

Twenty Years Trajectory of Sub-Regional Integration: A History of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, 1975 - 1995

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Abstract

The idea of economic cooperation in West Africa like in other regions of the African continent can be traced to the pre-colonial period. During this period, cooperation became inevitable because of the effects of geographical differences on what could be produced or grown in different communities. However, the formation of the largest regional economic grouping, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote economic cooperation and development in the sub-region added new narration to the history. Thus, the signing of the Lagos Treaty in 1975 which ushered in ECOWAS was a watershed in the history of West Africa as Anglophone, Lusophone and francophone countries agreed to work together under one umbrella for the economic integration of the sub-region. This paper attempts to evaluate the economic cooperation between the Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries of West Africa from 1975 to 1995. The paper is divided into three sections, the first section focuses on the historical development of cooperation in West Africa in pre-colonial and colonial periods, while the second section examines the formation of ECOWAS and

its objectives. The last section critically looks into the achievements of ECOWAS in line with its objectives and the challenges that affected its performance.

Keywords: ECOWAS, economic cooperation, integration, regional body, West African states

Introduction

Economic cooperation among developing states, especially at the sub-regional level is opined as the essential instrument for economic integration and development and other economic benefits for the countries involved in such an arrangement. There are numerous reasons for such an assertion. For instance, according to Ernest Haas, Leon Lindberg and other proponents of regional integration opine that collective efforts can match any form of economic challenge that might be too huge for one country to handle. However, the idea of economic cooperation among the West African communities is traceable to the pre-colonial era. Available evidence suggests that like other regions in Africa, the West African sub-region also witnessed the exchange of ideas, goods, and, services from one community to

another before the advent of the Europeans. Consequently, this led to the contact of people of different origins, ideas, languages, and cultures which in turn promoted trade relations that lasted for many centuries.

The advent of colonialism in West Africa brought about changes in economic relations. During the colonial period, people were not actively engaged in meaningful economic relations with their immediate neighbours. But towards the end of the colonial rule, and post-colonial period, the leaders of West Africa embarked on concerted efforts of promoting economic integration and cooperation. This was seen as a means to fostering economic integration and development. The lofty initiative, however, met some impediments, particularly the barriers that came from their respective colonial experiences, especially, post-colonial relations with their colonial masters, and the language of barrier of French, English and Spanish. This remained unsettled not until the middle of the 1970s when they mutually agreed on building a broad-based cooperative body.

Historical Development of Economic Cooperation in West Africa: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods

Cooperation among Pre-Colonial West African Societies

In traditional West African society, agriculture was practiced as a primary occupation by most people. However, women engaged in the manufacturing of household items, such as pots, baskets, and clothing as part of their normal household duties (Flint, 1976). Given the fact that agriculture was the common and primary occupation of the majority of people, agricultural practices engaged in by the people were different from one area to another. Various factors responsible for this have been itemized by scholars of economic history, but amid these factors, geographical and climatic conditions are essentially determinant factors when it comes to the economic activities of the people in the pre-colonial period. For instance, people in the forest

zone engaged in the cultivation of kola nut and palm trees, while their counterparts in the savannah were known for the production of cereal crops. This differentiation was also evident in the area of domestication of animals and birds. Those in the savannah zone raised livestock and those in the riverine area practiced fishing (Ogunremi, 2005). For this reason, for a community to quench its thirst for the goods which it cannot produce, it needs therefore to enter into mutual trade relations with other neighbouring communities (Falola, 2005).

Trade relation between communities in West Africa was a way by which people mutually related and cooperated economically in the pre-colonial period. According to available evidence, the Ketu (Yoruba), Bombe, and Hausa traders exchanged a variety of items brought across long distance trade. During this period also, the ancient cities of Kano and Bamako had maintained flourishing entry ports where traders from all over North and West Africa converged for the exchange of consumable, precious, and household items. This explains the importance of inter-regional trade which involved more than two states organized in a place where large prosperous sellers displayed a variety of goods in anticipation of buyers.

The movement of people and goods was quite possible and easy during this period through the existence of a complex network of routes. Some routes connected various towns in the same state and these also linked different states together. These trade routes played prominent roles in trade relations during this period in West Africa. On the interconnectedness of routes network that cut across different cities, Falola asserts that:

Many highways took off in the coastal regions, passed through the vast hinterland, and went northward. There were many of these north-south routes. One of the highways started in Lagos

and passed through Abeokuta, Ilorin, Bida, Zaria, and Kano all in Nigeria. Another began in Accra and transversed Kumasi, Sabuga, Yendi, and Mango up to Say on the Niger bend yet, and another began in Monrovia and passed Mussandu, Keruan, Kankan, Siguru, Bamako, San, Djene to Timbuktu. There were also the east-west routes, cutting across many West African States. One such route began in St Louis, Senegal, and ran through Bakel, Kita, Bamako, San, Ouagadougou, Say, Sokoto, and Kano. These network routes had distinguished characteristics. First, the routes connected the whole of West Africa and those places that were not located on the highways were linked by extensive feeder roads. Second, the routes were wide enough for people who traveled on foot or with animals and constantly well-kept safe (Falola, 2005, p. 64)

Interestingly, for the long-distance trade, there was a relay trading system. This system allowed partnership among the traders to be constantly maintained as goods could be sent from one trader to another. Besides trading activities which formed the enduring means of economic cooperation, communities in the pre-colonial period also exchanged technological ideas. Craftsmen of different communities could settle freely out of their ethnic groups to practice their professions. For

example, Yoruba weavers settled in neighboring states, such as Nupe, and in some Hausa lands to practice their profession (Akinwunmi, 2003).

Cooperation among West African Societies during the Colonial Period

By the end nineteenth (19th) century, almost the entire West Africa was carved under the British, Spanish and French and Portuguese colonialists. Several works have been produced on the concepts of colonialism and imperialism by scholars of different orientations. Hence, in an attempt to reconcile the two concepts, a conclusion was reached on the fact that the former was a precursor for the latter in Africa. The Africa continent was of greatest value to Europe as a source for raw materials for the benefit of industries in Europe (Norman & Palma, 2005). Although there is the possibility of having other motivating factors, economic interest was the major determinant factor of European presence in Africa. Ndubusi succinctly corroborates this through his submission that;

During the period of scramble for Africa, the Europeans split and claimed whatever parts of Africa they felt had great economic promise to them and ultimately established a colonial rule over there with well-armed coercive instruments. In essence, the European expansion and colonization of Africa must be seen as a result of a bourgeois attempt to acquire political power that would be commensurate with, and further consolidate its economic power at home (Ndubusi, 2005, p. 142).

This development changed the nature of economic interaction in West Africa. Consequently, the direct control of political, economic, and social activities exclusively was in the hands of the European colonial masters. The indigenous people receded from the active control of their internal affairs and African economies were incorporated into that of metropolitan countries of Europe. As a result, there was little or no commendable cooperative attitude between the Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone blocs in West Africa. Also, this period

was characterized by intense rivalry and a lack of practical economic cooperation between European colonialists. The colonialists secured colonies in Africa to secure profitable trade for the mother countries (Norman and Palma, 2005). In line with this principle, colonial powers developed various economic institutions and trading firms that unified the colonies under each of them. Accordingly, three notable trade firms were pioneered and vibrant representing colonial countries in trading activities. These include the United Africa Company U.A.C, Compagnie Francaise d'elAfrique Occidentale C.F.A.O, and Societe Commerciale de Quest Africaine. Other European firms later joined these pioneering firms to completely monopolize trade and commerce and they handled the two-thirds or three-quarters of the overseas trade in West Africa. Comparatively, their commercial network was equal in size and importance to the administrative system operated by the colonial power (Hopkins, 1973).

It is pertinent to note that despite the restrictions put in place by the colonialists and European trading firms, the people of West Africa still maintained a considerable level of economic interaction regardless of blocs created by the Europeans. For instance, the northerners moved to the south to work on construction projects and took part in the harvesting of coffee, and cocoa, and clearing of the bush for new farms in the forest region. Harsh conditions and lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas whether in Anglophone, Lusophone or Francophone countries had made many young men in various African territories move to nearby towns or cities where they could have access to jobs. This clearly showed that colonialists did not create permanent devices by which the movement of the people could be completely restricted (Kenoye, 1990). Meanwhile, urging for more reliable and shorter routes promoted something close to cooperation in areas between the British and French colonialists, especially. For example, the British in Gambia signed an agreement with the French in Senegal to have easy access to the groundnut fields in the area of upper Gambia.

Similarly, French colonial authority in the 1940s was able to build a port on a suitable point in the upper Gambia after the negotiation with British colonial authority. The significance of the Gambia River was recognized by French authority because it provided access routes not only to some Senegalese districts but also to some areas in Mali (Hopkins, 1873).

The Formation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Following the independence of many African states from the late 1950s, economic development was identified as a major priority. Therefore, it was given a special attention in the developmental program of the new states. For this desired goal, economic cooperation was seen as an essential instrument for economic development in Africa. Accordingly, economic cooperation in contextual meaning informs collective self-reliance, and countries involved in such arrangements can present a unified front on the issues affecting their socioeconomic and political development. The formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) by the West African States was premised on this and it represented a concrete step to foster unity in the West African sub-region. It represents a concrete and far-reaching step taken so far to put meaning into the concept of West African unity. However, the evolution of what currently been referred to as ECOWAS by and large can be said to have started in 1914 up to the immediate post-independent era. The British authorities in the then Nigeria and West Cameroon Protectorates and Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (now the Republic of Ghana), and Gambia tentatively agreed upon common custom tariffs and at the same time instituted a free trade on both domestic products and imported goods within this region (Onwenu, 1980). Also, France in its own area of jurisdiction formed unified economic institutions for French territories. The testament to this was the growth of the Franc Zone which was the result of the introduction of Colonies Francase

d'Afrique C.F.A. and the formation of the Currency Board for French colonies in the 1940s (Hopkins, 1973)

Closed to two decades after independence there were several efforts at different times towards cooperation for economic growth and development. This was typified by the existence of various organizations on economic relations. In 1959 for instance, the Conseil de l'Entente was established. It comprised Ivory Coast, Niger, the Republic of Benin, and Togo. It was established with the limited aim of preserving economic dominance by the Ivory Coast in this area using the Fonds d'entraide et de Garantie, a fund sponsored by the Ivory Coast herself. In the same vein the Niger Basin Commission was founded in 1964 based on the agreement, which was signed by the following countries, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) Benin, Guinea, Mali, and Ivory Coast. The main goal of this Commission was to promote research into the navigation of River Niger and progressive study on the development of the basin (Adejuge, 2005). Likewise, in 1967, the West Africa Economic Community/ Communauté Economique de l'ouest was founded in Monrovia. The member countries included the Republic of Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) Senegal, Togo, and Sierra Leone. This Economic Community could be looked upon as the major first attempt to institutionalize economic cooperation on a larger scale because its membership cut across Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries in West Africa. Nevertheless, its treaty was never ratified and therefore the expectation to serve the purpose of its establishment was not materialized.

Furthermore, between 1972 and 1973, Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) was established. Its membership included Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Senegal. The whole members of Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF) were represented except Guinea,

Togo, and the Republic of Benin. The purpose for its establishment aimed at the realization of a far-reaching regional cooperation that previous integration efforts failed to achieve. Meanwhile, the critique has it that, it was founded to kill the West Africa Economic Community which was established in Monrovia upon the premise of institutionalizing economic cooperation on a larger scale (Onwenu, 1980). Within the same year that CEAO was founded, the Mano River Union was co-founded by Liberia and Sierra Leone through the Mano River Declaration. Later in 1980, Guinea registered its membership. The member countries in the arrangement shared the same similarities in terms of ethnic, cultural, and economic composition (Kenoye, 1990).

These economic organizations formed the basis for relentless efforts on economic cooperation in West Africa. However, there are several inherent weaknesses associated with each of these organisations. First, most of them were linguistics in nature and they were restricted to a narrow field of cooperation. Second, most of them were indirectly motivated by external influences especially Western countries to maximize their selfish interest at the expense of West African development. As a result of these reasons, they could not their respective objectives. On this note, Bolarinwa observed that;

Among francophone countries in West Africa, the period between 1959 and 1965 witnessed the evolution of many regional groupings that were either fallout of France's African policy or response to it. On the other hand, similar region links in the case of British colonies in West Africa were soon

before or soon after independence (Bolarinwa, 2005, p. 216).

The Economic Community of West African States was formed on May 28th, 1975, following the formal signing of the ECOWAS treaty in Lagos, Nigeria. Shortly after, another treaty was signed in Lome, Togo. This treaty is known as the treaty for ECOWAS Protocols. Its contents contain full discussion for compensation, cooperation, and development. This was adopted to allay the fear of some member states that might be thinking of losing revenues as a result of the elimination of tariff barriers and a harmonization of industrial policies and projects (Olagbaju and Falola, 2005).

The ECOWAS is one of the largest single economic groupings in the third world and the only multilingual common market in Africa. The coming of ECOWAS as a sub-regional integrative body was significant for socio-economic development. As an integrative body, ECOWAS will serve as a platform for West African States to work together as one without minding the differences inherited from their respective colonial masters. This could be justified by the composition of its membership and other factors. Member States include Togo, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania, while Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Liberia, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau (Adejogbe, 2005). Thus, ECOWAS comprises fifteen countries in the West Africa sub-region and it is regarded as the most populous of the regional economic communities in Africa. Also, it has two distinct economic groups, the eight West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), which formed a monetary and custom union with the C.F.A franc as its common currency, and the seven non-UEMOA countries, each with its currency (Olagbaju and Falola, 2005).

However, it is worth mentioning at this point that the process that led to the formation of ECOWAS is far from what one can describe as an easy ride to success. It took fifteen years of rigorous efforts that were characterized by numerous obstacles such as inter-state rivalry, mutual suspicion, lack of political will to surrender national sovereignty to a supranational organization, and most prominent of all was dislike of Nigeria's leading role in the process when the idea was conceived. With the astute leadership of Nigeria, the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, those obstacles were surmounted. He adopted a strategy of personal diplomacy specifically designed to reach out to West African leaders to assuage the fear of other states in particular the francophone states. This was done by making a convincing statement that Nigeria had no intention of dominating them. As a result of this effort, the initial ill-thought about Nigeria's intention was reduced and the ECOWAS community was presented as a beneficial entity to all member countries (Bolarinwa, 2005).

Assessment of ECOWAS Objectives

The broad objectives of ECOWAS are the promotion of cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunication, and financial questions. Another salient objective goes with the promotion of social and cultural matters to raise the standard of living of its people, increase and maintain economic stability by fostering closer relations among members, and contribute to the progress and development of the African countries (Ogbona, 2024)

The objectives were clearly stated in Article 2 of the treaty. The ways and manners by which these objectives can be realized are further specified in the same article. In this regard, Olagbaju and Falola state the following steps for the realization of ECOWAS objectives:

(a) The admission of custom duties and other changes of equivalent effects on imports and exports.

(b) The elimination of qualitative and administrative restrictions on the trade among members.

(c) The establishment of a common tariff structure and commercial policy towards non-member states.

(d) The elimination of obstacles restricting the free movement of persons, services, and capital among the member states.

(e) The harmonization of agricultural policies and the promotion of common projects in the member states notably in the field.

(f) The evolution of common policy in and joint development of transport, communication, energy, and other infrastructural facilities.

(g) The harmonization of economic, industrial, and monetary policies of members and

(h) The establishment of funds for compensation, cooperation, and development.

The policies listed above will essentially lead to the creation of an economic union for member countries (Olagbaju and Alola, 2005, p.251).

The year 1993 was significant in the existence of ECOWAS. The recommendation of the Committee of Eminent Persons to review the ECOWAS treaty led to the adoption of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty. With this new development on ground, there was a greater expectation of having stronger and more dynamic ECOWAS that will cater to the new trends in the global system (ECOWAS, 2000).

Article (2) of the Revised Treaty pronounced that ECOWAS shall ultimately be the sole economic community in the region for economic integration and realization of the objectives of the African economic community (ECOWAS, 2000).

At the same time, under the Revised Treaty, the Community also adopted the following fundamental principles that predicated on the objectives of ECOWAS

- Equality and interdependence of member states
- Inter-state cooperation
- Solidarity and collective self-reliance
- Harmonization of national development policies and programs
- Non-aggression between member states
- Peaceful settlement of disputes
- Respect, promotion, and protection of human rights
- Promotion and consolidation of democracy and good governance
- Accountability, economic and social justice (ECOWAS, 2000).

Looking at the earlier ECOWAS objectives, the strategic planning for the implementation, and institutional arrangement for the enhancement of the delivery capacity of ECOWAS that accompanied the Revised Treaty of 1993, one may be apt to conclude, that the major concern of ECOWAS was the quest for development in the West Africa continent, a development that encompasses human, material, and technological advancement. And to have track achievements in this solely depends on a strong and buoyant economy that usually comes from establishment of appropriate institutions, and mechanism for economic cooperation.

The Achievements and Problems of ECOWAS

The Achievements of ECOWAS

Since it was established in 1975, ECOWAS member states have adopted and implemented many comprehensive programs in the area of market and

monetary integration, physical and product integration as well as political cooperation. At the inception efforts were geared towards promoting the liberalization of the regional economy and to achieve free movement of the people, goods, services, and capital in line with Article (2) and Article (27) of the ECOWAS Treaty (ECOWAS, 2007). The community worked on the agreed visa requirements and other border routines to facilitate the free movement of people from member states within the ECOWAS region (ECOWAS, 2007). Likewise, in May 1979, the protocol on Free Movement, Residence, and Establishment was signed by member states to create integrative and cooperative region. This was an unprecedented development in the history of formal cooperation because with the possession of a simple travel document, ECOWAS citizens can reside in their host West African countries within the period of 90 days (ECOWAS, 2000).

Following the signing of the protocol, countries like Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Ghana inaugurated their ECOWAS Travel Card Scheme which provided their citizens willing to travel to other member states with travel permit that also covers resident permits. The card was expected to be renewed periodically for statistical and record purposes. Also, some years later the ECOWAS Brown Card Vehicle Insurance Scheme was introduced to complement existing provisions for the free movement of people, goods, and services. Twelve countries that include Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Code d'Ivory Ghana, Guinea-Bissau Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo applied this scheme immediately in their respective countries (Bolarinwa, 2005). However, for the smooth implementation of these adopted programs, the Community, according to Bolarinwa, opted for a trilateral phase for the implementation.

Phase (1) Right of Entry of Establishment (1980-85), Phase (2) Right of Residence (1985-90), Phase (3) Right of Establishment (1990-95). The transition from one phase to another as it was stated in Article

2 (4) shall be based on the experience gained from the implementation of the first phase (Bolarinwa, 2005, p. 224).

The economic benefits of this program were immense. For example, traders from Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries could move freely uninterrupted. In addition, the program encouraged the labour movement and promoted better understanding through the constant interaction of each of the blocs. In this regard, ECOWAS surpassed other regional groupings in Africa based on the fact that no similar functioning mechanism on the free movement of people in their regional integration efforts (ECOWAS, 2005).

Having monetary cooperation remained a cherished idea from the humble beginning of the cooperative effort; the Community initiated ECOWAS Monetary Cooperation Program (EMCP) was designed with the ultimate objective of achieving a single currency area. Although the implementation of the program has not yet been carried out, relentless efforts were always on to see it implemented. Close to this in the scorecard of ECOWAS was the Trade Liberalization Protocol of ECOWAS. The objective of this protocol was to eliminate or at least reduce the customs barriers, which had previously obstructed trade among the member states. With this protocol in place, processed goods, and handcraft products from sub-region being exported or imported into member states should attract no custom duties or taxes of any equivalent, and it began to take effect as far back as 1990 (Olagbaju and Falola, 2005). The rationale for trade liberalization was viewed on the note that, if countries in the region keep down their trade barriers to each other, they should be better off.

In the area of industrialization, industrial products are categorized into two which included priority and non-priority goods. Also, member states were classified into three groups depending on their level

of industrialization. According to Adejugbe's analysis:

Nigeria, Code d' Ivory, Ghana, and Senegal constituted the first industrial group and they were required to eliminate tariffs on industrial goods for four years, for goods termed as priority and six years for non-priority goods. Countries like Benin, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo were in the second group and expected to eliminate tariffs within six years and eight years for priority and non-priority goods respectively.

Meanwhile, the rate of tariff elimination for the third group which includes Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger was eight years for priority products and ten years for non-priority goods (Adejugbe, 2005, p. 238).

This arrangement was to ensure every state within the region irrespective of the blocs it belongs was placed according to its capacity and commercial exchanges went on between and among the Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone countries. Industrial products especially from those countries in the first group had often crossed various borders of West African states whether

Anglophone, Lusophone or Francophone blocs (Olagbaju and Falola, 2005).

Remarkably, for a country or region to promote industrial expansion premium must be placed on the adequate and effective communication system. An effective communication system makes distance shorter and enhances the speed of commercial interaction. At independence, many countries in West Africa lacked effective communication systems. Onwenu shares insight into how appalling and problematic the situation was:

It is a common experience to telephone London first before you can then reach a neighboring country like Ghana by phone from Lagos. Similarly, we know that we cannot reach Lome, Togo by phone from Abidjan, Ivory Coast unless we contact Paris first" (Onwenu, 1980, p. 335).

To address this problem, the ECOWAS Community awarded a telecommunication project otherwise known as the ECOWAS Communication Scheme under which they fashioned out three program (i) Connection of West African capitals by the automatic telephone, telex, and telefix links through the intercom program (ii) Creation of Lome Telecommunication Maintenance Center (iii) Development of a Regional Telecommunication market (Adejugbe, 2005).

Similarly, the Community embarked on road development programmes, and laudable achievements were recorded. For instance, the Community started the physical construction of the

West African highways network as a part of the continental network (trans-coastal, from Lagos to Nouakchott and trans-Sahelian, from Dakar to N'djamena. Individual countries also included in their road development programmes, the extension of roads into the neighbouring countries. With the provision of a road network, traders, as well as business men and women were able to carry out their trading activities with less stress within the sub-region. Upon this advantage, the West African Chamber of Commerce came into existence. It drew its membership from all the states in West Africa. This was later strengthened by the establishment of ECOBANK (ECOWAS, 2005).

Although ECOWAS was established primarily for economic integration and cooperation, contemporary events that engulfed the West African sub-region in the global system have clearly proved that integration or cooperation will be meaningless if ECOWAS as a body turns a blind eye to the present contending political environment. The Liberian crisis which erupted in the 1990s makes this fact indisputable.

The unprecedented breakdown of laws and order and other basic institutions of state in Liberia called for the intervention of other West African states. The Community sent ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to the country (Turk, 2000). The decision to embark on this, however, was taken out of economic consideration and maintenance of peace in the West African sub-region. The member states convincingly agreed that there was no way such a crisis could be in a place without posing a great threat to the peace and economic well-being of West Africa. The ECOMOG mission accomplished its ultimate aim of restoring peace and order in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Equatorial Guinea, countries that were engulfed civil wars in the 1990s.

The Problems of ECOWAS

With the foregoing discussion on the achievements of ECOWAS, one can comment freely that, the ECOWAS Community performed well in the

specific areas of fostering economic development for the whole sub-region. However, what could be regarded as "long-term goals" such as the industrialization of West Africa and other sensitive areas of economic development are far from realization. This was attributed to the numerous problems the community encountered in the process of regional integration and cooperation in West Africa.

The first major problem according to different works on the challenges of ECOWAS is traced to the colonial heritage which in some instances constitutes a hindrance to development. The erstwhile colonial governments especially Britain and France always exert constant influence in African socio-economic and political decisions (Ronnback, 2008). By implication, West African economies had been tied with the metropolitan countries. Also, it led to the manifestation of many inter-state functional organizations and custom unions with narrow objectives. The negative effect of this was the inherent thwarting of the efforts toward the aim of achieving regional cooperation.

Furthermore, the ECOWAS had been battling with unyielding attempts to create formidable trade relations within the sub-region. The absence of formidable trade relations among the member states of West Africa remained a great challenge. It is incontestable that regional integration demands a high degree of trade relations among the integrating states. This was not convincingly manifested among West African countries. Countries from each of the blocs preferentially engaged more in trading activities with their former colonial masters than their neighbouring states (ECOWAS, 1998).

Mutual acrimony is another similar problem to the above. West African states continually nurtured mutual distrust and acrimony that characterized their colonial experience. West African countries preferred to maintain closer ties with their former colonialists than their neighboring states (Ronnback, 2008). If this were unresolved, it would

prevent the member countries from sincerely working together for economic growth and development.

ECOWAS also was confronted with the challenge of diversifying economic activities. Most of the countries' economies in West Africa were predominantly agricultural based and therefore faced problems such as over-dependence on importing finished products, exporting raw materials to other places to source revenue at the expense of their economic development, and constantly limited value-added activities ranging from processing, manufacturing, and services (Ogbonna, 2024).

Another major challenge facing ECOWAS is the inconsistent implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence, and Establishment. The founding treaty of ECOWAS clearly states that citizens of member states should be considered community citizens, with member states committed to removing all barriers to their freedom of movement and residence within the region (Dokubo, 2009). This principle was reiterated in the 1979 Protocol, which outlined specific procedures for its implementation. However, in practice, most member states have failed to fully honor this commitment, continuing to enact national policies that impede the protocol's effective application. For instance, in 1983 and 1985, Nigeria, a leading member of ECOWAS, deported over two million ECOWAS nationals. A similar situation occurred between 1999 and 2001 in Côte d'Ivoire, where the government forced thousands of migrants from Burkina Faso to leave the country (Dokubo, 2009). In 2019, Nigeria also closed its borders with neighboring countries, Benin Republic, Cameroon and Niger Republic citing concerns over illegal arms, contraband goods like rice, and the movement of unauthorized individuals (Oyigebe et al, 2023). This border closure sparked controversy, with many ECOWAS member states

condemning the action as contrary to the ECOWAS Protocol on the free movement of persons and goods. The decision also raised concerns about the potential setback it posed to regional integration and economic cooperation, weakening confidence in Nigeria's leadership in fostering collaboration within the sub-region

Infrastructure encompasses transportation, water, sanitation, power, telecommunication, roads, irrigation and many more are inadequate and insufficient to drive projected industrialization. Where they seemed to be available, they were grossly vandalized by unpatriotic elements. As a result of this, the lofty aim of transforming West Africa into industrialized economy became seemingly unrealizable. And, also because of the interconnectedness of infrastructure to other factors of development, other successfully implemented program became less productive. Adejugbe sheds more light on the problem of infrastructure;

Physical facilities are not sufficient. In areas where there were adequate facilities, the advantage has been considerably reduced by lawlessness, corruption, and theft. The seaport in Nigeria demonstrates the problem. Postal system currently in the region can hardly support greater volume of intra- West African trade (Adejube, 2005, p.238)

In addition, political instability was another obstacle faced by the ECOWAS Community. Quite many ECOWAS member countries were confronted with political instability that required the attention of leaders of those countries involved more. Accordingly, the effects of political crises in different countries hampered adequate attention that could have been given to the issue of cooperation. Furthermore, there are multiple organizations for

regional cooperation and integration with similar objectives to that of ECOWAS. This constituted another serious problem for the ECOWAS community in the sense that it caused a sharp division of attention and commitment among member countries.

Closely tied to the issue of political instability in West Africa is the recent erosion of democratic rule in several countries, notably Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The military takeovers in these nations represent a significant setback to the democratic governance that ECOWAS strives to promote. The 1993 ECOWAS Revised Treaty explicitly emphasizes the commitment to promoting and consolidating democratic systems of governance in all member states (Frempong, 2009). In a regressive move, the military-led governments of these three countries officially withdrew from ECOWAS in September 2024 and subsequently formed an alternative alliance called the Alliance of Sahel States (International Crisis Group, 2024). According to many analysts and observers of African integration, this development marks a major setback for ECOWAS, particularly in terms of its efforts toward regional trade and development.

Conclusion

After the independence years, the leaders in West Africa consolidated their efforts towards having an integrative body to foster economic growth and development in the sub-region. It is in this respect that this paper provides an insight into the historical background of different attempts to establish a sub-regional body for economic cooperation. The paper revealed the division of West Africa into two distinct blocs, along linguistic lines that occurred as a result of colonization, and nurturing fear of dominance were major obstacles to proceeding efforts on integration before 1975 when the ECOWAS was established. Thus, one can conclude that those preceding organizations were unsuccessful because they were limited and

restricted in terms of scope, membership, and focus. Right from its Inception, ECOWAS has adopted many protocols and initiatives to achieve economic cooperation and integration. In this regard, the Community has added some credibility to its scorecard in terms of achievements and performances. However, two decades of its existence, ECOWAS in 1993 revised its treaty to accommodate new developments. More importantly, the Revised Treaty broadens the activities of ECOWAS to encompass strategies for economic cooperation and integration that will eventually lead to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa. ECOWAS like other regions in Africa has been facing challenges ranging from low intra-regional trade, inadequate infrastructure to support aspiring industrialization program for the region, political instability, and ethnic conflicts just to mention a few.

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