



January 2005

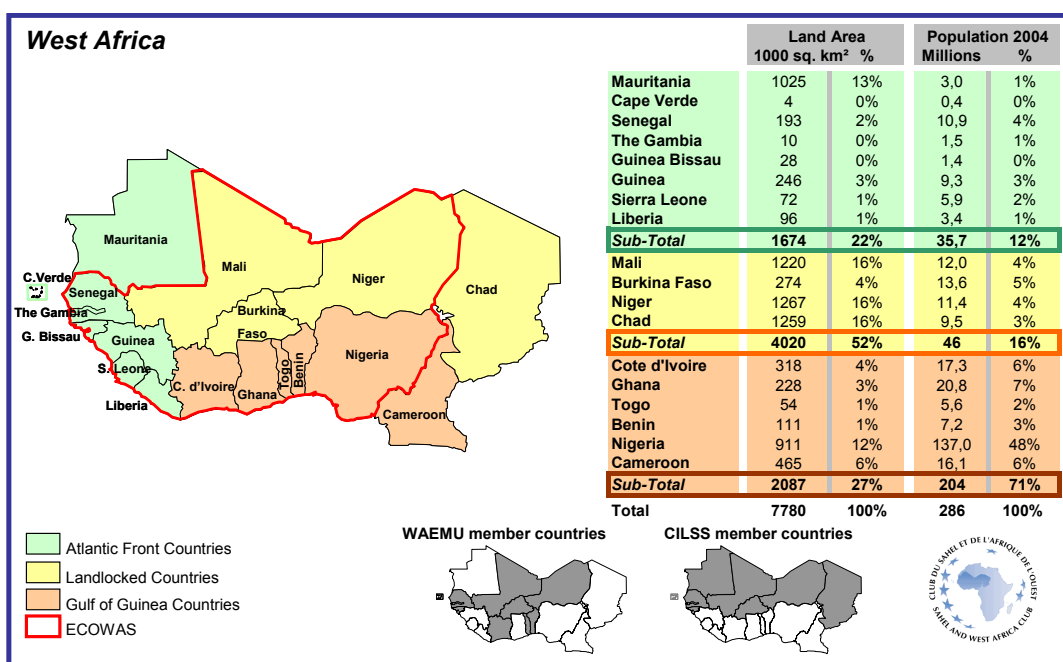
## West Africa and The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)

The Club du Sahel was created in 1976 by Member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in collaboration with African leaders from Sahelian countries as a forum for the International Community to discuss and encourage strong support over the long-term for countries in the Sahelian region, victims of the drought.

In 2001, taking into account the interdependence and complementarity of the Sahel with other countries of West Africa, the Sahel Club's Strategy and Policy Group decided to expand the Club's geographic coverage to encompass the whole of West Africa. The Club then became the Sahel and West Africa Club.

The Club works within a network consisting of West African government representatives, actors from civil society, the private sector, as well as development and research agencies. The Club also works in close collaboration with West African development partners and with international and regional organisations notably ROPPA, the CILSS, the WAEMU, and ECOWAS, its principal partner in the region as a whole. As a member of the OECD Development Cluster, the Club has also developed synergies with other Directorates.

The Club's activities cover West Africa, composed of 17 countries stretching from Cape Verde to the west to Chad in the east. They include fifteen countries that are members of ECOWAS plus



Mauritania and Chad. Cameroon is also taken into account given its geographical location. The region covers a surface area of 7,800,000 km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to 21 times the surface area of Japan, 2 times that of the European Union and approximately 85% of Canada or the United States. Fourteen of these countries belong to the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC), with a GDP per capita in the order of \$US 350/year.

Until the end of the 19th century, demographic growth in West Africa stagnated, but the population has grown from 40 million in 1930 to 85 million in 1960. **In 2003, there were approximately 290 million inhabitants** representing 4.6% of the world population (6 billion 314 million), approximately 43% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa (673 million), 64% of the population of the European Union, roughly equivalent to that of the United States, 2.2 times that of Japan and 9 times the population of Canada. Hence, four decades of unprecedented, dynamic urbanisation in West Africa is not surprising. The urban population has risen from 15 to 45% of the total population. The equivalent evolution in Western Europe took a century and a half.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the massive **investment efforts** were not sufficient to provide the region with the socio-economic infrastructure indispensable to its long-term development. This situation continued for the next 25 years at a time when the region needed even more significant investment to generate a level of economic growth that could have helped meet two challenges: improve the living conditions while addressing the needs of a rapidly expanding population. This issue has become central to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) strategy. The Club's Secretariat will attach a high priority in the coming years to putting the following question on the forefront of the development agenda for the region: **where and how will the approximately 430 million West Africans live in 2020?**

While taking into account the problems and challenges of the region, **the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat along with its African partners has developed a prospective vision of West Africa which focuses on the identification and promotion of the dynamics of change as well as the drivers of change.** Over the last four decades, West Africa has experienced significant transformation, and

should not be perceived as a stagnant region but rather as a region in constant evolution, and capable of significant adaptation and progress.

The media coverage of events in West Africa often presents a pessimistic vision of the region. **However, the dynamics of change observed over the long-term show a very different reality.** Over the last two decades the region has undergone significant social, cultural institutional and political changes: new modes of governance; shift from a single-party to a multi-party system; changes in the respective roles of the State and the private sector; expansion of the employment-generating informal sector; macro-economic and structural adjustments; economic liberalisation; changes in the configuration and the role of the media; emergence of civil society's role in its professional or community-based representative organisations; evolution of women's rights in society and their changing role in public affairs; predominance of youth in society; higher priority for local development and the regional integration process; affirmation and strengthening of regional international organisations (WAEMU, ECOWAS, the CILSS) and regional initiatives (water resource management for the major rivers, NEPAD); formulation and implementation of programmes to combat poverty; adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the countries of the region; contributions from the diasporas to help support their native regions.

Furthermore, **the quantitative assessment of West Africa's performance should certainly not be seen only from a catastrophic angle.** Of course, the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has only risen by US\$50 over the last forty years. In absolute terms, however, GDP has almost quadrupled. If it has only risen slightly on a per capita basis, it is because the West African population has risen three-fold over the same period of time. Similarly, it is true that food availability per person is more or less the same today as it was forty years ago. But to maintain this level of availability per person, the region's inhabitants have had to increase production by 300%. The fact that one quarter of the children in the region do not know how to read nor write has also been verified. But it must be kept in mind that 30 years ago, 70% of the children were considered illiterate. However, there were half as many children then as there are today. There are plenty of these examples.

**The purpose here is not to say that “everything is going well” but rather to recognise the considerable efforts made by West Africans with the support of their development partners.** These changes have certainly not taken place without being confronted by severe problems. They have been impeded by problems related to governance, human security, national and international strategies and policies, new pandemics, ill-adapted training systems, the slow development of the local private sector, tensions and conflicts often resulting from rapid changes in societies and the environment in which these societies are evolving.

The SWAC would like to recall that **the demographic shocks endured by West Africa in the past but which still continue, as well as by Sub-Saharan Africa, have not been observed anywhere else.** No other region in the world at any period of time has known such demographic growth<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, no other region has undergone such demographic expansion while at the same time entering into a global world.

To date, foreign direct investment in West Africa is still under 0.3% of total foreign direct investment (FDI), and the region’s share of world trade is still extremely low (under 1%). Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is still relatively small in comparison to the real needs of the region. It represented less than 5% of the regional GDP in 2001, which, on a per capita basis, amounts to 17 dollars<sup>2</sup>. **Low levels of international transfers, high public debt in many countries (in relation to repayment capacities), persistent problems for countries of the region to mobilise internal savings and budgetary resources** are adding measurably to the challenges of meeting the social, environmental and economic goals of sustainable, equitable development.

In view of all of this, it should not be surprising that the majority of West African countries will be unable to attain the Millennium Development Goals. To achieve these goals, the countries in the region must mobilise

<sup>1</sup> Examining this subject in his book *Afriques noires*, Roland Pourtier states “Human history has never seen such an increase in population on such a huge continental scale. And it is going to continue for a long time. Nowhere has the expression “population explosion” been more appropriate.” (2001 – Carré géographique – Hachette Supérieur)

<sup>2</sup> With major differences from one country to the next.

substantial internal and external resources, on a per capita basis, in order to finance the necessary socio-economic investments. **To ensure improved living conditions in West Africa and greater security for all, it is necessary for the region itself and the international community to intensify their actions now in support of the dynamics of change in West Africa. Maintaining the status quo would not only have severe consequences for future generations but would also eventually imply higher costs for the international community. This means that an innovative, continuous partnership with West Africa must be everyone’s responsibility.**

-----  
**Attached to the OECD**, the Club’s Secretariat is financed through voluntary contributions from a large number of OECD countries. The Club is led by a Secretariat composed of a small technical team based in Paris. It benefits from the support of a network of partners from inside and outside the region.

**Its work plan is subject to approval by its Strategy and Policy Group (SPG), the SWAC’s Board of Directors**, comprising of representatives from contributing countries with the participation of West African countries as well as the main regional partner institutions and networks. The SPG meets twice a year to examine the work accomplished by the Secretariat and approve its annual and multi-annual work programmes. The SPG is chaired by a personality designated by its members for a period of a limited duration.

**As a facilitator, moderator, leader of open constructive exchanges, the Club plays a bridging role**, an interface between West African actors and OECD Member countries. **The Club Secretariat’s main objectives** are to:


- Help identify strategic questions related to medium- and long-term development in West Africa;
- Contribute to mobilising and strengthening African capacities within a network approach;
- Support initiatives and efforts by West Africans to promote medium- and long-term development in the region;
- Facilitate exchanges between regional actors and OECD Member countries;

- Promote constructive debates that lead to innovative decisions within and outside the region aimed at building a better future for the region.


**These decisions concern** notably the policy enabling environment; concrete actions to be undertaken on the ground; mobilisation and allocation of resources; implementation of new partnerships leading to immediate results and paving the way for a better future.

**The Club's Secretariat concentrates its efforts on four areas of interest for the region itself as well as that of the international community.** The work programmes to be carried out in each of these areas are consistent with the concerns for the future of the region expressed notably in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in the Vision of the African Union and in the partnership agreement recently finalised between the Club's Secretariat and ECOWAS' Secretariat.

## THE CLUB SECRETARIAT'S FOUR AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

 Medium- and Long-Term Development Perspectives

 Agricultural Transformation and Sustainable Development

 Local Development and the Process of Regional Integration

 Governance, Conflict Dynamics, Peace and Security

SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA CLUB / OECD

Le Seine Saint-Germain, 4 Boulevard des Iles, Building A, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
92130 Issy-Les-Moulineaux (France)

Tel. +33(0) 1 45 24 89 87 • Fax +33(0) 1 45 24 90 31

E-mail: [sahel.contact@oecd.org](mailto:sahel.contact@oecd.org) • Web Site: [www.oecd.org/sah](http://www.oecd.org/sah)