

# Geographic Potential, Sectorial Clusterization and Regional Integration in West Africa

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## Abstract

The entity, West Africa, and its features is the architecture of continuous dialogue between geography and history – from the very beginning of the agrarian shape to the introduction of modern industry<sup>2</sup>. The natural endowments, vegetation and human resources combine to determine the course of economic history and potentials of West Africa. Starting from the surface, varied vegetative coverage exists across the stretch of the region, a suggestion of varied potentials for agriculture. From Dakar, stretching to the Lake Chad, a distance of about two thousand miles, there extends a belt of undulating grassland studded with trees. This area, known as the Western Sudan, forms a corridor measuring about six hundred miles in term of width. To the North lies the Sahara Desert, spanning about one thousand miles towards the North Africa. To the south and almost into the sea, lies a belt of tropical forests running from west to the east, covering no more than two hundred miles from the north to the south, and truncated in the middle by the savannah<sup>3</sup>.

The geographical location is endowed with vast and variety of natural and abundant human resources. Also, the antiquity of history reveals that the geographical expression is not without its own distinctive features. It is a home to several raw technologies of early ages and unique innovations now up-scaled in the most advanced regions of the world and, in particular, the home of some of the early Negro civilization. On account of weather driven pattern of vegetation and types of crops planted varies from rain forest to the savannah. Foodstuffs are the main items of comparative potential in the region. In the Sahelian areas livestock farming remains critical and still promise the greatest potential for rural livelihood.

West Africa is endowed with abundance of variety of valuable mineral resources. Significance of mining as a proportion of the GDP indicates the importance of mineral endowment in the growth, development and economic potential of West Africa. Mining is the most significant component of the secondary sector of the regional economy. Over the period 2005 to 2010 the secondary sector represents an average of about 34.9 per cent of the GDP of which mineral extraction is 25.7 per cent, and the mark-up was contributed by the combination of manufacturing, construction and utilities. It is a uniquely resourceful region and great potential to emerge as leaders in the global economies if these resources are well harmonised and optimally managed. Over 60 per cent of the world production of gold derives from Africa the bulk of which outside South Africa originates from West Africa. 96 per cent of the world production of diamonds comes from Africa bulk of which outside the Congo derives from West Africa. Over 45 per cent of world's output of manganese is produced in Africa, and 34 per cent of it comes from West Africa.

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<sup>2</sup> Hopkins, 1973, 1990

<sup>3</sup> Roughly between Accra and Port Novo

In addition, West Africa produces over 27 per cent of African's output of iron ore. It's been discovered since the 1960s that there unlimited reserves of iron ore running through the Birrimian system extending from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, to Southern Ghana. West Africa also produces the totality of bauxite which enters into the world market yet it is only a small proportion of West African bauxite that is really traded. The region is also believed to have considerable deposit of discovered and other minerals yet to be discovered.

Areas of food crop production where cross-country sectorial integration experiment is possible include yam, cassava, maize, millet, sorghum, rice, beans and plantain. In addition, rivers flow across countries to make common trade in sea resources possible. Products specific analysis shows that integration is possible in production of yam and cassava in the following countries: Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin; Sorghum and Millet for all countries except Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cape Verde and bulk of Guinea Bissau; Plantain in the case of Ivory Coast and Ghana, with South West Nigeria as a heavy consumer of plantain. Rice production also cuts across Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, part of Mali, Niger and Senegal. On cash crops integration, areas where cooperation towards production and trade is possible include oil palm production is specific to Nigeria, Togo, Ghana and Ivory Coast; Cocoa is more specific to Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Togo and Ghana, and on a low scale Liberia and Guinea. Coffee is planted in Ivory Coast with possibility in Nigeria but consumed throughout the region. In addition, groundnut production is common to Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau. Cotton is also one of the most important cash crop which cuts across many countries in West Africa, and of significant offensive and defensive interests in regional and global trade negotiations. Cotton is produced in Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Guinea and parts of Senegal, Gambia and Guinea Bissau.

Among others mining endowment to be explored in this paper, iron production was as early as 1904, with about 1500 furnaces that produced about 540 tons per year in Yatenga, northernmost provinces of Mossi states, around the Volta River in the independent West Africa kingdom that existed between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The area currently lies between Burkina Faso and Ghana. The output of iron from this region when it was active was probably more than the iron and steel imported per year in the region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. By the end of the century, imports had become dominant in some part of the region. Some reasons were adduced for the substitution of local steel production for imports. The main reason being that West African iron industry could not sustain the effect of European competition; although, unlike domestically produced much of European iron had high sulphur and the carbon content largely inappropriate compared to the local<sup>5</sup>. In addition to Nigeria; Liberia, Mauritania, Ivory Coast have endowments to develop viable and competitive iron and steel industry

The paper will focus on the geographic characteristics of West Africa and diverse resources in each of the locations. It will present agricultural and mineral maps showing regional similarities and potential for and model of clusterization

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<sup>4</sup> Curtyin, 1975

<sup>5</sup> Flint, 1974; Goucher, 1981