

## Research Article

# ECOWAS Integration and Development; Efforts, Challenges and Prospects

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**Abstract:** The critical necessity of development for Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has gained the most pronouncements in the discourses of the affairs of the continent. It is an issue around which there is considerable consensus as the way and manner to go about development from various perspectives. While some are of the opinion that individual government policies and objectives are the prerequisites for development in Africa, others have towed the lines of using collective intergovernmental organisations as the catalysts for development. There is, however, little agreement on the nature of the challenges the continent is faced with; ranging from crisis of various magnitudes to the debt of developmental agendas that require the best development framework and the best approach to follow in the attainment of the desired state'. In the context of the debate, the West African sub-region have settled for the Economic Community of West African States as New development blueprint for meeting the economic challenges of the sub-region. Much of the criticism of ECOWAS has focused, procedurally, on the lack of consultation in its drafting and paradigmatically, on its neoliberal content. The paper seeks an explanation not just in the complex interaction between a set of developments since 1980: the neo-liberal hegemony at the level of state policymaking, internal policy atrophy, coercive power of compliance, but equally the new constituencies (class forces) that have been thrown up in the last two decades – within the state, economy, and importantly the civil society in sub-Saharan Africa. Much of the latter is premised on the 'death of the emancipatory project' and the dominant politics of the petty bourgeois class in Africa. It is in this sense that we put in efforts in understanding the crises of development the entire continent and the West African sub-region is faced with. Our tool of analysis is the ECOWAS and its efforts to broker development in tandem with its integration and economic liberalization efforts. As a framework of analysis, the classical neo-functionalist theme is settled for; from the broader perspective of the theories of integration. On that note, findings were carried out, positions settled for, recommendations made in the course of this paper.

**Keywords:** Policymaking, consultation, organisations.

## Introduction

The development challenges that face Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa are enormous and varied. The crisis of poverty, trade deficits, genocidal conflict and civil wars and the crisis of economic and social policy outcomes are often presented as emblematic of the region. Understanding the nature of the crisis and dynamics that feed it has been the object of considerable contention. While others have held a combination of some factors premised on both internal and external rubrics responsible, this paper holds economic developmental challenges as paramount and a determinant of the material conditions of the people of the sub-region on which other question are premised. The analyses are to a considerable extent driven by ideological locations and paradigms. It is within this framework—rather than a sense of betrayal that constructing an alternative project and *rethinking Africa's development* must

begin. With the West African sub-region as our focus, the efforts of the ECOWAS are pertinent within the premises of carrying out a sub-regional integration attempt to fast track economic development. An analysis of the institutional organisation and the sectoral policies of ECOWAS Commission indicates that the ECOWAS in general, is an advanced model of integration in the broader context of the African Union in the pursuit of developmental agendas. Adeniyi (2011) opines that in over forty years, the ECOWAS has been able to build a solid *institutional architecture* which makes it a globally recognized organisation. It also strove to adopt protocols and develop policies and programmes to cover almost all areas of integration that were identified in the initial Treaty as well as in the revised Treaty. In terms of actual impacts, *the performance of ECOWAS, since its establishment, may be deemed to be generally satisfactory up to this stage*. Today, ECOWAS is adjudged to have taken positive steps by developing its operational capabilities and generating tangible impacts on Member States and ECOWAS citizens in the pursuit of the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.

By way of further clarification thus, efforts have been made premised on a historical attempts to integrate the countries of the sub-region, particularly in the period around independence in 1960 on several economic footings which yielded little or no result. To crown it all, an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was eventually established on 28 May 1975, by the Lagos Treaty (Nigeria), which brought together all the countries of West Africa.

The objectives assigned to the Community by this initial treaty (article 2) were, at the beginning, essentially economic: to promote co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity, accelerated and sustained economic development of Member States through effective economic cooperation and progressive integration of economies. Several initiatives undertaken after the establishment of ECOWAS have helped to strengthen its institutional architecture and to deepen its common policies and assuming an all-encompassing rolls thereby generating significant achievements in the sub-regional integration process. Signed on 24 July 1993 in Cotonou, the revised Treaty goes well beyond economic matters: establishing cooperation notably in the political and security domains, granting the Community powers to sanction, which demonstrates the desire to make ECOWAS an active player in international law in Africa and on a worldwide scale. This was thought out on the premise that the development question of the sub-region required a holistic approach even though economic affairs are fundamental.

Today, ECOWAS is an international sub-regional organisation which ranks among the most important ones in Africa and which other than its Commission composed of eight (8) Specialized Agencies, is originally established as an organization for purely economic cooperation and development in the interest of member states. Adebajo (2004) opines that The Economic Community of West African States has transformed itself into a real integration organization that brokers real development among member states and through other positive economic measures. The various member countries of ECOWAS, through acts and decisions passed during *Conferences of Heads of State and Government* and at *ministerial meetings*, have continually reaffirmed their attachment to deepening regional integration and development strides through their total ownership of the regional integration project in West Africa since it serves as the pivot and the backbone of the sub-regions development questions. In furtherance of our postulations, the pursuit of the goals of integration in West Africa can be seen as a process which is at once legitimate and natural and the basis for further economic and developmental emancipatory projects. It is abundantly

justified by reasons that are both theoretical and practical in resolving the crises of development. It is worthy of note that prior to modern efforts to attain development, West African countries is indeed composed of regional ethnolinguistic settlements that political borders from colonization have divided up in an entirely artificial manner but derives strength in its diversities have always been saddled with the desire to attain development on an individual scale. In fact, West African people have been historically integrated and it is the States born out of colonization that have set up barriers to this integration.

Moreover, in a context of increased globalization, integration also remains a powerful means for economic and social development especially for low-income countries. Hence, the renewed call for the attainment of development through integration within the framework of the ECOWAS is a necessity and a must if the West African sub-region is to move away from its uncelebrated position in global affairs.

As the main Regional Economic Community (REC) in West Africa, ECOWAS is the undisputed pillar on which the continental integration process, as advocated by the African Union is based. Composed of 15 member countries, its aim to promote cooperation and integration in the economic, social and cultural domains of the sub-region cannot be overemphasized. On that note, this study seeks among others developmental fronts of the sub-region, to make an inventory of the integration efforts made since the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975; promote a better understanding of the regional integration process in the ECOWAS sub-region; identify problems and challenges which countries and stakeholders are facing in their march towards sub-regional integration; and propose possible solutions to overcome identified problems so as to accelerate the sub-regional integration process.

### Conceptual Framework

Economic integration involves the process whereby states agree to forgo the ability to formulate policies independently on matters concerning trade, custom tariffs, immigration and international trade among others, seeking instead to delegate the decision making process to a new central organ. The aim is to promote economic advancement of member-states and the overall development of the region or sub-region as proposed in the objectives of the ECOWAS.

Integration theorists like, Doherty (1996) and Adedeji (2003), sees integration as a process which takes place in a cooperative mode and specifically, in functional arena in which the need for such cooperative behaviour is believed to exist.

According to Doherty and Pfaltzgraf, (1996:422),

*Such functions transcend the capacity of the nation–state to achieve satisfactory solutions by unilateral means. Therefore, states are said to have had an interest in cooperative relationships designed to find mutually acceptable solutions to common problems.*

According to (Karl Deustch, 1998:43).

*The successful performance of functional activities by bodies that had taken over specific tasks and authorities from government would bring nations closer together and build a common interest in peace. Instead of engaging in controversies over political schemes, states could easily take part in working arrangements that involve practical “household” tasks. As governments cede more and more of their task to these worldwide organizations, economic unification would not only promote a working peace, but would be the foundations for broader political agreement as well.*

Mitrany cited in Nye,(1986) believes that, problems of technical quality affecting a group of countries can be addressed outside the politicized context of ideology and nationalism. Because integration in functional context emphasizes cooperation in order to find a solution to a common problem according to a specific need or function. He further suggested that, eventually a thickening web of structures and procedures in the form of institutions will emerge. Therefore, cooperation in one area will lead to cooperation in another area. This tends to justify the development efforts of the ECOWAS if mirrored in the light of the above perspectives. Viewed from another spectrum, integration is the process by which two or more nation-states agree to work closely together within a region or sub-region to achieve peace, stability and development through the harmonization of policies by member states.

In a context of increased globalization, integration remains a powerful means for economic and social development, especially in regions seeking development and improved economic conditions. From that dimension, one can say with relative ease that the most compelling justifications for regional integration in the continent is a key desire for greater economic independence and development.

### **Concept of Integration and Development**

Europe World Year Book (2000) views development as a visible manifestation of improvement in income, wealth and modernization. It is the presence of social, economic and political policies which increase the quality of life. It further states that the level of development can be appraised from the availability of infrastructure in a community, society or nation and these infrastructure include roads, rail, power generation, communication, education, health, housing, portable water and level of technological advancement. This is because technological advancement determines the pace of national development and is generally one of the important indices for social development.

Economic integration leads to enlarged market which ensures higher economics of scale and hence competitive positions. Joint community projects will certainly help address the peculiar problems of agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructural decay. It is clear that integration targeted at societal development facilitates foreign investment, expand local production and improve economics of scale which fast track economic and social development in the interest of all and sundry (ECOWAS, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Situating our analysis under a theoretical base, the classical theory of regional integration points out that integration can take many different forms, depending on the degree of political and economic commitment of the member countries. The arrangements, which are to be made can range from a simple operation consisting of a reduction of customs duties to a more ambitious form of economic integration with provisions for an enlarged economic variable such as common monetary and fiscal policy, customs union or common external tariff.

The theory thus lays out a menu of options on integration in which regional integration deepens as restrictions on economic variables and investment diminish. Hungarian economist, B. Balassa (1961), identifies five different meanings or degrees, ranging from the lowest to the highest: free trade area, customs union, common market, economic union, total economic integration. This last degree, or final phase of the process requires the creation of a common entity which will make decisions on several domains mainly in the economic, political and social domains on behalf of the group and in compliance with modalities agreed upon before integration.

Based on this theory and in sync with the views of Babarinde (1996) total economic integration is therefore the outcome of a process for unifying economic policies between the various States, which necessarily entails establishing a development agenda between member countries, complete removal of obstacles to cross-border economic activities relating to trade, free movement of labour and services, as well as of capital. As those cumulatively have the potentials for development of any economy and the West African sub-region is not left out in this regard. However, challenges abound with the whole integration and developmental agenda of the ECOWAS ranging from the variables captured below.

### **Critical challenges of ECOWAS**

Since its inception in 1975, ECOWAS has made several achievements in the various fields of integration identified in the initial Treaty as well as the revised Treaty. At the same time, it has faced a number of constraints, which constitute challenges to be met and which have hampered the implementation of common sectoral policies and programmes targeted at enhanced development as follows:

- ✓ The challenge of Community discipline in the Member States is foremost and tends to retard the common economic objectives of the region;
- ✓ The challenge of creating value and ensuring effectiveness in ECOWAS programmes;
- ✓ The challenge of good coordination between ECOWAS and sub-regional IGOs;
- ✓ The challenge of undue interference of erstwhile colonial masters.
- ✓ The challenge of Community project ownership by the populations;
- ✓ The challenge of successfully integrating ECOWAS into the global continental integration project.

To address these challenges and positioned to address the development questions of the sub-region, The Conference of Heads of State and Government, in June 2007 in Abuja (Nigeria), adopted Vision 2020, which aims by 2020, to make the ECOWAS space “*a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region, built on good governance, and where people have the capacity to access and harness its enormous resources, through the creation of opportunities for sustainable development and environmental preservation*”.

The objective is also to convert ECOWAS from an “ECOWAS of States” to an “ECOWAS of Peoples” in which the people will be involved in the regional integration process so that they can own it and it will be at the centre of regional policy concerns, and they will be the ultimate beneficiaries.

To achieve this Vision, the ECOWAS Commission developed the *Regional Strategic Plan* (2011-2015) whose implementation is yet to be evaluated but was replaced by a *Regional Strategic Framework* that will seek to integrate the various programmes of institutions and agencies in the region in the pursuit of development.

In parallel, the ECOWAS Commission has, in a participatory process, prepared a *Community Development Programme* which was adopted by the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in July 2014 in Accra, Ghana. This programme sets forth the Region’s medium and long term development agenda through the definition of a compact of priority projects and programmes to be implemented. The challenge remains that of mobilising resources for implementing activities and the investments planned in the CDP even though the steps taken was adjudged in tandem with the requirements for progress. In view of the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of ECOWAS in 2015, the Sub-Regional Office for West Africa of the



Economic Commission for Africa, working within the scope of its 2014-2015 biennial programme, decided to carry out a critical study on the status of regional integration within this sub-region.

This study brought out relevant recommendations to help achieve greater efficiency in the march towards regional integration, as well as contribute to continental integration, as advocated by the African Union (AU) which comprise of:

- (i) assessing the status of the efforts towards integration since the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975;
- (ii) fostering a better understanding of the regional integration process within the ECOWAS sub-region;
- (iii) identifying and resolve the problems and challenges faced by countries and various stakeholders in their march towards sub-regional integration; and
- (iv) proposing possible solutions to identified problems so as to accelerate the sub-regional integration process. These to a large extent resolved the debt of development as structural and functional adjustments were made even though there is still room for much to be desired in the context of development.

### **Conclusion**

Borrowing a leaf from the works of Laffan, 1992; Daltrop, 1986; Lodge, 1994; Deutsch, 1971. Regional economic integration has the potentials of peacefully creating a larger coherent economic system out of previously separate units in the long run; the tempo for development is entrenched.

One can safely say that ECOWS is on good grounds by drawing extensively from the experiences of the European Union in re-drawing the strategies of sub-regional integration. This is germane because a way to encourage integration is to learn from the experience of other regions, which have achieved a measure of success. There is also the increasing need to strengthen bilateral links which in turn provides a basis for multi-lateral cooperation. Also, ECOWAS needs to promote and expand trade as well as the movement of capital, peoples, goods and services. This is bound to assist the member states to mutually benefit. Joint efforts should also be made to improve the precondition for enhanced integration through initiatives aimed at infrastructures, which are unaffordable for the small states.

In ECOWAS, the nexus of integration and development are apparent in the present quest to liberalize economic policies as a catalyst for the overall development of the sub-region. In order to achieve the set objectives, established instruments and institutions within the framework of the ECOWAS should be strengthened to guide and administer the affairs of member-states in the overall interest of the sub-region. Conceived as a prelude to development, Integration entails the unification and representation of the existence of rules and principles that would shape behaviour in a given spatial area as it concerns the sub-region. If pursued vigorously, the process would reinforce structural interdependence of a technical and economic sort, with positive effect on economic welfare in the interest of the general needs of the sub-region.

Together with these and as an attempt to recommend possible steps to development objectives, measures should be taken to remove tariff bulwarks and encourage division of labour, quicken specialisation in production and stimulate economies of scale. There is need to develop conflict prevention mechanisms through a sub-regional program of education in

order to mediate actively in conflict situations that has potentials to truncate development and distort existing ones.

Other integrative blocs such as IGAD, SADC etc. in turn should create mechanisms of preventing conflicts and promoting a culture of tolerance and compromise. One reason for this is that integration is best developed in an atmosphere of trust and confidence among nations and their populations which should be approached with the commitments of a sub-region in need of sustainable development.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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