



# The Structure of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

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In order to do business correctly in the ECOWAS region, you have to be informed about existing laws, infrastructure, barriers etc. so as to be prepared for difficulties. This article will give you a short overview about the history, structure and the institutions of ECOWAS.

## History of ECOWAS

Although the ECOWAS region was founded on the 18th of May 1975, its roots go back to the early 1960's. The ex-president of Liberia, William Tubman, took the first step towards a West African community. This was in 1964, when the first agreement was signed. The countries involved in this agreement were Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, this agreement did not achieve any of the goals it should have.

Seven years later, in April 1972, two generals, Gowon from Nigeria and Eyadema from Togo, picked up the concept again and restructured it. They started differently and went on a trip to 12 different countries to present their idea to the then governments. In December 1973 the representatives of these countries gathered together for a discussion in Lomé. The ideas and concepts were discussed, evaluated and changed by lawyers and experts in this field in January 1974. In addition, a conference with the actual governments was held in Monrovia in January 1975.

After all these meetings and conferences the 15 finally involved countries signed a corporate contract and created the Economic Community of West African States. This happened on 28th May 1975. During these years some of the countries left the ECOWAS region, such as Mauritania in 2002. Others, such as Cape Verde, became part of the Community in 1977.

The actual member states are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cape Verde, Guinea, and Niger.

## **General Information about ECOWAS**

ECOWAS consists of 15 member states with three different spoken languages (English, French, Portuguese), different currencies and a total population of 220 million people. The mission of ECOWAS is to promote economic integration across the region. In order to enter the business region of ECOWAS it is very important to know everything about the structure, the status of the institutions and the member states of ECOWAS. This will help you think about difficulties that can arise by doing business in the ECOWAS region and enable you to try dealing with them before entering the region.

## **Structure of ECOWAS**

ECOWAS comprises three branches of power; the Executive branch, the Legislature and the Judiciary. There is a fourth institution - the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), which deals with some economic affairs of the community in addition to communities outside the bank as well.

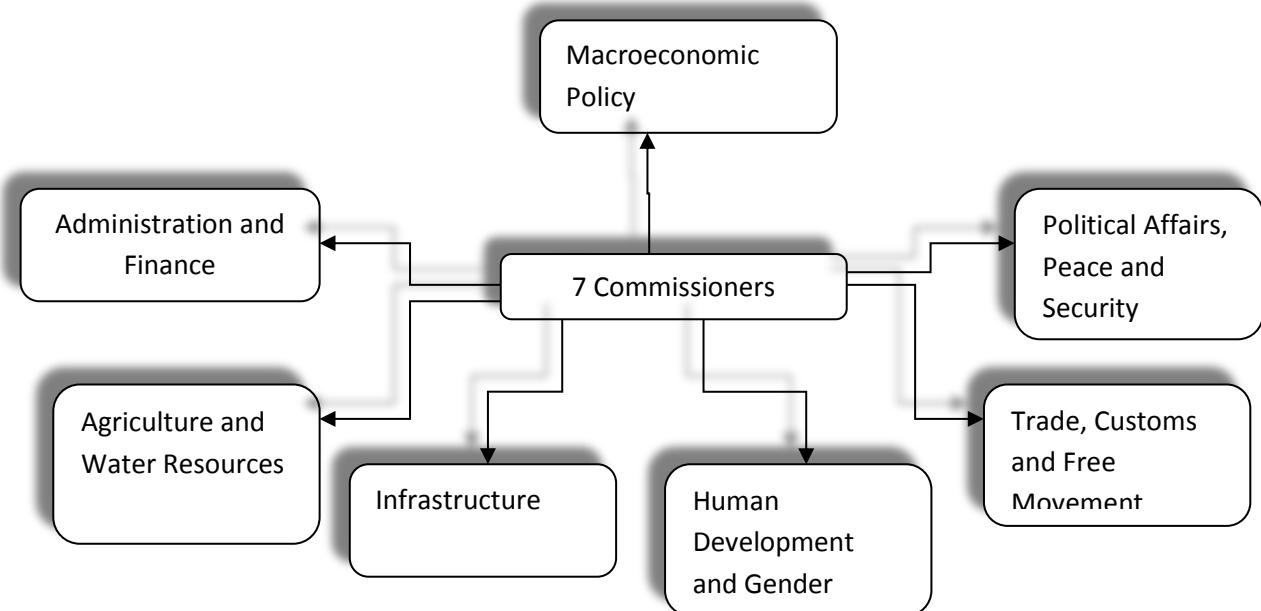
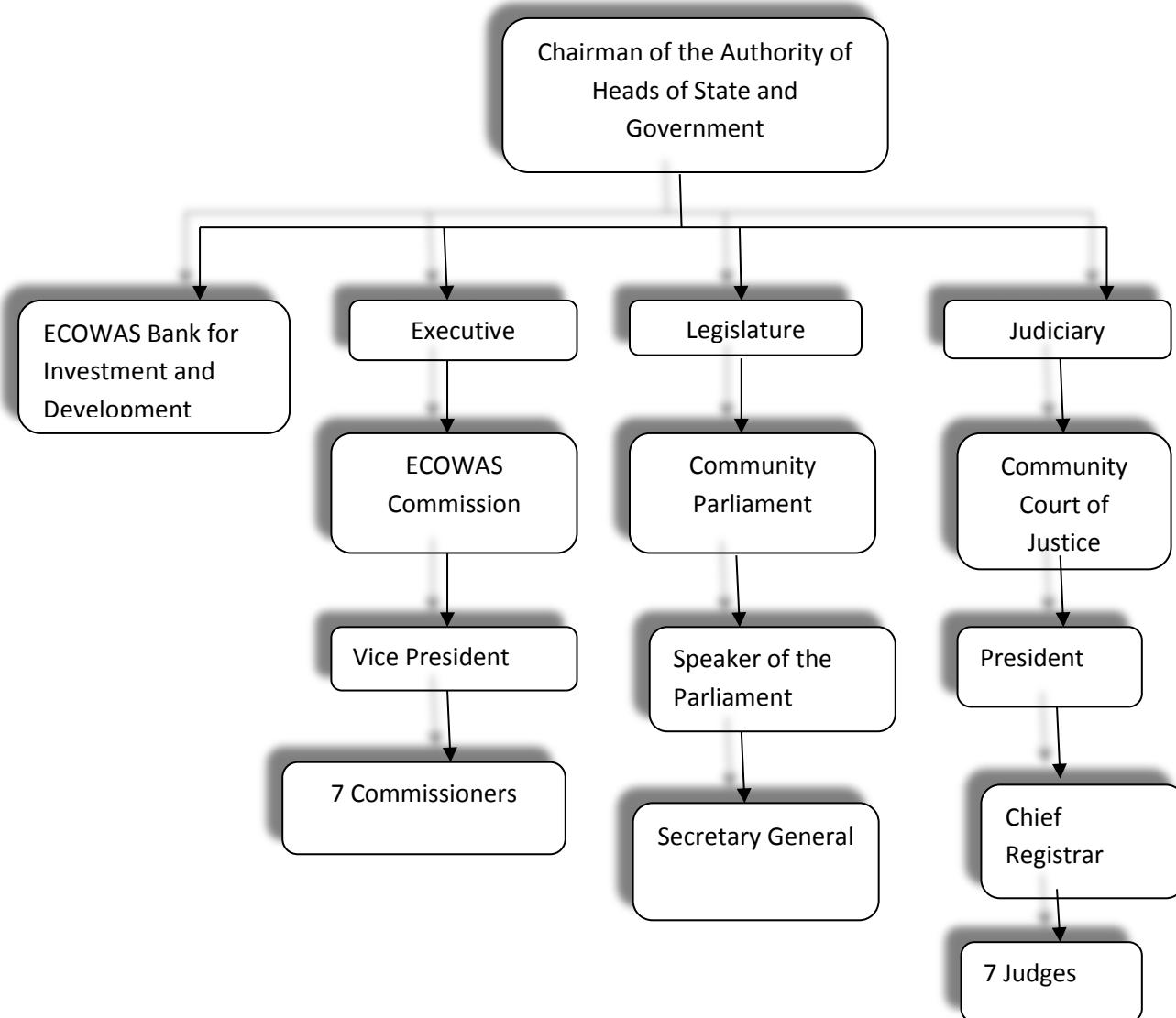
The head of the organization is the Chairman of Authority of Heads of State and Government, currently John Dramani Mahama from Ghana, who is appointed by other Heads of State to oversee the affairs for a period of one year. The Authority is responsible for general direction and control of the community and meets at least once a year.

The institution of the executive branch is the Commission of ECOWAS. Its head is the President of ECOWAS Commission appointed by the authority for a non-renewable period of 4 years. The Vice President and the following 7 Commissioners assist him:

- Administration and Finance
- Agriculture and Water Resources
- Human Development and Gender
- Infrastructure
- Macroeconomic Policy
- Political Affairs, Peace and Security
- Trade, Customs and Free Movement

Until 2006 the ECOWAS Commission was named ECOWAS secretariat. The differences between these two institutions are the change of name and an increase in the number of officers at the management level. One of the main features of restructuring the commission is that there is a smaller and more clearly defined sector for each Commissioner so that the work can be done and controlled more accurately. This restructuring process brought a lot of advantages with it. One of them is the improvement of the community spirit.

Another Institution is the Community Parliament, which belongs to the legislative branch. The Speaker of the Parliament chairs it. Below him is the Secretary General, who is responsible for the administrative functions of the institution. Taking this Institution as an example, the reorganization of the commission was carried out to improve its efficiency. This works because of strong management support.



The parliament has 115 seats, which represent the 15 member states. Each of them has at least 5 seats, the rest is shared in correspondence to the population. The following table shows the seats of each member state:

Member State	Parliament Seats
Nigeria	35
Ghana	8
Cote d'Ivoire	7
Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Senegal	6 each
Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo	5 each

The last of the four main institutions is the Community Court of Justice, which represents the judicial branch. A president also chairs it. The Court Registrar, who handles the administrative functions with the support of other professionals, assists him. The Court ensures the interpretation and application of Community laws, protocols and conventions.

The two main institutions of these four are the ECOWAS Commission and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), which were created to implement policies, pursue a number of programs, and carry out development projects in Member States. The vision of EBID is to become the leading regional investment and development Bank in West Africa, an effective tool for poverty alleviation, wealth creation and job promotion for the well-being of people in the region. The changes can only be realized if everyone in the community gets involved.

## Summary

This article gives only brief and general information about the ECOWAS region. This information is important for enterprises that want to enter the West African market, because they need to know the market and its circumstances before entering it, in order to be prepared for upcoming difficulties. Feel free to ask for any more information and advice before entering the West African market.

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## Sources of Information

Official Website of ECOWAS - [www.ecowas.int/?lang=en](http://www.ecowas.int/?lang=en)

Official Website of WAMI - [www.wami-imao.org](http://www.wami-imao.org)

International Democracy Watch - [www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php](http://www.internationaldemocracywatch.org/index.php)