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Stagnation on Low Levels: Political and Economic Transformation in Central and West Africa

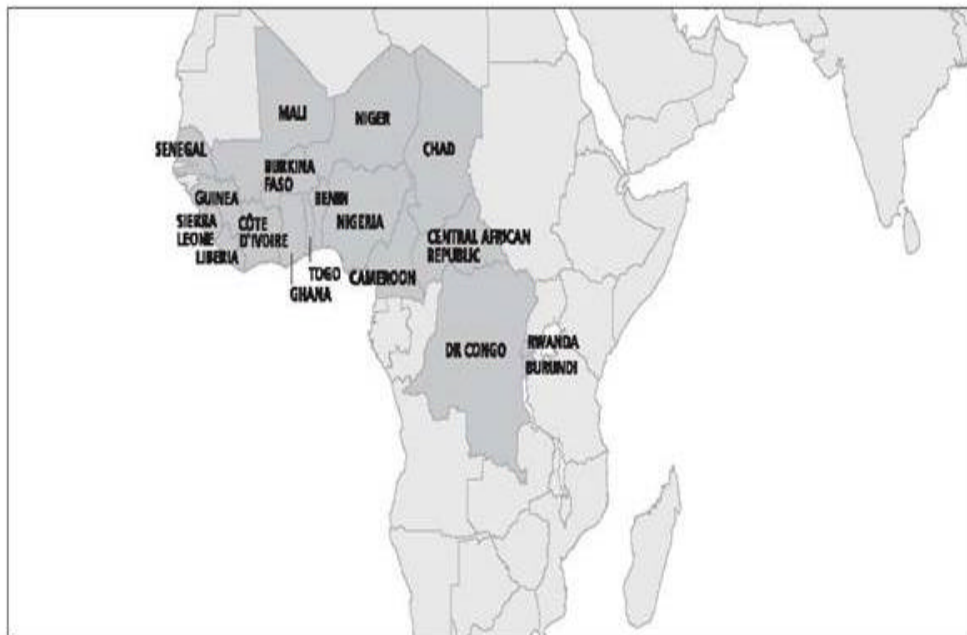
Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 12 (December 2005)

by [Matthias Basedau](#)

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Introduction



Introduction

During the period from 2003 to 2005, political and economic transformation in Central and West Africa (CWA) has gained little ground; though there have also been few losses. In a region notorious for violent conflict, the number of peace accords and peace processes—such as in Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Liberia—is

certainly encouraging. However, their sustainability remains uncertain and will continue to require international assistance.

On balance, the development towards both liberal democracy and market economy is stagnant and remains on a low level. Notwithstanding particularly positive and negative developments such as in Niger and the Ivory Coast respectively, a number of distinct differences within the regions persist. Generally, developments in West Africa are considerably more favorable than in Central Africa. Numerous transformation deficiencies remain more pronounced in the economic than in the political arena. The starkest contrast is found between individual countries in terms of their development in political transformation.

This report provides an overview on the state, trajectory, and management of the transformation processes in the 18 Central and West African countries. It is based on the results of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) and the underlying country assessments which analyze each individual country in detail.

Democratic Development

In Central and West Africa, four regime types can be identified. Benin, Ghana, Mali, and Senegal constitute a group of largely democratic countries, although they display some shortcomings in terms of the control of the state territory, the rule of law, as well as social and political integration. Four countries display more serious deficiencies. This group comprises Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has made the most formidable progress in political terms and currently enjoys a certain amount of political stability, which, however, still depends on the presence of British troops and UN-peacekeepers.

Whether five transitional regimes will follow Sierra Leone's example remains uncertain. Burundi, CAR, DRC, and Ivory Coast are so-called post-conflict societies that are trying to restore constitutional order after periods of civil unrest and war. In CAR and Burundi post-conflict general elections were held in spring and summer 2005 respectively, both returning to power former warring factions with sound majorities. In Liberia, elections were conducted recently (October/November), whilst in the DRC and Ivory Coast, elections originally scheduled for 2005 had to be postponed given ongoing frictions between adversaries.

Table 1: Political Regimes in Central and West Africa

Democratic with slight defects	Democratic with serious defects	Autocratic Regimes	Transitional/post-conflict/state failure
Ghana	Niger	Guinea	Burundi *, ***
Senegal***	Sierra Leone	Rwanda***	Central African Republic*
Benin	Burkina Faso	Cameroon	Liberia*
Mali	Nigeria**	Togo	Ivory Coast**, ***
		Chad***	DR Congo**, ***

* Elections held in summer, spring, and autumn 2005. ** Elections planned for 2006. *** Regional rebel activity limits state control of the national territory.

Certainly, the peace accords and peacebuilding efforts remain fragile, and the outcome of the transition process uncertain. One option is resumed nation-wide armed conflict or continued disintegration of the state; another is the emergence of formally democratic but essentially autocratic regimes, such as in Rwanda since the 2003 elections.

Such autocratic regimes also persist in Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, and Togo. Although multiparty elections are held regularly, serious irregularities have resulted in hegemonic party systems and personalized rule by “Big Men.”

In many Central and West African states, the national government has no monopoly over the use of forces and public administration does not cover the entire national territory. Transitional and post-conflict regimes face fundamental problems in rebuilding the state. Rebel activity restricts the monopoly on the use of force in Burundi, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Nigeria. In Mali and Niger there are extensive, essentially state-free regions without the presence of armed groups.

Citizen rights are a minor problem de jure; however, administrative shortcomings and discrimination against minorities constitute de facto problems. In Ivory Coast, the concept of “Ivorité” denies large parts of the Northern Muslim population, who emigrated from the Sahel, fundamental citizenship rights. This conflict has not been resolved and constitutes one of the “root causes” of the civil war and the present de facto partition of the country. Similarly, unclear citizenship rights of the Rwandophone population in East Congo are a cause of conflict.

Despite frequently large Muslim populations, the secular order of the state is, by and large, unquestioned. Favorable secular French traditions and the largely moderate character of African Islam have a regulating effect. In Niger and Nigeria, however, strong fundamentalist tendencies continue to pose a threat. Entrenched cleavages between Northern Muslims and Southern Christians and Animists exist in Nigeria and Ivory Coast, yet in many other countries, such as Benin, Cameroon, Ghana and Togo, a comparable potential can be found without having caused similar tensions.

The democratic quality of elections differs considerably from country to country and corresponds with the regime types outlined above. Despite minor administrative irregularities that do not affect the overall outcomes, the defective democracies—with the possible exception of Burkina Faso—have managed to conduct free and fair elections.

Contrarily, the transitional regimes often even lack minimal electoral legitimacy. This is particularly true for the DRC. Burundi, CAR and Liberia have regained legitimacy only when elections were held after the period reviewed in the BTI (2003-2005). Elections in Ivory Coast, due in October 2005, were postponed due to the sluggish peace process, but the Gbagbo government enjoys residual electoral legitimacy through the balloting in 2000.

The poor democratic quality of the electoral regime is a central feature of the autocratic regimes. Although multiparty elections are held, outcomes are seriously affected by major irregularities. The military is a traditionally strong antidemocratic veto actor in Central and West Africa and continues to pose an obstacle to transformation, albeit weakened, particularly in Benin or Niger. In the CAR, the former chief of staff of the armed forces, Francois Bozizé seized the capital in a surprise attack in March 2004. A failed coup attempt took place in Chad 2004; alleged coup plots were reportedly thwarted in Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Fundamental democratic rights such as the freedom of association and speech are mostly constitutionally guaranteed in principle; though in many cases prove to be largely nominal only. As a rule, the actual quality of freedom rights corresponds to the quality of elections. Before

founding elections are held, transitional regimes deviate in this respect: In these cases, the realization of the freedom of speech and association foregoes electoral legitimacy.

The rule of law is, by and large, respected merely in the West African countries of Benin, Ghana and Senegal, though shortcomings persist. These deficiencies are even more serious in Mali and Niger. Transitional regimes have failed to guarantee the rule of law thus far, while the power-sharing arrangements between former warring factions indicate a minimal and uneasy separation of powers.

Checks and balances between the legislature, executive and the judiciary function fairly only in the more or less defective democracies (with the exception of Sierra Leone). Exclusively presidential and semi-presidential forms of government—in Nigeria there is also a pronounced federalist system—mean that the executive dominates the legislature. Informal power relations in the framework of neopatrimonial rule and dominant party systems in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Togo amplify the asymmetrical relations between the institutions.

The judiciary frequently fails to perform effective control over the executive, given its scarce resources, poor professional standards and liability to political influence and corruption. Related to that, the abuse of public office remains rampant in many countries, including the regional top-scorers, Ghana, Senegal and Mali.

Democratic institutions are found in the eight more or less defective democracies only. By and large, these institutions are fairly stable, albeit that a weak administration accounts for some deficiencies. Fragile coalitions in the fragmented party system of Benin and frictions between federal states in Nigeria cause additional problems.

In contrast, the level of acceptance and support for democratic institution is generally higher than their performance. Key actors accept them as a central arena of politics in the defective democracies; even in the autocratic regimes, actors are ready to use the only formally democratic institutions as a platform for political activity.

Political parties, interest groups and NGOs account for the weakest performance in terms of social and political integration. Social capital and social self-organization remain underdeveloped or have suffered setbacks in some countries, particularly in cases of long-lasting violent conflicts and authoritarian rule such as in Burundi, CAR, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Rwanda and Togo.

Apart from the transitional regimes—there are emerging party systems at best—political parties mostly do not fulfill their ascribed societal and political functions. Given scarce resources, a lack of internal democracy and shallow programmatic bases it is just ethnic or other loyalty that awards stability to the party systems to some extent.

High fragmentation, however, does not seem to be the prime obstacle to democracy in the region. The long-standing autocracies in Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Rwanda and Togo are characterized by dominant ruling parties with comfortable absolute majorities. The more democratic regimes display fairly different levels of party system fragmentation. A volatile and pulverized party system is apparently compatible with democracy, and the same applies to moderately fragmented multiparty systems in Mali and Niger as well as to a two-party (or future dominant party) system in Ghana.

As a rule, trade unions constitute the most relevant interest groups politically. Mostly they represent civil servants, and Nigeria's active oil workers' unions remain an exception. Civil society has gained ground in Central and West Africa in recent years. As in the DRC, partially, civil society compensates for the absence of the state in the social sector. Yet the topography of

social self-organization and civil society generally remains meager and dependent on external assistance; frequently not enough to fulfill a “watchdog” function.

Though survey poll data is available for four countries only, the high consent to democracy, consistently over 70% in Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal suggests that it is not popular attitude that hinders democracy in West and Central Africa, but leadership and structural problems.

Economic Development

While the political balance sheet remains mixed, no country in Central and West Africa has established a fully fledged socially responsible market economy or even comes close. It is just Ghana and Mali that score above the mean in absolute standards. A particularly poor performance is found in view of the general level of socio-economic development and sustainability. The criteria welfare regime and institutional framework for market competition as well as private property hardly fair any better. While fiscal policy shows a mixed record, the stability of prices and currencies as well as performance indicators account for a more optimistic picture.

Human Development Indicators confirm Central and West Africa's dubious reputation as one of the least developed regions in the world (s, [Table 2](#)). Only Ghana and Cameroon display “medium human development” in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), and Cameroon comes in last in this subgroup. The remaining cases are placed close to the bottom; Sierra Leone was the least developed country out of 177 cases in 2004. The percentage of people below the poverty line—although no real comparable data is available—is one fourth at best (Senegal), and exceeds 60% in a number of cases (Niger, Chad, Sierra Leone and Nigeria).

Table 2: Economic and Human Development Indicators in Central and West Africa

Country	HDI Rank	IEF Rank	Inflation a	Budget balance	Growth a	Poverty	GDI-Rank	Debt service % of GDP
Year(s)	2004	2004	2004	2002	2004	1990-2002	2004	2002
Benin	161	128	2.6 b	-4.5	3.0	33.0 c	130	2.3
Burkina Faso	175	93	-0.3 b	..	4.3	44.9	143	2.7
Burundi	173	..	9.3	-1.7 d	3.0	58.4	140	3.2
Cameroon	141	126	1.0 b	3.9	4.9	40.2 c	111	3.9
CAR	169	117	3.2 b	-1.2	0,5	..	138	0.1
Chad	167	113	3.0 b	-2.2	38,0	64,0	135	1.5
Cote d'Ivoire	163	92	1.6 b	-2.5	-1.0	36.8 c	132	7.1
DR Congo	168	..	8.0	-2.3 d	7.5	..	136	16.2
Ghana	131	98	10.8	4.0	5.8	39.5 c	104	3.4
Guinea	160	93	17.0	-6.2	1.0	40.0 c	..	2.3
Liberia	15.0	..	23.1

Mali	174	85	-1.3 b,d	-7.3	1.8	58.9	142	2.7
Niger	176	118	2.6 b	-2.0 e	3.5	61.4	144	1.3
Nigeria	151	141	15.0	-5.0	5.5	70.2	122	3.4
Rwanda	159	121	12.0	-11.0 d	5.1	35.7	129	3.2
Senegal	157	72	0.5 b	-1.8	4.8	26.3	128	4.3
Sierra Leone	177	135	13.6	-16.5 d	7.4	68.0	..	2.9
Togo	143	131	0.5 b	-2.9 d	1.9	..	119	0.9

Sources: HDR 2004; IEF 2005; Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU); a. EIU estimates; b. Member of the monetary union (Franc CFA); c. National Poverty Line; d. Government deficit/surplus (excluding grants) in % of GDP; e. 2003.

The institutional framework for market competition has improved in Benin, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, whilst in the DRC and Liberia, violent conflict and state failure has hindered any advancement of the already desperate situation. Generally, no country displays an advanced level of market competition: On the Index of Economic Freedom almost all countries are rated “mostly unfree”; it is just Senegal that does comparatively well and is awarded a “mostly free” assessment. Causes include half-hearted commitment to reform and a large and sometimes even growing informal sector that naturally escapes from any effort to include it into a formal institutional framework.

The monetary union in the Franc CFA Zone in many Central and West African states is responsible for the remarkably high monetary stability in its member countries (s, [Table 2](#)). The Franc CFA is tied to the Euro (formerly the French Francs). Particularly, the Central Bank for West Africa is largely independent and responsible for monetary policy in the region (there is also a central bank for Central Africa, which, however, does not have the exact status as its West African counterpart). Other key macroeconomic indicators such as budget balance and debt are less impressive. Ghana tops the ranking, followed by a group of still fairly successful governments (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Senegal). Governments in Cameroon, CAR and Ivory Coast had serious problems in maintaining macroeconomic stability.

In principle, private property is well-defined and protected by the law in all countries, yet given administrative shortcomings and corruption, private property is actually poorly guaranteed in most of the countries. Privatization, demanded by donors, has strengthened the role of private enterprise, in particular in Ghana and Senegal, but the informal sector remains the backbone of the economy. The Privatization process of parastatals, such as in Chad, proved too sluggish and in Ivory Coast, for instance, the former colonial power continues to dominate the private sector.

Viable arrangements for social security are virtually absent in the region. Ghana, Mali and Senegal head the ranking, and the failed states of CAR and DRC find themselves at the bottom. No country can fight endemic poverty without external assistance.

“Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers” (PRSP) are preconditions for donor approval of “Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities” (PRGF). However, in some cases PRSPs have not yet been drafted or have failed to produce satisfactory results. Traditional networks of family or clan bases have to fill the gap, regardless whether they are sufficient or not.

Equality of opportunity remains unsatisfactory as revealed by the Gender Related Development Index (GDI, s. [Table 2](#)). Women have limited access to education and public office, female genital

mutilation is a common practice in many countries. Many ethnic groups face marked discrimination. In Niger, for example, some ethnic groups are basically treated like slaves.

In terms of quantitative measures the strength of Central and West African countries does not point to sound growth. The trends in commodity prices, on which all countries depend in the region, have been relatively favorable. But the subsequent relatively positive growth rates cannot conceal the key macroeconomic indicators such as the balance of payments and debt that remain problematic.

In resource dependent economies such as Nigeria, the oil sector is poorly integrated into the rest of the economy. It is possible that Chad—a growth rate of an estimated 38% is the result of the beginning of oil production in 2003—will develop into a rent-seeking economy and be faced with the negative effects of resource production in the future (“Dutch disease”, corruption and even violent conflict).

Moreover, small economies certainly do have a higher potential for growth than others. The IMF has already issued a warning that the growth rates will not suffice to substantially reduce poverty, even more so when high fertility rates threaten to eat up any progress.

Ecology is not a priority on the governments’ agendas, though desertification, deforestation or the plague of locusts in 2004 shows its relevance quite plainly. There are efforts to tackle soil erosion in the Sahel, but any ecological policies remain inconsistent on the whole and are often set up only to win the applause of donors.

Human capital continues to be underdeveloped, even primary and secondary education. Research institutes suffer from a lack of resources and local scientists are liable to the “brain drain.” Encouraging developments in Ghana or Rwanda are not to be denied, yet concerns persist that the most formidable source of development will continue to be neglected.

Transformation Management

Transformation faces an extremely high level of difficulty in Central and West Africa. Taking this into account, Senegal and Ghana have done fairly well, although deficiencies persist. Such shortcomings are more pronounced in Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Rwanda. Extremely poor or virtually absent transformation management is found in the transitional and autocratic regimes of Cameroon, Chad, Guinea and Togo.

On balance, the region scores best in international cooperation, which is mainly due to the countries’ dependence on foreign assistance. Steering capability reveals a mixed record; governments have laid stress on economic transformation rather than political reform. Altogether, governments do not use resources efficiently and as far as consensus building is concerned, there are distinct differences between the various countries.

The most formidable constraint to transformation in the region is not weak civil societal tradition or ethnic conflicts, but structural problems. General economic development largely still depends on primary commodity prices. Abundance in natural resources as in the DRC, Guinea and Nigeria, if not managed properly, can create both economic and political problems, a development often labeled the resource curse. Ecological problems, such as desertification and erratic rainfall, add to poor educational levels as well as endemic abject poverty and inequality. Physical infrastructure remains weak, and landlocked economies have high transportation costs and become dependent on political developments in transit countries.

The democratization processes in many countries since the beginning of the 1990s has helped the emergence of civil society, but respective traditions remain weak on balance, with possible exceptions such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Benin who could build on traditional forms of a civic culture. In other countries, any social capital was destroyed by violence and tyranny.

Severity of social and political conflict is less pronounced than Western media coverage would suggest. On the one hand there is a number of countries with a record of extreme violence (e.g. Burundi, DRC, Liberia, Rwanda), often with ethnic, regional or religious overtones such as in Rwanda and Burundi (Hutu vs. Tutsi) or, recently, Ivory Coast (North vs. South). On the other hand ethnic diversity does not necessarily entail widespread violence, exemplified by cases such as Benin, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Mali.

Steering capability

On average, the setting of strategic reform goals, their implementation and political learning are managed with moderate success in Central and West Africa. Particularly remarkable are inter-country differences.

Ghana—it is one of the few countries in Africa that may achieve the “Millennium Development Goals” (MDG) 2015—scores best, followed by Senegal, Mali and Niger. Again, transitional regimes in Burundi, Ivory Coast, and DRC as well as autocratic regimes such as Togo show a very poor record.

Since economic conditionality by donors and their respective dependency force almost all countries to embark on economic reforms, it remains unclear to what extent steering capability can be attributed to the governments themselves.

Additionally, in transitional and post-conflict regimes, security has to be upheld by foreign (UN) troops and the implementation of reform depends largely on foreign experts. Considerable progress in Sierra Leone has to be ascribed to foreign presence; (and) the limited sovereignty of such countries has already been described as a de facto “re-colonization.”

The imposing character of reform may be responsible for an ownership problem. As soon as the very power base of regimes such as in Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon and Rwanda is threatened, transformation is thwarted. The intrinsically heterogeneous character of power-sharing arrangements in post-conflict regimes in DRC and Liberia hinders a priori any effective policy formulation and implementation.

Resource efficiency

No government uses human, social and natural resources efficiently to implement reform. It is just the political top scorers—headed by Senegal—and Rwanda which do relatively well. Governments in DRC, Ivory Coast and Togo waste resources or consume these themselves.

Poor public administration and personalized power struggles hinder the efficient coordination of actors, institutions and policy goals. This applies particularly to the power-sharing government in Ivory Coast and DRC. The coordination of potentially conflicting policy goals is managed relatively favorably in the more democratic countries, particularly in Niger.

Partly due to donor pressure, all governments have stepped up efforts to fight corruption. However, tremendous success has not been achieved. According to Transparency International (TI), no country in the region scores better than rank 64 out of 145 countries. Four countries find themselves amongst the worst 15.

Nigeria's President Obasanjo, founding member of TI, has had limited success in fighting corruption. Although the situation has improved compared to the Abacha era, corruption remains rampant at all levels of society.

Consensus-Building

Consensus-building is traditionally highly valued in African cultures. The national conferences held at the beginning of the 1990ies accommodate this appreciation of a consensus. Yet governments in Central and West Africa differ remarkably in this respect. Positive examples such as Senegal, Ghana and Mali stand in stark contrast to Ivory Coast and Togo.

Generally, elites agree on the principal goals of political stability and economic prosperity, but the commitment to market democracy is shared by a majority only in Ghana, Senegal and Mali. The abovementioned imposing character obscures dissent with regard to the economic order and thwarts its implementation.

In Rwanda—even though the commitment to economic reform cannot fully be denied—and other authoritarian regimes, governments are the real antidemocratic veto actors. The democratic integrity of former warlords in the power-sharing governments of the DRC or Liberia is questionable at best. Liberia's Charles Taylor, ousted in 2003, keeps on undermining political stability in the country.

The notorious military coups, however, have become a rare species in the region. Even the violent regime change in CAR in 2003 was not a coup in the classical sense. In former military oligarchies such as Benin, Ghana and Mali, the military is now apparently under firm civilian control.

Irreconcilable conflicts depend mainly on the leadership. In Benin, Mali and Senegal, governments contributed to the de-escalation of conflict potential. Past injustices were addressed in Benin and Mali. In Senegal there is hope that the secessionist conflict in the Casamance may end in the near future.

In contrast, governments in Chad, DRC, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Togo and Rwanda are mainly responsible for ongoing (violent) conflicts. In Ivory Coast, the entourage of the presidency continued to undermine the peace accord of Marcoussis and to instrumentalize xenophobia, particularly with regard to national citizenship. The Rwandan government uses the genocide of 1994 as a pretext to repress any opposition or to intervene in the neighboring DRC.

The development of social trust that cuts across different segments of society is hard to assess, given that survey data is not available. However, the participation of civil society has been part of poverty reduction policies in many countries. Here again, the inclusion of civil society has been a precondition set by donors and has entailed the already mentioned ownership problems.

International Cooperation

Given dependence on external assistance, no country in Central and West Africa can afford to renounce international cooperation. With the possible exceptions of Ghana and Senegal, development co-operation is hardly managed properly to achieve goals of transformation. The frequently lacking will for political reform is favored by the partial absence of political conditionality. In order to maintain a zone of influence, the French government has continuously supported authoritarian governments in Chad and Togo. In Ivory Coast, French troops prevented the conflict from escalating but a somewhat clumsy handling of peace negotiations has rather obstructed a sustainable solution.

Traditionally, the United States has awarded more priority to human rights since the end of the Cold War in the region. However, following 9/11, some countries have become allies in the “war on terror”, and the oil boom in the Gulf of Guinea has prompted plans to step up oil imports from the region. Certainly, both will not favor pro-democratic conditionality.

The limited potential of economic conditionality and development assistance is illustrated by Chad. In order to avoid negative consequences of oil production, a special revenue management system was introduced, which, assisted by the World Bank, includes the development-oriented use of the revenues and the supervision by both international and national control bodies. However, the Déby administration proved reluctant to extend the management system to new oil fields and has failed to provide sufficient support for the control regime.

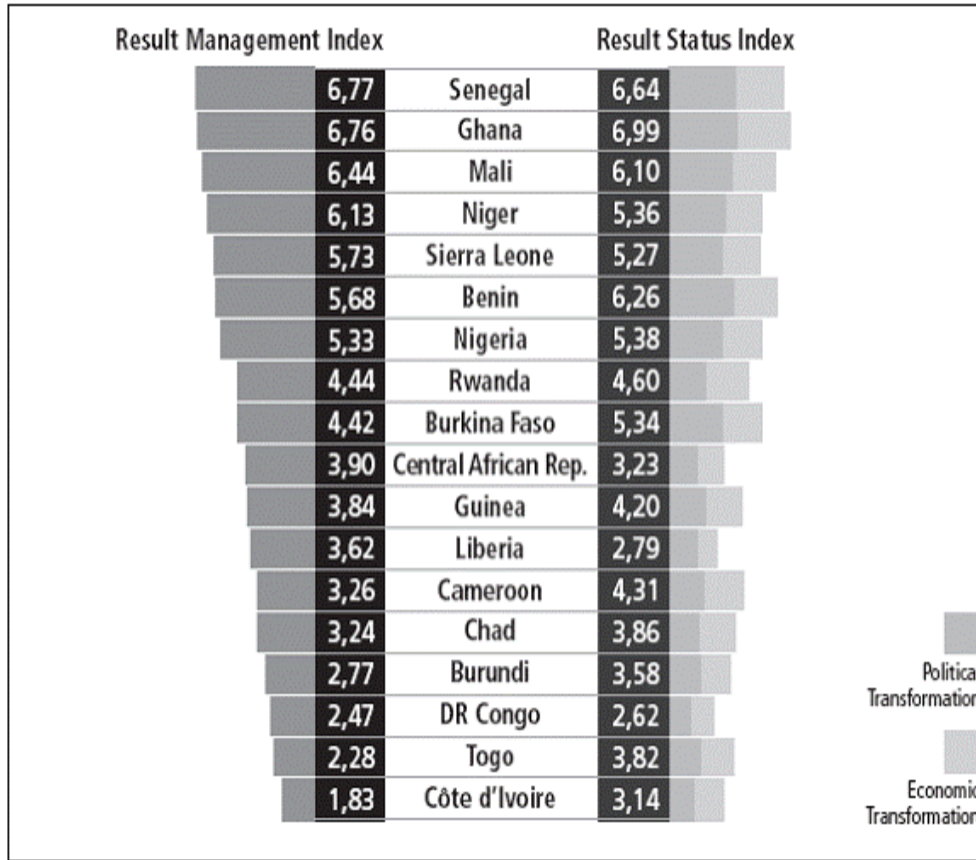
Due to widespread political instability, Central and West Africa does not attract foreign investment. The reliability of the governments compares well to that. Benin, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal could uphold their almost untainted reputation. The record of the authoritarian and transitional regimes is certainly worse. The Gbagbo administration in Ivory Coast proved to be erratic rather than cooperative.

Finally, the cooperation in regional and international organizations such as ECOWAS and EU is certainly an asset of transformation management in the region. As an exception, Nigeria scores fairly well in this respect. As a regional power, Nigeria has brokered several peace accords and participated in several peacekeeping operations. Along with Senegal’s president Wade, the Nigerian President Obasanjo is one of the masterminds behind the “New Partnership for African Development” (Nepad). Nepad includes a “peer review” mechanism, which is designed to assure the maintenance of standards in governance through mutual supervision. Rwanda and Ghana have already undergone this peer review (results are not known yet).

Outlook

As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, both economic and political transformation have made little progress in Central and West Africa between 2003 and 2005, and this also holds true for the period 2001-2005. Notwithstanding its problems with food security in 2005, Niger has made considerable progress in the political arena. For the very first time in its history a democratically elected government was re-elected. Sierra Leone is well on its way to recovering from the civil war since 2002, although economic reform has not taken root yet.

Results of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2006 for Central and West Africa



In Rwanda, political and economic transformation followed different trajectories. Economic reform continues to make progress, but democratization has essentially failed. The Ivory Coast certainly experienced the least development in the region. Generally, however, political developments in the region will remain volatile, especially in transitional regimes—positive and negative surprises included.

General conditions for market democracy remain highly adverse in many respects. The relatively higher success in the political arena, however, is proof of the fact that democratic progress is possible even in the context of poverty and dependence, if only leaders live up to the challenge. The consolidation of democracy, on the other hand, will demand a substantial change in socio-economic conditions. Donors can use political and economic conditionality to support respective development. These are promising only if they coincide with local willingness and capability.

About the Author

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