

**COMUNIDADE DOS ESTADOS DA
AFRICA DO OESTE**



**ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES**

**COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE DES ETATS
DE L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST**

**MEETING OF ECOWAS MINISTERS OF LABOUR,
EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

DAKAR, SENEGAL, 7 DECEMBER 2012

MINISTERIAL MEETING

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the invitation of the ECOWAS Ministers, a meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Labour, Employment and Social Affairs was held in Dakar, Republic of Senegal, on 7th December 2012. In the run up to this ministerial meeting, an Experts meeting was held from 3rd to 5th December 2012, with a view to considering and validating the draft ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security and its Administrative Arrangement, the draft ECOWAS Action Plan for the elimination of child labour, particularly its worst forms, and the draft ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan, as well as Supplementary Act establishing the ECOWAS Social Dialogue Forum.
2. Ministers of the under-listed Member States or their representatives attended the meeting:
 - Republic of BENIN,
 - BURKINA FASO,
 - Republic of COTE D'IVOIRE,
 - Republic of The GAMBIA,
 - Republic of GUINEA,
 - Republic of GUINEA BISSAU,
 - Republic of LIBERIA,
 - Republic of MALI,
 - Republic of NIGER,
 - Republic of SENEGAL,
 - Republic of SIERRA LEONE, and
 - TOGOLESE Republic.
3. The following organisations were also represented:
 - African Union Commission (AUC)
 - International Labour Office (ILO)
 - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);
 - ECOWAS Social Dialogue Forum
4. The list of participants is attached to this report as an annex.

II. OPENING CEREMONY

5. The opening ceremony was chaired by the Minister, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Vocational Technical Training of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and was marked by six (6) speeches.

Welcome speech of the Minister of the Civil Service, Labour and Relations with the Institutions of the Republic of Senegal

6. On behalf of the President of the Republic of Senegal, H.E. Mr. Macky Sall, the government and people of Senegal, the State Minister, Mr. Mansour Sy, thanked the delegations present for their massive participation in the meeting. He said that this is an eloquent testimony of the interest that all attach to the common cause, which is ECOWAS and its goal of promoting regional cooperation. He recalled with emphasis Article 3 of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty which defines its vision aimed at raising the living standards of its peoples, maintaining and enhancing economic stability, fostering relations among Member States in order to contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent. He expressed strong hope that the Ministers will adopt all the documents submitted for approval, which will help achieve the common goal by working together in conformity with the ideals of our Organisation. The Minister presented the status of progress of the concerned programmes in Senegal. He concluded his statement by wishing the meeting successful deliberations.

Statement of the UNDP Representative

7. The UNDP representative, Mrs. Couty Fall, indicated that the holding of the meeting was a crucial landmark in the realisation of an "ECOWAS of peoples", considering the important social impact of the documents on the agenda. She highlighted UNDP's strong interest in the process, owing to the recent events that destabilised many African countries and that call for the requisite preventive measures and expeditious actions that need to be taken to avoid further vulnerability of the youths – already seriously affected by the unemployment crisis – and migrant workers – already affected by the socio-political crises and international migration restrictions. To conclude, she reiterated UNDP's commitment, in conjunction with the other Agencies of the United Nations System such as ILO and UNESCO, to provide more support to the ECOWAS Commission and the tripartite actors in their unrelenting efforts to meet the expectations of the youths with a view to achieving social cohesion and realising an "ECOWAS of Peoples."

Statement of the African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs

8. The statement of the Commissioner for Social Affairs of the AU Commission, Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, highlighted the importance of the work of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the AU, specifically with regards to its coordinating role with respect to the subjects of employment and social protection. He identified the importance of the collaborative work of the RECs with the AU Commission and the need for ownership at both the level of RECs and by Member States. Lastly, he highlighted the work already done by the AU and satisfaction that the instruments submitted at the current meeting make reference to the AU related policies.

9. The AU Commissioner also expressed the readiness of the AU in working with ECOWAS and in deepening collaboration, particularly in areas of Labour, employment, productivity and social protection. The Commissioner called on ECOWAS and its Member States to strengthen regional and national follow up institutions essential to the implementation of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action, to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and submit periodic reports to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. He extended the invitation of the AU to the ECOWAS Commission and its Member States to the 9th Ordinary Session of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission taking place in April 2013 in Addis Ababa with the theme "Enhancing the Capacity of Labour Market Institutions in Africa to meet Current and Future Challenges".

Statement of the representative of the ILO Regional Office

10. The ILO Sub-regional Director, Mr. François Murangira, started his statement by extending greetings and encouragements from the ILO Director-General and the ILO Regional Director and expressed satisfaction at the active and sustainable partnership between ECOWAS and ILO. Laying emphasis on youth employment, he expressed ILO's satisfaction at the commitment made by ECOWAS to Member States to effectively address the youth employment crisis, which has become a global phenomenon, although the social and economic characteristics vary significantly, both in scope and type, from country to country and from region to region. He stressed that the Action Plan for the elimination of child labour supplements the commitments made by ECOWAS Member States in line with ILO Convention 183 on the worst forms of child labour ratified by all Member States. To conclude, the ILO Regional Director indicated that he was delighted to note that social protection would soon become a reality in West Africa and that ILO positively welcomed the recommendation made to extend social protection to informal workers.

Statement of the ECOWAS Commissioner for Human Development and Gender

11. On behalf of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, H.E. Mr. Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, the Commissioner for Human Development and Gender of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr. Adrienne Diop, expressed profound gratitude to the government and people of Senegal for accepting to host this historic meeting for our Organisation. She also thanked the participants and technical partners for their support. The Commissioner expressed satisfaction that ECOWAS effectively implemented many actions in the social field, particularly by:

- Establishing the ECOWAS Social Dialogue Forum;
- Developing the ECOWAS Action Plan for the elimination of child labour;
- Developing the ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan;
- Reviewing the draft ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security;
- Pursuing harmonisation of labour laws in the ECOWAS region.

12. She concluded by indicating that the draft ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security is a crucial instrument in the process of developing the Member States, particularly with regard to economic growth, employment promotion, fight against poverty and social development, as well as in advancing the ECOWAS integration process which is aimed at realising the ECOWAS Vision 2020 to transform the “ECOWAS of States in ECOWAS of people.” She recalled the urgent need of finding a solution to youth unemployment and the necessity to provide adequate training. She indicated that if the youths are well-trained and employed they will bring progress, social peace and economic growth. Before concluding her statement, the Commissioner for Human Development and Gender pledged that the ECOWAS Commission will spare no effort in making sure that social issues become the driving force behind regional integration.

Opening speech of the Minister of Labour, Employment, Social Affairs and Vocational Technical Training of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire

13. In his opening address, the Minister of Labour, Employment, Social Affairs and Vocational Technical Training, Mr. Moussa Dossou, noted that the meeting was holding at a moment when all regions of the world were confronted with the crucial challenge of unemployment and that in Africa, the poverty level and incapacity of our economies to absorb the flow of active youths ready for employment, further expand the issue of youth unemployment. The Chairman of the meeting indicated that, in addition to issues relating to youth unemployment, other equally important and closely related issues also call for requisite responses to be made. These issues include child labour and the regional social security mechanism.

14. He urged his colleagues, Ministers in charge of these very important issues, to provide the requisite leadership to transform the political commitment into concrete actions, by addressing the various challenges relating to labour and social security which confront our region. He strongly appealed to all concerned to coordinate the brilliant ideas on these vital issues, which are now at the heart of all governance challenges, with a view to achieving an inclusive economic development. According to the Minister, there is need to safeguard the children's future, give hope to the youths and improve social security for the active populations. Before declaring open the meeting of ECOWAS Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs and wishing them successful deliberations, the Chairman commended the partners for their support, and in particular, lauded the ECOWAS Commission's pivotal role in organising the meeting.

III. ELECTION OF THE BUREAU

15. The Bureau of the meeting was elected as follows:

- Chairman - Republic of Côte d'Ivoire;
- Rapporteurs - Republic of Benin;
Republic of Sierra Leone.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND WORK PROGRAMME

16. The following Agenda was adopted:

- i. Opening Ceremony;
- ii. Election of the Bureau and adoption of the work programme;
- iii. Presentation and consideration of the Report of the Experts meeting;
- iv. Adoption of the Report of the Ministerial meeting;
- v. Closing session.

V. PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE EXPERTS

17. The report of the Experts, presented by the Director-General of Labour, Social Affairs and Vocational Technical Training of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, Mr. Danho Pierre Ange Désiré, contained the following main points:

Draft ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security and its Administrative Arrangement

18. The context and issue of social security in West Africa, the historical background to the draft Convention on social security, its goals, and challenges relating to its implementation, were discussed at length. The revision process of the ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security and its Administrative Arrangement, essentially intended for migrant workers, which were adopted in 2004 but not yet ratified by any Member State, was initiated out of the need to take into account the fundamental principles for the coordination of the social security legislations, compliance of provisions of the Convention with ILO's social security instruments, and consideration of best practices inspired by other conventions in other regional organisations like ECOWAS.

Draft ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan

19. The draft Action Plan aims at improving youth employability and job creation in the ECOWAS region. The five priority intervention areas identified are:

- a. National Action Planning for Youth Employment;
- b. Youth employability through education and vocational technical training;
- c. Youth engagement in private sector development;
- d. Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS);
- e. Intra-regional mobility of young workers.

Draft Action Plan for the elimination of child labour

20. The main causes of child labour, particularly widespread poverty, low standard of education and training, low registration of births, rapid urbanisation, armed conflicts and political stability, were reiterated.

The Action Plan's strategic goals aim at:

- Putting in place the enabling environment for the elimination of child labour in all ECOWAS Member States;
- Strengthening the ECOWAS institutional mechanism for monitoring-evaluation, particularly the peer review mechanism; and
- Improving knowledge on the scope and impact of child labour in the region.

Draft Supplementary Act establishing the ECOWAS Social Dialogue Forum

21. Social dialogue is an important strategy that helps safeguard social stability and peace in the Member States, and should be therefore promoted permanently in enterprises, different areas of activity and in the country as a whole. The draft Act outlines the scope, purpose, basic principles and tripartite commitments.

VI. OUTCOME OF DELIBERATIONS OF THE MEETING OF MINISTERS

22. The meeting of Ministers congratulated the Experts for the quality of their deliberations and the results they arrived at. The meeting congratulated the ECOWAS Commission for taking the initiative to include in the regional agenda these topical issues which represent major concerns for the governments and populations in the Member States, especially in relation to the consequences on political stability and social cohesion.

23. Participants informed the meeting of the measures taken by their respective countries with a view to developing and implementing programmes in the areas concerned. They reiterated their commitment to act collectively, under the ECOWAS framework, to ensure greater efficacy and efficiency of the recommended actions.

The Ministerial meeting adopted the report of the Experts, as well as the draft documents concerned, which are:

- The draft ECOWAS Convention on Social Security and its Administrative Arrangement;

- The draft ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan;
- The draft Action Plan for the elimination of child labour; and
- The draft Supplementary Act establishing the ECOWAS Tripartite Social Dialogue Forum.

24. The meeting also made the following recommendations:

- a. Member States are urged to take the requisite measures with a view to facilitating access to social protection for rural workers and the informal economy, particularly by extending the existing social protection regimes, taking into account the African Union's Social Protection Plan for the Informal Economy and Rural Workers (SPIREWORK) (Malabo, July 2011).
- b. ECOWAS Commission and AU Commission are urged to strengthen their cooperation in this area, to supplement the efforts of the Member States.
- c. Member States without National Youth Employment Action Plans should develop one and ensure its implementation.
- d. The ECOWAS Social Dialogue Forum with its tripartite constituents is an important social structure that should be utilised for effective sensitization and mobilisation of the Community to implement programmes especially the ECOWAS Youth Employment Action Plan.
- e. Member States should establish Youth Employment Funds to facilitate easy access to credit by youth in the region
- f. Member States should establish National Action Plan against child Labour;
- g. Member State should put in place Units to ensure elimination of Child Labour.
- h. Member States should sensitise the populations, as well as build the capacities of the structures and populations to ensure better understanding of issues relating to social security;
- i. Member States should provide adequate budgets, especially in sectors with high labour force potentials such as agriculture, infrastructure, etc.

VII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

25. The report was adopted.

VIII. CLOSING SESSION

DONE AT DAKAR, THIS 7TH DAY OF DECEMBER 2012

**CHAIRMAN
FOR THE MEETING**