The Emerging ECOWAS of People

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ABSTRACT:

Background The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in May 1975 with the aim of promoting "co-operation and integration leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples." However, for more than three and a half decades, the process of regional integration in West Africa has only circled around heads of states, ministers of state, parliamentarians and other top-brass politicians to the exclusion of ordinary grassroots citizens. Therefore, in June 2007, when the ECOWAS Commission launched its new vision of 'moving from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of People' I initiated a research work, which spanned over a three year period, to examine what roles ordinary citizens can play to support the integration process.

Methodology To achieve my objective, I sampled the views and opinions of a broad spectrum of non-state actors (NSAs) including leaders of civil society groups, private sector institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), media, as well as youth and women groups. The methods I used to collect my data included interviews, questionnaires, newspaper articles and review of published materials.

Outcomes The outcome of my research indicated, clearly, that the people of West Africa are exceedingly interested in the integration process. I found out that, in spite of the bureaucracies of officialdom, there is an **emerging ECOWAS population who have innovative ideas and strategies on how regional integration can be achieved using a bottom-up approach.**