



**ORGANISATION OF TRADE UNIONS OF WEST AFRICA
(OTUWA)**

Mapping OTUWA Engagement With ECOWAS

ADAGBO ONOJA



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PREFACE

Upon the revival of OTUWA in October 2015, in addition to prioritizing the development of a strategic plan for the organization, the issue of engaging with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), was the next key priority of the resuscitated organization.

Three years after late president Sekou Toure, of Guinea-Conakry, inaugurated OTUWA in 1983, General Ibrahim Babangida then military president of Nigeria, as Chairman of ECOWAS Council of heads of states, signed the document in June 1986, which proclaimed OTUWA a creation of ECOWAS, to further the mobilization of the working class into the integration process of ECOWAS. With this declaration, OTUWA was accorded category A consultative status in all the structures and agencies of ECOWAS.

However, following the almost one decade of wilderness caused by among other factors, the civil war in Côte d' Ivoire, which at the time was playing host to OTUWA's headquarters in Abidjan the capital city, the organization went into serious decline.

The 2015 conference revived the organization and moved the headquarters to Abuja, to be close to the headquarters of ECOWAS, also based in the Nigerian capital . We have held some activities to chart a way forward in reintegrating into the activities of ECOWAS.

This study, which we commissioned Adagbo Onoja a lecturer of Veritas University, Abuja, to do is in furtherance of our quest to get the right issues on which to anchor our engagement with ECOWAS and its agencies.

Mr Adagbo Onoja, a doctoral student at University of Ibadan, trained

first as a journalist in Bayero University Kano, and later as a political scientist from the same university. He has post graduate degrees from University of Warwick and University College London, respectively. He worked with Alhaji Sule Lamido, as a senior Aide, when he was Nigeria's minister of Foreign Affairs, and for six of his eight years as Governor of Jigawa state.

This study was made possible with the support we got from Friedrich Ebert Foundation, whose outgoing country representative Mr. Ulrich Thum, showed a lot of understanding when we approached him on the need to carry out the study. We are deeply indebted to him for facilitating the study.

John Ejoha Odah
Executive Secretary

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INTRODUCTION

The Idea of Mapping

This mapping exercise is aimed at identifying issues, themes and programmes that may form the subject of a reflective conversation between the Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA) and the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS). This is with a view to strengthening and advancing the underlying, fundamental principles of ECOWAS.

While ECOWAS serves as an inter-governmental body overseeing what should be the collective and strategic approach of the West African governmental leadership, OTUWA serves as the representative body of millions of workers in the trade union movement who are also government constituents. Given this situation, it would seem entirely appropriate that ECOWAS and OTUWA should be working together in tandem and on common goals.

Within this context, prioritizing mapping engagement between ECOWAS and OTUWA becomes quite urgent. Not only are both ECOWAS and OTUWA creations of authority, they are also each in authority. There may of course be differences, but if there is an agreed policy framework to refer to, this could immeasurably enhance a cooperative and constructive approach to problem solving.

The proposed mapping exercise is thus of self-evidently mutual benefit. It will provide all parties with a clear basis on which to plan to meet the needs of our people. It will indicate where policies need to be updated, refined and if necessary, reconfigured, to meet both everyday realities and changing patterns of economic and social development. In a world where the polarization of interests is

drastically narrowing opportunities for inclusive development, with all of the consequences this entails, what is proposed here is a first step towards ensuring that all sides can engage, and be reassured that there is a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities we face.

A thorough desktop review has been utilised in carrying out the mapping exercise. Documents such as the Lagos Treaty, for example, and subsequent amendments or additions to it as in the creation of OTUWA in 1986; the 1993 revision of the original Treaty; the ECOWAS Vision 2020 which was endorsed in 2007; the creation of the Tripartite Forum in 2010; FMM West Africa: Support for Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa and the Supplementary Act Relating to the General Convention on Social Security of Member States of ECOWAS in 2013. This is besides numerous other ECOWAS documents and will include relevant additions from books, journal articles and other sources such as Hamalai and Obadan, (2015).

The document begins in the first section with a reminder of what we are talking about when we make reference to ECOWAS and to OTUWA. In the second segment, we take a broad outline view of ECOWAS' key issue areas and associated policy frameworks. Section three shifts to OTUWA as part of a global movement, but also as a key regional civil society organisation. Section four itemises the key issues for further conversation between ECOWAS and OTUWA while section five brings the synthesis to a conclusion.

Sketching ECOWAS and OTUWA

The Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS) continues to suffer from a degree of misrepresentation/misunderstanding in the hands of those referring to it. ECOWAS is often simply represented as the sum of the statistics that surround it

– the year it was formed, the number of countries by which it was constituted, the population of the sub-region and, sometimes, how well or otherwise particular functions are undertaken, for example the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group – ECOMOG. Rarely is ECOWAS represented as being a source for creative thinking and successful implementation.

It is clear that if ECOWAS was to be seen in this light, it would be much more effective on the global stage, and especially if it was undeniably pursuing policies which had the overwhelming support of the peoples of West Africa.

This brief history of ECOWAS is not going to be about the data regarding it. It is going to go beyond how ECOWAS was formed in 1975 in Lagos, had 16 member countries which became 15 after Mauritania withdrew, these countries being Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote D' Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Togo and its 391million demographic strength (2019 projections).

As uncontested as these facts are in themselves, they are not as important as the collective agency of the political and civil society leaders of these countries and both intellectuals and those with invaluable tacit knowledge either as practitioners of statecraft or as the producers of the means of survival.

For a continent that was historically and chronically managed in order to maximize the profits for vested interests outside of the continent, ECOWAS is particularly worthy of further examination. ECOWAS was formed at a time when regionalism and cross border cooperation was still very underdeveloped. Furthermore, ECOWAS was formed at a time when the region had nothing to mobilise other than raw commodities and it must be noted, an incredible capacity for the accommodation of a vast array of identities within and between communities. Although a Francophone version of

ECOWAS preceded it, this did not prevent ECOWAS from becoming a powerful component of African agency, warts and all.

By its 44th year of existence in 2019, ECOWAS has gone on to acquire a multiple of institutions, often modelled after those of the European Union which dictates the pace in international regionalism. ECOWAS has particularly drawn attention to itself in conflict management by creating a peacekeeping force that remains a largely unique initiative, formed towards the end of the Cold War, and when the 'scramble for Africa' had been stalled by national liberation struggles.

What this has meant is that the numerous peace keeping and peace support operations that oversaw much of the post Cold War conflicts globally, had much to learn from ECOMOG, Perhaps more importantly, ECOMOG was overwhelmingly not seen as an occupying or colonial force, but as a legitimate arm of West African governments, acting in the interests of the West African people as a whole.

The formation of ECOWAS also contained a powerful on-going 'internal dynamic' and that was the importance of building a democratic consensus, both between and within ECOWAS member states. The impact of ECOWAS on the various democratization processes that have taken place cannot be under-estimated, including the need to move beyond the barrel of a gun to the ballot box. In the current context this is likely to prove more relevant than ever, and must be even more entrenched if the catastrophes of war are to be avoided.

OTUWA too is no less a product of this agglomeration of experiences. OTUWA is not just another member of the emergent global civil society. It also has its own unique development path as a non-state player through times of extraordinary social and political upheavals. It is worth simply restating that Trade Unions have been at their most effective when they are able to unite workers, regardless of their

cultural, religious or other identities. By 1986 it had become apparent that this unifying feature of the trade unions could be a vital prerequisite for integrating the sub-region long before the Cold War ended. Again, that this happened in Africa, not Europe or North America, makes it all the more prescient.

The road travelled for both ECOWAS and OTUWA has not been paved with gold. ECOWAS have had to contend with the persistent impact of poverty and deep economic crisis. It also had to weather the storm of internal conflict and civil war. It had experienced the frustrations of military rule, and the denial of democratic mandates. It has similarly felt the negativity of chronic corruption, and the continuation of economic subservience. ECOWAS has contained within its ranks, far sighted individuals who tried and sometimes succeeded in developing survival strategies. It has seen the most articulate and seemingly sensible developmental strategies cast aside by those motivated by their own personal accumulation. ECOWAS has also seen the importance of not allowing the longer term goals to be lost despite all manner of possible distractions and crisis. In other words, ECOWAS has matured and gained tremendous experience over its over four decades of existence

So too in a number of ways has OTUWA. The organization has managed to re-position itself, and develop a perspective that has continued to strengthen its effectiveness despite resource limitations, political conflict in general, and the impact of austerity. OTUWA is now seen in the global trade union movement as a success story to be replicated elsewhere. It has built a reputation for wise, united and measured leadership, for transparency and accountability, for great strides towards inclusivity, and perhaps more importantly, for its focus on the needs of workers and the poor.

The point however, is to recognise that both ECOWAS and OTUWA having learnt the lessons from these experiences possess and share a crucial legacy which can serve as a vital resource going forward.

Mapping ECOWA and OTUWA's Priorities

Given the centrality of the need to address the needs of the vast majority of the West African peoples, and especially those who are challenged by poverty and inequality, there is a pressing need to look again at ECOWAS' policies that touch on the interests of workers and the poor.

While it could be reasonably argued that all ECOWAS policies will in some respects impact on the plight of workers and the poor, it is important to recognise that there exists a range of policy initiatives that impact directly upon them. It will also be important to stress that democratic rule is most effective when it is inclusive, and where the consequences of policy implementation are fully appreciated and known. That there will from time to time be areas of disagreement, and conflict, even if contained within certain guidelines, but that mature organisations and partners understand there is nothing to fear from robust debate, and all to gain from listening carefully to each other, and providing the time and space for those interactions to take place.

Given the content and shape of the labour market across the Region, and the rise for example of workers in what is called the informal sector (that is increasingly identified as the 'survival sector'), the challenges facing small and subsistence farmers, and the growing army of unemployed young people has meant that the trade union movement has had to redefine itself, and its relationship to sectors of civil society that play a role in the modern economy. This has not only helped to make the trade union movement more responsive, and representative of a much wider defining scope of workers, but has also strengthened collective and democratic organisation of those who were once considered adrift on the margins of the economy. This is a crucial development. The idea that trade unions represent and service only industrial or state employed workers is no longer valid. Trade Unions in the West Africa region have been in the forefront of changing their own organisational forms in order to provide

representation for those workers who are not located in traditional sectors, and this in turn has provided impetus to ensure that all workers, regardless of where they work, are empowered by trade union membership.

The approach adopted here is to list the policy areas considered key, to assess the current phase of their implementation and the implications from the point of view of workers, with particular reference to the meeting grounds between ECOWAS and OTUWA.

Some of the policies identified for this purpose are contained in key documents such as the Lagos Treaty; the 1993 revision of it; the ECOWAS Vision 2020; the 2010 Tripartite Social Dialogue Forum; FMM West Africa: Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa and the Supplementary Act Relating to the General Convention on Social Security of Member States of ECOWAS in 2013. Additional to this list are the books, journal articles and similar raw materials considered relevant to the review exercise.

- After initial research and the distillation of key documents, the first, observable key agenda item must be the policy of a Common Market or a Custom Union to drive all other ECOWAS initiatives. In this regard, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, (ETLS) and the associated Common External Tariff policy, (CET) are overarching in character. The CET which operationalises the ETLS is already in place and serves as the de facto basis of a custom union. Although the CET itself came into effect only as recently as 2015, it has for a considerable time represented the conscious, stated and unstated essence of ECOWAS and described as the 'economic union in West Africa' in the revised Treaty of 1993, and specifically as part of a cure for poverty through 'co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly in the field of industry, transport and communication, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce...!'.

- This is also emphasized in the Lagos Treaty. In other words, the coming into force in 2015 of the CET represented a most recent attempt towards making ECOWAS effectively a customs union, meaning that all categories of goods and services are eventually free of tariff impediments in inter-community trading. Unlike the way in which agricultural goods were covered in the initial phase in the very late 1970s. This progression makes valid a claim of customs union status for ECOWAS in spite of some residual statist practices to the contrary at the actual borders. There are however serious concerns remaining including the discriminatory or non-compliant attitudes by some member states to the letter and/or the spirit of the protocol.
- Following closely the policy of a drive to a customs union is the policy of free movement of people. This could be regarded as the most controversial or the most difficult component of the ECOWAS strategic objectives. The complexity of human agency vis-à-vis the objective of free movement of people has become even more complicated with global security concerns, compounded by the rise of both informal and institutional xenophobic sentiment in many countries and the polarization this creates. This is undoubtedly made worse by populist interpretations of migration patterns.

Despite this, it is remarkable that the principles on the free movement of persons has remained basically intact as defined in the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods until it was further elaborated in the 2008 ECOWAS Common Approach to Migration, and the ECOWAS Labour and Employment Policy adopted the following year and further refined in the 2013 ECOWAS General Convention on Social Security. As at today, ECOWAS citizens do not need a visa to enter another ECOWAS country. What exists is rather an ECOWAS Passport and similar travel documents that are acceptable across the region. Similarly, residency as a roadblock has been removed in that there are clear processes and phases by

which ECOWAS citizens can avail themselves of the facility to live elsewhere in the region. Of course in some countries in the region, there remain cumbersome documentation processes; multiple border encounters and corruption.

There are also those, mirroring what is happening in the Northern Hemisphere who are prepared to use the scapegoating of 'foreigners' in order to distract from poor governance, or to build divisive political support on a populist basis. All the more reason for ECOWAS and the trade union movement and civil society in general to take it upon themselves to explain the benefits of open borders, and the Common Approach to Migration, and in so doing to expose negative sentiment that militates against the principles underlying it, and popularize the necessity for unity and cooperation across the region.

- The ECOWAS Monetary Co-operation Programme, (EMCP) operationalising the financial/monetary plank for a customs union represents the third broad policy framework in ECOWAS. Targeted at achieving convergence of macroeconomic jump – off points for member states, it is a vital requirement for a customs union. This has had a long history already, having come into force in 1992. Expected to climax at a single currency, this has made progress with the creation of the West African Monetary Union since 2000. Given the kind of variables involved in this process, such as the management of exchange rates, a central bank supervisory role and sentiments relating to national currencies, it is not surprising that it faces practical challenges equal to the free movement of people. Numerous postponements do not appear to have dampened political will for such a development, and it would not be surprising if there are more postponements beyond 2020, the current target date.
- The management of two crucial initiatives, the Common Agricultural Policy, (CAP) and the commitment to infrastructure development, together under one heading makes

sense as far as development is concerned. If we take the case of the Common Agricultural Policy we see a recognition of how strategic agriculture is viewed in the integrative project. But we also see a recognition of how bedevilled it is by low productivity as a result of constraints imposed by natural factors such as amount of rainfall. Besides, there is the paucity of what are considered the three factors for enhanced production: selected seed, fertiliser and agricultural machinery, (ECOWAS Commission, 2008: 3).

There is an abundance of agricultural resources and if properly supported, it will be an acknowledgement of what this would mean for food security, job creation and foreign exchange earnings for the region. It is instructive that 'Food and Agriculture' is one of the specialized technical commissions of ECOWAS. The ECOWAP could thus be regarded as an attempt at responding to the paradox of plenty through the 2005 framework and the six priority areas it is identified with, viz: improved water management: improved management of other natural resources; sustainable agricultural development at the farm level: developing agricultural supply chains and promoting market: preventing and managing food crisis and other natural disaster and institution building, (ECOWAS Commission, 2008: 10).

ECOWAP sums up the organizational exertions on specific areas such as agriculture and infrastructure where systematic intervention including in such areas as telecommunications, transport, mining, and energy. Transport, mining and energy are areas without which the idea of a customs union is impracticable and unthinkable. The prospects of a Trans-West African Highway linking Nigeria to Mauritania and Senegal to Chad as well as the West African Gas Pipeline conjoining Benin Republic, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo are all considered essential.

- Peace and security as a core area speaks to the law and order

requirement for integration in an economic community that has had more than its share of violent conflicts, state paralysis and state implosion. The capacity for crisis management within ECOWAS has been strengthened and includes violence containment and alleviation mechanisms through ECOMOG. Added to an increasingly sophisticated early warning mechanism, involving the deployment of diplomatic pressure and other behind-the-scene moves, towards peaceful mediation must be noted. The experience of ECOWAS has become a case study in peace making and peace keeping. As Jaye and Amadi (2012: 4) argued, ECOMOG raised issues of legitimacy and legality principally because it was not an intervention authorized by the UN which tends to animate international security. As Olonishakin has pointed out, ECOWAS has been a story in part of continental “firsts” in the area of regional peacekeeping, “the first in the continent to undertake a major peacekeeping mission (beginning with the deployment of ECOMOG in Liberia in 1990), preceding other regional organisations in terms of developing a 'workable security management mechanism' in the face of a complex emergency in the post Cold War world, (2012: 13).

- Moreover, it is important to note that, before ECOMOG interventionism, ECOWAS had enacted two specific protocols on security, viz the 1978 Protocol on Non-Aggression and the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence. Afflicted as these two protocols were by internal and external pressures, they nevertheless indicate an organizational consciousness of the need for a security dimension for effective integration. The question of security amid real concerns on the trafficking of people, the informal trading in weaponry, especially but not exclusively, small arms and light weapons across the region, as highlighted by Jaye and Amadi should be amongst concerns that are addressed by all social partners, and not confined to the secretive boardrooms of a security elite. Security affects all of our people and for effective mechanisms we would argue that

this too should be collectively addressed, and should include a re-evaluation of the type of ECOMOG best suited for purpose. Ensuring that particularly military interventions when required are rooted in an agreed policy framework, including what happens after conflict is a critical consideration.

- This work declines to lump Democracy and Good Governance with Peace and Security exertions of ECOWAS. In this respect, we take note of Jaye and Amadi, (2012: 5)'s reminder of how 10 West African countries conducted elections based on a multi-party democratic model in 2007 alone. The significance is that less than half of that number conducted any elections at all before that era. The ECOWAS engagement with the agenda of free, fair and credible elections is a crucial commitment articulated in the ECOWAS Vision 2020, entitled: 'Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community'. The accompanying Vision Statement declares the following: To create a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region, built on good governance and where people have the capacity to access and harness its enormous resources through the creation of opportunities for sustainable development and environmental preservation". The ECOWAS Vision 2020 and the '2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance' could meaningfully enrich current practices against the usurpation of power and help to address human rights violations. Among them are numerous declarations in favour of a guarantee of imprescriptible rights, freedom of the media, impunity of governments and guarantee of regular elections. To date, ECOWAS rates above its peers for its guarantee of access to its judicial intervention without having to exhaust openings in national judicial processes. There is thus consistency and continuity.

We believe that all of these matters above could be immeasurably enhanced if entrenched in the popular consciousness by the collective endeavour of all social partners in the sub region.

What Might OTUWA Engage On?

The question here is what are the key policies or issue areas on which OTUWA might need to engage the larger ECOWAS in the light of the above review and at this point in time? Outlined below are some of the issues derived from existing policy frameworks, and informed by the current context. They are posed as key questions that can form the issues for an engagement process.

The Imperative of a Re-appraisal of the Customs Union

To what extent is the narrative of ECOWAS as something about achieving a customs union after which all else would be added still helpful without explicitly tying customs union to a paradigm of a leap forward?

What is the guarantee that this emphasis on a customs union in itself can produce the sought outcome of poverty eradication without West Africa becoming a manufacturing region, for example?

Isn't a paradigm re-appraisal important at this point so as to centralize negotiating a more specific agenda such as an industrial leap in West Africa's relationship with other trading or geopolitical blocks such as the EU and China?

How might agriculture and agricultural communities become drivers of the ECOWAS project as opposed to the current situation where it is ECOWAS that is driving agriculture in the region?

Advancing ECOWAS Common Citizenship

Can ECOWAS create a framework for translating the idea of supra-national citizenship into the reality of community relationship? That

is, how does ECOWAS free the documentation of citizenship from the national, cultural and linguistic segmentation imposed on West Africans by colonial dynamics which existing documents still embody and privilege?

That is also about how the current protocol might be reframed to respond to the question of determining citizenship status of children of free movement families into new cultural areas or between a free mover and an indigenous wife/husband.

By how might ECOWAS deepen community and/or farm relationship towards cultural fusion of the labouring class, a fusion considered a key pre-requisite for creating or transforming the informal economy of individual traders, economic adventurers and small time merchants selling very primary products such as fish, vegetable, oil, food items such as grains, rice, beans, tubers and textile into an industrial economy?

How will the weight of the informal sector manifest itself when common citizenship is firmly established, and what will it mean for cross border trade of both informal and more formal economic activity?

How can we ensure that social provision (especially in terms of education and healthcare) does not cause distortions in migration patterns?

Consolidating Agricultural Advantage Through a Revised ECOWAP

How might the agrarian character of West Africa form the basis for rapid agrarian transformation?

How might ECOWAS harness the huge domain of cotton/textile industry basic to which is the agrarian farmer, be they those employed and those largely self-employed?

Are there linkages at this level that can create an agrarian chain upon which transformation can rely?

Can ECOWAS shield this prospect from being undermined by competition in which the West African cotton industry, like the food industry, is disadvantaged financially, expertise wise and technologically?

What might be ECOWAS' response to the question of domination of the agrarian economy in West Africa? What should be the percentage of share of the market? What might ECOWAS consider as no longer importable or otherwise at this point in time?

Trade liberalisation, yes but what sort of trade? What does comparative advantage mean for West Africa's agricultural products in its EU-ECOWAS dealings?

What should be the value equivalent role for agricultural products in China-ECOWAS trade interactions?

While it is true that the ultimate outcomes of the ECOWAS project - the West African Highways and the West African Gas Project are all, substantially, products of private investment, can the private sector approach work in the case of rapid agrarian industrialisation?

Security, Peace and Progress in ECOWAS

What are the prevailing and future threats to a united, democratic and responsive ECOWAS, and how can ECOWAS ensure that proactive responses have clear mandates?

What are the strengths and weakness of the ECOMOG experience to date, and what lessons can inform future strategy?

In what ways can internal and external security considerations be managed so that they empower people and strengthen democracy and accountability nationally and regionally?

What other agencies can help build capacity in this area, that does not undermine national and regional self determination, and which preserves the rights of all citizens and especially minorities?

In the digital age, how can information technology be used to strengthen responsible and peaceful actions, and also ensure that popular participation is a reality without fear or favour?

By what strategy might ECOWAS undermine the impact of negative - accumulation smuggling and trafficking in drugs, arms, currency and human beings, (sex slavery) - on regional security?

The Imperative of the Biometric Fix to Elections

Commitment to democracy is next to peacemaking in terms of where ECOWAS has made very good progress. But even as re-assuring as the number of ECOWAS countries that conduct regular elections nowadays, the question of the technical quality and credibility of most of the elections or their outcome remains problematic. The imperative of shielding workers who form the majority of the voting population from the outcomes of poorly conducted elections makes this an important issue for OTUWA-ECOWAS interfacing.

Is there an answer in digitalisation of national elections processes across the community? That is, answer to making rigging impossible by a decision of the highest level of authority within ECOWAS that all national elections be digitalised. A technological fix to electoral fraud may be financially involving but still cheaper than the cost in human lives, property, psychic disruption that election related creases impose on every country in West Africa that have experienced it or about to experience it or under a Third Term regime or prolonged personal rule. There would be something to celebrate if such were achieved because it adds to the fact that ECOWAS citizens are not bogged down with having to exhaust remedies available at the national level before accessing the ECOWAS judicial facilities. It is

time to end conflicts and state collapse arising from contested legitimacy of elections in the community.

Conclusion: The OTUWA and ECOWAS Relationship

This review conducted a mapping of engagement between OTUWA and ECOWAS in terms of six broad spheres. All the six areas proposed for the engagement collectively speak to the belief that ECOWAS risks becoming a case of coming together to share poverty instead of wealth. As history has shown that sharing poverty almost always trigger a more serious crisis than poverty itself, a conversation between important actors such as OTUWA and ECOWAS on how to abort such risks is considered crucial. West Africa has seen too much of violence in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea and it is witnessing the rise of terrorism, sundry militias, large scale killings, rural banditry and kidnapping.

OTUWA does not have or claim to have, all of the answers. What it does have is an extraordinary rich history and perhaps more than any other mass organisation, a proven capability to represent the interests of a large section of the population regardless of ethnicity, religious or cultural considerations, or indeed nationality. This is a critical point. In partnership with government, it could have the capacity to change the nature of the West African region and beyond. Of course its primary brief is to protect and extend the interests of workers, and their families and communities, but its very history shows that it is overwhelmingly a unifying force for positive change.

We believe that it is wise for ECOWAS to acknowledge the depth that the trade union movement can bring to the table as well as OTUWA's experience as a vital resource.

The project that is outlined here is essentially a process of laying out on the table the lessons from experience and providing rich material

for ECOWAS and its partners to then be able to map out a way forward for a range of developmental area based on best practice, and innovatory thinking.

The world that we are now entering does not demand that we agree with one another all of the time, but it does call upon all of us to extend our listening and learning skills to a level that has never been more necessary. This is the real challenge inherent in this simple paper. Can we assemble from our collective and singular pasts, the key documentation, reassess the dominant ideas, the successes and the failures, to glean invaluable lessons to inform a strategy going forward?

We sincerely hope that what is written here will help open the doors of mutual learning towards developing new and revamped strategies to address the formidable challenges facing the majority of our people in the West African sub region.

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