



West African civil society Memorandum on the Economic Partnership Agreements and Common External Tariff

1. As a prelude to the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which will take place in Dakar on the 25 of October, 2013 to deliberate on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and the Common External Tariff, among other things;
2. We, organisations of civil society in West Africa, from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo, have held, from 23 to 24 October, 2013, our own "ECOWAS Peoples' Summit".
3. The decisions that our Heads of State will take on the CET and the EPAs will determine the development trajectory of our region as well as the possibilities for sustainable structural transformation. While these two issues are being treated together, we draw the attention of Heads of State to the fact that they are neither of the same level of importance, nor do they have the same consequences for the integration and development of West Africa, which is of foremost importance. Unfortunately, however, as things stand at the moment, the EPAs, which should be accorded less priority, is threatening to derail the main primary objective of regional integration.
4. The CET is one of the principal instruments necessary for the integration of systems of production and markets in West Africa. Its adoption is the clearest expression of the establishment of a West African Customs Union which will facilitate the construction and implementation of a single trade policy. Therefore it has to be effectively articulated through common regional sectoral policies, in particular industrial and agricultural policies, in order to reinforce regional productive capacity and release its enormous potential.
5. Many civil society organisations within the region have undertaken important work on the CET and have made significant contributions in this regard. The concerns expressed in the agricultural sector have to be taken on board, including through the adoption of trade policy measures appropriate to particular circumstances of West Africa. These measures, which have to be simple to implement, must be oriented to the needs of West Africa, rather than be dictated by imbalanced international treaties. The absence of a common single regional trade

policy is a major challenge that must be resolved if the CET is to be anchored in a credible framework.

6. We are aware that, whatever the nature of the CET, and the quality of the regional trade policy on paper, these cannot attain the objective of strengthening of capacity in the productive sector, and economic competitiveness, as well as intra-regional trade, unless West African states implement the protocols and decisions on the free circulation of goods and persons which they have willingly signed. We are convinced that the removal of the many unnecessary obstacles to the development of intra-regional trade is imperative to the development in the region.

7. While the results so far attained in the area of integration and development reflects neither the aspirations of the West African people, nor the efforts of regional institutions, we remain strongly committed to working to deepen economic integration in West Africa. Therefore, we will support all initiatives which reinforce our integration, and at the same time resist all other projects which would tend to slow down, stop, or compromise the processes of economic development in our region.

8. It is for this reason that we are particularly worried about the EPA negotiations and the challenges that they pose to West Africa. Contrary to initial promises of the European Union to the effect that the EPAs will be a tool for strengthening regional integration, West Africa is now fragmented and balkanised into five different trade regimes as a consequence of the conclusion of interim EPAs. Furthermore, the recent adoption by the EU of a decision threatening to withdraw the trade preferences of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, by 1st October, 2014, is a pressure which risks weakening West Africa's resistance and pushing them to adopt any EPA "at all costs".

9. We emphasise that the EPAs are only trade agreements, and moreover among partners whose trade has dropped from 75% in 1975 to 28% as at now. They should not, under any circumstance, replace or determine our own trade policies. The conclusion of these agreements cannot be justified unless they contribute concretely to realising the economic and social development objectives of our peoples. And yet, the agreement which is being negotiated is far from reflecting the interests of the ECOWAS countries, 11 of whose 15 members are LDCs. This speaks volumes!

10. On market access, West African has made a lot efforts to accommodate the European Union's position. In spite of this, the EU remains fixed at its original position, demanding 80% liberalisation of West African markets, a demand that cannot be reasonably justified.

11. We reject the new offer of 75% market liberalisation which is about to be considered by the Heads of State in Dakar, because this is economically not sustainable and is socially catastrophic for West Africa. Many rigorous studies, which have up to now not been challenged, have proved the negative impact of such levels of liberalisation in terms revenue loss, further job losses, collapse of local industries and investment, and so on.

12. With regard to the EPA Development Programme (EPADP), we emphasise that this has nothing to do with traditional aid, which is the terms to the EU has reduced it. Rather, this has to do with the fact that if the EPAs are signed, 12 West African LDCs will open their markets and give up important fiscal revenues while they are under no obligations by any international law to do so. It is for this reason that we demand that our Heads of State ensure that finance is integral to the EPADP, with additionality of resources, stability and predictability as pre-requisites for signing the EPAs.

13. On the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Clause, we reaffirm that its inclusion in the EPAs reduces to nil all the efforts by West African States to diversify their trading partners and acquire new technologies and opportunities for investment from the emerging countries of the South. In this regard, we demand that our Heads of State renew the mandate of the negotiations which limits the application of this clause strictly to the developed countries.

14. Close to 10 years of negotiations have not led to conclusion of a regional EPA. In the same period, for well-known reasons, some countries in the region have initialled or signed interim EPAs. Due to this, West Africa finds itself with five different trade regimes in relation to the European Union. We reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana and demand that the governments of these two countries avoid taking actions which would disrupt regional integration. We further demand that collectivity of the States, regional institutions, civil society actors and the private sector, should take respective actions to find solutions to the Interim EPAs as soon as possible.

15. We emphasise that, in any case, the Interim EPAs can neither be the basis nor the model for the regional EPAs. We are well aware of the risks and threats to regional integration in the event that the regional EPA is not concluded. But we reject any option which involves signing simply any type of agreement. We therefore invite the Heads of State to provide credible alternatives, notably a Plan B in order to avoid repetition of the 2007 scenario.

16. The analyses carried out into the interim EPAs demonstrate that, contrary to what has been claimed up till now, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana risk losing more by implementing their IEPAs, rather than by not implementing them, especially since most of their value-addition, job creating, and dynamic enterprises and industries rely on the regional market.

17. We reaffirm our call for ECOWAS to establish a Regional Integration Support Fund. This Fund, which could be funded, among others, through a community levy of 1.5%, could serve, in a transition period, to meet the losses that IEPA countries could suffer. During this period, these countries will, in the same way as all the other countries in the region, will make work to finalise their common regional sectoral policies, improve their competitiveness and deepen their regional integration through operationalising the policies on free movement of goods and persons in the region.

18. For us, regional integration remains our highest priority. In this regard, we call on the ECOWAS Commission to organise without delay a large consultation, open and inclusive, to inform all West African actors on the challenges and opportunities of the CET, and also to create conditions to correct the imperfections of CET, and facilitate their ownership and implementation.

19. Furthermore, we demand that the Commission should undertake, without delay, objective evaluation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme as well as the protocol on the free movement of goods and persons. Such an evaluation should be open to all West African actors, including the grassroots populations and cross-border traders.

20. In support of these demands, we commit ourselves to mobilise the peoples of West Africa in order to support the realisation of regional integration and the economic and social development in the region.

Dakar, 24 October, 2013

Regional Networks: ROPPA, POSCAO, FOSCAO, OSCAF, AFAO, REPAOC, COASAD.

National organisations: Benin: PASCIB; Burkina Faso: SPONG; Cote d'Ivoire: OSCAF-CI; The Gambia: TANGO; Ghana: TWN-AFRICA, WACSI; Guinea: CECIDE; Guinea Bissau: MOUVEMENT SOCIETE CIVIL; Mali: CMANE-AC; Niger: RODDADHD; Nigeria: NANTS, Togo: GARED; Senegal: ENDA, CNCR, FSS, M23, Y EN A MARRE, VECO, CICODEV, ACTIONAID, CONGAD, CNTS;