

# The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Transcending Regional Economic Integration

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*The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has over the years evolved from an organization for economic integration and development into an organization for peace, democracy and economic integration as result of the dynamics of the political environment of the West African sub-region. ECOWAS' mandate appears to have expanded from that of pursuing a strict economic agenda to a robust political mission. This paper examines the extent to which this has been achieved. This intervention probes the extent to which current modifications to the ECOWAS security protocol enhance its operations in comparison with previous security challenges in the sub-region. The paper postulates that political will is essential to effective cooperation and integration. It poses the central question of the extent to which political leaders in West Africa have been committed to the achievement of the objectives of ECOWAS.*

## Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 as an institutional framework for regional integration and development in the West African sub-region. Since its establishment, the regional body has over the years evolved into an elaborate institution with expansions in the sphere and scope of its objectives. ECOWAS is arguably the most successful effort at sub-regional quest for collective self-reliance in Africa (Ronnback, 2008). However, grim economic conditions in the sub-region over forty years on belie this success. ECOWAS was established with the primary objectives of promoting economic cooperation among member states, strengthening the economies of the states and raising the living standards of the people. While regional integration arrangements are often evaluated in purely economic terms, integration may be pursued for explicitly political motives. Although it is almost taken for granted that trade integration is the main benefit sought by countries entering regional integration arrangements, it is hard to explain the growth of interest in regional integration based on trade motives alone (Page, 2000). All successful regions have objectives other than freeing trade, and this is essential for the political will to evolve. Trade may well be secondary to political or

security objectives or a tool rather than an objective. Even if political motives are not uppermost, political will is a crucial ingredient in the integration process and, in its absence, little progress will be made.

Most of the studies on regional integration in West Africa in general and ECOWAS in particular tend to access the organisation on the terms of its original objectives of economic integration and development of West African states. ECOWAS has of course made some progress in the pursuit of regional economic integration. The overall objective was to promote cooperation and integration through the establishment of economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development. In order words, the primary target of ECOWAS was to improve the capacity of member countries in economic governance. However, there has been a growing linkage between economic governance, peace and security (Terwase, Abdul-Talib and Zengani, 2015). West African countries have had serious challenges in maintaining peace and security within their territories due to rising issues of militancy, terrorism and youth restiveness. Issues such as unemployment, poverty, illiteracy and poor governance are among the main conditions that lead to youth engagement in activities such as militancy, and insurgency



against the government of the state as witnessed in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and Liberia (Olaiye, 2014). Setbacks in economic growth and development in West Africa has been attributed to poor governance and weak institutions while security challenges have been traced to unemployment, corruption, poverty and failure of the government to provide basic services to the people. Failure of governments to provide basic services and to meet the expectations of its citizens creates an environment of insecurity (Hewitt, Jonathan & Robert, 2007). It, therefore, has become a priority need for ECOWAS to ensure good political and economic governance among West African states in order to improve on the social conditions of the people. The success or failure of ECOWAS as a regional body may not be accurately accounted for outside the dynamics of the political and security environment of West Africa. This paper examines the trends and dimensions of the transformation which ECOWAS has undergone in response to the demands of the political milieu of the West African sub-region.

#### ***Regional Integration: A Conceptual Framework***

There is no one generally accepted scheme of conceptualizing integration. One area of controversy among early scholars is whether integration refers to a process or to an end product. For instance, Karl Deutsch defined integration as the attainment, within a territory, of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population (Deutsch, 1957). When a group of states have integrated in this way they constitute a security community. Deutsch used amalgamation to refer to the formal merger of two or more previously independent units into a single larger unit, with some type of common government (Deutsch, 1957).

Ernst Haas, in his classical study of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) titled the *Uniting of Europe*, defined integration as the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectation and political activities to a new centre whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states (Haas, 1958). Haas developed the concept of

spill-over and saw the European Economic Community (EEC) as a spill-over from the ECSC. He talked about the expansive logic of sector integration and predicted that trade liberalization within the customs union would lead to harmonization of general economic policies and eventually spill-over into political areas, leading to the creation of some kind of political community (Haas, 1958). However, when the European integration process experienced crisis in the mid-1960s and many scholars began to regard his theory as being too deterministic, Haas admitted that he had not foreseen a rebirth of nationalism and anti-functional high politics and then revised his theory to take account of dramatic-political aims of statesmen such as General de Gaulle (Laursen, 2008).

Among scholars that conceive integration more as a process than an end product is Leon Lindberg. In his study of the early EEC, the *Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration*, Lindberg noted that integration is

- (1) the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs; and
- (2) the process whereby political actors in several distinct settings are persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new center. (Lindberg, 1963: 5)

Central to Lindberg's concept of integration is the development of devices and processes for arriving at collective decisions by means other than autonomous action by national governments.

In his study of the fate of nation-states in Western European integration, Stanley Hoffman noted that every international system owes its inner logic and its unfolding to the diversity of domestic determinants, geo-historical situations and outside aims among its units (Hoffmann, 1966). Hoffman observed that the national situations and role perceptions were still rather diverse within the European Community (EC) and, therefore, contrasted the logic of integration with the logic of diversity. The logic of diversity, according him, sets the limits to the degree to

which the spill-over process can operate, restructuring the domain in which the logic of functional integration operates to the area of welfare. In areas of key importance to the national interest, according to Hoffman, nations prefer the certainty, or self-controlled uncertainty, of national self-reliance, to the uncontrolled uncertainty of integration. Thus, he focused more on the mechanics of integration processes, which is shaped by preferences of nation-states as they rationalize the logic of integration on the basis of their national interests.

Mattli (1999) provides a conceptual model of conditions under which implementation of an integration scheme is likely to succeed or fail. Assuming a rational approach to behaviour, he argues that two types of conditions need to be satisfied if integration is to succeed. First, there must be a demand by the integrating actors for greater integration. The actors must perceive a significant potential for economic gains from extending market exchange within the region. If there is little potential for gain, perhaps because regional economies lack complementarity or because the small size of the regional market does not offer important economies of scale, the process of integration will eventually peter out. He notes that the potential for gain is not static but may grow with the diffusion of new technologies, which will then give the actors an incentive to lobby for regional institutional arrangements that render the realization of these gains possible. Second, there must be the fulfilment of supply conditions, which he defines as the conditions under which political leaders are willing and able to accommodate demands for regional institutions at each step of the integration process. Political leaders anxious to improve their chances of retaining power will support integration if it helps to improve domestic economic conditions. The implication is that interest in promoting integration increases during periods of economic difficulty, and wanes during periods of economic success. But he notes that political will alone is not sufficient, given the collective action problems which arise, notably coordination, in the integration process. This leads to a key supply condition: the presence of a benevolent leading country within the region seeking integration. Such a country serves as a focal point for the coordination of rules, regulations and policies. It

also has the capacity and incentive to ease the distributional tensions that may arise in the integration process. Another useful supply condition is the establishment of commitment institutions to improve compliance with the rules of cooperation and to help catalyze the process. Mattli's conclusion is that areas with strong market pressure for integration and undisputed leadership are most likely to experience successful integration; regional groups that do not satisfy either of the two strong conditions are least likely to succeed (Mattli, 1999).

While regional integration arrangements are often evaluated in purely economic terms, integration may be pursued for explicitly political motives. Although it is now almost taken for granted that trade integration is one of the main benefits sought by countries entering regional integration arrangements, all successful regions have objectives other than free trade. Trade may well be secondary to political or security objectives or a tool rather than an objective. It is difficult to find any regional groups which have only a strictly trade agenda (Page, 2000: 6). Even if political motives are not uppermost, political will is a crucial ingredient in the integration process and, in its absence, little progress will be made. At the same time, economic integration can have political consequences, as when it contributes to stabilizing a political regime or enhancing regional peace and security. However, to the extent that political and economic forces are inextricably intertwined in a rather complex and dynamic way, it will be more analytically useful to see integration in the light of the dynamic interaction between economic and political variables. As Karl Deutsch rightly noted, authentic regional integration encompasses the whole system (Deutsch, 1971). Actors in regional integration seek to enjoy the advantages of economies of scale, increased commercial activities, and uninhibited factor mobility, through institutional integration and policy integration, making room for collective decision-making and the sharing of responsibility for policies. Sovereign states participate in regional integration for various reasons and because they expect tangible benefits, which may be political or economic. Politically, a country may participate in a regional scheme in order to bolster its military prowess, augment its political stature, deter



aggression from hostile neighbours, and enhance or fortify regional peace and security. Similarly, countries may integrate so as to achieve economies of scale, optimally allocate scarce resources, and to increase trade and accelerate economic growth. In any case, participating in regional integration enhances the fortunes of the domestic political economy. Since the economy is the base of the state, it does not make much meaning to try to divorce economic integration from the political process through which such integration is negotiated and contrived. Thus, a more analytically useful definition of regional integration may have to capture the political dynamics of regional economic integration.

For developing countries, the rationale for economic integration has often derived from their development needs. They have been concerned with the development of new industries through cross-border coordination to exploit the advantages of economies of scale which a larger home market permits. Thus, much thinking in developing countries on the advantages of regional integration sees it as a development tool and specifically as a tool of industrial policy (Asante, 1997). The advocates of import-substitution industrialization strategies could see the problems of pursuing these strategies in the context of small home markets, and saw regional integration as the way to establish these industries on a more competitive footing. The implicit assumption was that the choices made within the regional context would be efficient, and that member countries would accept the resulting pattern of industrial specialization (Page, 2000). Regional integration among developing countries is part of a wider strategy to promote equitable growth and is not an end in itself. Effective regional integration will *ceteris paribus* increase competition, reduce private transaction costs, enable firms to exploit economies of scale, encourage inward foreign investment and facilitate macroeconomic policy coordination. Regional groupings should be open towards the world market in the sense of keeping tariffs at a level that does not encourage trade diversion. They should not attempt a form of regional autarky that has led to past failures. Open regionalism complements unilateral liberalisation. Without regional coherence, unilateral liberalisation may imply negative spill-over effects

### ***The Economic Community of West African States***

The call for a West African community was made by President William Tubman of Liberia in 1964. Following this, an agreement was signed among Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in February 1965, but this could not realize the idea of integration in the region. In April 1972, General Gowon of Nigeria and General Eyadema of Togo re-launched the idea, drew up proposals and toured 12 countries from July to August 1973, soliciting their inputs on the planned regional community. A meeting was then called at Lomé from 10-15 December 1973, which studied a draft treaty. This was further examined at a meeting of experts and jurists in Accra in January 1974 and by a ministerial meeting in Monrovia in January 1975. Finally, 15 West African countries signed the treaty for an Economic Community of West African States (Treaty of Lagos) on 28 May, 1975. The protocols launching ECOWAS were signed in Lomé, Togo, on 05 November 1976. In 1977 Cape Verde joined ECOWAS, while in 2002 Mauritania withdrew from the Community.

ECOWAS was founded to achieve collective self-sufficiency for the member states by means of economic and monetary union creating a single large trading bloc. It was designated one of the five regional pillars of the African Economic Community (AEC). Together with Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Southern African Development Community (SADC). ECOWAS signed the Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community (AEC) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in February 1998. This protocol creates a platform for ECOWAS to collaborate with other Regional Economic Communities under the framework of the African Union in pursuit of areas of interests such as peace and security, development and governance. The vision of the founding fathers of ECOWAS was one of intraregional commerce and cooperation. Structurally, ECOWAS was initially set up as a guideline of prescriptions than a regulatory framework for the region. The goal of ECOWAS based on the situations and political

matrix of West Africa at that time, were integration and development (Wooldridge, 2006). ECOWAS sought to achieve broad and far reaching goals and built its institutions around these goals. The original institutions of ECOWAS were: Conference of Heads of States and Government, which is the highest governing authority of ECOWAS and meets annually with a chairman elected in turn from member states; Council of Ministers which is responsible for community operations and meets twice a year; Community Tribunal which settles intra community disputes and when necessary renders opinions on treaty language; Community Court of Justice which addresses complaints from member states and institutions of ECOWAS as well as issues relating to defaulting members; the Executive Secretariat which is in-charge of the day to day administration of the Community; the ECOWAS Parliament which plays an essentially consultative role and provides advisory opinion on issues covering a wide range of areas; and six Specialised Commissions, including: Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary, and Payments; Industry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources; Transport, Communications, and Energy; Social and Cultural Affairs; Administration and Finance; and Information. There is also the ECOWAS Fund for Cooperation, Compensation, and Development. ECOWAS presently functions on a regular platform with four pillars: Peace and Security, Developing Infrastructure, Policy harmonization (to facilitate trade) and Good Corporate Governance.

The ECOWAS Secretariat and the Fund for Cooperation, Compensation and Development are its two main institutions to implement ECOWAS policies on economic integration. In 2000, five ECOWAS members formed the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) aiming to establish a strong stable currency, the *eco*, to rival the CFA franc, whose exchange rate is tied to that of the euro and is guaranteed by the French Treasury. The eventual goal is for the CFA franc and *Eco* to merge, giving all of West and Central Africa a single stable currency. The launch of the new currency is being prepared by the West African Monetary Institute based in Accra, Ghana. This is intended to be the forerunner of a common central bank. However, several of the WAMZ's countries suffer from weak currencies and chronic budget

deficits which are currently plugged by their central banks printing more and more notes of decreasing real value. The ECOWAS Fund transformed into the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development in 2001.

According to Article 3 of the revised treaty of ECOWAS, the aims and objectives of the community include to promote co-operation, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations-among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent. In order to achieve the above mentioned, the Treaty stipulates that the community shall, by stages, ensure: the harmonization and co-ordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities, particularly in food, agriculture and natural resources. Other activities include industry, transport and communications, energy, trade, money and finance, taxation, economic reform policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science, technology, services, health, tourism, legal matters; the protection of the environment; and the promotion of the establishment of joint production enterprises.

The Treaty provides for the establishment of a common market through;

- i) the liberalization of trade by the abolition, among Member States, of customs duties levied on imports and exports, and the abolition, among Member States, of non-tariff barriers in order to establish a free trade area at the Community level;
- ii) the adoption of a common external tariff and a common trade policy vis-à-vis third countries;
- iii) the removal, between Member States, of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, and to the right of residence and establishment; and
- iv) the establishment of an economic union through the adoption of common policies in the economic, financial, social and cultural sectors, and the creation of a monetary union.

The treaty also envisages the promotion of balanced development of the region, paying

attention to the special problems of each Member State particularly among those of landlocked and small island Member States; the encouragement and strengthening of relations and the promotion of the flow of information particularly among rural populations, women and youth organizations and socio-professional organizations such as associations of the media, business men and women, workers, and trade unions.

### ***Western African Region***

West Africa<sup>1</sup> is a highly complex region characterised by potentials and difficulties. Though extensively endowed with natural resources, it is among the poorest regions of the world as the majority of its population live in poverty (Olaiya, 2014). Majority of the states in the region are highly indebted (ADI, 2012). Generally, West Africa has a large stock of natural resources that could be used to improve the living conditions of its population. Nigeria, for example, is the largest producer of petroleum and one of the top ten producers in the world. Similarly, other West African states have one type of natural resources or the other. However, the region has been among the world's most volatile and unstable regions with its modern history punctuated by political instability, internal conflicts, protracted civil wars, coup d'états, militancy and terrorism (Mobolaji and Kedir, 2012). The region appears to be the most coup-prone in Africa. Antidemocratic political behaviour, militarisation, corruption, inequality, high mass-elite gap and different forms

of oppression are all prominent part of the history of the region (Ronnback, 2008). There is considerable risk that West Africa will continue to be an insecure region. A combination of conditions of political instability, economic underdevelopment, and social insecurity put the region at the risk of less favourable development (Joseph, Wilkenfeld & Gurr, 2007). The dynamics of ethnic politics in all West African states have made the region an arena for violent struggles over political power and economic resources.

Economic activities in West African countries have serious impact on their stock of natural resources. When the natural resources are sold, their Gross National Product (GNP) records the sale as an economic activity without accounting for the corresponding loss from their balance sheet of the assets liquidated to generate that economic activity. The economy is based mainly on the mining and sale of natural resources. Thus, the economy is largely not based on wealth creation, but is kept afloat through depletion of natural wealth. Especially for those that depend on crude oil, the economy is subject to the boom - burst cycle of global oil price fluctuation (Adams & Mengistu, 2008). The economic balance sheet usually looks rosy during the boom period and gloomy during the burst period. To improve their country's GNP, government leaders attempt to increase the sale of more resources as much as possible and are often hailed as economic masters until there is nothing more left to be sold. With the economy in irresponsible hands, the national balance sheets of most West African countries deteriorated badly as they sold off their natural resource assets while borrowing wildly against the amount left unsold, using both sources of cash to finance consumption and less viable projects (Adams, 1991). In the end these countries have been squeezed between a dwindling asset base and soaring debt profile. Of the 15 countries of ECOWAS, 13 are included among the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) of which only Cape Verde and Nigeria were excluded (IMF, 2013).

Attempts to foster local industry have also been hampered by insufficient technology, training, and investment funds. The paucity of local markets and the difficulty of transporting goods from major West African centres to world

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<sup>1</sup> West Africa is the part of Africa that is located at the Western part of the African continent and most of it is in the sub-Saharan Africa. There are 16 countries in West Africa and they are Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Geographically, West Africa is well distinguished from other parts of Africa. Most West African countries were colonised by Britain and France, and after over half a century of colonisation, waves of independence swept across the region between the late 1950s and early 1960s. Despite the closeness of the countries in West Africa, there is significant cultural and religious diversity with Christianity and Islam being the two predominant religions in the region (Kra, 2012). All West African countries have different cultures within its boundaries.

markets contribute to the lack of manufacturing in most parts of the region. This has led to a very low trading network among West African countries as most of them produce primary products that hardly have any market in another country within the region. West African states have very limited economic interaction among themselves. Few commodities make up the bulk of exports of one West African country to the rest of the region as most West African countries produce only raw materials for which there is little demand elsewhere in the region. Many West African states have more economic ties with their former colonizers and their overseas development partners. The most obvious feature of modern West African history has been the continent's poor economic performance and developmental failures. Economies simply failed to take-off after independence as states appeared to be worse off at the end of the twentieth century than they were during the 1960s at independence. A large part of surplus and returns from investments in Africa leaves the continent through debt repayment, expatriation of profit, capital flight etc. On the domestic front, political factors associated with elections in a number of countries, and insurgencies, including terrorism, in others, are key risks for the region in 2015 (World Bank, 2015). Disease infection and epidemic, mainly of malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and Ebola, have been a major problem in Africa.

A prominent unique feature of the West African region is the relative cordiality in interstate relations and the high volatility of domestic political environments. Apart from the colonially inherited Anglophone/Francophone dichotomy, relationship among states in West Africa has been marked by relative peace. While the politics between states appear to be well ordered, most domestic polities in West Africa have very few signs of stability. Most of the conflicts in West Africa, which have earned it the unenviable status of a zone of turmoil, are intrastate conflicts, ranging from civil wars, ethnic uprising, religious crises, insurgency, militancy etc. The volatility of domestic politics in Africa is attributable to the weak authority and legitimacy base of West African states which makes it highly problematic for them to have effective control of the groups within the state. Apart from few cases of boundary disputes. West African states have

maintained astoundingly peaceful relations among themselves. Little security concerns have affected state actions as the growth and structure of African militaries reflect the relative peace that exist on the external borders of African states. The frequent coups experienced in Africa is perhaps attributable to the fact that soldiers have so little to do in battle fields that they had to carve out roles for themselves in politics.

### ***Politics of integration in West Africa***

Integration is a dynamic process that is driven by a number of forces. This motive force comes from the interaction of a number of social, political and economic forces, operating from the global, regional and national spheres. The outcome of the dialectical interaction between the various forces depends on the relative strengths of the contending forces. That is to say that the logic of regional integration in a particular region is not determined only from the point of view of the region. Integrating actors in a region are under constant influence of both the global and domestic environments such that the outcome of the integration process represents an equilibrium between national, regional and global factors.

Regionalism in Africa in general and West Africa in particular has had a very strong political motive (Mathews, 2003). One outstanding character of states in West Africa is their weak authority base within the domestic environment (Englebert, 2000). As such one of the leading interests of leaders of West African states is how to ensure survival of the states they are in charge of. This weakness of authority and legitimacy base makes national leaders to adopt various strategies aimed at consolidating their hold on state power. The preservation and strengthening of the state become the overriding priority of governments, not only within domestic politics but equally in foreign policy (Clapham, 1996). The centrality of political survival of leaders has also provided logical motive force for integration in the region as leaders tend to collaborate at the regional level to protect their hold on state power.

Through the formal conduct of states foreign policies, West African leaders find common understanding among themselves so as to reduce the threat they face and pose to each other, both internally and externally. Thus, the process of regional integration in West Africa has taken the

character of an elite agenda, in which the civil society and the private sector are sidelined. As a result, the process is not driven by bottom-up socioeconomic process, but rather by top-down pursuits of political goals. With low level of political accountability in their domestic politics, African leaders did not also border to democratise the regional integration process. For example, the Constitutive Act of the African Union begins as follows; We the Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), while the Charter of the United Nations starts with "We the Peoples of the United Nations". To the leaders, regional organizations serve more or less as forums for political legitimization, a resource that is much sought after in African politics in general. Neo-patrimonial structures at the national levels are replicated at the regional level to maintain a system of power consolidation through regional patronage. The main interests pursued at regional forums in Africa are more of the political survival of the leaders than (economic) interest of the nations. There then arises a contradiction in the interests of leaders: conflict between their need for regional political-legitimacy-base and their desire to remain effectively in charge of their national sectors (Fanta, 2008). Despite its acknowledged gains, governments are afraid that integrating at the regional level would make them lose their sovereignty to a collective power. As such, integration in West Africa, like most of the developing regions, is largely ambivalent with little evidence that governments are prepared to cede authority to supranational bodies. As a result, the commitment institutions which are supposed to underpin the sustainability of these regional arrangements have remained weak.

Apart from consolidating their hold on the political power of their various nation-states, West African leaders also use regional platforms as strategies for foreign relations with the outside world. Regional bodies tend to present relatively ordered forums to interface with the international community to cover or make up for the sordid state of domestic affairs. As such, governments which by all practical purposes have suspended their national constitutions and bastardized their electoral systems still summon the moral courage to actively participate in drafting and promulgating

regional instruments on good governance and people's rights. For example, General Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria as the then chairman of ECOWAS initiated idea for the establishment of ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee (SMC), which was set up to settle disputes and conflicts within the community, securing of ceasefire by deploying ECOMOG to monitor the observance of ceasefire, establishment of interim administration in Monrovia, and ultimately the constitution of a government through nation-wide elections (Draman and Carment, 2001). Despite the democratic content of this initiative, General Babangida could not allow the full maturation of democratisation process of his own country when he annulled the 1993 presidential election.

Regional integration in West Africa has become part and parcel of the game of political survival of leaders. This made it expedient for these leaders to, as much as possible, foster peaceful interstate relations in the region, overlooking some ordinarily legitimate grounds for disputation. For example, the boundaries of West African states have remained unchanged despite the fact that the original colonial demarcations were hurriedly done in a manner that did not account for the political, sociological, economic and ethnic makeup of the region. The boundaries of many West African countries were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial powers and were not encouraging frameworks for unified, legitimate and capable states (Jackson & Rosberg, 1985). These arbitrary boundaries did not only divide social and ethnic groups into separate political territories, numerous variegated groups were lumped together, occasioning series of intrastate conflicts. Also, about sixteen African countries are landlocked, three out of which are in West Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) with no access to the ocean or sea and with all the attendant economic and strategic implications (Rosenberg, 2018). Yet, African leaders at the AU's resolution on border problems pledged member states to respect the national frontiers they inherited at the eve of their independence. Thus, the international community embraced the principle of boundary stability established by the AU and by extension regional communities (including ECOWAS) to effectively prevent the application of the norm of self-determinism to a



group of people once their country has become independent. In the case of border dispute between Mali and Burkina Faso, for instance, the International Court of Justice maintained that because African states had decided to retain the colonial boundaries, the practices of the region must be respected despite the apparent conflict with the principle of the right to self-determination.

### ***Challenges facing ECOWAS in Regional Economic Integration***

ECOWAS was originally focused mainly on economic development and integration in the region. It started as a framework for regional economic integration. The overall objective was to promote cooperation and integration through the establishment of economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development. ECOWAS has succeeded in removing tariffs on raw materials and has made some progress towards macro-economic policy convergence, but tariffs on industrial goods remain high. There is a high degree of success within an offshoot of ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). A customs union has been established and could serve as a fast-track mechanism for the larger group. There is also harmonisation of business regulation and convergence on macro-economic policies. Despite these successes, it should be stressed that ECOWAS still has a long way to go in achieving the objectives of regional integration and development in Africa.

Though it was believed that a common currency would facilitate trade relations among members of ECOWAS, the volume of trade at present between ECOWAS members is still low ((Terwase, Abdul-Talib and Zengeni, 2015). Despite the trade liberalization which was launched in 1990 to establish a schedule of trade liberalization to remove tariffs and non-tariff barriers, quotas, quantitative restrictions and prohibitions, goods have continued to be subjected to undue control, constituting serious non-tariff barrier, increasing the cost of transactions and posing a major obstacle to market integration (Asante, 2004). Various protocols of the community including those that have to do with trade, customs, dispute settlement mechanisms, infrastructure and sector development have not yet

been ratified by most member countries. Attempts to create a customs union have failed and trade liberalisation has not developed as planned. ECOWAS had to face the problem of coordination and harmonisation of economic and fiscal policies throughout the region. There is also the challenge of how to address the concerns of some member states that may suffer losses in the early stage as they surrender some of their sovereign powers to a regional decision-making body. Since harmonisation of economic policies would require states to surrender part of their sovereignty, the tendency for states to guard their sovereignty jealously becomes a problem to the integration process. Moreover, countries with weak industrial base were sceptical about the free-trade zone in West Africa on the ground that it would further impede the development of their industrial capacity.

Also, weak infrastructural base has been a serious impediment to trade and economic relations among ECOWAS members. West African states have very limited economic interaction among themselves. Few commodities make up the bulk of exports of one country to the rest of the region as most of the countries produce mainly raw materials for which there is little demand elsewhere within the region (Mutume, 2002). Many West African states have more economic ties with their western development partners. For instance, despite Senegal's nearness to Gambia, trade between the two neighbours is negligible (Kra, 2012). While France constitutes Senegal's biggest trading partner, Gambia trades more with the United Kingdom. The major impediment to intra-regional trade in West Africa include poor physical infrastructure, conflicting trade policies, absence of common currency, inefficient service-providing support institutions (like banks) and so on (Keane, Cali & Kennan, 2010). Another key reason is the lack of economic complementarity, due to the fact that most West African states produce similar (primary) goods and a significant lack of a manufacturing and service economy in the region. It may be surprising that while most banks in West Africa (Nigeria and Benin Republic for example) readily have the documents for importation from outside the region, it is usually difficult for exporters to secure the necessary documents from same banks. Generally, it is more cumbersome to export than to

import in West Africa and most of the goods that cross state borders are smuggled since businessmen almost get frustrated trying to follow non-standardized official procedures. Thus, a good number of intra-regional trades in Africa are not officially documented by appropriate state agencies, and since the states cannot regulate it they lose out on the relevant revenue accruable to the state from such transactions. Even in terms of repatriation of money from goods sold, exporters usually find it difficult due to inefficient domiciliary accounts operations as banks find it difficult to cooperate with other banks in another West African country. This is the root cause of the difficulty in integrating the economies of West African states which are said to be disarticulated and hardly complementary.

#### ***Transcending Economic Integration***

In the face of serious challenges which have inhibited the achievement of its primary objectives of regional economic integration and development, ECOWAS has become inundated with political and security challenges which are expanding the focus of the organisation towards embracing security and political objectives. As a result of growing insurgency in the Mano river region of the sub-continent, the proliferation of small arms, growing refugee crisis and a real threat of spill over conflict, ECOWAS broadened its former narrow economic mandate to include conflict resolution and peace keeping. Though integration involves a dynamic interplay of economic and political factors, ECOWAS was conceived and actually took off largely with economic objectives. Thus, the main focus of ECOWAS was originally on regional economic integration and development. However, a realization of a link between development and security led to the adoption of two new protocols which addressed regional security concerns. These were protocols on non-aggression in 1978 and protocol on mutual assistance on defence matters in 1981 (Festus, 2004). The latter agreement applies not only to conflict between ECOWAS members, but also to internal conflict supported from outside a member state. The protocols can be regarded as first steps towards development of a security framework within ECOWAS, including a standby force comprising of national units of ECOWAS states.

The exigencies of the Cold War international system gave fillip to the establishment of regional security in West Africa under the ECOWAS. Domestic and external threats to security and state survival during the Cold War motivated the signing of the new protocols on non-aggression (1978) and on mutual assistance and defence (1981). The Cold War international political environment was insecure and many African states maintained non-aligned posture, at least officially (Olive, Tom & Hugh, 2005). The global security arrangement under the United Nations was ineffective because the Security Council was largely paralyzed by Cold War politics among the great powers. This made way for a regional thinking in the establishment of security mechanism for West Africa.

ECOWAS has over the years evolved and is still evolving capacities for security and political undertakings in West Africa. Security challenges in the region including civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone and insurgency in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Chad, have led to emergence of an ECOWAS security mechanism known as ECOMOG. This has made for the development of peacekeeping/peace enforcement capabilities of the regional body. General Ibrahim Babangida, then the chairman of ECOWAS, had in May 1990 summoned a meeting of Heads of State and Governments in Banjul, Gambia. In the meeting he had proposed and seen to the emergence of an ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) composed of Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Togo and Nigeria. The move was conceived as a paradigm shift from a trade-based ECOWAS to a security-based one expedient for tackling the mounting security challenges in the region, especially with the conflict situation then in Liberia (1989-1997). Babangida had stated inter-alia at the Summit thus:

It is imperative for us in this region to grasp and adapt to the dynamics of this global process of change if we are to contribute to and benefit from it. This would, therefore entail an expansion of the purview of the assignment we gave to the Secretariat (of ECOWAS). The generally unstable situation in member states and other political problems of this continent indicate that our

organization has a responsibility to act and act urgently and decisively. (Agedah, 1993: 147)

This portrays a rethinking of the role of ECOWAS as a regional body from economic to security and political objectives. Challenges of security and governance among West African states were the factors that contributed in broadening the focus of ECOWAS from economy and development to politics, governance and security. In reaction to the war in Liberia (1989-96), some West African leaders, prompted by a Nigerian initiative, agreed to intervene and sent troops into the country in 1991. This provided the background for the formation of ECOMOG as organized security cooperation within ECOWAS (Pogoso & Oshodi, 2015). This followed the review of the 1979 and 1981 protocols making way for the development of the ECOWAS Mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security. The intention was to achieve collective security and peace, and to prevent, manage and resolve internal and interstate conflict (Aboagye, 2004). The mechanism is supposed to prevent, manage and resolve both internal and interstate conflicts, strengthen the areas of conflict prevention, early warning, cross border crimes, international terrorism and the proliferation of small arms and anti-personal mines. The mechanism commits members to constitute and deploy civilian and military forces to maintain or restore peace within the region whenever needed. To prevent interstate conflict, members are expected to establish appropriate framework for rational management of natural resources shared by neighbouring member states. They are also obliged to protect the environment and to formulate and implement policies on anti-corruption, money laundering and illegal circulation of small arms. The roles of ECOMOG can be categorized as observation and monitoring, peacekeeping and restoring the peace, humanitarian intervention, enforcement of sanctions, preventive diplomacy, peace building, disarmament and demobilization and policing. ECOMOG has intervened militarily in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Guinea Bissau. These missions have been aimed at securing cease-fire, creating an atmosphere for negotiations and protecting civilians. However, cooperation in the

execution of military actions under ECOMOG has been problematic due to problems of financing the missions, accusations of partiality against some of the missions, and high-handedness of the troops.

ECOWAS has developed instruments for strengthening of democracy in the sub-region. They are the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which emphasizes the importance of the principles of the United Nations and the declaration of human rights, and a Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in West Africa from 2001. The instruments feature some important principles, including zero tolerance for military/illegal change of government, strengthening the capacity of parliaments, civil control over armed forces, autonomy for political parties, free and fair elections and the promotion and protection of human rights.

Ironically, despite the fact that ECOWAS has not made much progress in actualising its primarily (economic) objectives, the security mechanism of ECOWAS through ECOMOG has recorded significant success. ECOWAS is the first African regional organisation that has been able to intervene militarily in armed conflict situations. Military interventions have been carried out in a number of member countries. Though ECOWAS had intervened in a number of member states, including Guinea Bissau in 1999 and Cote D'Ivoire in 2003, the capability of ECOMOG as a regional security arrangement was demonstrated in its interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The primary purpose of these interventions was to provide humanitarian aid and to respond to the need to stabilise the political situation in affected member country. As a result of the successes recorded in this direction, ECOMOG has been regarded as good example of regional peacekeeping mechanism and a viable complement to United Nations peacekeeping. In the face of United Nation's late action in Liberia, ECOMOG was therefore not only involved in ensuring peace but it was also instrumental in thwarting the coup by Sierra Leonean Army in Freetown in 1997. ECOMOG reversed the coup in 1998 and restored the elected President, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, to power. But in spite of this, the military outfit was not able to stop the devastating rebel attacks on Freetown in January 1999 neither

was it able to totally eliminate guerrilla attacks owing mainly to funding problems and inadequate equipment (Adebajo, 2004). After the interim President of Burkina Faso, President Michel Kafanda was ousted in a coup led by the leader of presidential guard General Gilbert Diendere in September 2015, ECOWAS in an extraordinary meeting took the decision to oppose the coup plotters and reinstate the ousted President. Through a mediation team of President Macky Sall of Senegal and President Boni Yayi of Benin Republic, the coup plotters were made to relinquish power while the interim government in Burkina Faso was reinstated.

The development in ECOWAS underscores the important relationship between peace and development, as well as the strong link between political stability and economic development. However, there are still disagreements among members of ECOWAS over the importance of ECOMOG in the realization of the objectives of ECOWAS. Some countries, especially those of the Francophone members, are sceptical over the militarization of ECOWAS because they see the organization as primarily a framework for economic integration and development. On the other hand, the Anglophone countries tend to see ECOMOG as a necessary step towards achieving peace, development, democracy and integration in West Africa (Francis, 2006).

### Conclusion

ECOWAS has over the years developed from an organization for economic integration and development into an organization for peace, security and good governance as result of the dynamics of the political environment of the West African sub-region. Though it has been argued that ECOWAS has been more successful in the area of security and by extension, these successes still aid the achievement of the economic objectives since the security and political problems have over the years contributed in slowing down the process of economic integration and development. Despite observed challenges and shortfalls, efforts of West African states at promoting regional cooperation have shown positive prospects for further development. The future success of ECOWAS and ECOMOG is of importance for the future of the whole region and beyond. Addressing the

challenges of security and development are important elements in any efforts at stabilizing the region and improving the living conditions of the vast population of the region.

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