

Socioeconomic Indicators of Selected West African Countries and Prospect for 2030 Development Agenda

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Abstract

Poverty, health inequity, high cost of food prices, high electricity tariffs among other socioeconomic challenges are common futures of West African economies. This paper examined socioeconomic indicators of the West African economy between 1995 to 2019 using the profile and trend analytic approaches. The socioeconomic indicators examined are poverty head count ratio, under-5 mortality rate, government education expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), government health expenditure as a percentage of GDP, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission, electricity consumption (Kwh per capita), food production as a proxy for food security and real GDP. The selected West African countries include Mali, Benin, Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria following availability of data. Findings from the analysis revealed that the 15 West African economies are diverse across these dimensions of development. It further showed that with the exception of Nigeria (although, by far the largest economy in the region), the focused countries have performed averagely in relation to the socioeconomic indicators. Moreover, tepid economic growth (Real GDP) was observed for these countries as a result of lower commodity prices and impact of pandemics (Ebola and COVID-19), while income per capita ranged from \$452 to \$3,678) within the region. However, much gap is still existing towards achieving the related Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) and Targets. The policy implication of the findings inter alia is that sound socioeconomic policy framework at the regional level based on pro-development strategies is needed to improve the socioeconomic status of the West African countries for Agenda 2030 in line with the evidence from the paper. This agenda should not be divorced from structural transformation and enhanced regionalism and integration.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, Under 5- mortality rate, Food security, Electricity consumption, poverty head count, Carbon mission, ECOWAS

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Background to the Study

Socioeconomic status (SES) refereed henceforth as indicators, are operationalized as either education, social class, inequality, unemployment, income, occupation, political participation, and environment among others (Geyer at *al.*, 2006; Goldthorpe, 2009; Ploubidis et al., 2014). These indicators have also been explained as the position of an individual on a socioeconomic scale that measures factors such as education, income, type of occupation, place of residence and in some population, heritage and religion. It revolves around a theoretical construct encompassing individual, household, and/or community access to resources. These indicators shape development discourse and formed the core of economic policy strategic agenda in developing countries. In this article, our focus on these indicators are: Under-5 mortality rate, real gross domestic product (Real GDP), food production proxy for food security, electricity consumption in kilo watt, carbon emission a proxy for air pollution, government health expenditure measured in relation to GDP, government education expenditure, percentage of GDP and poverty headcount ratio, a measure of the poverty level and poverty dynamic per time.

Sketching the statistics, in 2018, estimated real GDP growth for West Africa was 3.3%, up from 2,7% in 2017. Between 2014 and 2017 precisely, West Africa's GDP growth rate trailed the rate of Africa as a whole, though it was faster than in Central and Southern Africa [4]. The tepid growth reflected lower commodity prices, shrinking oil production in Nigeria and the impact of pandemics including the Ebola and currently, the COVID-19. Economic growth contraction in Nigeria (by far the largest in the region) overwhelmed the high growth in some of the smaller economies, pulling down the region's average growth rate. The West African 15 economies are diverse across the dimension of development measures. Buttressing further, income per capita in 2018 ranged between \$ 45(US dollars) to \$ 3, 678. Growth in the region has been projected to remain subdued at 3.6% in 2019 and 2020. Positive net exports and investments were the main drivers of growth in 2018, while government and household consumptions contributed marginally to the growth potentials. Major risks for the region's economic prospect in 2019-2020 include fragile security conditions in Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria.

High unemployment presents an important socioeconomic and policy challenge in West Africa. After declining from 4.2% in 2010 to 3.7% in 2015, the region's average rate of unemployment shot up to 5.2% in 2018. Unemployment reflects the economic structure and population dynamics in individual countries, many of which are dominated by the largely informal agriculture and service sectors. Structural transformation remains weak, especially those dependent on extractive resources. From 2000 to 2015, labour shifted from agriculture only marginally, by 6.4% and industry's share increased by only 2.2% point. Two –third of the shift was caused by changes in the service sector, whose productivity is less than that of the agriculture sector (UN, 2020; West African Economic Outlook, 2018). The informal workers are poorly paid, and many receive wages below the poverty line. Informally, under-employment, job precariousness and income inequality affect women more than men. The West African region-with a total population in excess of 340 million-has the lowest modern electricity consumption rates in the world. Electricity access rates in the region vary from

below 20% in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger and Burkina Faso to more than 50% in Senegal and more than 70% in Ghana. In Nigeria, the largest country in West Africa, it has been estimated that 96 million people-55% of the population do not have access to electricity (WEO, 2015). The ECOWAS combined together; only 19% of the rural population has access, mostly in the larger rural centers and some localities to electricity (Drame, 2014). Poor electricity access in the regions is linked to a variety of regulatory, social, economic, technical and financial constraints such as insufficient generation, high price of energy and petroleum. They also include lack of energy financing, and transmission and distribution losses (Vilar, 2020).

West Africa's carbon emissions (CO₂) are daily increasing due to economic growth, industrialization and environment degradation (Ameyaw and Yao, 2018a; Ameyaw and Yao, 2018b). The CO₂ emission has been recorded as the fastest pollutant in West Africa in the last two decades (Aye and Edoja, 2017). Agricultural production and productivity has remained low in West Africa. About 70% of the agricultural growth rate of the region is attributed more to the expansion of cultivated land to sophistication in agricultural system or actual increase in productivity than any other mean (Dabugat, 2014) Climate shock and variability are leading challenges of agricultural production process, where a steady decline annual rainfall and progressing desertification creates adverse effects on the resilience of populations within arid and semi-arid countries in the region. There is also a clear deficit of public investment-both domestic and foreign in agricultural development across the region, with only 6 countries out of 15 (40%) meeting the 10% targeted of official public spending in agriculture under the African Union 2003 Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa (ECOWAP +10, 2015. Though the global under-5 mortality (USMR) dropped from 93 deaths per 1000 live births in 1990 to 39 in 2017, the highest rates are still seen in the ECOWAS zone, with an U5MR of 76 deaths per 1000 live births in 2017, leading to 2.7 million deaths in the region. Even if U5MR has declined in most sub-Saharan African countries, substantial inequalities between sub-groups of the population still exist within the West African Countries (Tabutin, and Masquelier, 2017).

In Africa, particularly in the West Africa sub-region, between 2001 and 2018, government expenditure (% of GDP) was about 5.52 and 5.49 respectively. In line with the position of, (Novignon and Lawanson, 2016) sub-Saharan Africa comprised majorly by the West African countries witnessed the least health care expenditure per capita compared to other regions of the world. For example, per capita income in the region although increased from \$2397.7 (US) in 2000 to \$3283.43 (US) in 2011, which further rose to \$3439.9 (US) in 2016 (Tandon and Cashin, 2010), much lower than the world average of \$ 10,5625 (US) in year 2017, much lower than the Abuja Declaration of 15%.

This paper extends and contributes to the literature on socioeconomic indicators of West African countries using the case studies of Benin; Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria due to the availability of data, although adequate must be taken in interpreting the data. It basically contributes to the literature in four ways. First, we show why socioeconomic indicators matters for 2030 Development Agenda. Second, we present some brief review of literature on the selected socioeconomic indicators. The aim is to showcase the trend in the empirical

literature. Third, we present some trends and profile of the West African socioeconomic indicators, to pictorially show the movement of these indicators. Four, we identify some key lessons from the analysis and then offer some policy suggestions in light of the evidence that would help West African countries and policymakers to strategize on how to improve these indicators for development aspirations and for 2030 Development Agenda. Specially, this paper is important as it will help point the way forward towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8,3,12,7,13,4,1, which is 'No poverty', 'Good Health and Well-being', 'Quality education', 'Affordable and clean energy', 'Decent work and economic growth', 'Responsible consumption and production' and 'Climate Action'. The questions that shape the discussion of the paper is anchored on the following:

1. How do these socioeconomic indicators relate Sustainable Development Goals?
2. What are the challenges of socioeconomic development in West Africa?
3. What are the prospects of these socioeconomic indicators in West Africa?
4. What is the situation of inequality in West Africa?
5. What are the policy measures to addressing these challenges?

The reminder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II presents the socioeconomic indicators in relation to 2030 Development Agenda. Section III presents a brief literature review while section IV discusses some lessons and policy implications of the findings of the paper. Section IV concludes the paper with some policy options.

Why Did Social Economic Indicators Matter for Sustainable Development Goals(S) DGS)

Despite the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), more works and efforts are needed to achieve the desired global development aspirations. The Sustainable Development Goals is that resolve and efforts to achieve these development aspirations. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development sets out a very ambitious program (me) of work. In September 2015, the 17 goals and 169 targets of the SDGs we agreed upon. In summation, the SDG is divided into five broad themes or sections of: People: Goals 1-5; Planet: Goals 6 and 12; Prosperity Goals 7-11; Peace: Goals 17 and Partnership: Goal 17 (UN, 2016). Sustainability in this context must be viewed from a broader perspective that includes the socioeconomic dimensions. These dimensions in relation to the study include but not limited to under 5 mortalities, real GDP (economic growth); food production for food security, electricity consumption, air pollution and CO₂ emission, government health expenditure and government education expenditure as percentages of GDP and poverty headcount relation. How do these indicators link to 2030 Development Agenda?

The 2030 Development Agenda aim at ending poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potentials in dignity and equity. The 2030 Agenda takes a brother view of education than that encompassed in the Millennium Development Goals and includes not just primary education but lifelong learning. This wider focus is illustrated by the variety of actions targeted, for example; to ensure all boys and girls have access to pre-primary healthcare and education; complete free and quality primary and secondary education and have access to affordable technical vocational and teacher education. It also emphasized gender and social elements, such as the elimination of gender, minority and disabled disparities in the level of education available to

the people. To achieve this, it is recognized that more qualified teachers, better facilities and more scholarship must be made available via expenditure on education. Education is a key goal of SDG 2030.

By 2030, it is expected that there will be an end to hunger and ensure access by all people to free healthcare, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants and adults, to safe, nutritious and significant food for year-round. Target 2.4 in particular aim at ensuring sustainable food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices that increases productivity and food production, that help maintain economic system, that strengthen capacity for adoption to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other diseases and that progressively improved land and soil quality. The World Food Programme (WFP) define hunger as "not having enough to eat to meet energy requirements", but also noted that "hunger can lead to malnutrition but absence of hunger does not imply absence of malnutrition" and warns that daily undernourishment, that is less than 2,100 calories per day is a very important but less visible form of hunger.

Improving the education and health of the people will not only lead to a better quality of life but also has positive impact on economic development mostly poverty reduction and inequality. The provision of education and health for all irrespective of class is a key element for policies that promotes broad-based economic growth. Provision of education and health services need to improve productivity and earning of workers. Education also helps to mitigate many of the problems faced by developing countries including the West African countries that are the focus. Education and health are important tools to empower poor people and overcome exclusion based on gender, location and other correlates of poverty and as submitted by (UN, 2003) public expenditure on education and health must be productive and not unproductive.

Limiting the effect of climate change may be necessary to achieve sustainable development, equity and poverty eradication in the West African countries. It raises challenging issues of equity, justice and fairness as all countries irrespective of where they are on the developing spectrum, will share the consequences of not taking mitigation and adaptive actions seriously over climate change. Without additional mitigation efforts, global warming will lead to a high risk of severe, widespread and irreversible impact globally, and West Africa in particular, including the extinction of a large fraction of species. Climate change will also reduce renewable surface water and groundwater resources in most dry sub-tropical regions, intensifying competition for water. It also poses negative risks for land available for both agriculture and human habitation. This exposition no doubt illustrates the linkage of these indicators to SDGs.

Literature Review

Conceptualizations

Socioeconomic Indicators

Socioeconomics refers to society related economic factors that relate to, and influences one another (Becker, 1974). According to Mark (2009), socioeconomics is the reciprocal relationship between economic science on the one hand, and social philosophy, ethics and

human dignity on the other, towards social reconstruction and improvement. Marmot(2004) sees socioeconomics as an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience, and of an individual's or family's economics and social position in relation to others. The socioeconomic indicators as conceptualized in this paper includes poverty headcount ratio; government education expenditure, percent of GDP; CO₂ emission as a measure of air pollution; electricity consumption in kwh per capita; food production index as a measure of food security; real GDP per capita; and under – 5 mortality rate.

National poverty headcount ratio is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty lines. National estimates are based on population – weighed sub-group estimates from household surveys (World Bank, 2008). The headcount ratio is calculated by comparing the income of each household in relation to the poverty line. Government education expenditure as a percent of GDP is calculated by dividing total government expenditure for all levels of education by the GDP, and multiplied by 100. The percentage of government expenditure on education to GDP is useful in comparing education expenditure between countries over time in relation to the size of their economy. A high percentage to GDP suggests a high priority for education and a capacity of raising revenues for public spending (Edward *et al.*, 2015). Government health expenditure, percent of GDP is the sum of outlays by government entities to purchase health care goods and services divided by the GDP, and multiplied by 100. It consists of recurrent and capital spending from government budgets, external borrowings and grants, and social health insurance funds, all as percentage of GDP (Piabuo and Tieguhiong, 2017). It contributes to the understanding of the relative level of public spending on health to the beneficiary population. Carbon dioxide(CO₂) role in the greenhouse effect is a major contributor to air pollution. Radiation and heat emanating from the earth's surface need to be released out into the atmosphere, but due to the high level of carbon dioxide, there is an ozone effect on the ground level (West *et al.*, 2004). Carbon footprints are measured in grams (g) of carbon dioxide equivalent, which is the amount of CO₂ that would cause the same level of radioactive force as the emissions of a given greenhouse gas (Quyang and Lin, 2017). Long-term health effects from CO₂ emission includes heart disease, lung cancer, and other respiratory diseases. Electricity energy consumption is the actual energy demand made on existing electricity supply. Annual electricity consumption per capita serves as an important measure of a country's electric power development. Energy consumption leads to the creation of new markets, businesses and job openings, which provide more opportunities for individuals to earn an income and lift themselves, families and communities out of poverty (Gretchen, 2013).

Food production index covers food that are considered edible and contain nutrients. The index number of food production compare a volume of agricultural production in a given year with a base period. They are based on the sum of price-weighted quantities of different agricultural products used as seed and feed, weighed in a similar manner (Cafiero, 2014). The commodities covered in the computation of indices of food production are edible and nutritious crops and livestock products originating from the country. Real GDP per capita measures that average level of national income (adjusted for inflation) per person. It gives a rough indication of average living standard (IMF, 2013). It measures the actual increase in goods and services, while excluding the impact of rising prices per person in the economy. The

under-5 mortality rate (U5MR), which is the probability of a child dying before 5 years of age per 1000 live births, is a key global indicator of child health, and one of the most important measures of global health (Black *et al.*, 2016). U5MR reduction is a major target of the Sustainable Development Goal by 2030 (UN, 2016).

Brief Empirical Literature Review on Socio-Economic Indicators

have intensified sex of the child, place of residence, mother's education and household wealth as factors associated with U5MR. According to the authors, the U5MR is significantly lower in girls than boys in. The authors concluded that sex of the child and mother's education are identified as major factors to U5MR in the ECOWAS countries

Ghazanchyan and Stotsky (2013) examined the drivers of growth in sub-Saharan Africa including the ECOWAS sub-region over the period 1999-2011. The paper correlated SSA/ECOWAS great experience to its key determinants of growth, including private and public investment, government consumption, the exchange rate regime and real exchange rate, and current account liberalization, using the panel data technique. The result showed that higher private and public investment was found to boost economic growth, why government consumption exerts a drag on growth while a more flexible exchange rate regime is beneficial to growth. On the other hand, the real exchange rate and liberalization are not drivers of growth in the ECOWAS sub-region within the reviewing period.

Haris- Fryet *al.*, (2015) examined socioeconomic determinants of household food security and women's dietary diversity in rural Bangladesh using the multinational logistic regression on a randomly-selected sample of 2809 women of reproductive age drawn from 9 unions in three districts of rural Bangladesh. The paper identified numerous interlinked factors associated with household food security, but wealth and literacy we are the only two determinants associated with improved food security and dietary diversity. The paper concluded with the designing and monitoring of the substantial influence on food security. Kwakwa (2018) is of the view that electricity consumption has been increasing whereas the supply is not enough to meet the growing demand in Benin, a West African country. Therefore, managing electricity consumption has become critical owing to the expected risen future consumptions. Using the autoregressive distributed lag model approach, the author found that population; urbanization, education and industrialization positively affect electricity consumption while income negatively reduce electricity consumption in Benin.

Chen (2017) examined the factors affecting electricity consumption and the consumption characteristics in residential sector; a case example of Taiwan through two approaches, a social economic perspective and a direct use prospective. The results of the paper revealed that gross domestic product (GDP), employment rate, residential space, and the implementation of energy labelling schemes provide significant impact on residential electricity consumption. Whereas, the impact of electricity price and the energy efficiency standards do not receive significant support. The results, derived from the case of Taiwan's residential electricity consumption provides valuable information for policy-making on green labelling, energy standards and electricity prices.

Zeng et al., (2016) explored issues concerning which factors that influence carbon dioxide emission in 73 cities of China using the linear mixed effects model. The empirical results demonstrate that population size, secondary industry proportion, energy consumption structure, urbanization level and economic level have generally shown a positive influence on CO₂ emissions in Chinese cities. Meanwhile, urbanization level is of no significance to explaining carbon dioxide emission.

Maliteo and Cantarero (2018), investigated public healthcare expenditure in two most decentralized countries in the world; Canada and Spain for two partly overlapping time spans of data availability. Canada, 1981 to 2013 and Spain, 2012 to 2013 using regression analysis. The paper revealed that physician numbers are a significant driver of real per capita public health expenditure in Canada but not in Spain despite the greater per capita number of physicians in Spain. Differences in the growth and performance of real per capita income explain much of the gap between public health spending between these two countries with some contribution from differences in per capita physician numbers.

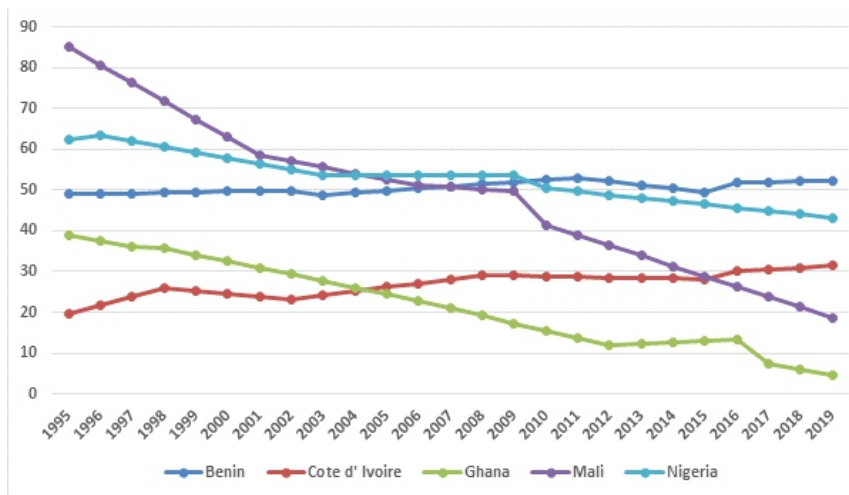
Yun and Yusoff (2019) reviewed the literature on the determinants of public expenditure on education. The author concluded that sufficient public allocation for the education sector was seen to be both necessary and crucial. The understanding of the variables that determine public education expenditure policy therefore serve as a fundamental key element to assist in improving the future planned allocations. In another article, [30] focused on the macroeconomic determinants of education expenditure in Nigeria from the period, 1980-2012 using the vector autoregressive approaches. The paper revealed that oil revenue is the most important determinant in funding education expenditure both in the short run and in the long run in Nigeria. The funding from non-oil was more or less not substantial while impact of external sector on education expenditure was deleterious.

Ibrahim and Ohwofasa (2015) examined socio-demographic determinants of poverty in Nigeria and its gender differentials. Using the binary profile regression analysis. Evidence from the paper revealed that social demographic variables as well as level characteristics are strong determinant of poverty in Nigeria. The empirical results from the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition showed that female-headed households are more disadvantaged in terms of social economic deprivation than the male headed households. In a related paper, Buba *et al.*, (2018) examined the social economic correlates of poverty in Ghana using Ghana Living Standard Survey round 6 and 7. Results show that education, literacy, locality, and household size are strongly correlated with poverty, meanwhile, education, savanna zone, locality, sex of household heads and literacy are significant variables. These results differed from earlier results on gender and poverty. The results of the paper show that there is a high probability for male headed households to be poorer than female-headed households. This, the author premised on the fact that most poverty interventions by international donor and agencies mostly focus on females in rural areas with little attention being paid to males. Also, household heads that never attended school are more likely to be non-poor than household heads who attended School.

Profile and Trend of Socioeconomic Indicators in West Africa

The data presentation is based on the trend and pattern of the 8 socioeconomic indicators in relation to the focus countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d' Ivoire, Mali and Benin from the year 1995 to 2019. Figure 1 show the poverty headcount ratio of the countries under review at the US 1.90 dollar per day purchasing power parity(PPP)

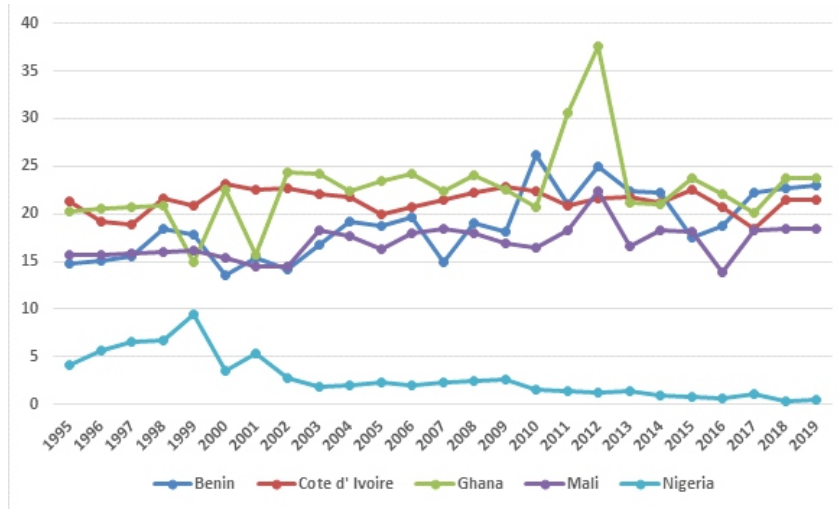
Fig. 1: Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$1.90 a Day (2011 PPP) (% of population) in Selected West African Countries



Source: World Bank Development Indicator, WDI (2020)

The ratio of people living below \$1.90 a day in the population of the 5 West African countries has reduced marginally from between 20 and 85 percent in 1995, to between 5 and 52 percent in 2019. The trend showed Mali and Ghana as the best performers in terms of poverty reduction in the ECOWAS countries. This was attributed to efficient structural reforms of the two countries. The trend also showed that Benin and Nigeria are respectively the two countries that is battling with poverty. The result could also be generalized for the rest of the ECOWAS zone. The implication is that ECOWAS countries may not be meeting the 'no poverty' goal of the SDG if policy effort is not bolstered in the region especially in Nigeria, that have been described as the poverty capital of the world.

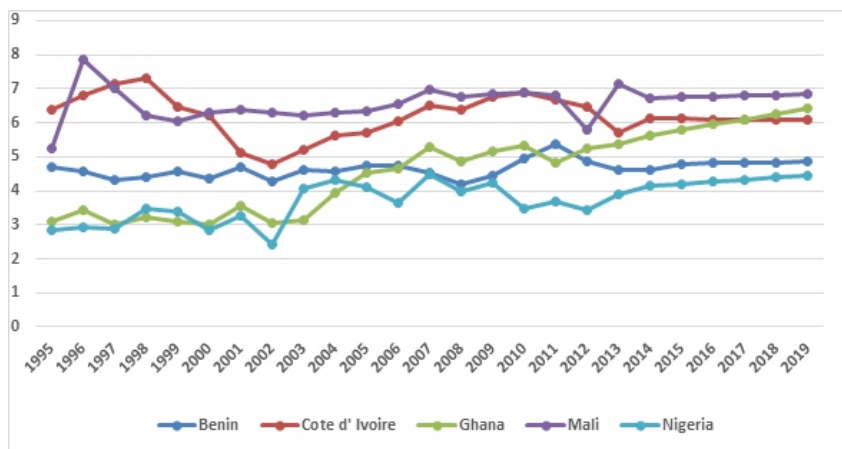
Fig. 2: Government Education Expenditure Per Capita (% of GDP) in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI(2020)

Figure 2 shows the government education expenditure per capita (% of GDP) in the five West African countries. From the trend, Ghana is taking the lead in public expenditure to education in the ECOWAS countries. This is followed by Benin republic, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali respectively. Again, Nigeria is taking the back seat. Ghana has close to 37%, over and above 26% UNESCO Standard., while Nigeria, the giant of Africa, the most populous and richest spend only meagre 9%. In terms of ranking in Africa, apart from South Africa, Ghanaian universities are becoming the order of the day including Nigeria that migrate to Ghana, for university education. Although, Ghana stood the chance of meeting the SDG 4, the question of quality comes to mind. How qualitative is Ghanaian educational system? Indeed, the rest of the ECOWAS countries may not meet this goal/target by 2030 by the trend and projections.

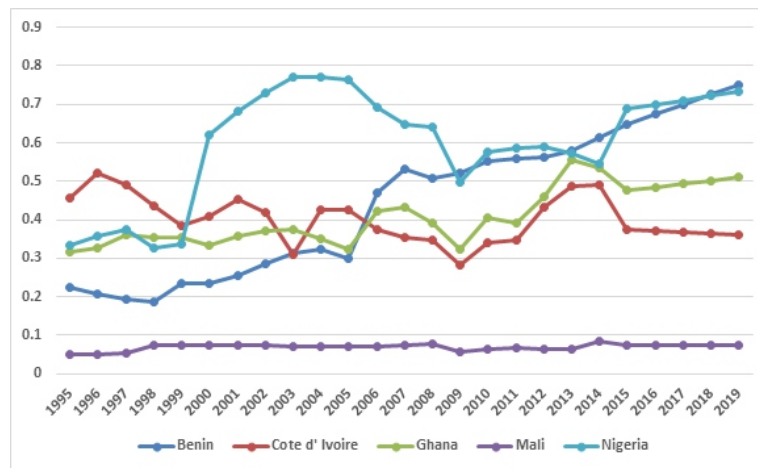
Fig. 3: Government Health Expenditure Per Capita (% of GDP) in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI(2020)

Figure 3 show Government health expenditure in relation to GDP for the five countries under review. The trend showed that Mali is leading, followed by Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Benin. Again, Nigeria is trailing behind these countries. From the trend, the Abuja Declaration of 15% expenditure on health by these countries are still far from reality. This portends a serious danger to the West African countries, as SDG 3- "good health and wellbeing" will be a mirage by 2030 for these countries in particular and the ECOWAS zone in general.

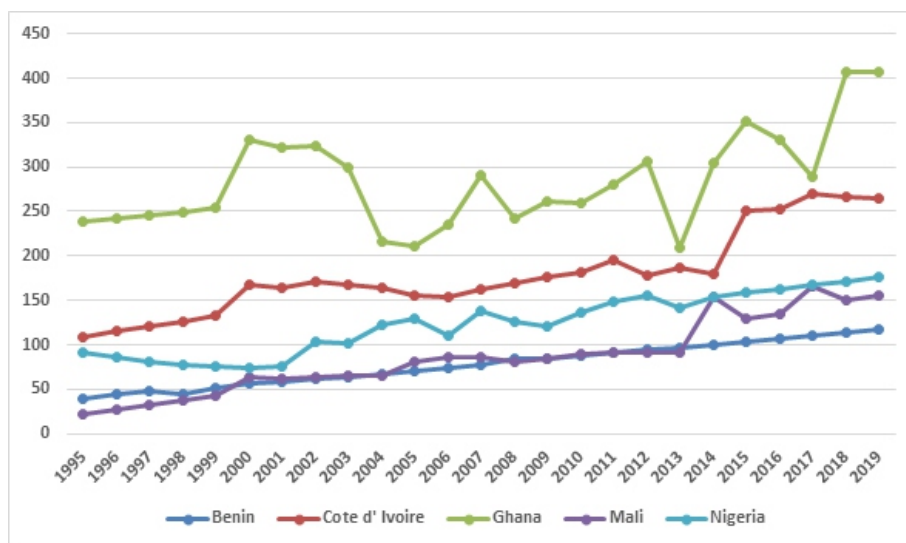
Fig. 4: CO2 Emission as a Measure of Air Pollution in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI (2020)

Figure 4 show CO2 emission in the countries in focus. Nigeria is recording the highest emission among the comparator countries followed by Benin republic. Prosperously, Mali has zero Co2 emission among the five countries. Will these countries achieve SDG 13 by 2030? This may not be in the affirmative. However, policy efforts must be sustained and maintained towards climatic actions, especially reducing methane and Co2 effects. Target 13.1 enjoined all countries to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disaster.

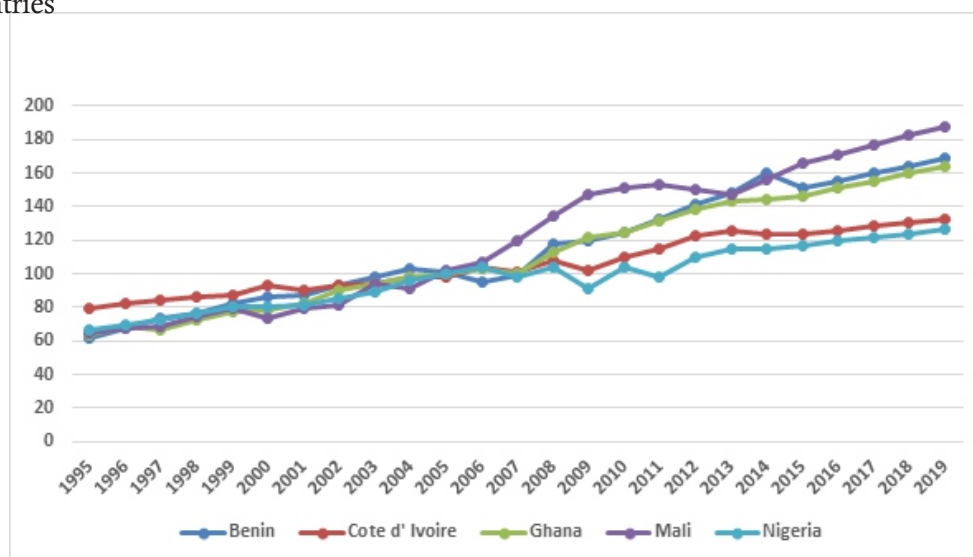
Fig. 5: Electricity Consumption (kWh Per Capita) in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI(2020)

Figure 5 shows electricity consumption among the five ECOWAS countries. Ghana has maintained a distant first position in electricity consumption among the five countries under review. It has risen from 240kwh averagely in 1999 to 407 kwh averagely in 2019. Cote d'Ivoire was following and Nigeria respectively. With the ongoing trend, will these countries and the rest of West Africa countries achieve, Target 7.1, which is to “ensure that there is universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy” and Target 7.3 is to “double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency”? This is yet to be seen in the years ahead.

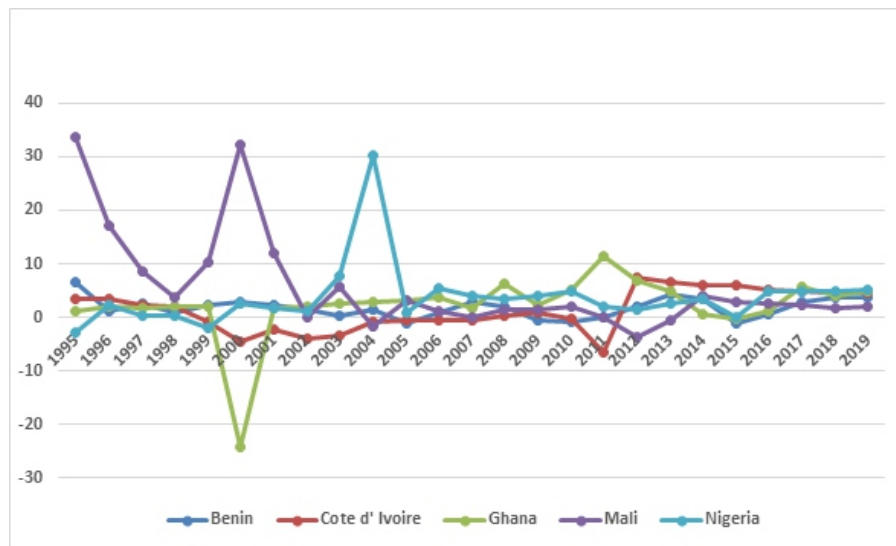
Fig. 6: Food Production Index as a Measure of Food Security in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI(2020)

Figure 6 show the food production as proxy for food security in the reviewing countries. All the five countries under study has progressed marginally in food production index from between 60 and 80 caloric content in 1995 to between 126 and 188 calories in 2019. Mali maintained the lead with 188 calories in 2019, followed by Benin with 169. Ghana and Cote d' Ivoire follows, while Nigeria is again trailing behind. *Target 2.1* – By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. *Target 2.2* – By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025, the internationally agreed target on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons. Can these targets be achieved by the ECOWAS countries?

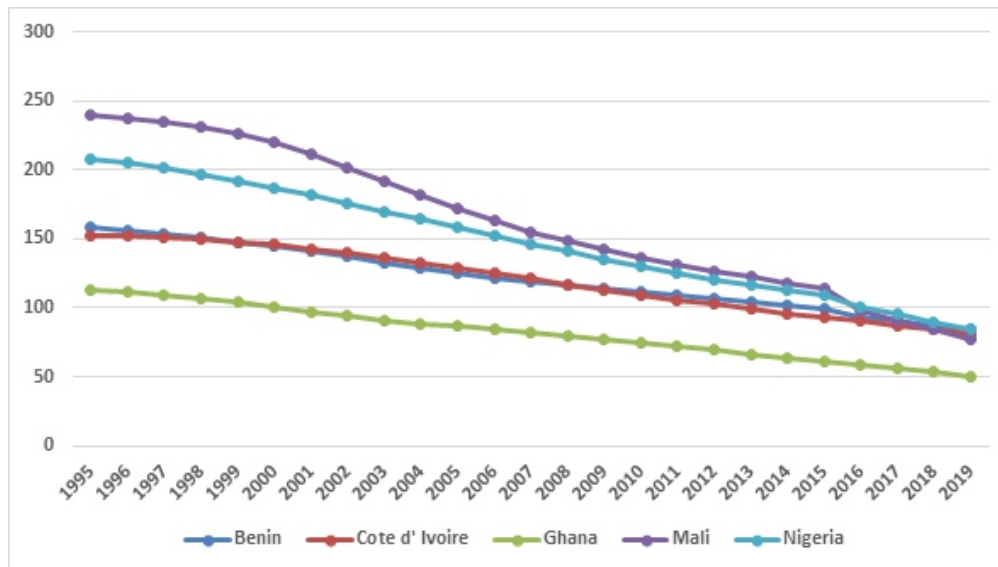
Fig. 7: Real GDP Per Capita Growth Rate (Annual %) of Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI (2020)

Figure 7 is on the real GDP growth of the five reviewing ECOWAS countries. Intuitively, the growth rate of the countries has fallen below the 7% per annum for development. From the trend, one can for sure conclude that high unemployment rate has characterized these countries in particular and ECOWAS countries in general. Will these countries achieve SDG 8? In reference, *Target 8.1*- Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with natural circumstance and in particular, at least seven percent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries (LDCs). *Target 8.5*- By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities and equal pay for work of equal value. It is expected that policy efforts must be strengthened to achieve this goal and the targets by 2030 by the ECOWAS countries.

Fig. 8: Under-5 Mortality Rates in Selected West African Countries



Source: WDI (2020)

Figure 8 shows the Under – 5 mortality rate of the five reviewing countries. From the trend, Mali followed by Nigeria has the highest number of U5MR among comparator countries. Ghana has lower U5MR. Does this convey a message of hope for the ECOWAS countries in relation to SDG3 and in particular, Target 3.1- By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live birth. Target 3.2- By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1000 live births and under-5 mortalities to a least as 25 per 1000 live births. Can these targets be achieved by these countries and the ECOWAS countries at large by 2030?

The West African Inequality Crisis: Some Facts of the Matter

Underlying the socioeconomic analysis of poverty, inadequate government expenditure on education and health, poor access to energy, costly food prices and exclusive economic growth is the inequality crisis. While a small but growing number of people are becoming fantastically rich, the vast majority are denied the most essential elements of a dignified life, such as quality education, healthcare and decent jobs, despite remarkable economic growth by extractive industries (Aboagye-Attah, 2019). Compared with other regions of the African region, West Africa has the greatest number of countries where more than 30% of the populations are living on less than \$1.90 a day. The region has also the lowest level of public healthcare coverage and the lowest proportion of the population with access to water and decent education. These pressing human needs co-exist with massive inequalities that hold back the progress of many in the region. The region also has high rates of child marriage, and three countries- Niger, Mali and Nigeria- have the highest number of children in Africa married before the age of 18 years. This endangers the sexual and reproductive health of the girl child deprives them of the opportunity to acquire an education.

Wealth inequality is a common feature of the West African economy. Wealth inequality not only creates a divide between rich and poor-it also has a strong gender dimension. For example, in most of the West African countries, men own 62% of household places of residence and 62% of agricultural land, while only 37% of owners of real estate female (WAEO, 2019). In addition to inequalities of wealth and income, there are two additional forms of inequality in West Africa: gender inequality and inequality between urban and rural areas. In terms of gender, West Africa is the most male-dominated region following UNDP's 2017 Gender Inequality Index (HDI). Gender inequality can also be found in political representation, with women accounting for as few as 5.8% of elected representative in the Nigerian parliament, 7.2% in Benin and 8.8% in Mali (Oxfam, 2019). Rural communities have the least access to all forms of public services, from education to healthcare. One of the targets of SDG is that, by 2030, each country must achieve and sustain growth in income share of the bottom 40% of its population at a rate higher than the national average. The Oxfam Briefing Paper- has shown that all the West African countries are still a long way from achieving the SDG 10- reduced inequalities, thereby increasing the share of the poor. Therefore, the Oxfam paper recommended that ECOWAS countries Governments must promote progressive taxation, boost social spending, strengthen labour market protection, invest in agriculture and strengthen land rights for smallholders, while the ECOWAS Commission needs to prioritize tackling inequality and develop a regional action plan to drastically improve the region's socioeconomic performance. Box 1 and Table 1 presents the paradox of inequality and the ranking of government's commitment to reducing inequality in West Africa.

Key Lessons, Policy Implications and Conclusion

Key Lessons

Some key lessons can be derived from the socioeconomic indicators and inequality analyses. These lessons are as follows:

1. Ending poverty and hunger, in all its forms and dimensions in West Africa will ensure that the West Africans countries fulfill their potentials in dignity and equity.
2. Qualified teachers, better facilities and more scholarship must be made available via expenditure on education.
3. To ensure food security in West Africa, there must be substantial food production system and resilient agricultural practices that increases food production.
4. The provision of education and health is a key element of policies that must promote inclusive growth.
5. Reducing the deleterious effects of climate change will be necessary to achieve sustainable development, equity and poverty eradication in West Africa.
6. Climate change poses a great challenge and danger to available land for agriculture and human habitation.
7. Inequality is at a crisis in West Africa. Also rife in the provision of public services, such as education and healthcare. Therefore, tackling inequality is critical to the fight against extreme poverty.

Policy Implication

The policy implication of these lessons are summarized thus:

1. For the SDG goals to be achieved in West Africa, the policy makers should ensure access to health and education including access to technical, vocational and teacher education. Moreover, ECOWAS Government must as a matter of urgency improve and sustain expenditure on education and health expenditures, in line with global best practices.
2. Following 1 above, public expenditure on education and health must be productive and not unproductive.
3. Additional mitigation efforts must be maintained, so as to reduce the spreading effects of climate change on agriculture, renewable source and groundwater resources and to reduce the effect of drought.
4. Sound policy framework at the regional level based on pro-poor gender sensitive development strategies will support poverty eradication actions.
5. The key is for West African governments to radically increase their commitment to tackling the issue of inequality through promoting progressive taxation, boost social spending, strengthen labour market protection, invest in agriculture and strengthen land rights for smallholders.

Conclusion

This paper examined socioeconomic indicators of the West African economy between 1995 to 2019 using the profile and trend analytic approaches. The socioeconomic indicators examined are poverty head count ratio, under-5 mortality rate, government education expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product(GDP), government health expenditure as a percentage of GDP, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission, electricity consumption (Kwh per capita), food production as a proxy for food security and real GDP. The selected West African countries include Mali, Benin, Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria following availability of data. Findings from the analysis revealed that the 15 West African economies are diverse across these dimensions of development. It further showed that with the exception of Nigeria (although, by far the largest economy in the region), the focused countries have performed averagely in relation to the socioeconomic indicators. Moreover, tepid economic growth (Real GDP) was observed for these countries as a result of lower commodity prices and impact of pandemics (Ebola and COVID-19), while income per capita ranged from \$452 to \$3,678) within the region. However, much gap is still existing towards achieving the related Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs) and Targets. The policy implication of the findings inter alia is that sound socioeconomic policy framework at the regional level based on pro-development strategies is needed to improve the socioeconomic status of the West African countries for Agenda 2030 in line with the evidence from the paper. This agenda should not be divorced from structural transformation and enhanced regionalism and integration.

The major challenge of the paper is data collection for the 16 ECOWAS countries. Using only five countries and relying on trend analytic may be misleading. Therefore, the interpretation thereof of this paper must be done with caution. As part of the agenda for further examination of socioeconomic indicators in West Africa, we suggest the inclusion of more countries in the analysis, and preferable use a panel data approach as this will aid policy making.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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