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Topic: ECOWAS renewable energy regime and the promise of micro-level energy access: community governance and traditional financial cooperatives as alternatives?

Abstract

West African countries rank amongst the lowest in electricity access and highest in energy poverty in the world. To address these challenges, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established renewable energy institutions aimed at securing electricity access in the region using renewables. These institutions have in the past decade received enormous foreign contributions and development aid. However, energy access and electricity availability remain insufficient especially in rural areas. The central theme of my dissertation is to examine why ECOWAS renewable energy instruments have been ineffective in achieving its set objectives and to further explore alternative approaches for improving energy self-sufficiency in the region.

The preliminary findings from the literature review reveal several critical dimensions which are as follows: first, ECOWAS renewable energy frameworks are constructed on top-down governance approach in which elite policymakers, high level politicians, donor agencies and bureaucrats define policy objectives and design action plan for energy projects. This means that periphery communities do not have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes aimed at resolving their daily energy challenges. Second, ECOWAS renewable energy strategies are modeled after foreign intervention and development aid practices that have proven to be unproductive in transforming problems in Africa. In view of this, there is a need to explore alternative approaches which can be used to ensure energy access and guarantee affordable electricity in both urban and rural areas.

Consequently, my doctoral dissertation seeks to investigate if ECOWAS renewable energy objectives will be better achieved if grassroots leadership are embedded in decision making processes. Furthermore, I intend to explore how community governance and indigenous cooperatives can be used for financing and managing small-scale energy projects. My research inquiry will be conducted using case study and mix methods.