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**REMARKS ON THE REFORM OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANISATIONS IN WEST AFRICA**

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REMARKS ON THE REFORM OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS IN WEST AFRICA

The Ministerial Lobby Group (GMAP) places great importance on reforming West Africa's intergovernmental organisations (IGOs). Can the Group provide a new impetus here? How can the Club du Sahel and its Secretariat help? This note makes a few historical points and outlines some ideas for debate.

The reason there are so many intergovernmental organisations in West Africa (over 40 according to some estimates) is that in the early years after independence regional co-operation aroused great enthusiasm. But this was not matched by any collective capacity to make these organisations work or to weed out the inefficient or redundant ones.

Following a decision of the ECOWAS Heads of State at their 1991 Summit, a major study was published in 1997 by the United Nations' African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP). This pointed out that these concerns were not new, and that similar requests had been made by ECOWAS leaders in 1983, followed by largely ignored studies on the topic in 1986 and 1987.

The history of the question suggests that the literature is there, a large number of analyses and proposals have been made, and many of the people who did the work are still available. Some points may need to be updated, but many of the proposals could be approved by political leaders, while others would have to be revised. Once the choices had been made, action plans by sector or by organisation would need to be laid down with clear objectives (services expected, resources to be used, schedules, financing).

The problems that arise and the solutions to apply vary from one category of intergovernmental organisation to another. The IDEP study suggested making a distinction between organisations for economic integration, together with their financial and monetary offshoots, technical organisations, and organisations for cross-border co-operation.

In the case of economic IGOs, pragmatism is called for. The political fallout from the creation of WAEMU seems to be past, although major changes in its monetary area contradicted the principle of ECOWAS pre-eminence restated in 1991. New initiatives are appearing: an Eastern sub-market free trade area, a monetary project for non-CFA countries. But the essential thing is to remove contradictions that might lead to distortions, and develop anything that will favour synergy. Political impetus is necessary, but a lot of work needs to be done by the technical staff of the institutions involved, and some outside support may be useful.

For the technical IGOs, attaching them to ECOWAS as "specialist institutions" is generally accepted as a principle. Which IGOs are abolished and which are merged should be decided with a clear idea of the services expected and the cost of providing them. The fact that the donors often provide the bulk of the financing needs to be considered insofar as it give them *de facto* power over these institutions. Although it is clearly up to States to say what they expect of the IGOs, discussion with the donors will be necessary. Ultimately it would be healthier if the States increased their share of the financing.

Here it might be instructive to analyse the financial situation of the IGOs: theoretical and actual contributions from member-States, aid from donors, budgets, arrears. A balance-sheet of this sort might give some idea of the value for money of the services these IGOs provide.

For the third category, including the major river basin agencies, it is worth considering attaching them to ECOWAS. Can supervision from a distance be effective? Might it not be better for States to involve their decentralised local authorities in monitoring the agencies' work? ECOWAS may, however, be considered to be a useful forum for harmonising sectoral policies on the environment, water management, and land-use planning.