what can realistically be expected from the growing set of private sector networks and organisations that engage in regional policy processes on these matters? How much space is there in these regional arenas for an effective role of private sector actors? Who are these actors? How have they positioned, structured and organised themselves to influence policy processes at national and regional level? How much bargaining power and capacity for collective action do they display?

4.3.1. Overall policy and actor context

The first step in the analysis is to take stock of changes in the policy context and in the arena of private sector actors that claim a role in regional policy processes. Regarding the policy context, the main change is the appearance of a *regional and continental agenda* on agricultural and food security policies from 2000 onwards. Before that period such policies were strictly confined to the national level. The shift is reflected in a set of continental and regional strategies and initiatives, such as the Agricultural Policy of WAEMU (2000) followed by CAADP/ECOWAP (2005) and related regional and national investment plans. On the commercial front, the perspective of changing the commercial regime between the EU and ECOWAS induced by the EPA negotiations, has generated tensions, with the EU and within ECOWAS region, but has also contributed to increase the focus on the coherence of the regional process, including the move towards a customs union based on a Common External Tariff.

In the wake of these emerging regional agendas, the arena of private sector actors also expanded. At national level, producers’ organisations got formal recognition a long time ago, and became increasingly structured into representative organisations/platforms. At a regional level various networks emerged representing producers at a generic level or in specialised niches. They are recognised by ECOWAS,

strongly supported by the donor community and have set up a framework for dialogue amongst them.⁵² In addition to this, several '*structures interprofessionnelles*' were created at both national and regional levels (see Box 3).

Box 3: Key private sector players in the ECOWAS region

Generic organisation representing producers: ROPPA (Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa).

Specialised networks of pastoralists and breeders: (i) the 'Réseau Bilital Marobé' (bringing together the relevant organisations from 9 Sahel and coastal countries, mainly involved in research-action and advocacy on the securisation of pastoral mobility); as well as (ii) the APESS (the Association for the promotion of livestock in the Sahel and in the Savane (representing and providing support to more than 30,000 individual members from 13 countries in West and Central Africa).

Inter-professional structures: these include: (i) the livestock oriented COFENABVI ('Confederation of National Federations of cattle-meat') in landlocked countries; (ii) UFOA (the 'Union of Organisations from the Poultry Value Chain'); and (iii) two frameworks put in place by ROPPA for specific value chains (i.e. the 'Regional Framework for Rice Producers' and a similar structure for producers of cattle-meat, still to be operationalised).

In its policy declarations and documents, ECOWAP attaches great importance to dialogue and partnerships with private sector actors considering the crucial role the latter are expected to play in regional integration processes. Yet beyond this principled position, many questions arise in relation to the wide range of private sector actors that could potentially be involved. These range from family farmers to entrepreneurial producers and agribusiness as well as their different associations⁵³ and their interests tend to diverge.⁵⁴ Hence, it is important from a political economy perspective to examine the legitimacy and representative nature of the organisations involved as well as the type of roles they are able to display in promoting regional agendas in agriculture and food security when policies, dialogue processes and value chains are still predominantly driven by national dynamics.

4.3.2. Livestock and rice: two emblematic integration challenges in West Africa

The livestock and rice value chains are highly strategic for ECOWAP due to their critical importance for agricultural production and food security.

Livestock occupies a central place in the West African economies and societies, particularly landlocked Sahel countries. This is reflected in indicators such as its share in GDP,⁵⁵ the contribution to satisfying growing demands; and employment creating effects all along the value chain. Livestock plays an important role in spatial planning and valorisation of dry zones, and is a crucial factor of regional trade and

⁵² This framework ('Cadre de concertation inter-réseaux des producteurs en Afrique de l'Ouest') was recently created in Banjul, February 2013.

⁵³ Who stands for the private sector? Family farmers? Entrepreneurial producers or actors from the agribusiness? Or the various operators intervening at different points of the value chain including in providing financing (the bank sector)? Symptomatic for this lack of clarity is that the 'Regional Pact', signed in 2009 by ECOWAS and the stakeholders of ECOWAP (member states, producers organisations, civil society, private sector, donors) was endorsed by the regional network of chambers of commerce (who are national consular bodies representing producers).

⁵⁴ Producers/organisations may be more interested in increasing access to inputs and markets, while large agribusiness actors may be more interested in creating a better environment for private investment.

⁵⁵ In Burkina Faso livestock would represent 45% of the GDP in the primary sector.

integration, resulting from the fact that the coastal areas have large deficits in livestock while the Sahel countries have a surplus.⁵⁶

The importance of rice derives from the substantial increase in consumption as a result of a growing population, household revenues and rapid urbanisation. This, in turn has led to a sharp increase in imports (representing up to 40-50% of regional consumption). It also explains why all the national plans elaborated after the food crisis in 2008 for redressing the agricultural sector have created public incentives to reduce the rice deficit, enhance production and satisfy national demands. The gap between demand and supply for both animal proteins and rice is affecting negatively the trade balance of ECOWAS, showing a deficit of \$3bn dollars per year over the period 2008-2011 as a result of increased imports and higher international prices.

The regional challenges affecting each value chain are different. Both would benefit from being more embedded in a coherent and shared vision within ECOWAS. Yet the value chains in the rice sector are hardly 'regionalised', as reflected in the limited analysis of production costs or search for complementarities and the aims of achieving national self-sufficiency through increasing production and transformation. The weak regionalisation of the rice value chains is highly problematic, in particular because there is a huge potential for regional development of irrigated areas, regional storage facilities, regional infrastructure, regional markets and other integration and collaboration possibilities that are not being exploited. The stakes in the domain of rice imports remain substantial. Cartels are at work, closely associated to powerful allies at the centre of the State, making major benefits from importing rice. Even a giant like Nigeria had to recognise the power of these informal networks and adapt its policies (see Box 4 below).

Box 4: Changes in Nigeria's trade policies with a view to safeguard the effectiveness of national rice strategies

Considering the size of its internal market (170 millions inhabitants), Nigeria could theoretically be expected to 'go it alone' in organising its rice market at national level. Historically, the trade policies of Nigeria - particularly in the field of agriculture and food products - have been highly protectionist and characterised by import restrictions and/or huge custom duties. However, such policies induced trade operators in neighbouring countries (Benin, Cameroon, Niger) to specialise in the import of food products from the world market and in the re-exportation to Nigeria, making use of the gap between tariffs of the zone CFA (WAEMU and CEMAC) and official tariffs applied by Nigeria.⁵⁷

This situation forced Nigeria to gradually soften its trade policies and align them to those of neighbouring countries (without losing sight of its stated ambitions to reach food self-sufficiency). New policies were formulated to substitute imports by local production through incentives provided to invest in the national value chain. The expected outcome is that importers who are not embedded in the national value chain will pay substantially more duties than those who invest in the production and processing of local rice. This, in turn, may help to ensure more contract-based investments by big operators in the local chain. The scheme is already in place and has attracted interest, including from the Nigerian group '*Dangote Industries*', who announced a package of 1 billion US dollars to spatially plan and organise the production of rice in a zone of 150,000 ha while providing support measures to the transformation sector.

These political and financial gains from rice imports constitute an obstacle to sustainable investments by national and regional public institutions as well as private sector actors in the promotion of local rice. That's

⁵⁶ Livestock products are also key in the trade between ECOWAS, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC) and CEMAC. In principle the Common External Tariff should henceforth be applied to imports from Economic Community of Central African States Central Africa. This will not be evident considering the informal nature and non-taxed base of most trade. These trade flows are subjected to all kind of informal obstacles and corrupt practices.

⁵⁷ The military hierarchy in Nigeria has long been suspected of maintaining these protectionist policies with a view to stimulate clandestine trade that could be informally taxed by the army officials on the ground.

where the regional potential added value is twofold: (i) limiting the risks of diverging policies that would weaken national approaches (i.e. convergence of incentives, price policies, etc.); and (ii) ensuring a strong integration and coherence between rice policies, trade policies, investment policies and fiscal policies.

A different picture emerges in the livestock sector. The competitiveness of the value chains in this sector is based on integrated regional production systems. Thus, ruminant livestock rely on extensive production systems whose viability depends on mobility of cattle from the North to the South. This mobility is firmly rooted in history and tradition. It is based on natural complementarities between agro-ecological zones and on 'conventions' (i.e. informal, sophisticated arrangements) that regulate the exchanges between pastoralists and farmers. These conventions are increasingly contested as a result of climate stress, the growing competition in resources in the host areas and the integration of livestock in agricultural production systems, resulting in a rapid increase in (violent) conflicts. This competition for land use is prone to increase, given the increasing incidence of extreme weather events (especially severe droughts), because of climate change. The comparison of the severest food crises in the later history reveals that all were preceded by drought or other extreme weather events. They resulted in poor or failed harvests which in turn resulted food scarcity and high prices of the available food.

To a large extent, the trade in livestock remains organised using the traditional channels, e.g. the markets in trans border areas or close to urban centres. The export of processed products from the Sahel remains marginal. Attempts to establish contractual arrangements between livestock organisations from the Sahel and buyers from coastal zones would reduce the number of intermediaries, but has made limited progress. This reflects the continuing power of informal networks that rely on linguistic and religious bonds as well as oral contracts. It also shows a resistance of the actors involved who hold different and strong views to those who call for modernisation and professionalisation of the value chains.

Contrary to the rice sector, the future of the livestock value chain is less threatened by imports. Yet also here the focus of (coastal) countries is on developing *national* policies to achieving food self-sufficiency. These strategies are underpinned by growing scepticism on the relevance of pastoral mobility and trans border transhumance – which most of the coastal countries now see as 'archaic' practices generating conflicts and insecurity – though some of these assumptions can be questioned. Sahel countries, from their side, base their national policies on enhancing market outlets towards coastal areas as well as innovative financing mechanisms to develop the value and export chains.

The regional market offers interesting opportunities for the producers of both coastal areas and the Sahel. Yet confronted with differences in interest and strategies among coastal and Sahel countries, ECOWAS struggles to develop an integrated regional vision on the future of the sector. It is against the background of the observed dynamics and identified regional challenges of both sub-sectors and value chains, that the question of the roles and influence of private sector networks in defining how ECOWAS defines and implements its agenda becomes a highly strategic issue.

4.3.3. Actors and collective action in the rice and livestock sectors

In analysing the ability of private sector networks to influence core regional policy processes and organisations, it is useful to look at four things:

1. The nature and 'location' of the policy process.
2. Degree of structuring, organisation, representativeness and legitimacy of the various private sector actors (i.e. structures and rules of the game).

3. Why and how these organisations position themselves in the policy arena and the claims they make towards the regional level (i.e. the interests and incentives at work).
4. The existence and quality of consultative mechanisms (i.e. the processes involved).

All these aspects are critical for the credibility of organisations and their advocacy work as well as for meaningful collective action and bargaining in regional policy processes. By comparing and contrasting fundamental factors to collective action, the following observations can be made:

4.3.4. Nature of the regional value chain

This constitutes a first important conditioning factor. As explained above, livestock is by nature a largely 'regionalised' policy domain in West Africa. This is not the case with rice, where the dynamics are mainly framed and organised by 'national' strategies for food/rice self-sufficiency that almost all member states have put in place. As a result, the rice sector offers a more complex picture of networks and actors.

4.3.5. Degree of structuring

Considering the 'regional' nature of livestock issues, one might expect a relatively strong structuring in this sector. This is not (yet) happening, primarily as a result of the huge fragility of professional and inter-professional associations at national level. Their institutional weakness is logically transposed to the regional network (COFENABVI). It covers only part of the market channels and does not take into account a country like Nigeria. It does not dispose of a level of representative capacity, analytical capacity and the capacity to introduce proposals nor of the organisational clout that is commensurate with the challenges of the sector.

The 'national' focus of rice policies helps to explain why different actors of the value chain are poorly organised to act at a regional level. Only the rice producers have established a framework for consultation, the '*Cadre Régional de Concertation des Organisations de Producteurs de Riz*' (CRCOPR) within ROPPA. It brings together organisations from 13 countries, yet again without Nigeria. It positions itself as policy interlocutor of regional organisations and privileges support to producers and member organisations.

The economic operators – such as Dangote Industries or Olam - intervene in several countries but have not yet developed an explicit regional strategy. They equally follow the national approach and structure the value chain in a national vision of the functioning of markets (national production for national demand, without considering the possibilities of regional trade). The commercial operators are also not organised at regional level. With regard to the importers, only some major operators are organised at national level. There is no regional organisation where they can join forces. During the food crisis, ECOWAS had envisaged the creation of some sort of a cartel of importers to increase the negotiating capacity of contracts on the international markets. Yet this failed due to heterogeneity in consumer preferences (rice quality and origin), and (informal) characteristics of the rice sector such as privileged relations between exporting and importing countries or between national importers and political elites/public institutions.

4.3.6. Diversity of interests and positions

A third interlinked factor that influences the behaviour and actions of private sector actors in regional bargaining processes is the whole question of interests and incentives.

In the livestock area, the positioning strategies and specific demands of the private sector organisations towards the regional level are quite diverse, reflecting different ideological, policy and financial consideration on what regional approaches should look like. The inter-professional poultry organisation UFOA pleads for a defiscalisation of imported inputs for cattle food production (e.g. maize). The livestock

network COFENABVI focuses on the modernisation of infrastructure, more fluid intra-Community trade flows, the ‘construction’ of a regional space of health safety, growing contractualisation and better training. The regional networks of producers are defending largely similar agendas. APSS (who represents mainly sedentary or semi-sedentary actors) recognises the need for major adaptations in the livestock sector with a view to accommodate structural mutations (such as the growing pressure on resources or climate change). Yet the ‘Réseau Bilital Maroobé’ of pastoralists chooses for a more “conservative” position. It rather seeks to safeguard the securisation of trans-border transhumances, reduce the numerous formal and informal taxes pastoralists have to pay when moving their cattle and focus instead on negotiating mutually beneficial deals with local actors in the areas where their stocks reside temporarily.

In the rice sector, it can be noted that the consultative framework of rice producers (CRCOPR) hardly insists on the regional dimensions in the value chain policies, including the question of required convergences and complementarities. It de facto aligns to the national visions for the future of the sector.

Box 5: The rice producers and collective action around the Common External Tariff (CET)

For a long time, the rice producers have advocated – with the support of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - for high tariff levels (a tariff band of 50%), but lost that battle with the adoption of the Common External Tariff, CET (10% band, equal to that prevailing in WAEMU). The final arbitration by member states and ECOWAS on how to deal with rice in the CET illustrates well the respective weight given to two key policy objectives, which are often perceived to be contradictory: (i) protect local value chains and support to providing producers a good price to enhance overall production; and (ii) improve access of (urban) populations (and electoral constituencies) to cheap rice. The producer network tried to measure the impact of the level of protection retained. Yet the study did not yield sufficiently solid material for an advocacy campaign. Since then it concentrates on technical questions (e.g. access to inputs and finance).

Considering that its members are focused on national policies, the activities at regional level mainly consist of networking, sharing lessons and good practices or providing inputs into the ECOWAS ‘Rice Offensive’ policy process. When applying this lens to Nigeria, it appears that most economic actors subscribe to the vision of the federal government centred on national self-sufficiency. But they disagree amongst each other on how to achieve this (e.g. by imposing high tariffs, by liberalising imports so as to reduce illegal imports or by providing incentives to importers to invest in the local rice chain).

4.3.7. Mechanisms for dialogue and bargaining

ECOWAS has set up a number of institutional mechanisms at the level of ECOWAP and in relation to trade policies. Regarding ECOWAP, two types of mechanisms are to be distinguished: (i) a set of thematic Task Forces dealing with the preparation of technical dossiers for consideration by the regional authorities (at different levels according to the importance of the issue; and (ii) a political structure (‘Consultative Committee for Agriculture and Food’) which embodies the principle of a multi-actor partnership underpinning ECOWAP.

While the livestock networks may participate in the technical task forces, they are not formal members of the Consultative Committee (though they may occasionally be invited to sessions). The regional networks of rice producers participate in both the technical Task Forces set up by ECOWAS. They are also formal members of the political body, i.e. the Consultative Framework for Agriculture and Food.

4.3.8. The lack of regional level leverage – Key case conclusions

The ECOWAS mandate, means and institutional arrangements in the sector of agriculture and food security are such that it can seek to cooperate with member states rather than promote integration policies

through an empowered Commission. It is symptomatic that ECOWAS remains highly dependent on donor funding to implement the regional programmes, despite its capacity to mobilise financing from its member states beyond the capacities of any of the other RECs. It had set aside US\$150 million from its own reserves for the implementation of the Regional Partnership Pact, yet most of this money could not be spent because other competing demands (e.g. Mali, Ebola) were prioritised.

Despite the fact that the continental CAADP and the regional ECOWAP provide the formal institutional space and framework for forming and promoting regional value chains, the case analysed in this section highlights:

- Both cases point to the importance of structural and foundational factors in national and regional dynamics. In the case of Burkina Faso, the fact that it is landlocked and a Sahelian country that is heavily dependent on imported rice creates a vulnerability and political sensitivity by its political leaders to particular aspects affecting political incumbency and food security. The comparative case of livestock and rice value chains in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, explores these structural features further, pointing to the strong historically grown eco-agrological relationships in the regional livestock sub-sector in Burkina, and how this fundamentally differs from neighbouring Nigeria, where there is a stronger mix of powerful interest groups and a broader range of options in terms of promoting food security. The Burkina case, furthermore, points to the nature of the domestic political incentives behind agricultural and food security policies, as well as to the dangers of working at cross-purpose with externally driven regional and continental food security programmes. This has been the case at the inception of the CAADP process in Burkina Faso, and to a certain extent also in Nigeria.⁵⁸ These diverging national interests in food security in Nigeria and Burkina Faso create different types of member state pressures or commitment to regional efforts in support of CAADP and ECOWAP.
- The comparison of the rice and livestock sub-sectors in Nigeria and Burkina Faso help highlight the different political economy features in the formal and informal institutions, the state and non-state stakeholders, their interests and the power and influence some of these groups or coalitions can exert. These features differ according to value chain and according to the place of these actors in the in the value chains. Informal trade is rife in both sectors, but it is an all-pervasive feature in the livestock subsector, that cannot be wished away by regional integration or “modernisation” efforts. Regional livestock has a long history, with strong geographic, socio-cultural and eco-agricultural grounds that profoundly affect the context in which regional organisations operate. The case starts to unpack these characteristics and list some of the stakeholders by way of illustration, but it is clear that the dimensions of culture, customs, belief and ethnicity are still insufficiently factored in.
- Beyond the institutional aspects, both narrowly defined value chains clearly demonstrate the complex range of different interests and the lack of a cohesive group pushing for one or other form of regional cooperation or integration. The national interests between the two neighbours differ substantially in terms of the political incentives and support behind food security, affecting the potential for regional collective action or the creation of regional public goods in these sub-sectors. Donor support seemingly has prioritised so far formal players and processes, with a danger of ignoring - the often hidden - losers from particular policies, including women smallholders.

⁵⁸ See also the case of the AU, part of the broader study.

5. Final conclusions

A number of conclusions and related implications can be derived from the analysis and the key findings of the ECOWAS and the peace and security and food security studies. They highlight the importance of considering political economy factors when trying to explain the gap between ECOWAS aspirations and actual practice or when designing donor support strategies to regional integration processes. The five lenses of a political economy approach, applied in this study, have shown their relevance in the case of ECOWAS.

5.1. Key findings

In this logic, a first observation is that the impact of foundational factors – linked to historical trajectories, colonisation by different European powers, geography and natural endowments or demography – is still very strong in West African regional integration dynamics. Most countries in the region remain fragile states with limited social cohesion, common sense of identity or shared development vision. Inequalities are growing, increasing the chance of conflicts around access to resources and land. These material conditions are the source of the chronic instability of the region as well as the generally poor levels of governance to be observed across the board. They also explain why over time peace and security became the core business of ECOWAS, as member states had a strong incentive to organise themselves to prevent the regionalisation of wars and conflicts and related collateral damage.

Furthermore, political elites operating in such an environment tend to display a short-term, opportunistic approach to policy-making, fundamentally anchored on the pursuit of national interests. The traction and incentives to invest in medium-term, development-oriented regional processes through ECOWAS are correspondingly low. As a result, the gap between formal commitments to regional integration and actual progress (in all policy domains) is often huge. A case in point is the limited political capacity of ECOWAS to formulate and help implement a formalised set of regional policies on agricultural development and food security. This is linked to deep-rooted ‘regionalisation dynamics’ pushed forward by state and non-state actors (operating through informal channels and networks) that challenge state territorial control and regional policies alike. In West Africa, ‘regionalisation’ seems to have the upper hand compared to state-centric ‘regionalism’.

In its 40 years of existence, ECOWAS has built up a substantial set of formal institutions, organs, norms, processes and systems to foster regional integration. In peace and security matters, the architecture looks quite impressive and acted as a source of inspiration for the AU/APSA. In various sectors, attempts are made to strengthen the institutional links between the regional body and member states. ECOWAS is the only REC that was able to formally establish a Community levy, enhancing its scope for autonomous action. Specialised agencies are set-up to facilitate implementation in various policy domains (e.g. agriculture and food security, gender). Yet this report provides evidence on the dominance of informal rules in West African regional integration dynamics.

Despite successive treaty revisions and the creation of a Commission, the prevailing mode of governance remains almost entirely intergovernmental. In some cases, ECOWAS has been able to effectively activate the progressive norms contained in its two core protocols on peace & security and governance (e.g. Ivory Coast, 2010-2011). In other cases, the configuration of power relations and interests was such that a timely response to a major political crisis was not offered (e.g. Burkina Faso, 2014). Despite adequate policy frameworks (CAADP, ECOWAP) and the commitment of own resources, ECOWAS has limited power and incentives to provide in view of fostering effective implementation. Solid compliance and accountability

mechanisms are missing, as exemplified in the political economy of the budget process or the lack of enforcement of the ECOWAS Court decisions. These flaws are not primarily linked to capacity issues. They reflect the existence of powers that have a vested interest in allowing many 'grey zones' and space for *ad hoc* approaches to decision-making, resource allocation and accountability provision. All this is not to say that collective action is not taking place. Yet when it occurs it does not tend to follow formalized rules and procedures. For instance, ECOWAS seeks to foster compliance in an indirect manner, through soft mechanisms of dialogue and persuasion. Furthermore, the rules of the game are not static. There are examples of gradually 'shifting norms' in a positive direction. A case in point is the attitude of regional actors and citizens regarding unconstitutional changes of government. Over time, a culture of rejection of such practices has developed, also within the ECOWAS Commission.

The political economy lens also helps to make sense of the actors and drivers behind regional integration processes. ECOWAS has made considerable efforts to promote participatory modes of governance, associating private sector and civil society actors to the regional construct. The web of actors linked to ECOWAS has effectively been broadened, resulting in positive effects (e.g. the role of gender organisations in peace and security issues or in the inputs of civil society organisations on building the good governance agenda). Commitments have also been made to evolve from an "*ECOWAS of States*" to an "*ECOWAS of people*". While these evolutions seem promising, the political economy analysis shows clearly that the Heads of State (often acting as individuals rather than as representatives of a political system) call the tune. As in some other RECs, there is a 'hegemon' (i.e. Nigeria) that has been a key driver of regional integration processes in particular areas (such as peace and security), though its leadership and dominance should not be exaggerated (considering the power of regionalisation dynamics beyond state control and its own growing internal weaknesses). Other member states display so many features of fragility that their inputs in state-centric cooperation/integration process are inevitably weak if not insignificant.

Despite a stronger structuration of private sector and civil society organisations at regional level, their bargaining power and capacity to act and influence core regional policies in a coherent and effective manner remain limited. This is closely linked to diverging interests between actors artificially put together in a container concept such as 'the regional private sector'. Reference can be made to the diverging interests between importers of staple food commodities (notably rice) and local producers (farmers and operators). The first constitute powerful oligopolies, have a strong influence on the political elite and extract rents from constrained local production capacities and segmented regional markets. The latter are more fragmented, but both categories of actors further undermine regional-level action to support local and regional agro-food value chain development. The co-existence of ECOWAS with WAEMU is a clear sign that a 'single' regional body may not be the appropriate way forward for West Africa. A multi-layered pattern of regional frameworks allows for more coherent forms of interest articulation of the various actors. Examples include the monetary union around the CFA in the francophone member states or the complementary roles played by ECOWAS and WAEMU in agriculture and food security.

The report also confirms that political economy conditions and related capacity for meaningful regional action tend to vary greatly according to sectors and even sub-sectors of intervention. In peace and security, coalitions were possible between 'willing' member states (individual Heads of State) and the Commission, to effectively apply the regional arsenal of norms and tools, even if this implied entering into the troubled waters of interfering in sovereign affairs. In the agricultural domain the regional trigger proved less powerful to define a coherent and shared vision (e.g. on the future of the livestock sector in a rapidly evolving regional context and situation of growing climate stress), provide powerful incentives to member states to implement CAADP/ECOWAS plans (see Burkina Faso case) or effectively challenge the predominantly

national focus on policy-makers (e.g. rice sector). This huge diversity of political economy situations calls for a much more down-to-earth and tailored approach to promoting regional integration dynamics, according to prevailing windows of opportunities (however small they may be).

The political economy analysis also requires a consideration of external factors that shape policy and institutional development processes. In West Africa, the external influence on the regional integration process is huge, firmly engrained in history (see ongoing presence of France) and multi-dimensional (as illustrated by the proliferation of actors involved in the conflict in Mali or the growing influence of China or Arab funding). It is generally based on a mixture of collaboration, competition and conflict – as illustrated in the evolving relation between ECOWAS and the AU and related search for relevant forms of task division). In such a crowded arena, it is not evident for ECOWAS to carve out its own space and deliver added value. The EU has been a key player, fostering major changes in trade policies (through the EPA) and acting as a main donor (the envelope for the regional indicative programme of the 11th EDF for a six year period has grown substantially to attain 1.15 billion euro).

Despite the existence of own resources, levels of aid dependency are high, particularly for regional programmes. These are exacerbated by the lack of commitment of member states to pay contributions and to collect the levy. In the agricultural domain, donors are committed to share information, align and harmonise development assistance around regional strategies. Nonetheless, because development partner representations are often spread across ECOWAS countries, information exchange between the national and regional levels is rather fragmented. Moreover, donors in West Africa still have important bilateral projects and interventions related to their areas of expertise and own interests. Donor harmonisation still remains a challenge. Beyond traditional issues of coordination, this study suggests the main challenge for donors is to align much closer to the real political economy dynamics prevailing in given sector or policy areas. Despite improved analysis and available evaluations, donor efforts are predominantly tilted towards formal players and processes. The implementation approaches followed to supporting regional integration tend to pay insufficient attention to critical dimensions such as interests and incentives, winners and losers, or concrete windows of opportunities for progressive and incremental reform – with the resulting risk of reduced impact and sustainability.

5.2. Implications

These findings carry important implications for stakeholders interested in closing the implementation gap and building more effective forms of regional cooperation through ECOWAS. Key aspects for consideration relate to the level of ambition of future policies, appropriate sectors or policy areas for action, and selection of partners and stakeholders in programme design and implementation:

- Several structural factors continue to have a major influence on current dynamics and institutions. These need to be properly recognised and incorporated in the design of realistic support strategies. For instance, the co-existence of ECOWAS and WAEMU is an illustration of the various historical trajectories of the countries. Grand schemes aimed at merging the two bodies or working out a rational division of labour are likely to encounter major difficulties. The evolution and relevance of both structures will depend on the policy issue at stake and related capacity of the regional bodies involved to generate collective action.
- The cases addressed in this study indicate that the set of incentives and capacity for meaningful regional action tend to vary greatly according to sectors and even sub-sectors of intervention. In peace and security, coalitions were possible between ‘willing’ member states (generally individual

Heads of State) and the Commission. This facilitated application of the existing regional arsenal of norms and tools. In the agricultural domain, the regional trigger proved less powerful to defining a shared vision, providing powerful incentives to member states to implement CAADP/ECOWAS plans or challenging the predominantly national focus on policy-makers. This huge diversity of political economy contexts calls for a much more down-to-earth and tailored approach to promoting regional integration dynamics. It also implies making use of critical junctures while diversifying the possible 'entry points' for regional action (sometimes smaller informal alliances of member states or specialised regional structures are better conducts to get political traction and action).

- While there is space for multi-actor approaches to regional policy formulation and implementation, there are also constraints hampering the ability of non-state actors to play a positive role as 'norm entrepreneurs' or 'drivers' of regional integration agendas. Beyond major challenges of capacity, organisation and funding, regional networks may end up being 'too close for comfort' (this danger of co-optation stems from the deeper nature of state-society relations in the region, often characterised by dependency and clientelist relationships). Yet one should avoid over-simplifications. 'Regional' actors can be identified in different policy domains that are acting on principles and beliefs about regional identity. With targeted institutional support they could be further enabled to demand specific regional reforms 'from below' through coalitions sharing similar interests.
- The study shows how ECOWAS is often not performing its role according to a clear set of formal, transparent and institutionalised rules respected by all. The Commission rather follows an *ad hoc* path, looking for windows of opportunities to play the role of an informal broker or foster compliance, in close alliance with 'willing' or 'reformist' states and through 'soft mechanisms' of dialogue and persuasion. Future institutional support programmes could try to strengthen formal and informal interfaces, dialogue mechanisms and coordination structures with member states as well as with the AU at different levels (as a key condition for more effective collective action). They could also seek to further enable ECOWAS in its role as a credible and accountable broker—equipped with the necessary political intelligence to know when and how it can usefully intervene.
- The external influence on the regional integration process is huge, firmly engrained in history and reflected in a proliferation of external actors often intervening at cross-purposes. In such a crowded arena, it is not easy for ECOWAS to carve out its own space and deliver added value (including towards the AU). Despite the existence of own resources, levels of aid dependency are high, particularly for regional programmes. The main challenge for donors is to align much closer to the real political economy dynamics prevailing in a given sector or policy area (linked to power relations, incentives and interests) rather than towards formal players and processes.

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Annex 1: List of interviews

Institution	Department	Name	Function
Ministry of Agriculture (Burkina Faso)		Pascal ILBOUDO	Permanent Secretary for the coordination of agricultural sectoral policies (SP/CPSA)
West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)	Department for Food Security, Agriculture, Mines and Environment (DSAME)	Gilbert ZONGO	Officer for Agriculture
West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)	Department for Food Security, Agriculture, Mines and Environment (DSAME)	Seyni HAMADOU	Director for Agriculture
Comité Interprofessionnel du Riz du Burkina (CIR-B)		Bikienga BOUKARE	Executive Secretary
Réseau des organisations paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA)		Ousséini OUEDRAOGO	Executive Secretary
		Kalilou SYLLA	Former Executive Secretary
Union Conannet des Étuveuses de Riz de Bagré (UCERB) (Bagré, Burkina Faso)		Mariam NANA	President
Réseau Ouest Africain des Céréaliéristes (ROAC)		Charles NOUATIN	Executive Secretary (former executive at the Commission of the WAEMU)
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Col. Maiga SEIDOU	Chief of Staff for the ECOWAS Standby Force
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	DCP Charles TOKOR	Police Component
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Alice BALLAH-CONTEH	Civilian Component
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Col. Klaus REINECKE	German Military Adviser to ECOWAS
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Cmdr John TULLY	US Military Adviser to ECOWAS
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Col Charles LOIC	French Military Adviser to ECOWAS
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Oluwafisan BANKALE	Programme Officer: Communication and Advocacy – Small Arms
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Dr Sani ADAMU	Coordinator
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Dieudonné NIKIEMA	Manager ECOWAS Peace Fund/Capacity Building Specialist

ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Sampson EYEKOSI	Lieutenant Colonel
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security	Dr. Cyriaque PAWOU MOTOM AGNEKETHOM	Directeur Regional Security
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Peacekeeping and Regional Security, and Political Affairs	Richard BALIMA	Principal Accountant/Head of Finance Division
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Political Affairs	Dr Remi AJIBEWA	Director
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Political Affairs	Maimuna KONATE	Head of Division Political Affairs and International Cooperation
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Political Affairs	Sorou Francis Gabriel OKE	Head Election Division
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Political Affairs	Dr. Jonas HEMOU	Director External Relations
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Early Warning and Monitoring Centre	Dr Lat GAYE	Director
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Early Warning and Monitoring Centre	Nanténé COULIBALY	Analyst
ECOWAS Commission (Abuja)	Department of Social Affairs and Gender	Dr Bolanle ADETOUN	Policy Officer on Gender
Institute for Peace & Conflict Resolution Nigeria		Prof. O. OSHITA	Director General
EU Delegation in Nigeria		Richard YOUNG	Deputy Head of Delegation
Comité Interprofessionnel du Riz du Burkina Faso (CIR-B)		Léonce BERTHE	President
Réseau Ouest Africain des Céréaliers (ROAC)		Soumaïla SANOU	President
Union des Groupements Céréaliers de la Boucle du Mouhoun (UGCPA)		Soumabéré DIOMA	Executive Secretary
NEPAD Nigeria Office		Sunday UHIENE	Economic Affairs & CAADP
Réseau des éleveurs et pasteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (Bilital Maroobé)		Blamah JALLOH	
Association des pasteurs éleveurs du Sahel et de la Savane (APESS)		Ousmane BA	Vice-President
Association des pasteurs éleveurs du Sahel et de la Savane (APESS)		Ibrahima ALIOU	Secretary General
Institute for research and application of development methods (IRAM)		Bernard BONNET	Expert pastoralism
World Bank		René BESSIN	

Hub Rural		Yamar MBODJ	Executive Director for Western and Central Africa
Cadre Régional de concertation des organisations de producteurs de riz du ROPPA		Aurélien LAKOUSSAN	
Cadre Régional de concertation des organisations de producteurs de riz du ROPPA		Ousseini OUEDRAOGO	
ECOWAS Commission	Agriculture	Alain SY	Director
COFENABVI		Roger Félix BONI	
LARES (Benin)		Bio Goura SOULE	Expert
OSIRIZ / CIRAD		Patricio MENDEZ DEL VILLAR	

The research also drew on interviews with private sector actors and European development partners held for previous projects.

This study is being carried out with support from Swedish development cooperation. The project is the sole owner of the production, and the publisher is responsible for the content



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