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**Fostering free movement of persons in West Africa: achievements, pitfalls and prospects for intra-regional migration.**

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**Abstract**

Migration in West Africa is strongly influenced by poverty, depressed economies and socio-political crises. The influx of migrants into the cities and irregular migrations across national borders in search of decent living conditions reflect a crisis of development. To understand the dynamics of these diverse migrations, we focus on causes, and changing configurations of emerging migratory flows; autonomous female migration, trafficking in women and children; intra-regional migration as alternatives to "illegal" migration to the North; progress and constraints in creating a borderless sub-region and fostering intra-regional migration.

The abolition of the mandatory residency permit; introduction of Brown Card travel certificates and the elimination of the ubiquitous border formalities are aimed at facilitating intra-regional movements of persons. Progress was constrained by multiple cooperation groupings and memberships; conflicting objectives; inconsistent political support; growing national identity; depressed economies and xenophobia against 'foreigners'. We suggest that governments should align national employment laws with regional treaties; protect the rights of migrant workers; promote pro-poor employment strategies; adopt variable speed approach in implementing migration policies; and enforce migrants' right of residence and establishment.

# 1. Introduction

This paper sketches the patterns and major trends of migration in West Africa, with a focus on the socio-economic conditions in the sub-region that gave rise to these migratory configurations. To understand the dynamics of these diverse migrations, we focus on causes, and changing configurations of emerging migratory flows; autonomous female migration, trafficking in women and children; intra-regional migration as alternatives to "illegal" migration to the North; progress and constraints in creating a borderless sub-region and fostering intra-regional migration. It then outlines the path to the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the practical aspects of the implementation of the protocol on free movement of persons, and the delays with respect to the protocol on establishment and settlement. Attention is also focused on the achievements and constraints in implementing the protocol on free movement of persons, as well as recent attempts to create a borderless sub-region. The lessons learnt form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations of the paper.

# 2. Motivations for migrating

Migration is historically a way of life in West Africa. Over the generations, people have migrated in response to demographic, economic, political and related factors: population pressure, environmental disasters, poor economic conditions, conflicts and the effects of macro-economic adjustment programmes.

In the past, population movements to restore ecological balance and for greater security prevailed over wide areas and migrants have always considered the West African sub-region as an economic unit within which trade in goods and services flowed. Today, intra and inter-country movements continue to be a central feature of African life. In general, migrants from and within the sub-region include temporary cross-border workers, professionals, clandestine workers and refugees. Much of the movement has been intra-regional (mainly from the northern zones to the coastal regions), short term, male dominated and over long distances.

In recent times, clandestine migrations have been sustained by poverty and human deprivation, and the deterioration of the well being of the vast majority of the population. Poverty has become both widespread and intense and the proportion of the population living in abject poverty is on the increase. Rural to urban migration has intensified, as landless farm labourers, deprived of the means to improve their living conditions, are pressured to abandon work and life in the rural areas and to emigrate in search of wage labour in the urban areas. In recent years, macro-economic adjustment measures and huge increases in the number of entrants into the labour market have fuelled the job crisis, creating a sustained pressure for labour emigration. In the Sahel, in particular, desertification and cyclical famines have triggered waves of environmentally displaced persons across national frontiers within the sub-region.

As the economic situation continues to deteriorate rapidly, the pressure to emigrate is at its height. The retrenchment of public sector workers in several countries of the sub-region (Senegal, Togo, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria), the stressful socio-economic environment coupled with declining real incomes contributed to the sustained exodus of both skilled and unskilled persons, both males and females. This situation has triggered an outflow of professionals and skilled persons on a scale not experienced before, to various African countries in addition to Europe, America and Canada.

The feminisation of poverty also drags women migrants increasingly to the wage labour market (both formal and informal) as a survival strategy to augment meagre family income (see part 4 below). Conflicts, environmental degradation and mismanaged economies have further aggravated the pressure for migration from poorer to relatively prosperous regions, within and increasingly outside of West Africa.

## 3. Major trends in intra-regional migration.

The West African sub-region encompasses countries of immigration and emigration as well as those that combine both. There are also countries that serve as transit routes for migrants. The main traditional countries of immigration in the sub-region are Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In the early 1970s, Nigeria also became a major migrant receiving country as the oil boom generated ample employment in various sectors of the economy. The major sending, mainly labour exporting, countries include Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Togo. Senegal has been both a labour exporting and labour receiving country. These migratory configurations have however somewhat changed in recent years; Senegal for example has taken on an additional role as a transit country for migrants seeking to enter the European Union (*via* Las Palmas to Spain); Ghana and in later years Nigeria have turned into labour exporting countries as a result of the deteriorating economic conditions in Ghana in the late 60's and in Nigeria in the middle 80's (Adepoju, 1996). In recent years, Ghana has experienced a flow of return migrants as the economic situation there continues to improve.

Since the late eighties, traditional labour importing, relatively richer countries in Africa (Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire) and hitherto attractive destinations for migrants (Zimbabwe, Zambia and Nigeria) have experienced endemic political and economic crises, which also spur out-migration of their nationals. So long as the economies of the recipient countries could accommodate clandestine labour migrants who possess neither passport, neither entry visas, nor residence permits where required; there was little sign of stress. However, as economic conditions worsened and unemployment among nationals intensified, immigrants were targets for reprisals through expulsion.

Highly skilled migrants, including doctors, paramedical personnel, nurses, teachers, lecturers, engineers, scientists and technologists have moved from Ghana, and recently Nigeria, to virtually all African countries, attracted by relatively higher salaries and better living conditions. Others migrated to Canada, United States, Britain and Germany, as were students in various disciplines who failed to return home at the end of their training. To cite one example, until the early 80s, few Nigerians saw emigration of professionals

as rewarding because their working conditions were attractive and internationally competitive. The collapse of oil price leading to a sharp decline in oil revenue; a rapid deterioration in living and working conditions; devaluation of the national currency; biting effects of the macro-economic adjustment programme, especially wage freeze and inflation; authoritarian military rule and the vacillating economic situation fuelled large-scale emigration of all categories of workers, both skilled and unskilled, to other parts of Africa, Europe, North America and the Gulf States (Adepoju, 2000).

During the apartheid regime, skilled professionals drawn especially from Ghana and trickles from Nigeria migrated clandestinely to the then homeland states in South Africa. The numbers were small, mostly teachers, university professors, doctors, lawyers, nurses and engineers. Independence in 1994 and the prospects of a booming economy in a democratic setting opened a floodgate for immigration into the Republic of South Africa: highly skilled professionals from Nigeria and Ghana to staff the universities and other professions; tradesmen from Senegal and Mali including street vendors and small traders, and a wide range of illegal migrants who are accused of engaging in illicit activities. Some of these illegal immigrants entered the country without proper documentation; others overstayed the legal residency.

Overall, within the West African circuit, a lot of cross border movements, involving female traders, farm labourers and unskilled workers who paid little attention to the arbitrary borders have essentially been intra-regional. The interdependent economies of neighbouring countries also facilitated this migratory configuration. In recent years, however, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in West Africa in the late sixties and early seventies, the small scale of population and markets, the miniscule intra-regional trade and the inconvertible currencies that constrained intra-regional trade created conditions hindered rather than promote intra-regional migration. Poverty has propelled a wide variety of migration configurations, including autonomous female migration.

## 4. Autonomous female migration

Autonomous, selective female migration has become a major survival strategy in response to deepening poverty in the sub-region. Statistics on poverty indicate for instance, that 7 out of every 10 Nigerian that is poor are women. About 51 per cent of rural women live below the nationally defined poverty line, lacking access to basic education, decent nutrition, adequate health and social services. Women perform the majority of the work in food processing and dominate the rural and urban informal sector activities. Yet, less than 20 percent of women own their own farm lands, fewer than 10 percent have access to agricultural inputs and less than 5 percent have access to agricultural credits (Chinsman, 1998). This situation has prompted and sustained female migration to the towns in search of waged employment as a coping mechanism.

As the adverse effects of macro-economic adjustment programmes bite harder and deeper and the removal of subsidies from social services and wage freeze drastically affected living standards, sponsored, selective migrations flourished. Retrenchment across sectors

also implied that few families had working members necessary to sustain its budget and livelihood. For a large majority of families, migration became a coping mechanism of the last resort. In the process, the traditional male-dominated long-term and long-distance migratory streams in West Africa are becoming increasingly feminised. Anecdotal evidence is showing an increase in migration by women, who traditionally had remained at home while men moved around in search of paid work. Significant proportions of females now migrate independently, even internationally, to fulfil their own economic needs rather than simply joining a husband or other family members (Adepoju, 2000). To the extent that this is a relatively new phenomenon, it constitutes important changes in gender roles in the region. Female-headed and single-parent families have burgeoned as a result of male migration, divorce or death of the male head, with intense pressure on the females who have to combine work and familial responsibilities. Higher educational attainment amongst females has also enhanced their mobility, locally and internationally.

As the economic crisis deepened and living conditions deteriorated, female migrants as autonomous migrants have been moving principally to improve their economic status and gain control over their lives. Such autonomous female migration reflects increasing economic pressure on rural families, as female migrants tend to be concentrated in the low paid, low skilled labour market. Women in the sub-region generally face discrimination in employment, economic opportunities and access to credit and financial facilities, and are marginalised politically. Although empirical studies focusing on gender analysis of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and women's work are few, it seems evident that the overall impact has been negative. One of the most noticeable effects is the increased workload that women, both in rural and urban areas, have had to bear.

A large proportion of poor women are increasingly being pushed into the labour force almost uniformly on very disadvantageous terms, due to the lowering of household incomes as real wages fall and employment rises. The removal of subsidies on basic goods and services and the introduction of charges for health and education tend to force women into paid employment, and particularly in the informal sector as they are forced to meet these increased expenses and as remittances and supplementary incomes from migrant and resident husbands, respectively, thin off and have become inadequate for household consumption needs. In effect, SAPs have affected women in their roles as producers, mothers and household managers and also had serious consequences for the family, women in particular, at the micro level (Adepoju, 1966). Forced to do more with less, the family has developed a variety of survival strategies ranging from selective migration to differential investment in education for its various members. These survival strategies have led to new residential patterns, changing income streams, different types of health seeking behaviour as well as expenditure patterns (Adepoju, 1997).

Traditionally, men migrate leaving behind wives and children (who may join them subsequently) in the care of the extended family. Autonomous female migration was sanctioned by a variety of customs, and made the more difficult by the job segregation and discrimination in the urban labour market (Adepoju, 1984). All these have changed. Autonomous female migration directed toward attaining economic independence through

self-employment or wage income has intensified. A large proportion of women who migrate to urban areas are household heads. Female migration has burgeoned in recent years especially the new phenomenon of females migrating internationally, leaving their husbands behind to cater for their children - a turn-around in sex roles. This feature is increasingly visible among professionals in Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana. Female-headed families and single-parent families have burgeoned as a result of male migration, divorce or death of the male head, with intense pressure on the females who have to combine work and familial responsibilities (Adepoju and Oppong, 1994).

Yet, for so long, migration surveys simply did not ask women about their migration experiences. Where women did move, it was implicitly assumed that this was for marriage or to join family members. Hence female migration was viewed merely as associational. This stereotype was questioned and surveys are confirming that economic concerns play an important role in female migration decisions, even when joining a spouse (Adepoju, 1982). In recent times, however, survey data show a striking increase in migration by women, who traditionally had remained at home while men moved around in search of paid work. More significant is the finding that some of female migrants are autonomous migrants moving independently, often over long distances, to fulfill their own economic needs rather than simply to join a husband or other family member (Findley, 1997).

What factors have sustained the upsurge of economically motivated female migration in recent years? Before economic crisis deepened, women could supplement husbands' income and remittances. As men increasingly lost their jobs, and incomes are irregular, women, like men are increasingly turning to migration to meet their economic obligations. Women are therefore adopting a variety of survival strategies given the pressures on their time and energy that they encounter, both at the household and community levels (Adepoju, 1996). The economic situation of the women is getting worse, not better given current economic crisis; women are now the poorest of the poor. Economic downturn and social disintegration have reduced the woman's family's resource base, shifted a larger share of income-generating activities unto her shoulders, added more family health-provision and health-care responsibilities for the family to her burden and have locked women more tightly into the migration system as a survival strategy (Mbugua, 1997). We are now witnessing and need understand a phenomenon of increasing proportions of women alone without husbands and kin, either to assist, control or protect them. Women are now evolving a series of initiatives, including migration to survive the economic crisis and political instability and the perception of a dismal future (Oppong, 1997).

When women migrate they face a number of gender-specific problems: loss of rights to village lands left behind, lower pay in urban employment owing to lack of education, the need to juggle childbearing and work outside the home, separation from their children who may be fostered to another family or left behind in the care of grandparents. Women in the sub-region engage in a life-long struggle to combine reproductive and productive tasks and responsibilities within the family context (Oppong, 1997). They are socially disadvantaged with respect to access to productive resources, to control over the labour

process in both domestic and market places, to modes of remuneration and so on. In essence, gender-specific responsibilities reduce the flexibility and ability of women to migrate. Because women tend to experience more constraints on land access, the separation of roles tends to handicap women relative to men with respect to independent migration.

## 5. Undocumented migrations and trafficking in migrants

Young West African migrants are adopting more sophisticated, daring and evasive methods to enter the countries of the North, as the later tighten their border controls. Movements are more clandestine and spontaneous involving more risky passages and trafficking via more diverse transit points. Some of these migrants enter the host countries clandestinely as tourists or students and later work and live there without officially changing their status. Others travel via intermediate countries such as Gambia, Cape Verde or Guinea Conakry to obtain false documentation for a fee en route to Spain, Portugal, Italy, or Libya, invariably via another country, giving rise a multi-polar and multidimensional migratory path. While some continue with the traditional two-step moves from a village to a coastal city and then to Europe, many others pursue varied itineraries through Sahelian or coastal African cities to reach the ultimate destination, Europe.

Clandestine migrants, who initially migrate as businessmen, students, or tourists, employ a variety of tactics to stay on at the destination, living with friends and working in the 'underground' sector. The deteriorating political and economic situation in Africa has reinforced the resolve of emigrants to sidetrack the official channels of immigration. The youths are especially vulnerable: their exaggerated aspirations and expectations remain unfulfilled in a rapidly deteriorating socio-economic and political environment, at the same time as they are fed with exaggerated information about the opportunities in the countries of the North.

Although firm statistics are difficult to come by, it is now evident that trafficking in illegal migrants, hitherto a rare phenomenon, is on the increase as young persons are now involved in dare-devil ventures to gain entry into Europe. In addition to the sporadic incidence of so-called stowaways who engage in life-threatening ventures hidden on board ships to southern Europe, and recently to as far as East Asia, there are accounts of unscrupulous agents who also exploit desperate youths with promises of passages to Italy, Spain and France via, for instance, Dakar and Las Palmas. Most of these youths get stranded in Dakar; others who find their way through get apprehended and deported on arrival or soon afterwards.

Worsening youth unemployment and rapidly deteriorating socio-political and economic conditions, poverty and human deprivation stimulated and intensified irregular and undocumented migration as well as trafficking in migrants. The dramatic changes in the region's economic fortunes adversely undermined the abilities of families to meet the basic needs of its members. One of the consequences is the weakening and disintegration of family control on the youth that roam the street, seeking for even a lowly paid job for

months without success. For most youths, migration, either in pursuit of higher education or for wage employment is destined towards the towns and thence to other countries. For a few, such migration is of the mobility type, but for the large majority, it is strictly for survival (Adepoju, 2000).

In desperation, most of these youths fall easy prey to scams and risk their lives during the hazardous journey to the countries of the North, with the assistance of labour traffickers and bogus agencies, in search of the illusory green pastures. Many are seeking asylum, citing abuse of human rights in their home countries. Newspapers have also reported incidences of trafficking in children and young girls from south-east Nigeria to Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The recent shock story of the ship carrying young children from Benin destinated to, but turned back from Gabon and Cameroun raised consternation locally and internationally. It is in this context the potential role of ECOWAS in fostering managed intra-regional migration is discussed below.

## 6. The creation of ECOWAS and implementation of the Protocol on free movement of persons in practice

The leaders of West Africa recognised in the early seventies that intra-regional integration could be an important step towards the sub-region's collective integration into the global economy. Thus, the treaty signed in Lagos on 28 May 1975 creating the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) covered almost all fields of economic activity.

What is of particular relevance to the theme of this paper is Article 27 of the Treaty, which affirms a long-term objective to establish a community citizenship that could be acquired automatically by all nationals of the Member States. This reinforced the preamble to the treaty that outlined the key objective of removing obstacles to the free movement of gods, capital and *people* in the sub-region. Thus the treaty simulated efforts towards a homogeneous society that once existed in the sub-region. It is in that context that the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment of May 1979 was explicit on free mobility of labour. Phase one of the Protocol guaranteeing free entry of Community citizens without visa for ninety days was ratified by Member States in 1980 and put into effect forthwith to usher in an era of free movements of ECOWAS citizens within member countries.

The rights of entry, residence and establishment were to be progressively established within fifteen years from the definitive date of entry into force of the protocol. The implementation of the first phase over the first five years abolished requirements for visas and entry permit. Community citizens in possession of valid travel documents and international health certificate could enter Member States without visa for up to ninety days. Member States can nevertheless refuse admission into their territory so-called inadmissible immigrants under its laws. In the case of expulsion, normally at the expense of the immigrants, States undertake to guarantee the security of the citizen concerned, his/her family and his/her property. The delayed second phase (Right of Residence) of the

Protocol came into force in July 1986, when all Member States ratified it, but the Right of Establishment has not been implemented till now

In 1992, the revised Treaty of ECOWAS, among others, affirmed the right of citizens of the Community to entry, residence and settlement and enjoined Member States to recognize these rights in their respective territories. It also calls on Member States to take all necessary steps at the national level to ensure that the provisions are duly implemented.

The coming to force of the protocol on free movement of persons coincided with a period of economic recession in most West Africa, especially those bordering Nigeria, which at that time was booming economically fuelled by the huge oil sector earnings. The oil-led employment opportunities attracted migrants of all skills, but especially unskilled workers, in their droves from Ghana, Togo, Chad, Mali and Cameroon to work in the construction and services sectors. The short-lived oil boom resulted in a rapid deterioration in living and working conditions and devaluation of the national currency, wage freeze and inflation. In early 1983 and in mid-1985, the Nigerian Government revoked Articles 4 and 27 of the Protocol to expel between 0.9 and 1.3 million illegal aliens mostly Ghanaians. The ratification of the second phase of ECOWAS Protocol on Right of Residence that came into force in July 1986 coincided with the implementation of the structural adjustment programme in Nigeria. In June 1985, about 0.2 million illegal aliens were again expelled as the economic crisis deepened. This development created a crisis of confidence that rocked the Community to its very foundation.

Aliens are usually scapegoats when governments are confronted with teething economic and political problems; migrants are targets of hostility from the native population and are blamed for whatever economic, social and political problems arise in the country. The situation in Cote d'Ivoire illustrates this: A major country of immigration in the sub-region, it has a vast natural resource endowment but a small domestic labour force: about a quarter of its waged labour force are foreigners. The country's first post-independent president, ignoring the arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers encouraged immigration from the country's poor neighbours. Immigrants from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Liberia, Senegal and Ghana flooded the plantations clandestinely and did menial jobs that the local population despised. They brought their families and were allowed to marry cross-culturally, settle and vote. By 1995, there were 4 million such immigrants out of a population of 14 million. The recent shift in the country's liberal immigration policy and the growing anti-immigrant sentiment is taking a dramatic, sometimes violent, turn as non-indigenes continue to flee the country. The policy to register and issue special identity cards to foreigners is widely viewed as aimed at deporting (now classified) illegal immigrants. In March 1999, Ghana also requested all aliens in the country to register and be issued with identity cards. Immigrants are suspicious of this move, recalling the antecedents of the 1969 Alien Compliance Order that culminated in the expulsion of all non-Ghanaians.

Most countries of the sub-region have enacted, or retained a series of laws, which in effect restrict 'foreigners', including nationals of community states, from participating in

certain kinds of economic activities while the expulsion of aliens from some Member States negates the *raison detre* for establishing such communities. Expulsions and deportations are common policy measures directed at illegal migrants before and remarkably after the formation of sub-regional economic unions. Examples of expulsions of non-nationals include Sierra Leone (1968), the Cote d'Ivoire (1958, 1964), Ghana (1969), Chad (1979), Equatorial Guinea (1974), Senegal (1967, 1990), Guinea (1968), Nigeria (1983, 1985), Liberia (1983); Benin (1998); Cote d'Ivoire (1999).

Persistent border disputes deriving from arbitrary borders has been a common event in the sub-region even when the OAU enjoined governments to respect these borders in order to avoid potentially protracted, widespread conflicts that such disputes may generate. Yet border disputes between Senegal and Mauritania, between Ghana and Togo and so on have led to the expulsion of Community citizens from these territories. The following sections reviews the performance of ECOWAS, highlighting the progress made and constraints encountered in creating a borderless space and facilitating free movement of persons.

## 7. Constraints and lessons learnt in enhancing free movement of persons

Member States of ECOWAS belong to more than one union with different ideologies, aims and objectives; nationals from different groups migrate in stages across countries associated with the Community and the balkanisation of these countries along colonial lines - francophone, anglophone and losophone - has hindered rather than promote free mobility of labour in the region. The countries also exhibit different levels and patterns of development, political systems and ideologies. Countries with small population are juxtaposed within those with large population and land area; some are resource poor while others are endowed with human and natural resources. The smaller and economically less prosperous countries are often suspicious of the demographic and economic giants  - Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire – in the Community.

The major constraints include the multiplicity of economic groupings whose objectives, population, market size and structures are as diverse as the membership of the groupings. The wavering political support, political instability and inter-state border disputes and wars have retarded progress in ratification and implementation of protocols. The persistent economic downturn has crippled the ability of States to pursue consistent macro-economic policies and resulted in part in poor funding of cooperation unions. The non-convertibility of currencies hinders financial settlements and the harmonization of macro-economic policies and procedures. A high proportion of cross border movement in the sub-region is unrecorded due to the ubiquitous roadblocks across frontiers, the lengthy and costly formalities at border posts, and the corruption of officials.

Community citizens have been expelled by most Member States, in spite of the protocol on free movement of persons. Sentiments against non-nationals have risen in recent years as a result of the economic downturn, increasing unemployment among young nationals, and political instability. The Protocol on Establishment and Residence has not been implemented, in spite of the close link to the right of free movement, integration of trade, tariff regimes and promotion of labour mobility in the sub-region.

The absence of peace and stability in several parts of the sub-region discourages investment, the very foundation of development, leads to capital flight, stalled sustainable development and employment generation. The conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia have gradually spread to Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau, with potential to become a regional conflict. The current crisis has uprooted thousands of people internally and across national boarders, as refugees and displaced persons.

## 8. Progress made in enhancing free movement of persons

The free movement of persons without visa within the West African sub-region is a major achievement of the organization. Associated with this development is the progress made in the area of monetary policy, communication, trade and related matters. These include the introduction of ECOWAS travellers' cheques – the West African Unit of Account - to harmonise the sub-region's monetary policy; the proposed adoption of a common currency by 2004 to facilitate cross-border trade transactions and the introduction of the Brown Card travel certificates to be used as ECOWAS passports.

Regional infrastructure has been rehabilitated and expanded to foster economic integration with the proposed establishment of two rail links: a coastal route from Lagos to Coutonou, Lomé and Accra and a Sahelian route linking Lagos to Niamey and Ouagadougou. The abolition of the mandatory residency permit and the granting by immigration officials of the maximum 90-day period of stay to ECOWAS citizens at entry points took effect from mid-April, 2000. Border posts and all checkpoints on international highways are to be policed by customs and immigration officials only. These posts, which hitherto constituted a menace to free movement of persons and goods, were to be scrapped.  To this effect, the Nigerian government ordered all checkpoints between Nigeria and Benin to be dismantled immediately.  Border procedures are to be modernised by the use of passport scanning machines and border patrols were to be installed by Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali to monitor and police national frontiers, in addition to closer collaboration between the police and internal security agents on exchange of information, staff exchange programmes and frequent meetings and training courses.

Customs policies and shipping laws are to be harmonized and updated to promote liberalisation of maritime services.  In the process a zero percent rate of duty would be applied on approved industrial products, goods and traditional handicrafts as measures to facilitate effective establishment of a free trade zone. Free movement of goods and persons across the borders of the sub-region would take effect by the end of April 2000. The trade liberalisation scheme is to progressively establish a customs union over a 15-year period from January 1990 when the scheme took effect.

Other developments include the creation of a borderless sub-region as the major agenda of the meeting of Heads of State and Government held in Abuja early 2000; the adoption during their summit in Abuja (May, 2000) of an ECOWAS passport as a symbol of unity and to progressively replace national passports in circulation over a transitional period of

ten years. The sub-regional private airline was launched in Abuja to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the organization to facilitate intra-regional travel

Firm proposals were made to boost transport, and telecommunication links among Member States, and especially the establishment of trans-coastal, trans-Sahelian and trans-coastal/Sahelian rail links. Effective 1 January 2000, of a zone for the circulation of goods, free of custom duties was set up. The Lome Protocol on the mechanism for the prevention, management, and control of conflicts, and maintenance of peace and security was signed in December 1999 and the free movement of goods and persons across the borders of ECOWAS Member States was scheduled to begin by the end of April 2000. Nigeria and Ghana are taking the lead to implement the scheme, ahead of other countries.

## 9. Conclusion

In general, migrants from and within the region include temporary cross-border workers, professionals, clandestine workers and refugees. Much of the movement has been intra-regional, short term, male dominated and involving long distances. These movements are mostly of the 'survival' type in search of whatever work migrants can get, in any location and at any wage.

Migration within and from West Africa is strongly influenced by poverty. One visible manifestation of the crisis is the influx of migrants into the cities, migration in regular and irregular situations across national borders and to the developed countries in search of viable employment opportunities and decent living standard. The implementation of the protocols on free movement of persons, establishment and settlement in West Africa highlights the need to harmonise the diverse co-operation unions especially with respect to national laws and regional treaties dealing with labour migration. The improvement in the communication and transportation network, for instance, construction of highways and railroads to link the various countries in the community and to facilitate the movement of people and goods is a major prerequisite for effective integration.

Based on lessons learnt, how best can the free movements of persons be fostered in ECOWAS? In 1991 African Heads of State signed the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community to take off over a thirty-four-year period. Among other objectives, it was hoped that sub-regional unions would facilitate intra-regional labour mobility, and promote self-reliant development in the region.

In that context, West African countries should identify areas of agreement which they can progressively implement, notably free movement of persons, travel cards, traveller's cheques, tariff regime, customs and immigration formalities to enhance intra-regional labour mobility and cross-border trade, and then implement other agreements using the variable speed approach, whereby sets of common objectives are agreed upon but component countries move at different speeds towards implementation, some rapidly and others slowly. The governments should revise national employment codes in line with ECOWAS protocol and ensure that the rights of migrant workers in the host countries are protected; harmonise national laws which conflict with regional and sub-regional treaties

and address the issue of the right of residence and establishment of migrants and obligations of the host countries by amending national laws and investment codes that restrict "foreigners", including nationals of Community States, from participating in certain kinds of economic activities.

Nationals, especially potential migrants, should be provided with adequate information on the full provisions of the protocol on free movement of persons and the rules and regulations guiding entry, residence and employment in Member States, especially the need for valid travel documents. Macro-economic policies should be streamlined to pro-jobs and pro-poor and also to enable countries boldly embrace the common currency proposal to facilitate financial transaction by migrants and the business community.

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