“The Politics of Regional Integration in West Africa”

Amadu Sesay & Moshood Omotosho
WACSERIES Vol. 2 Num 2
October 2011
About WACSERIES

WACSERIES is a quarterly publication of the West Africa Civil Society Institute. Its objective is to emphasise the contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) to the promotion of democracy, good governance and the socio-economic development of West Africa, and to create in-depth debates on issues of interest to civil society. The series covers all the areas of intervention of CSOs in the sub region.

To subscribe, please send an email titled “subscription WACSERIES” to research@wacsi.org.

Please complete the short questionnaire at the end to share your views on this edition of WACSERIES.

About WACSI

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) was created by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) to reinforce the capacities of civil society in the region. The Institute was established to bridge the institutional and operational gaps within civil society.

Vision: To strengthen civil society organisations as strategic partners for the promotion of democracy, good governance and national development in the sub region.

Mission: The objective of the Institute is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of CSOs in the formulation of policies, the implementation and promotion of democratic values and principles in West Africa. The role of WACSI is to serve as a resource centre for training, research, experience sharing and political dialogue for CSOs in West Africa. The Institute makes its plea through policy dialogue to discuss current issues affecting West African States. Reference documents are regularly published by the Institute and distributed to political leaders.

www.wacsi.org

About OSIWA

The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) was created in December 2000 as part of the world network of 32 autonomous foundations founded and supported by George Soros. These non-profit-making foundations share in the commitment to work for an “open society”. Based on the principle that no one has monopoly of the truth, an open society recognises the different points of view and always remains open to improvement. In practice, open societies are characterised by the priority of law, democracy, respect of diversity and human rights, liberalisation of markets, information to the people and the dynamism of civil society.

www.osiwa.org
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

* Amadu Sesay is Professor of International Relations at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria and Professor of Integration in Africa at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, respectively.

** Moshood Omotosho is Assistant Lecturer in the Department of International Relations at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
### LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEC</td>
<td>African Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIC</td>
<td>Brazil, India and China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEAO</td>
<td>Communauté Economique de L’ouest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Communauté Financière d’Afrique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMZ</td>
<td>Common Monetary Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>East African Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Economic Commission for Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
<td>ECOWAS Monitoring Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETLS</td>
<td>ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>ECOWAS Standby Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRSC</td>
<td>Federal Road Safety Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDC</td>
<td>Least Developed Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAD</td>
<td>Mutual Assistance in Defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAMZ</td>
<td>West African Monetary Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRU</td>
<td>Mano River Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACCIMA</td>
<td>Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTAs</td>
<td>Preferential Trade Agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECs</td>
<td>Regional Economic Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern Africa Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAAC</td>
<td>West African Airways Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WACB</td>
<td>West African Currency Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WACSI</td>
<td>West African Civil Society Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WACSOF</td>
<td>West African Civil Society Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAEC</td>
<td>West African Examinations Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAMZ</td>
<td>West African Monetary Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WANEP</td>
<td>West African Network for Peacebuilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UEMOA</td>
<td>Union Economique et Monetaire Oust-Africaine,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations’ Development Programme,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Politics of Regional Integration in West Africa

Amadu Sesay* and Moshood Omotosho**

Today, the UN classifies 73% of West African states as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). ECOWAS accounts for 35% of the African LDCs—making West Africa the foremost LDC region in Africa and, indeed the world as a whole. No less than eleven ECOWAS countries exhibit some of the lowest socio-economic development indicators, including the lowest Human Development Index ratings in the world... (Only) Cape Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria are non-LDCs...The average annual per capita income of $949 in 2007, veils the grimmer reality of nearly 60% of the people in the region live on less than one US dollar a day. This is far above the 46% for sub-Saharan Africa...indeed West Africa is the region with the highest prevalence of poverty in the world today. This parlous economic state has meant over-reliance on foreign aid and loans, a situation that resulted in the designation of almost all the ECOWAS countries (with the exception of Nigeria and Cape Verde) as Highly Indebted Poor Countries...¹

...if done right, regional integration can be complementary to the process of globalization in both seizing the opportunities presented by globalization, and in guarding against and overcoming the attendant vulnerabilities and challenges. For small countries and poor regions like West Africa...regional integration may be critical in helping overcome some of the natural disadvantages and limitations that small nation states face with respect to the unavoidable forces of globalisation².

Background

The two excerpts above paint a very gloomy picture of the overall economic, technological, social and political fortunes of West Africa. More depressing is the fact that these vital statistics have so far remained bleak, the existence of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the last thirty-six years notwithstanding.

Significantly, twelve of the world’s fifty poorest countries are in ECOWAS (Table 1 below). Only three out of the 15 countries that make up the organisation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Benin</th>
<th>2. Burkina Faso</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Cape Verde</td>
<td>4. Gambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Guinea</td>
<td>6. Guinea Bissau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Liberia</td>
<td>8. Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sierra Leone</td>
<td>12. Togo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: ECOWAS States listed among the world’s 50 poorest countries

Source: [http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0908763.htm](http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0908763.htm)

Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, are not in the list. However, majority of the population in the three countries eke a living through subsistence livelihoods especially agriculture.

West Africa’s trade pattern is outwardly oriented towards the developed countries of the North. Exports are overwhelmingly raw produce, while the region depends on imports for most of its needs, including food, from the same source. Indeed West Africa’s trade and aid dependence on the traditional Northern development partners have remained virtually the same since the flush of independence more than five decades ago. Nigeria, the region’s super power, is not an exception with its overwhelming dependence on crude oil, which accounts for 80% of its foreign exchange earnings. Like the smaller and less endowed ECOWAS Member States, Nigeria is a net importer of food, particularly rice and wheat, but also luxury goods, to feed the large appetite of the one percent of its population that controls 80% of its wealth. The point that is being made is that if this grim and shocking state of affairs applies to the richest and most powerful country in the region, the plight of the smaller and poorer ECOWAS Member States is best imagined. As would be expected, many of them are still dependent on budgetary supplementation from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, countries to meet their development needs. However, and like the rest of the continent, the region is turning increasingly towards the emerging economies of Brazil, India and China, BRIC, as important trading partners and aid donors.

---

3 The UN classifies countries as ‘least developed’ based on three criteria: (1) annual gross domestic product, GDP, below $900 per capita, (2) quality of life, based on life expectancy at birth, per capita calorie intake, primary and secondary school enrolment rates, and adult literacy and (3), economic vulnerability, based on instability of agricultural productions and exports, inadequate diversification, and economic smallness. Besides, half or more of the population in the 50 least developed countries on the list including those in this table, are estimated to live at or below the absolute poverty line of U.S. $1 per day, accessed on July 15, 2011

4 Amadu Sesay, Olusola Olayode and Mashood Omotosho, “Africa and South-South Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges”, in Justin Dargin (ed.) South-South Cooperation in the Global System, Harvard University Press, forth coming
The founding fathers of ECOWAS were quite aware of the huge challenges that confronted them at independence, following years of unbridled exploitation and utter neglect of the basic needs of the citizens by the colonial masters; Britain, France and Portugal. Consequently, successful nation building has remained the biggest challenge for them, because their economies are small, weak and highly competitive. Accordingly, they are unable to exploit the complementarities of big and strong economies, and are equally incapable of competing effectively within the global economy. These realities made regional integration an attractive option for West Africa. Undeniably, also, globalisation processes have brought home forcefully to the region the reality that it is impossible for any country, including the most economically and politically powerful, to ‘go it alone’. Now, more than ever before, all countries need one another to survive in a world where states are intricately weaved together economically, politically and technologically, with significant externalities for those that are unable to catch the ‘globalisation train’.

Related to that is the ‘trade and competition effects’ of regional economic integration schemes, which provide policy makers with the incentive to pursue ‘virtuous macroeconomic policies because they have bound themselves in regional agreements and this implicitly or explicitly provides a check on the temptation to embark upon potentially parochial and harmful national policies5. The argument is equally made with respect to the size of the national markets in the region; except for Nigeria the markets of other ECOWAS states are small, making them uncompetitive and unattractive to the outside world. Successful regional integration is believed to increase the size of the local market; enhance competition and efficient production, due to economies of scale. All things being equal, then, it is much easier for the enlarged West African market to attract foreign investment that will benefit the region provided the investors do not engage in ‘tariff-jumping’.6 Socio-politically, successful regional integration will not only increase intra-regional economic ties through trade promotion, it will also weave a maze of valuable social, cultural, economic and political exchanges that enhance interdependence among the member states, to the extent that the risk of war and violent conflict among them is greatly reduced, if not eliminated. The unbroken peace Western Europe has enjoyed since the end of the Second World War is an eloquent testimony to this important externality of credible regional integration arrangements. Nearer home, there have been no major border skirmishes between ECOWAS states since the violent clashes between Mali and Burkina Faso in the mid 1980s. It is significant to note also that ECOWAS states have concluded several confidence-building protocols, and put in place relevant mechanisms to promote transparency, convergence and predictability in their relations with one another since 1975.

Finally, most African states have failed woefully to deliver the ‘good life’ to their citizens. Accordingly, national sovereignty is being consistently challenged in the continent and states are increasingly eager to give way to regional economic groupings, especially

---

5 ECOWAS Commission. ECOWAS Regional Strategic Plan 2011-2015: A Proactive Mechanism for Change. p.11
those that are inspired by Western Europe where successful economic integration has demonstrated proven capacity to enhance the well being of the citizens. Not surprisingly, the European Union (EU) has become an irresistible reference point openly cited by West African leaders and bureaucrats as a worthy example of a regional integration scheme and mentor of sort. In short, in a post-Cold War world order that has witnessed the emergence of successful economic groupings in Europe and elsewhere in the world, regional integration is the key to political and socio-economic stability, successful nation building and political independence in the long run for West African states. The imperative of regional integration was vigorously canvassed by late President Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone who believed that “...it is only after developing African states have coordinated their efforts and organised themselves at [sub] regional levels, that we can have the strength of purpose, which will make people listen to us not only in the Organisation of African Unity, OAU, but also at the United Nations”.

However, while many regional leaders profess open support for economic integration under the auspices of ECOWAS, very often it is so mainly at the level of rhetoric as their actions sometimes betray their true commitment to the regional integration ideal as we shall indicate later in the study. The rest of the work is divided into several sections; the first part examines the organisation’s origins. As well, the various roles played by the member states and governments in the integration processes are critically analysed in order to highlight the extent to which their national policies help to drive or obstruct effective integration in the region. The contributions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the emerging roles of the citizens in the integration process are equally highlighted and discussed. The rhetorical question often posed by scholars and conscious citizens, whether regional integration is real or not, is critically tackled against the background of some indicators as well as some of the successes and the challenges of ECOWAS its three and a half decades' existence. The study concludes by providing some vital policy recommendations on how to consolidate the gains of regional integration in West Africa.

**Regional Integration in West Africa in Historical Perspective**

We argue that contemporary integration schemes, particularly those in Africa, are essentially a post World War II phenomenon. Like many aspects of the present international system, they are largely inspired by developments in Europe and are specifically located in the determination of European statesmen to put an end to the rivalry between France and Germany, which was responsible for some of the most violent conflicts in their continent. More directly, contemporary integration projects in Africa and elsewhere are inspired by the seven-nation European Coal and Steel Community set up in 1951 to channel the energies of France and Germany to more productive ventures, and to prevent an outbreak of hostilities between them that could lead to another Europe-wide conflict with adverse global consequences. That humble European experiment was later expanded with the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

---

7 Siaka Stevens, former president of Sierra Leone, in *Republican Sierra Leone*, Freetown: Government Printer, no date p.8
bringing together 12 European countries to form the hitherto famous European Economic Community, EEC.

The EEC not only prevented a major war in Europe, it brought unprecedented prosperity to all member states and developed a momentum of its own that was irresistible. Thus, by 1973, the United Kingdom, once the organisation’s unabashed critique and Euro-sceptic, was constrained to join the now very influential organisation, bringing the membership to 13 countries. Indeed, the EEC and its successor the European Union, EU, became so successful that they are the reference point for countries and regions across the world, including West Africa that wanted to tackle their economic and political challenges multilaterally. For example, in November 2007, the African Union, AU, signed a controversial *Africa-EU Strategic Partnership Agreement*, widely regarded by many scholars and policy makers as not intrinsically in the long term interest of successful continental and regional integration in Africa.

The pervasive influence of Europe on existing integration projects in Africa can also be traced to the colonial period when Britain and France made spirited efforts to amalgamate their respective colonial territories to enhance cost-effectiveness in their administration and exploitation. In what is generally regarded as the first economic integration scheme in the region, Britain created the West African Currency Board in 1912, charged with issuing the legal tender for its four colonies; The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, to ease trade transactions. Next was the West African Airways Corporation, WAAC, to facilitate air transportation and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), to standardise examination for university admission in the four colonies.

France embarked on the same integration trajectory albeit in a more inclusive manner, by creating a monetary union using the Communauté financière d’Afrique popularly known as the CFA, among its colonial territories as legal tender complete with a Central Bank in Dakar, Senegal, which acts as a clearing house. But unlike their Anglophone counterparts, the French colonies retained the CFA as legal tender after independence making it relatively easy in theory at least, to promote trade among them. The existence of the common monetary system among the francophone ECOWAS countries is often identified as one of the major factors that explain their reluctance to subscribe to the Community’s common monetary zone.

Aside from the inspiration derived from the successful economic transformation of Western Europe after 1957, West African leaders saw pooling their efforts and resources through regional integration as one way of delivering the ‘dividends of independence’ to their people, after many years of colonial hardship and deprivation. In fact, economic

---

8 The EU presently has 27 Member Countries, with many former communist East and Central European countries waiting and eager to join.
9 See, for instance, Osita Eze and Amadu Sesay, *Africa and Europe in the Twenty First Century*, Lagos, NIIA. The book is devoted exclusively to a critical examination of various aspects of the Agreement.
cooperation was seen as a much more welcome and feasible alternative to political integration, which was advocated by the ‘radical’ wing of the pan-African unity debate led by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. Expectedly, there was a flurry of diplomatic initiatives and activities among the new states aimed at promoting collective self-reliance and regional integration. For example, in January 1964, President William Tubman of Liberia convened a meeting of four West African countries; Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, to explore the feasibility of setting up a Free Trade Area. Almost a year later in February 1965, diplomats from the four states met again in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to draw up a document that would have led to the formation of what they called an ‘Organisation for West African Cooperation’. However, these early initiatives did not materialise due to lack of sincerity on the part of the West African leaders and their strong adherence to their newly won political sovereignty.

A significant but limited breakthrough was achieved in 1973 when Liberia and Sierra Leone created the Mano River Union, MRU, to promote economic and political cooperation between their contiguous countries. The Union was joined by Guinea under Sekou Toure a decade later in 1983; the year that also witnessed the creation of the larger Communaute Economique de L’ouest, CEAO, among the French speaking West African countries. Many of these groupings have remained comatose for reasons that need not delay us here. More importantly, the early groupings could not promote the desired amity among some of their members. For instance, the Mano River Union did not prevent occasional friction among its members, or the civil wars and state collapse in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1989 and 1991 respectively. Significantly, pre-ECOWAS schemes were either based on linguistic criterion or were limited arrangements that did not fully cut across the inherited colonial and linguistic divide in the region.

**ECOWAS and Regional Integration in West Africa**

Regional integration does not have a single, universally acceptable definition. This is not unexpected because as an academic discipline, it is located within the social sciences genre. Available definitions are varied, ranging from the shortest and selective to the longest and all inclusive. For Onwuka and Sesay, regional integration refers to the various forms and contexts of economic integration arrangements—including common markets, free trade areas and harmonisation policies—prevailing or proposed at both the continental i.e. African Economic Community, AEC, and regional such as ECOWAS, Southern Africa Development Community, SADC, levels among many others. According to S.K.B. Asante, “...regional integration and regional cooperation have in common the involvement of neighbouring countries in collaborative ventures...”

For Phillippe De Lombaerde and Luk Van Langenhove, regional integration is a process of “...large scale territorial differentiation characterised by the progressive lowering of internal boundaries and possible rising of new external boundaries...” in which states

---

move from “a condition of total or partial isolation towards complete or partial unification, among others”\textsuperscript{14}. To Jacqueline Mambara, “...regional integration connotes the formation of closer economic linkages among countries that are geographically close to each-other, mainly through preferential trade agreements, PTAs...”\textsuperscript{15}. The EU defines regional integration as “...the process of overcoming, by common accord, political, physical, economic and social barriers that divide countries from their neighbours, and of collaborating in the management of shared resources and common national goals\textsuperscript{16}. The United Nations’ University identifies several types of regional integration arrangements that include; free trade area, customs union, common market, political and security integration, among others. Irrespective of the way the processes are defined, regional integration projects are essentially aimed at addressing, directly and indirectly, the perceived or real national interests of members individually and collectively. A successful regional integration project must be premised on three broad pillars: i) domestic peace and security in the integrating states because apart from the destruction of infrastructure such as road networks, telecommunications and other important facilities, conflict diverts attention from regional integration projects as was the case with Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire while their civil wars lasted; ii) enhancing political and civic commitment and mutual trust among the members, and iii) there must be a minimum threshold of macro- economic stability and good financial management in member countries\textsuperscript{17}.

From the above discussion, there are important differences between ‘integration’ and ‘cooperation’. Cooperation is a much weaker form of teamwork among sovereign states and it is more ‘issue specific’ than integration. Cooperation may be in areas such as information sharing, national or global monetary issues like that among the G-8 group of countries. Finally, ‘cooperating’ states retain much of their political sovereignty and can ‘opt out of the arrangement with relative ease’ since it does not involve the creation of supranational institutions\textsuperscript{18}. Conversely, regional integration connotes more engaging and deeper processes, relationships, coordination and activities among the member states, which could eventually lead to the formation of a common market, a common currency, free trade area or even political union among the integrating states in the long term\textsuperscript{19}. From such a viewpoint, regional integration schemers are in theory much more convenient and practical among geographically contiguous countries like those that make up ECOWAS. Finally, regional and continental organisations like ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) present their members with vital opportunities, challenges and costs that could directly and indirectly impact on their commitment to the schemes’ overall success or even future in the long run.

\textsuperscript{14} For details on these processes see Phillippe De Lombaerde and Luk Van Langenhove, “Indicators of Regional Integration: Concepts and Methodological Issues, IIIS Discussion paper No.64, no date, pp8.
\textsuperscript{15} Jacqueline Linda Mambara, \textit{Assessment of Benefits of Regional Integration in SADC and COMESA-A Gender Analysis}, Harare, Trade and Development Studies Centre, January 2007, p5
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p6
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. P6
\textsuperscript{19} See for instance his speech during the special OAU economic summit in Lagos, Nigeria, 1980, as well as his numerous speeches and publications of the ECA during his tenure as its Chief Executive.
Like other Regional Economic Communities RECs, in Africa, the formation of ECOWAS is credited to the dogged determination of Adebayo Adedeji, erstwhile Executive Secretary of the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Africa, ECA. He was convinced that Africa would not be able to compete with the rest of the world unless it is united economically and politically; and that such a process should start at the much smaller regional level\(^\text{20}\). ECOWAS is unprecedented in at least two important respects. First, it brought together for the first time 15 West Africa countries, irrespective of linguistic, colonial and pre-colonial history and experiences, in one region-wide organisation. Second, the creation of ECOWAS was also a clear indication of the determination by West African leaders to enhance the pre-colonial ties among their people, and to weaken the adverse social and economic legacies of the colonial era. The expectation was that the new organisation would enable the member states to create an enlarged market to enhance their competiveness and development. It was also envisaged that the enlarged market would enable industries and producers to exploit economies of scale and promote market specialisation that would eventually lead to improved terms of trade for the region. A single West African market with a population of almost 300 million would also increase the region’s bargaining power vis-a-vis other regions and trading blocs. Additionally, “politically challenging policy changes can often be achieved through regional agreements.”\(^\text{21}\)

Finally, globalisation is fraught with grave challenges and vulnerabilities especially for small, developing and weaker members of the community of states; and such challenges are better tackled collectively within the framework of a credible regional integration scheme. A United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, report endorsed this perception in its conclusion that ‘regional integration holds considerable promise for supporting inclusive growth, accelerating and sustaining development outcomes’ in Africa\(^\text{22}\). It is important to note that in the context of West African regional integration, Nigeria’s leadership role, aside from its population advantage, with about 50% of the region’s total population and potentially its economic power house, can also not be overlooked; for ‘excess’ petrodollars made it possible for Lagos to engage in what has been described as ‘spray diplomacy’\(^\text{23}\).

Aims and objectives of ECOWAS

ECOWAS’ mandate in 1975 was to create a common market in West Africa. However the 1993 Revised Treaty expanded the organisation’s brief to reflect the important changes that were taking place in the West African region and the rest of the world. Article 3 of the Revised Treaty identified the aim of ECOWAS as: “to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order


\(^{21}\) UNDP, Regional Integration and Human Development: A Pathway for Africa, New York, April 2011, p.7

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) The phrase was coined by Olatunde J.B. Ojo, and it means using every means available and possible, especially monetary inducements to less endowed West African neighbours, to cajole reluctant neighbours to buy into the ECOWAS idea and project, with Togo as the country’s closest ally. See Olatunde Ojo “Nigeria and the Formation of ECOWAS” International Organisation, 34 4 (Autumn), 1980.
to raise the living standards of its people...” Paragraph 2(d) of the same Article declared the long term goal of ECOWAS to be the

...liberalisation of trade by the abolition, among member States of customs duties levied on imports and exports and the removal of non-tariff barriers in order to establish a free trade area at the Community level; the adoption of a common external tariff and a common trade policy and finally, the removal of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods services and capital and the right of residence and establishment.24

The revised treaty was to promote the “harmonisation and coordination of members” policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities, particularly in food, agriculture and natural resources, taxation, transport and communications...” Apart from these high goals, the 1993 treaty tried to accommodate the new global, continental and regional concerns that were not anticipated in 1975. These ranged from politico-security issues to state collapse—resulting from the ongoing ‘uncivil’ wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone—as well as the organisation’s bitter, tortuous and challenging experiences in peacemaking in the two countries.25

Paradoxically, it is ECOWAS’ achievements in these ‘new areas’ that gave it local and global exposure, recognition and ‘respect’ among its peers. The ‘unorthodox’ concerns of the organisation also ‘set aside’ the once hallowed principles of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of members. In addition, ECOWAS’ foray into peacekeeping and conflict management ‘challenged’ the primacy of the global UN’s pre-eminence on matters relating to threats to world peace and security. Ironically, ECOWAS’ preoccupation with conflict management and peacemaking also became the most notable catalyst for the consolidation of its economic integration agenda, contrary to the experiences in Western Europe and other African RECs. In all this, there was no doubt that Member States played a pivotal role in shaping the fortunes of the organisation.

The Role of the State in Regional Integration Processes

The establishment of international organisations, irrespective of their geographical locations, membership size and distribution; whether they are bilateral or multilateral, regional, continental or global; and whether they are concerned with political, economic, military or socio-cultural cooperation or not, is informed first and foremost by broad complementarities of the Member States’ national interests. Put differently, regional integration schemes like ECOWAS and SADC, etc, are essentially designed to complement the efforts of nation states in promoting and consolidating perceived and diverse goals no matter how mundane they may be. From such a standpoint, there is no

---

24 For more on this, see the 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty, Abuja: ECOWAS Commission, 1993.
doubt that the ‘state’ is critical to the initiation, progress, success or failure of integration processes for a number of salient reasons.

First is the centrality of the state in international politics and inter-state relations as the basic unit in the international system in spite of the increasingly important roles of non-state actors in national and international life. Arguably, states remain major actors and initiators of policy and action in the community of nations. For example, the Treaty of Lagos that heralded the formation of ECOWAS in May 1975 was the result of a major shift in the pursuit of Nigeria’s national interest in West Africa. No doubt, the oil boom of the 1970s made the country’s leaders and elites to believe that Nigeria was on the road to unprecedented economic development, prosperity and political prominence; and that it would soon become the economic hub of West Africa, if not the rest of the continent. From such a point of view, the formation of ECOWAS in 1975 was the result of enlightened self interest on the part of all the member states most particularly Nigeria. ECOWAS would facilitate its ‘access’ to a captive market in West Africa for its finished products as well as raw materials to feed its’ booming’ industries. Such a scenario was expected to promote Nigeria’s economic development and industrialisation, a key national interest. Rapid industrialisation would propel the country into the league of the rapidly industrialising economies which would boost its standing in the community of nations. Sustained regional economic growth and industrialisation would also fulfil the nationalists’ promise to bring ‘the good life’ to their citizens after independence. In short, a successful ECOWAS would directly and indirectly promote individual and collective political transformation, prosperity, peace, security and stability in all the member states. Without such convergence of national interests the formation of ECOWAS would not have been possible in 1975.

Put differently, irrespective of size and endowment, states set up international organisations like ECOWAS and use them to promote their parochial national interests even if that is not openly stated in their foreign policies. This reality sometimes results in conflict and cooperation within such organisations. There is no doubt that the competing interests of ECOWAS members have impacted on the organisations in diverse ways in the last 36 years, and it is from such a perspective that the slow pace of integration in West Africa is also better understood among other important factors. Surely, some member states have not been diligent in implementing key protocols and projects such as free movement of people, goods and services as well as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, ETLS. This is not to deny the fact that the increasingly intricate web of economic and political interactions among its members has resulted in mutual expectations and dependencies that are raising the cost of violent conflict and war between and among them, and has from time to time served as a veritable deterrent inter-state relations in the region26.

At another level, it is arguable that by creating ECOWAS the 15 states in West Africa were determined to play down the divisive historical legacies arising from the

---

indiscriminate fragmentation of the continent during the European scramble for Africa. Given their varied colonial experiences including three inherited languages and cultures; English, French and Portuguese, setting up ECOWAS could be seen as a deliberate attempt by the founding fathers to sever the umbilical cords between them and their erstwhile colonial metropoles that created powerful artificial barriers to regional solidarity, brotherhood and cooperation among them and their citizens. The abolition of entry visas, one of the most visible attributes of state sovereignty and control, to enhance the free movement of people and goods in the region is slowly engendering ties of brotherhood in West Africa.

States do also play other decisive roles in shaping the fortunes and misfortunes of regional integration projects especially in Africa, because of ‘the primacy of politics’ and the cult of personality in the continent. Both phenomena can impact positively or negatively on the most promising regional integration arrangements. The disintegration of the East African Economic Community in 1972 following the coup by Idi Amin that overthrew President Milton Obote is a classic example of the lethal interplay of both phenomena. Put differently, the perceptions of states/leaders vis-a-vis the benefits accruing from their membership of international organisations, are very critical in shaping the ‘futures’ of regional integration schemes like ECOWAS and other RECs in Africa. There is another way in which states can impact on the destinies of international organisations through their leaderships’ styles, whims, ideologies, etc. The most glaring examples of this reality are from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire where the policies and actions of their leaders provided the potent background factors that led to the debilitating civil wars in the three countries. While the ‘uncivil’ wars lasted, the three countries were so incapacitated that they could not discharge their responsibilities as members of ECOWAS effectively, and were temporarily suspended from the organisation until the wars were successfully brought to an end.

In summary, the importance of the support of the state in the diplomatic negotiations and manoeuvres leading to the creation, sustenance and success of regional integration communities like EAC, ECOWAS or SADC, in Africa cannot be overemphasised. Some of the major reasons for the unimpressive record of integration projects in West Africa are due to the less than total commitment of member states. There is also no ‘evidence of credible judicial, institutional and policy efforts at managing the national development process on the basis of ECOWAS’ regional integration policies and programmes’ among member states. As well failure by the states in West Africa to significantly improve the lives of their peoples after more than 50 years of independence has led to the increasing advocacy by development partners, local and international civil society organisations, CSOs, to get the citizens fully involved in national development processes as countervailing forces to the state.

---

27 Africa now has 54 states with the recent independence of Southern Sudan on July 9, 2011 from Northern Sudan.
28 ECOWAS Vision Document: ECOWAS of the People: Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community, op.cit. p.7
Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Regional Integration in West Africa: The ‘Opportunities’

That ECOWAS has so far failed to effectively mobilise the huge potential of the region’s nearly 300 million citizens solidly behind its regional integration agenda 36 years after its creation is no longer news. Until very recently, ECOWAS did not involve the citizens in the integration processes in the region as it remained, in essence, a community of political leaders and senior bureaucrats. But as developments in European have clearly demonstrated, the ‘citizen factor’ has been very important in driving integration processes in that region. Thus in spite of the occasional opposition to some of the organisation’s policies and institutions, EU citizens are by and large ready to defend it against their governments. ECOWAS’ top-bottom approach and inability to effectively connect with the citizens was eloquently demonstrated in a survey carried out to mark its tenth anniversary. Respondents were asked if they knew what ECOWAS was, and some replied confidently that it was a football team in England.29

It would seem that ECOWAS’ founders and bureaucrats perceived the integration project by and large, as ‘a single event’ rather than a long and even tortuous process that required the support and commitment of the citizens if it is to succeed. This mistaken belief also explains why the organisation remains, in the main, an elitist club of leaders and has woefully also failed to make positive impact on the lives of majority of the citizens in the region. This important point is not lost to Joseph Abbey who noted that since regional integration is a process rather than a single occurrence, moving it in the right direction requires that “politicians should not prescribe and impose issues on the people; rather, people should be part of the decision-making process to enable them help in the implementation of its policies,” since neither the region nor its constituent member states are ‘homogenous’.30 Another significant factor in the shift from the ‘state’ to civil society is the realisation that in spite of the huge sums of money that have been disbursed to African countries including ECOWAS members in development assistance since the flush of independence, not much has been achieved by way of improved welfare for common citizens in sub-Saharan Africa. ECOWAS countries, including the regional ‘Super Power’ Nigeria, have made little progress in catching up with the emerging economies in South East Asia or South Africa. In general terms, the gap between the countries in the North and those in the South to which all African states belong, has not only widen but seems unbridgeable.31 Not surprisingly, the Development Assistance Committee, DAC, comprising all the major donor countries in Europe, North America and Japan, were constrained to look outside the state in Africa for ‘credible’ partners in promoting development and they found them in CSOs.32 It is believed that

29 Professor Anthony Asiwaju made the revelation at a seminar on “Nigeria’s Global Relations: The Challenges of the 21st Century”, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, October 1997. The senior author participated in the seminar.
getting civil society involved in the development processes including regional integration projects like ECOWAS, would bring the dividends to the people much faster.

By way of a definition, CSOs are “basically organisations within the broader civil society” and different from civil society per se, which is “...a public space between the state, the market and the ordinary household, in which people can debate and take action”. They are essentially the voluntaristic “...associations and non-governmental and non-profit organisations, social movements, networks and informal groups”33 that make up what can be loosely described as the ‘infrastructure of civil society in any state.’ They are believed to have the capacity to provide the ‘vehicle for social participation’ in every state and international organisation. They represent the “voice” of the marginalised in the society and are veritable “...expressions of the values and preferences and service provision”34 in any state and international organisation. CSOs are embedded in the larger society irrespective of their areas of focus and specialisation in the development process; and are essentially citizens’ groups created to advance various causes or interests. They are expected to assist state and non-state actors in the implementation of development programmes/projects directed at the “voiceless” segments of society. CSOs are believed to have the capacity to raise awareness among the populace either acting alone or on behalf of states and non-state actors like ECOWAS. This perceived ability of CSOs to directly and indirectly represent the interests, and enhance the wellbeing of the citizens in collaboration with states and international organisations, led to renewed interest in ECOWAS to involve them in the development and integration processes in the region35. The emerging strategic partnership between ECOWAS and CSOs is anchored on Vision 2020 enunciated in 2008, which aims at transforming the organisation from an ECOWAS of States (and elites) to a Community of people36. It is within this context that the growing collaboration between ECOWAS and regional CSOs like the West African Civil Society Forum, WACSO; the West African Network for Peacebuilding, WANEP, or the West African Civil Society Institute, WACSI, as partners in the integration processes in the region is better understood.

Civil Society Organisations are expected to buy into ECOWAS’ various programmes and to provide suggestions on how best to make them relevant to the needs of the majority of the citizens in the region. Among some of the more important underlying assumptions that informed the in favour of CSOs is the understanding that they provide an important bridge between the ‘distant’ ECOWAS and the citizens. CSOs are believed to provide a ‘middle way’ or ‘third sector’ between “sole reliance on the (non-performing) state” to drive the integration process in the region. CSOs are also perceived as providing new and refreshing perspectives on national, regional and global politico-social and economic development debates and programmes, etc; which ECOWAS could benefit

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 The senior author was one of the participants at that historic meeting to which he also presented a lead paper titled; “International Organisations and the Quest for Sustainable Development: Shifting from Government to Citizens Focus”; 27th August 2010.

from in the long run, since they also act as ‘watch dogs’, or ‘oversight agents’. As well, CSOs occasionally act as ‘legitimizers’ of national and regional development blue prints, policies and programmes. Finally, CSOs can contribute positively to national development efforts through their advocacy, service delivery, local capacity building, poverty alleviation; monitoring and evaluation’, etc.\(^{37}\) The critical questions that beg for answers from the foregoing, however, are: Can CSOs credibly and efficiently deliver on their huge potential advantages as partners in development? What must ECOWAS do to mitigate some of their major deficiencies to make them effective partners in development and integration processes in the region? The next section tackles these pertinent issues.

**CSOs as Partners in Regional Integration Processes: Issues and Challenges**

While CSOs have now been accepted worldwide as a critical ‘third force’ in the integration processes especially in a developing region like West Africa, what is not so publicly acknowledged is their limitations, especially in the context of Vision 2020. First, they are notorious for having very weak and unreliable governance structures; that they are inherently undemocratic with regard to their institutions, operations and ownership structures. These worries raise serious questions as to whether CSOs are better governed or more transparent than the states and governments they criticise and aspire to replace in providing services to the population. Furthermore, many CSOs, including even the older and more ‘high profile’ ones, hardly own the programmes and agenda that they execute, and are particularly dependent on external funding and national/governmental patronage to keep them busy. Such reliance deprives them of the ability to autonomously initiate programmes and policies, no matter how beneficial they may be to the masses or national development. Second, CSOs lack sufficient capacity to analyse, plan and execute projects, due to dearth of skilled manpower. They are also not known for having the requisite staff complement, a situation that is particularly grave among West African CSOs with which ECOWAS is presently partnering. More importantly, available staff is often ill-trained, ill-motivated and poorly paid. Expectedly, the generally low human capacity of most CSOs in the region hampers critical aspects of their mandates and activities such as monitoring and evaluation, oversight and programme implementation, making them very unreliable as development partners of ECOWAS that needs highly skilled and specialised personnel to deliver on a major goal like effective awareness creation among the citizens in line with Vision 2020.

Equally important is the reality that policy recommendations by CSOs may be consigned to the ‘waste bin’ if they are perceived as very critical of state authorities. Also important is the widely held belief that CSOs may not be too different from the states and regional bodies like ECOWAS with regard to their “performance and ability to improve access

(to), coverage, quality and efficiency” of their service\textsuperscript{38}. Perhaps much more damaging is the accusation that they are inefficient and corrupt. CSOs are also accused of lacking focus, poor service provision and variable quality of service, amateurism and high staff turnover, among others. All this is in addition to “poor cost effectiveness, lack of coordination, and poor sustainability due to dependence on external assistance,”\textsuperscript{39} etc. In other words, partnering CSOs in development processes may not necessarily bridge the yawning gap between ECOWAS and the masses in the Member States.

It is arguable that some of the CSOs’ limitations are environmental; the political space in West Africa is still constricted in spite of the on-going democratisation processes in all ECOWAS Member States and their adoption of the Protocol on Good Democracy and Good Governance. ECOWAS should therefore ‘set the ball rolling’ by deepening its own internal democracy. This is imperative if it is to transform from a ‘Community of States to a Community of People’ by the year 2020. Although ECOWAS is increasingly collaborating with diverse civil society groups in its activities, the present engagements are mainly ad hoc in nature; and are characterised by a lot of suspicion and ‘love-hate’ on both sides. ECOWAS should be more deliberate, consistent and focused in its dealings with CSOs in the region especially those with which it already has working partnerships not only to consolidate the relationships, but also to fast track Vision 2020. ECOWAS should come out with objective criteria for engaging with new CSOs region wide preferably using memorandum of understanding, MOU, and should be formally accredited to the Commissions’ headquarters in Abuja. The MOUs must spell out the privileges and responsibilities of each party to minimise areas of misunderstanding, suspicion and conflict. All the processes must be open and transparent as much as possible to provide a level playing field for interested CSOs to compete with one another.

Again, since one of the major limitations of CSOs is limited capacity, ECOWAS should directly and indirectly strive to empower them to enhance their contribution to its overall mandate and vision for the region. Capacity building clauses should be routinely built into all agreements between ECOWAS and accredited CSOs. Sufficient funding will make local CSOs less susceptible to external conditioning, more inward looking, proactive, and independent in their advocacy and related activities. In that regard, there must be explicit procedure for accessing ECOWAS’ funds or those guaranteed by it. Beneficiary CSOs must be made to account for them transparently and regularly in accordance with mutually agreed time-lines. On their part CSOs must endeavour to deepen their internal democracy, and strengthen their institutions and procedures to earn the continued patronage of ECOWAS and member states. As noted earlier, this is not presently the case. Finally, as service providers, CSOs must always strive to work closely with the beneficiaries who must be consulted at every critical phase of the project. This has not always been the case a situation that is not dissimilar to that

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} ECOWAS Commission: ECOWAS VISION DOCUMENT: ECOWAS of the People: Towards a Democratic and Prosperous Community, op.cit.
between the citizens and ECOWAS on the one hand, and the State and the citizens on the other.

Regional Integration in West Africa: Myth or Reality?

Is regional integration in West Africa a myth or a reality? This highly polemic question strikes at the heart of integration processes in West Africa since 1975. The question reflects two broad and contending perspectives on the ECOWAS project. On the one hand are those who are so passionate about West African’s development and integration agenda, and they feel disappointed by its slow progress and are left disillusioned. To this group of analysts, commentators, policy makers and the informed public, West African regional integration is a ‘fairy tale’, a myth. They use ‘myth’ polemically to stress that ECOWAS has not achieved its major goals of creating a common market among the fifteen member states or significantly improving the living standards of the people. ‘Myth’ in such a context is deliberately intended to provoke debate to draw attention to the fact that the organisation has failed the people. For example, the protocol on free movement of people adopted more than two decades ago, and which could have had direct impact on the common citizens if it were faithfully implemented by member states, has not had the desired effect of facilitating easy movement of peoples, goods and services across the region, and that generally, the objective politico-economic situation in West Africa has not changed significantly since 1975 when ECOWAS was set up.

To be sure, ECOWAS is celebrated within and outside Africa as the most ‘innovative’ and ‘advanced’ among the continent’s regional economic communities, particularly in the areas of conflict prevention, management and peacekeeping. The ECOWAS Standby Force, ESF or ECOMOG, is held as a model for other RECs in the continent. However, a lot is wrong with the organisation. “...member countries show weak evidence of following a consistent regional integration strategy to stimulate development at the domestic level.”40 For instance, they have failed to “apply faithfully the trade liberalisation provisions to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers to intra-regional trade...(and) the region still struggles to implement ECOWAS protocols that guarantee entrepreneurs the right of establishment, and migrant workers their socio-economic rights41.” From such a position, West African regional integration as a myth and draws attention to the challenges of the organisation and its members, and they are many. It is important then, to briefly examine some of those challenges.

First and perhaps most critical, is the perception that member states of ECOWAS lack reliable institutional mechanisms and policies to drive the integration project effectively. Of particular concern, is the glaring inability of the member countries to create a synergy between their domestic policies and the organisation’s protocols and programmes to facilitate a sustainable momentum towards region-wide convergence among them on the one hand, and those of ECOWAS on the other, to drive the

---

40 Ibid, p7
41 Ibid.
integration project. Second, the fragile political situations in some member countries, including the region’s potential powerhouse, Nigeria, continue to cause serious worry about the long-term future of ECOWAS. To be sure ‘stability’ has returned to some of the most unstable countries; Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Guinea (Conakry), and Cote d’Ivoire; but their democratisation processes and political institutions are still weak and vulnerable because of their inability to deliver social and economic justice to the majority of their populations. These challenges are often exploited by trans-border criminals who engage in activities like trafficking in small arms and light weapons. There is also endemic drug and human trafficking, environmental degradation and global warming, as well as debilitating diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS, all of which combine to make the life of the average West African citizen brutish and short⁴².

, the slow pace of integration means that national markets in most members, with the exception of Nigeria, remain unattractive to local and foreign investors. However even Nigeria’s huge population advantage is neutralised by challenges such as political uncertainty, terrorism, unreliable power supply, etc, which are a big drag on the country’s huge investment potential. The relatively unfriendly economic climate in most member states impacts negatively on their man power needs as highly qualified citizens are forced to leave their countries in search of the proverbial “greener pastures” abroad, a ‘brain drain’ that is unlikely to stop in the short term by all members. Finally, the socio-economic statistics are equally debilitating. West Africa is not only the poorest region in Africa; it is also among the regions of the world with the highest poverty prevalence rate. In 2009 an overwhelming number of the region’s 300million people, 60% or 290 million, lived on less than one US dollar a day⁴³. Equally depressing is the fact that although endowed with fertile soil for agriculture, West Africa does not produce enough food to feed its people; none of the fifteen member countries is self-sufficient in their basic food needs. Significantly, even Nigeria, the wealthiest member of ECOWAS is food dependent. According to Akinwunmi Adesina, the country’s Minister of Agriculture, Nigeria spent 991billion Naira in 2010 on rice and wheat imports; a situation he described as “dangerous” for a country that is richly endowed with all that is necessary to feed its people and export food to neighbouring countries⁴⁴.

**Indicators as the ‘Reality’ of Regional Integration in West Africa**

In spite of the enormous challenges discussed above, no one can categorically and confidently deny that regional integration in West Africa is not a ‘reality’. As used in this context, reality denotes a state of affairs that exists as a matter of fact, and has nothing to do with whether it is good or bad, satisfactory or not satisfactory. Critics may be

---

⁴² Ibid.p7. Significantly, in spite of these dire socio-economic conditions, some Governors in Nigeria have expressed serious doubts about their ability to pay the recently approved minimum wage of eighteen thousand Naira about $120 a month for a country that is the sixth biggest producer of crude oil in the world. The Nigerian Government is also threatening to remove the subsidy on fuel and that is bound to make life for the average Nigeria much more difficult.

⁴³ Ibid; p4

⁴⁴ Speech at IITA, Ibadan, reported in *ThisDay*, Lagos, on the 15th of August, 2011.
unhappy with the pace of integration in West Africa, but they cannot deny that integration processes are not taking place in the region. Indeed regional integration is alive; but how well it is, remains a matter of contention. What is clear though is that since the Lagos Treaty was adopted in 1975, important institutions and mechanisms have been set up by ECOWAS to deal with various aspects of its integration agenda. Thus whether we are satisfied with the pace at which ECOWAS is pushing the integration project or not is beside the point. This section examines some of these indicators of reality in regional integration.

Assessing indicators of regional integration in any part of the world is fraught with challenges, but it is much more so for an organisation like ECOWAS, which is yet to make any significant impact on the lives of the ordinary citizens in the region. Consequently we will focus our attention on those activities, protocols and decisions of ECOWAS that are designed to change the attitude and behaviour of member states through convergence on issues relating to politics, economics, culture, etc. Decisions and policies designed to harmonise national and regional policies with the aim of giving integration processes a nudge no matter how weak that may be, would also be assessed, albeit selectively. In other words, ‘indicators of integration’ tell us the measures that have been put in place or the decisions that have been taken by ECOWAS to enhance its integration agenda in the last 36 years and their outcomes. The overall goal is to critically assess the extent to which normative and legal instruments, institutions and processes are aimed at promoting and consolidating the region’s integration agenda in the long run. The focus of the discussion will be on: i) Some of the Protocols that have been adopted by member states since 1975 such as; the Protocol on Non-Aggression and that on Mutual Assistance in Defence, MAD; Free Movement of Persons, Goods and Services; Democracy and Good Governance, and the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peacekeeping and Security; ii) Aspects of the 1993 Revised Treaty, iii) The ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, ETLS, and related matters such as harmonisation of fiscal and economic policies including the establishment of a common external tariff, removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to intra-regional trade, establishment of a free trade area, etc; iv) The Common Monetary zone in the region.

The following questions, among many others, would be addressed in this section: To what extent are these issues, areas, goals, schemes and institutions relevant to the overall integration agenda? What progress has been made in the implementation of mutually agreed protocols, decisions, programme or schemes as the case may be? What are the major obstacles in the implementation of the organisation’s decisions and blueprints by member states? Answers to these questions would shed light on the state of integration in the region. In other words, we are particularly interested in
regionalisation and institutionalisation processes within ECOWAS and their ‘integration effects’\textsuperscript{45}.

**Protocols**

Protocols are important indicators of integration because if they are faithfully implemented, they can engender positive behavioural change among the integrating states towards one another, and in respect of third parties in Africa and the rest of the world.

a) The Protocols on Non-Aggression and that on Mutual Assistance in Defence of 1978 and 1981 respectively, represent concrete policies and decisions taken by ECOWAS to ‘protect’ and consolidate the integration project. Crucially, although both documents did not directly address economic matters, they were nonetheless very important indicators for a number of reasons. First, they reflected the fact that the region was vulnerable to threats of internal and external destabilisation, especially in the aftermath of the abortive Portuguese sponsored invasion of Guinea under Sekou Toure in 1970, and the end of the 30-month Nigerian civil war, 1967 to 1970. Second, the founding fathers were alive to the fact that integration can only flourish in a peaceful and stable political and socio-economic environment. They believed, and rightly so, that engaging in conflict prevention was necessary and indispensable—as events in some members states were to prove later—if the integration project were to be kept on track. Third, the protocols represented concerted regional efforts at confidence building in security matters among the members. In that regard, they set the tone for the elaborate 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peacekeeping and Security, which is generally acknowledged as ECOWAS’ most important milestone in the consolidation of its conflict prevention and peacekeeping roles in the region. It should be emphasised that the ECOWAS’ greatest success to date as noted earlier, has been in the sphere of conflict prevention, management, and peacemaking and peacekeeping, all of which have considerably contributed directly to the consolidation of peace and democracy in member states as well as the regional integration agenda\textsuperscript{46}.

b) The Protocol on Free Movement of People, Goods and Services

Adopted in 1979 the protocol came into force in 1981, and its goal was ostensibly to facilitate one of the most vital long term goals of ECOWAS; the creation of a common market among its members. The protocol abolished visas for Community citizens travelling within the region, as well as free movement of goods, services and labour.

\textsuperscript{45} For details on these processes see Philipe De Lombaerde and Luk Van Langenhove, *Indicators of Regional Integration: Concepts and Methodological Issues*, IIIS Discussion paper No.64, no date, pp15-6.

\textsuperscript{46} For more on this, see Amadu Sesay, *Fighting Bushfires: ECOWAS and Peacemaking in West Africa*, a manuscript commissioned by ECOWAS, which critically examined the organisation’s peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau; forthcoming.
Although the agreement has led to ‘easy’ movement within the region especially for citizens travelling by air, those travelling by road still face serious obstacles, delays and even extortion in the hands of security agencies, see Table 2 below. The Table paints a graphic picture of the frustrating man-made obstacles to the free movement of people, goods and services across the region that constituted veritable impediments to intra-regional trade and integration. Half-hearted implementation and/or outright violation of the protocol by security agencies in some member countries constitute one of the major obstacles to effective regional economic integration in West Africa. According to the Director-General of the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines and Agriculture, NACCIMA, in August 2011:

The ECOWAS protocol on free movement of goods and people is being hampered by the activities of the numerous security operatives and checkpoints across our borders. The presence of the overbearing number of security personnel mounting checkpoints at member states’ borders is counter-productive to the protocol. Those checkpoints...have also become a source of worry... ECOWAS should be alive to its objective and ensure that movement(s) of goods and people are harmonised for the overall development of member countries. It is time that ECOWAS moves away from just organising workshops and seminars to full implementation of this protocol.

Table 2: Checkpoints along selected Intra-ECOWAS Highways in 1998/1999 as obstacles to free movement and intra-regional trade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Ways</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Checkpoints</th>
<th>Checkpoints posts per 100km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagos-Abidjan</td>
<td>992Km</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotonou-Niamey</td>
<td>1036Km</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lome-Ouagadougou</td>
<td>989Km</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accra-Ouagadougou</td>
<td>972Km</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abidjan-</td>
<td>1122Km</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

47 The senior author has travelled from Lagos to Lome on three occasions and has firsthand experience of some of these challenges including being asked to give money to border security personnel in July 2003, on his way from Cotonou. Ass would be expected, no money was paid in the end but we were all unnecessarily delayed.


49 Quoted in The Nation, Lagos, 18th August, 2011, p15. The observation was made at a seminar on obstacles to regional trade in West Africa.
The 1993 Revised Treaty

The 1993 Revised Treaty is a veritable indicator of the determination of ECOWAS and its member states to move integration forward by accommodating new developments within the region and the rest of the world with the aim of putting in place instruments and institutions that will ‘effectively’ address those concerns. For instance, Article 58 of the new treaty betrayed the new focus on security matters, and by implication ECOWAS’s unwitting adoption of a ‘security complex’ posture in its relations with member states. The treaty tacitly acknowledged that the primary security interests of each ECOWAS state are linked together “sufficiently” and that their national securities cannot be realistically considered apart from one another50. Aside from that, Article 3 of the Revised Treaty affirmed the main purpose of the organisation as “the promotion of cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa”. As well, Article 4 rehashed key integration driver principles such as non-aggression, harmonisation of policies underscored by the peaceful settlement of disputes among member states, protection and promotion of human rights, accountability and democracy. Finally, the new treaty put in place institutions that were to deepen integration processes in the region; a Community Parliament, a Court of Justice as well as specialised agencies that are tasked with important socio-economic responsibilities like health and sanitation to promote the well-being of the ordinary citizens. The revised treaty also laid the basis for other fundamental policy thrusts and protocols such as that on Democracy and Good Governance, which has significantly contributed to the deepening of democracy and good governance in ECOWAS states, through convergence and zero tolerance for changes in government through undemocratic means. The proviso has been invoked by ECOWAS to good effect against regimes in Guinea, Niger Republic and Togo, and provided the legal and normative basis for regular ‘shuttle’ diplomatic missions by members of the Council of Elders in the region, which successfully doused political tensions in several member states. No doubt, inter-state relations in West Africa are more peaceful and predictable in the last three and a half decades than they have ever been. Certainly, the risk of inter-state war between ECOWAS members is now very remote51.

50 See the 1993 Revised ECOWAS Treaty for more details. Barry Buzan was the first to use the phrase ‘security complex’ in, People, States and Fear, Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 2nd edition, 1991, p190.
51 See Amadu Sesay, Fighting Bush Fires, op cit, for more on this important point.
ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, ETLS

This is another critical project in the organisation’s drive to promote and consolidate economic integration in West Africa, a core objective and mandate. The ETLS which came into effect in 1990 is intricately intertwined with several other vital goals planks such as the creation of a common market, a single monetary zone and free movement of people, goods and services, among others. More specifically, the ETLS is anchored on the complete removal of all barriers to trade in the region; and the standardisation of all custom duties and taxes of equivalent effect to enhance intra-union trade.

Three categories of goods were initially targeted under the ETLS scheme:

a. Unprocessed goods especially live stock, fish and mineral products,

b. Traditional handicraft wares and products, including handmade goods with or without the help of mechanical devices, fancy wares, small cabinet work, carpets, footwear,

c. Industrial goods of Community Origin.

These items are subject to the following, under the trade liberalisation scheme:

- Total exemption from import duties and taxes
- No quantitative restriction
- Non-payment of compensation for loss of revenue.

Stringent conditions are however to be satisfied by an importer/exporter to be able to benefit from the ETLS regime. They include: (i) goods must be of local origin in member states of ECOWAS, (ii) goods must be identified/listed in the ETLS annex, and (iii) goods must be accompanied by a certificate of origin and an ECOWAS export declaration form.52

On paper, the requirements look rather simple and easy to fulfil by any serious minded business person in the region; but in practice, it is much more difficult for intending exporters to effectively utilise the provisions of the ETLS. One of the most frustrating barriers is the reluctance of national governments directly and indirectly to ensure the full operation of the scheme, because some of them still rely heavily on import duties and related taxes for their revenue. Besides that there is the usual bureaucratic red tape and attendant delays in obtaining the mandatory documents, a process that could take several months, if not years, depending on the member country, by which time the

exporter or business person would have clearly lost the momentum\textsuperscript{53}. Related to that is the fact that the relevant laws and provisions are yet to be fully harmonised by member states to achieve region-wide convergence. Not only that, some ECOWAS members, especially those that are relatively developed and prosperous like Nigeria, Ghana or Cote d'Ivoire, are wary that unscrupulous third parties external to the regional could use rogue nationals to dump cheap and sub-standards goods on their markets and frustrate the growth of local industries. A third factor is that even after the mandatory documents must have been obtained and the goods are loaded onto trucks, long distance trans-national drivers often experience long frustrating delays at border posts as corrupt officials try to extort money before giving them the ‘all clear’ sign to proceed to their destinations. See Table 2 above. A long distance driver lamented that transport companies spend huge sums of money annually at border posts and other check points that are non-refundable because they are as a rule, not receipted. According to him; “even when you have all the paperwork, it is not always taken into account...not a lot of documentation is involved really, but there are too many unnecessary delays” on the roads\textsuperscript{54}. Chairman of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industries lamented that “the movement of good and products across the various borders in the sub-region is still a nightmare. Over the years, we are supposed to have progressed from Free Trade Area to a Customs Union and eventually to a Monetary Union. But we are yet to even successfully establish a Free Trade Area in the region which is the first level of integration process (sic)”\textsuperscript{55}. Of course the present situation is not conducive to trade in perishable goods in the region even when they are in high demand in neighbouring countries. These and other frustrating challenges have combined to considerably slow down the growth of intra-regional trade presently estimated at between 10 and 12 percent, “...compared to rates of 60% or more in Asia and Europe”\textsuperscript{56}. Not surprisingly, there is perceptible disappointment among the fledgling business community in the region, while member states display what we can call ‘integration fatigue’ resulting from the relatively negligible returns from the ETLS.

The Common Monetary Zone

The creation of a common monetary zone is one of the critical goals of regional integration in West Africa. However, not much success has been recorded in this sphere

\textsuperscript{53} It took me and some colleagues over seven months 2011, to register a research group with the Corporate Affairs Commission in Abuja in 2011, even though we had all the required documentation.


\textsuperscript{56} Corsino Tolentino, “West Africa”, in Corsino Tolentino and Mathias Vogl (eds.) Sustainable Regional Integration in West Africa, ZEI Discussion Paper, C208, 2011, op.cit. p23, for more on this aspect.
in spite of the many advantages that are associated with a common currency. When fully operational, a single currency provides a wider and more attractive market for local and foreign investors because monetary transactions will be simplified and short. Sadly, ECOWAS does not at the moment have a single currency as it is characterized by two main monetary groups. On one side are eight Francophone states plus Guinea Bissau, which belong to the union économique et monetaire ouest-africaine, UEMOA, zone with the CFA as legal tender. On the other, are the remaining Anglophone ECOWAS members plus Guinea, with essentially inconvertible national currencies. Significantly Liberia, which uses the American dollar as legal tender side by side with its local dollar that is only convertible in the country, does not for now belong to any of the two groups. As would be expected, transacting business in the region is generally difficult, slow and expensive because transactions are done in hard currency, mainly the US dollar, are preferred. However, access to the US dollar is either through competitive foreign exchange bidding through the Central Bank, as it is the case in Nigeria, through local foreign exchange bureaux or the informal sector. Invariably many small businesses are compelled to patronise the informal market to source for dollars and other hard currencies at much higher exchange rates, with all the negative consequences for their businesses and the local economies.

Although the five ECOWAS countries outside the CFA zone decided in December 2000 to create a single currency to be known as the West African Monetary Zone, WAMZ, no convincing progress has been made in that direction, and the deadline has been shifted a couple of times. Consequently the 2015 deadline may not be realistic and the feasibility of a single, region-wide common currency is dim. Obviously, the Francophone countries will be reluctant to give up the CFA, which has served them relatively well for decades and which is perceived as more stable and reliable. They are expectedly, rather sceptical of the new system and are reluctant to give up the CFA for the unknown. In the decades, the CFA zone countries have made significant progress towards “strong monetary, economic and trade integration” in contrast with the Anglophone group which seems to have lost the momentum. Not surprisingly, the merger of the two currency zones has been postponed four times; in 2003, 2005, 2009 and now to 2020. Even so, there is no firm guarantee that the stringent convergence criteria for the amalgamation which include:

- an inflation rate of not more than 5 per cent per annum,
- budget deficit of less than 4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP),
- 10 per cent ceiling on Central Bank financing of government budget of the previous year's tax revenue,
- Gross external reserves to finance at least 3 months' imports, would be achieved before then.

In addition to the above conditionalities, members are prohibited from accumulating “new domestic debt arrears and liquidation of existing ones; while tax revenue ratio to GDP, wage bill/tax revenue and public investment/tax revenue should not be less than
20, 35 and 20 per cent respectively...”

It is doubtful if member states have the political will to adhere strictly to the fiscal discipline that is so vital to the realisation of the common ECOWAS currency in 2020. Not only that, a single ECOWAS currency is also dependent on the ability of member states to successfully “incorporate the national laws in the regional statutes as well as tackling the issues of weak policy harmonisation, rudimentary payments systems, lack of trade integration agenda and poor sensitisation...” campaigns

Certainly, some member states are struggling to meet the stringent economic and fiscal convergence criteria but it has been an uphill task since none of them is in full control of their national economies, which are highly susceptible to external shocks like unfavourable commodity prices, a sudden increase in crude oil price or economic melt-down-turn in the OECD countries as was the case in 2008. In that regard, it is plausible to say that the on-going economic and financial uncertainties in the Euro zone especially in Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, would not engender much enthusiasm in West Africa for a regional currency. Also significant is the absence, so far, of concrete modalities for facilitating the merger of the CFA zone and the proposed WAMZ in 2020. ECOWAS is yet to also come out with what we can be call ‘Plan B’ on what it would do if none of the monetary groups is ready to surrender to a common regional monetary zone. Nevertheless, the fact that the issue has continued to task the attention of member states and the Commission in Abuja is an indication of their determination to give regional integration a push in the right direction in the long run, even if we are not satisfied with its present pace.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Regional integration processes are today, more than ever before, driven by the pre-eminence of the forces of globalisation in the post Cold War international system. As a result, no part of the world or section of humanity would like to be left behind or marginalised by other regions, or to be classified among the ‘wretched of the earth’. Thus successful integration will enable weaker regions and states to properly equip themselves for the fierce competition among regions and states in the 21st Century. The rest of this section discusses pertinent issues on how to consolidate the gains made by ECOWAS in the last thirty six years to move the regional integration agenda forward.

First, it is important for ECOWAS and its members to deepen their democracy and strengthen institutions by internalising the ethos of accountability and transparency by public office holders. That way, the citizens will stop perceiving public office as the surest short-cut to instant wealth and the fastest way to escape from the crippling poverty and deprivation in the region. To achieve such a goal will require strict adherence to the tenets of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance by the

---


Commission and member States. Second, expanding intra-community trade which is presently less than 20% is another challenge that must be addressed diligently and frontally by all ECOWAS members. However, that will only be possible if ECOWAS and member states are commitment to the total eradication of all artificial barriers which presently constitute major impediments to free movement of people, goods and services across the region. Happily all member countries are aware of these obstacles, one reason why the Federal Government of Nigeria is presently examining creative ways of partnering with the Federal Road Safety Corps, FRSC, to minimise artificial obstructions to trade especially with its immediate neighbours, especially Benin Republic. Under the proposed scheme, there will be only three officially approved check points under the ‘one-stop’ check arrangement, to reduce the number of hours/days spent by commercial truck drivers between the two countries due to the multiplicity of road blocks. It is also important for economic transactions in the region to be conducted transparently and speedily if member states are to attract the badly needed external investors that are indispensable to sustainable economic development and integration. As well, member states must continue to reform their tax and tariff regimes in line with the requirements of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme.

Intra-ECOWAS trade will be significantly enhanced if national production structures are properly coordinated and aligned to complement one another. ECOWAS should speed up the establishment of regional industries to fast track economic diversification and make the national economies more complementary, which is presently not the case. ECOWAs must effectively engage the private sector in the region to identify realistic ways of promoting intra-community trade. As Corsino Tolentino rightly noted, the participation of ‘...non-state actors is crucial for the success or failure of integration...’ projects.

The Commission must commit itself to the development of the agricultural sector in the region. Although 70% of the region’s population rely on agriculture, most agricultural activities are of a subsistence nature characterised by small holders who do not even produce enough food to feed their families or meet other commitments such as paying children’s school fees, medical bills, shelter, etc. More depressing, as already noted, is that no member country is food self sufficient, and rely overwhelmingly on food imports amounting to billions of dollars annually, which they can scarcely afford. To stem this negative trend, the Commission should endeavour to coordinate the agricultural policies of member States effectively and align them with its own.

Man power development remains an important challenge for the region in general and ECOWAS in particular. Qualitative manpower remains an indispensable means of harnessing other national resources in support of overall national development in the 21st Century. An educated manpower is perhaps the most fundamental and decisive

59 *ThisDay*, Lagos, July 25, 2011, p.30

60 Corsino Tolentino, “West Africa” in Corsino Tolentino and Mathias Vogl (eds.) op.cit, p.21
factor in determining what a nation can accomplish toady in its development efforts. Unfortunately, many ECOWAS countries do not seem to put a premium on the education sector. Not surprisingly there is widespread poverty, technological backwardness, economic and social deprivation in the region, whose subordination in the global political economy persists, and which hampers effective regional integration. A key development strategy for all the 15 members, therefore, is to diligently produce an intelligent and creative workforce that can be relied upon to take the initiative in driving economic growth, progress and economic integration in the region.

Peacemaking and peacekeeping engagements using ECOMOG and other mechanisms remain ECOWAS’s strongest point. Nevertheless its conflict management institutions and capacity need to be continually strengthened to enhance its credibility locally and externally. It is essential, therefore, for ECOWAS to do everything practicable to prevent states that are still relatively at risk— Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone—from relapsing into those old ways of doing business that led to their political and economic crises that earned them and the region such notoriety. A lingering challenge in Bissau is to promote professionalism in its armed forces and in particular, to persuade the ‘veterans’ of the independence struggle to leave the military by guaranteeing them a decent life out of their uniform. Commendably, ECOWAS is already partnering with other member countries and development partners to solve this lingering dilemma, through training and money to pay retirement benefits. The Commission should maintain a close and proactive watch on political and socio-economic developments in the ‘vulnerable’ states and continue to encourage them to consolidate the gains made so far in areas like governance, transparency and accountability. In that regard the Council of Elders remains a potent instrument that ECOWAS can deploy at short notice to douse potentially volatile situations in Member States before they implode into violent conflict.

In spite of its huge domestic challenges, Nigeria remains a major regional player in West Africa and a veritable driver of regional integration processes. Abuja must continue to play its lead-nation role in ECOWAS. No other country in the region could have committed such huge human and financial resources to the peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone other than Nigeria. The onus is therefore on the Commission and every member state to work closely with Abuja to ensure the long term success of the integration project. Although there are now open calls and pressure on the Nigerian Government to prioritize its goals and focus less on the region, Abuja should as much as possible, avoid unilateralism in its relations with the Commission whether in the economic, political or social spheres, as that would send the wrong signals across the region to the detriment of the integration project. This is important because integrating a region is a collective enterprise that requires all hands to be fully on deck at all times. Besides, states, like the human beings, are conscious of their ‘ego’, pride and image in the community of nations, irrespective of size and resource endowment. It is therefore much more expedient and even cost-effective to embrace multilateralism especially with regard to important regional issues.
Funding remains a serious challenge to the growth and development of ECOWAS. The organisation has improved its internally generated revenue through an innovative levy of 0.5 percent of import and export duties in member countries. That arrangement has directly and indirectly given Nigeria a veto of sorts on local funding. Nigeria, and indeed, other ECOWAS members must endeavour to remit their levies regularly and timely to the headquarters in Abuja. Failure to do so will make it hard for the organisation to dependably and predictably budget for its activities. ECOWAS should also expedite action on its economic and projects so that those members that depend heavily on customs and excise duties would have new revenue sources to sustain their national budgets, while compensation for those members who will lose revenue should be prompt and effective to minimise the costs of integration in the absence of significant and tangible short term benefits.

Finally, ECOWAS’ deepening relations with Europe after the Cold War should be a cause for concern West Africa—like the rest of Africa—has signed several socio-political, economic and strategic partnership agreements with Europe that are based on perceived ‘common interests’ to improve the wellbeing of the African continent’s citizens especially those in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the agreements are sold as selfless, in reality, they are informed by hardnosed geopolitical and economic considerations in Europe a point that was not lost to Tywuschik and Sheriff who acknowledged that the pacts “... [will] undermine Africa’s search for continental [and regional] integration...”61 Unfortunately West African leaders and senior ECOWAS bureaucrats continue to perceive European countries naively as ‘friends’ and ‘development partners’; and the EU as ECOWAS’ ‘mentor’. While no region or country can successfully isolate itself in an age of irresistible globalization, if ECOWAS is to put its relations with the EU on a solid footing, it must train and retain a crop of bureaucrats with competence in the vast and intricate bureaucratic maze of the European Commission and its plethora of agencies. A good starting point, perhaps, will be to engage a select group of West African scholars and researchers to conduct a critical study on the institutions and processes of the European Union on the one hand and important issues of mutual interest such as the Strategic partnership and related matters. Such a strategy is imperative and long overdue given the centrality of the EU in the political economy of ECOWAS in particular and the region in general. More importantly, ECOWAS leaders must be made to understand that their present relations and partnerships with the EU and its member states are not in the long term interest of national development or regional integration. More immediately, West African citizens must be fully brought on board the ‘ECOWAS train’ in support of its programmes and activities. It is only in such a context that Vision 2020 assumes greater importance and relevance since it is now widely acknowledged that the region’s heads of states, ministers and bureaucrats cannot deliver the ‘ECOWAS baby alone’. But how long the organisation will be in the labour ward is a moot point. Even so Vision 2020 seems to offer great prospects for mass participation in delivering the ‘ECOWAS baby’ in the long run.

REFERENCES


De Lombaerde, Phillepe and Luk Van Langenhove, Indicators of Regional Integration: Concepts and Methodological Issues, IIIS Discussion Paper No.64

ECOWAS Commission, Vision 2020 ECOWAS of the People: Towards a Democratic and Community, Abuja, March 2009

ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, Revised Treaty, 1993

ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, ECOWAS Strategic Plan, 2011- 2015


Stevens, Siaka former president of Sierra Leone, in *Republican Sierra Leone*, Freetown: Government Printer

*ThisDay*, Lagos, August 15th, 2011

*ThisDay*, Lagos, July 25th, 2011

*The Nation*, Lagos, 18th August, 2011


UNDP, *Regional Integration and Human Development: A Pathway for Africa*, New York, April 2011