The conference focused attention on the integration process of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the legal implications of regionalism, supranationalism and the limitation of the national sovereignties of Member States in relation to a supranational organization like ECOWAS, a Regional Economic Community (REC) in the West African sub-region. Since, the European Economic Community (now European Union) blazed the trail in 1951 with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which was established by the Treaty of Paris, RECs have sprung up in different regions of the world. Regional Economic Integration sometimes referred to as Regional Integration, typically occurs among neighbouring nations in a geographic region, when they agree through a Treaty to reduce and ultimately remove tariff and non-tariff barriers to free trade in the region by increasing the free movement of people, labour, goods, services, capital and ideas across national borders and reducing the possibility of regional armed conflicts.

Regional Integration makes it possible to lift a large part of the population out of poverty, enhance economic development and improve the living standards of the people. It can reduce the cost of trade, increase trade and employment opportunities, improve the availability of goods and services and increase consumer purchasing power in Member States. On the other hand, there could be the risk of trade diversion, employment shifts and reductions and loss of national sovereignty, as the Member States may have to give up more and more of their political and economic rights to a supranational authority and supranational actors.

Despite the abundant legal regime at the community level, ECOWAS has not been able to develop an ECOWAS Community legal order or ECOWAS Community law because of the absolute lack of implementing legislation in ECOWAS Member States, the non-ratification or domestication of ECOWAS Revised Treaty, the Protocols, Conventions and Supplementary Acts by Member States. Furthermore, Community Acts are not directly applicable in Member States, and there is also absolute lack of synergy between the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the national courts of Member States. The Court has not yet received a single referral from any national court and community citizens cannot invoke ECOWAS Community norms before the national courts of Member States, which also continue to lack the necessary tools to enforce the judgments of the ECOWAS Court of Justice. Also, Member States are very often in breach of their Treaty obligations to ECOWAS and it is difficult to hold them accountable because the Member States themselves and the ECOWAS Commission are reluctant to trigger the Sanctions Mechanism. Member States continue to guard very jealously, their national sovereignties, not mindful of their delegated authority to ECOWAS to act on their behalf in their areas of common interests. This, therefore, raises the question, is ECOWAS truly a supranational authority? Is there primacy of Community Acts over the municipal laws of Member States? Is there an ECOWAS Community legal order? Is there a pooling of national sovereignties? Does the enabling legal environment for the integration of the Community exist?

The proposed theme for the 2022 International Conference looked at these critical issues through the theme: “***ECOWAS Integration Model: The Legal Implications of Regionalism, Sovereignty and Supranationalism”.***