

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES SINCE INCEPTION

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ABSTRACT

Interactions existed among the people of West Africa in pre-colonial era while colonialism and early post colonial experiences significantly eroded the gains of integration. Post-colonial efforts towards integration manifested in the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. The gains derived from integration and the hope of fast tracking the prospect motivated this study. The study found that achievements were recorded in sensitization efforts, treaties directed at removal of obstacles to free movement of persons, goods and capital, management of conflicts and trade liberalization. However, conflicts, crisis of confidence, and inability of member states to implement protocols, foreign intervention, language barriers and lack of single currency were among the noticeable challenges. The study concludes that the challenges could be overcome in the interest of member states. It recommends the removal of unfair trade laws, custom and immigration restrictions imposed by corrupt officials, while the immigrations and customs of member states be adequately carried along to ensure compliance with existing protocols.

Key words: Integration, Citizenship, Community Colonialism, free trade, migration

1. INTRODUCTION

There is unanimity of opinion among scholars that long before the advent of colonialism, there were large movements of people across the geographical territory now known as Africa and beyond. Adepoju (2005) opines that in pre-colonial times, migration occurred largely in search of security, new land safe for settlement and fertile for farming. Schraeder (2004:34-36) adds that the market-oriented trade encouraged integration. Gray and Birmingham (1970:3) observe that the market-oriented trade was different from subsistence trade in that it involved luxury goods that were often traded over long distances.

Hopkin (1973) however records that one of the largest and most sophisticated market-oriented trading system that encouraged interaction and integration in today's West Africa and beyond was the trans-Saharan trade network. The practices then in West Africa demonstrated the prevalence of diplomatic practices as observed by Adjaye (1996) that were sophisticated in pre colonial era comparable to those of the twenty-first century. Among such he observes was adherence to diplomatic protocol and etiquette. This included the traditional African custom of warm welcoming of strangers into their midst.

The coming of the Europeans however encouraged mobility within their sphere of influence for political and economic reasons. With the balkanization of Africa in 1884 in Berlin, undue consciousness emerged among nation in respect to the artificial boundaries created by the colonialists among nations that engendered disputes and conflicts up to this century. This significantly altered the pattern of interaction among different entities. This study agrees with Gasiokwu (2005:4) that the Europeans did not stop regional migration but encouraged free mobility of labor while the goal was not for the purpose of integration. This explains why Adepoju (2005) observes that Colonial regime altered the motivation and composition of migration by introducing and enforcing various blends of political and economic structures, imposing tax regimes and establishing territorial boundaries.

With nations in West Africa becoming independent particularly in the 1960s, there emerged a new consciousness following the experiences in Europe in the implementation of Marshal Plan. It could rightly be concluded that the idea of economic integration in West Africa developed from the awareness of global economic interdependence. This explains why Adedeji (2002:1) believes that Africa came into existence during the age of regional integration. After World War II, the promotion of regional integration became a global phenomenon culminating in the establishment of the EEC in 1957, the Latin American Free Trade Association in 1960, the Central American Common Market in 1961, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967, and the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) in 1968. Fadumiyo (1987:13) observes that as at 1961, about 200,000 migrants from Mali, Cote D'ivoire, and Northern Nigeria entered or left wage employment in Ghana yearly.

Many attempts were made towards sub-regional integration in West Africa, but the linguistic challenges and the colonial tendencies could not favorably encourage it. Among such is the Union Douaniere Afrique Occidentale (UDAO) by the French West African States while Communaute Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) in 1973. The study observes that the ECOWAS though formed in 1975 is still confronted with infancy challenges but have recorded moderate gains that this study intend to examine with a view of recommending how these could be consolidated.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The aims and objectives of ECOWAS as contained in Article 2(1) is to promote cooperation and development in all the fields of economic activity..., social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African Continent. Article 2 (2) listed stages of implementation of the treaties and protocols. The study was motivated by the slow pace of sub-regional integration though moderate gains have been achieved.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to seek for ways that will make ECOWAS live up to its expectation. Other objectives include the examination of the development so far within the sub-region and to recommend measures to ensure greater success.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts free trade theory as its theoretical framework. The international trade theory emanates from Smith (1776) that the division of labor ensures effective competition among nations which in turn expand the productive capacity of nations. Expanding Smith's work, Ricardo (1817) opines that free trade was the best approach to achieve efficiency at a global level. Hence, his emphasis on comparative advantage was on labor hours used per unit of output, rather than absolute advantage since this encourages specialization among nations (Sen. (2010).

The Benthamite Utilitarian later introduced the role of demand as an explanation of the terms of trade in exchange. Mill in order to achieve a convenient balance introduced the notion of "reciprocal demand". The Heckscher-Ohlin version known as HOS and Samuelson moved free trade theory away from the skill- or technology-based interpretations of the comparative cost. The new trade theory (NTT) however emphasizes the impact of increasing returns to scale on the pattern as well as on the mutual benefits from international trade.

Applying this theory to West African situation, it calls on all member nations of ECOWAS to concentrate on the production of goods with comparative advantage over others. Through this means it is assumed that there will be efficiency in the allocation of resources and the exporting and the importing nations stand to benefit from that arrangement. It presupposes the removal of trade barrier that can create true citizens of West Africa sub-region.

However, Sorscher, (2010) observes that free trade came with a promise of prosperity but nations still experience structural trade deficits and an economy that cannot create jobs. Biden cited in Sorscher, (2010) notes that comparative advantage is discredited in terms of logic, experience, policy, and common sense but survives in the land of punditry. Though these criticisms were directed at developed economies but they are still largely relevant to developing economies because of wage differential among members nations and the protectionist policies by labor unions in nations with higher wage rate (Nigeria) as compared with those with lower wage rate (Togo and Benin Republic). Such policies to a large extent weaken the benefit derivable from free movement of labors within the sub-region.

This explains why Sen (2010) critically evaluating the theory notes that the neo-classical trade theories, of the HOS variant or even the more realistic models introduced as NTT both failed to address the issue of growth and development which include, "viewing change by comparing static equilibrium states, rather than as a process occurring in historical irreversible time." This explains why Stewart (1991), Ruttan (1998), and Bhattacharjea (2004) observe that the agenda the NTT theorists had set clearly excluded situations where "...changes can happen in resource endowments, technological possibilities, or consumer preferences.

Regardless of the criticisms, given that member nations can overcome basic challenges like conflicts, border restrictions, extradition of citizens and unequal business opportunities, the free trade theory could still work to their advantage. This is based on the understanding that the economies of the sub-regions has not developed beyond those of developed economies in the early nineteenth century.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept "integration" implies the existence of people, things or events that are more or less separate entities that can be brought together to form a stronger entity. Wallace (1990) defines integration as the creation and maintenance of intense and diversified pattern of interaction among previously autonomous units. Robert (1972) views international integration as a gradual shifting upward of sovereignty from state to regional or global structure or a process in which supranational institutions replaces national ones. In this instance, the shift is from national to a sub-regional grouping.

The notion of integration is often traced to the Marshall Plan for Europe when on July 5, 1947, as the US Foreign Secretary in his speech at Harvard announced a plan for European relief after the Second World War. He said that the US offer of economic aid to Europe was to be based on their ability to work out a common plan for the whole Europe. The policy he notes was not directed against any country but against hunger, poverty, despair and chaos while it aims at the renewal of active economy throughout the whole world. It was this statement that led to sixteen West European countries in 1948 to form the European Economic Cooperation. Lasok and Bridge (1976) cited in Gasiokwu (2005) refer to this as the first move towards Economic co-operation in Europe. The awareness of the gains from the global economic integration to a large extent equally informed the formation of ECOWAS.

Gasiokwu (2005) observes that the sub-region covers about 6.5 million square kilometers, located between the Sahara desert and the Gulf of Guinea. The population of the sub-region is 477,331,047 (<http://knoema.com/>). One pertinent feature of the population composition of West African sub-region according to Mabogunje (1972) and Adepaju (2005) is that each of the major ethnic group in the sub-region settled in more than one country. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani settled in eight countries like Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, and Mali among others. Also, the Yoruba are found in Togo, Benin Republic and Nigeria. This could have been a very good advantage for sub-regional integration if pursued with open mindedness. It is equally pertinent to note that the population of Nigeria alone is slightly more than 1/3 of that of the sub-region. Hence, Ciroma (1983) observes that most of the countries are too small to be able to create modern viable industrial structures within their national frame works.

The disadvantageous position of West Africa sub-region in international trade informs Wallerstein (1979) to observe that commerce was as a major tool in the "peripheralisation" of new territories and transfer of resources to "core areas". Such a position cannot but partly informed the need for integration in order to benefit from the economies of large scale and the removal of trade barriers among ECOWAS. This situation is what Immanuel (1972) refers to as inequities of trade by pointing at the asymmetry in exchange across countries, with productivity gains in the developing countries appropriated by the rest of world

However, there exists some pull factors like the ethnic spread and economic challenges that should encourage sub regional integration if there is political will among the member nations as these constitute the goal that this study intend to pursue. This is in line with Dočkal, (2005) that such an arrangement will present a unique opportunity for the integration process and will be helpful to eradicate the regional disparity. He refers to this as building bridges between nations which can bring neighbors closer to each other thereby contributing to sub-regional socio-economic

and political development. However, it has been observed that the factors that ought to encourage integration were not sufficiently tapped into, as such, not much is gained as compared with the expectations of the founding fathers.

6. ACHIEVEMENT RECORDED ON ACCOUNT OF SUB-REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

6.1 . Increased Level of Awareness of Integration

Since the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, it is an incontrovertible fact that the Community has been able to raise the level of awareness of the despondent position of West African nations to the real and artificial barriers created since early 1960's to immeasurable benefits derivable through integration. It is this level of awareness though not sufficient that challenged the protectionist approaches of member nations towards a pragmatic view of integration. The increase in the level of awareness for sub-regional integration according to Adepoju (2005) was a bold attempt to stimulate the kind of homogeneous society which once existed.

6.2 Free Movement Protocol

The success of attaining the goals and objectives of ECOWAS is hinged on free movement of persons, goods and capital within the sub-region. This explains why Viner, (1950) opines that the effectiveness of any integration is seen in terms of its relative size gains owing to trade creation and losses from trade diversion. Agyei, & Clotey, (2005) further note that the recognition of the need for economic integration includes free flow of persons, goods and services, and the right of residence and establishment of businesses. Envisaging the importance of this, Article 27 of the ECOWAS Treaty of 1975 provided for free flow economic interaction believing that this would eventually lead to a community citizenship among member nations. This development is considered as a positive step in the integration process.

This goal was broken to three phases. First, the protocol relating to the Right of Entry and abolition of Visa was implemented from 1980 - 1985. The second phase was the Right of Residence that was signed in 1986 but leave the host state to determine the criteria for guarantee the employment of migrant workers and members of their family. The third phase was the right of establishment that was adopted in 1990. The third was envisaged to provide the opportunity for a community citizen to settle or establish in any of the member States and have access to economic activities, to carry out these activities as well as to set up and manage enterprises, in line with the legislation of the host member state as applicable to its own nationals.

However, member nations in line with domestic laws reserved the right to allow entry of any person suspected to be of questionable character. It could be observed that the right of residence in the protocol was enforceable as from July, 1988 but that of establishment is yet to be fully implemented (Adepoju et al, (2007). To attain this objective, the ECOWAS on May 12, 2000 agreed to introduce a new passport consisting of three categories that is for citizens of the sub-region. Red passport was designed for the diplomatic personnel, blue for the service and green for the ordinary group (ECOWAS, 2000c). In addition, common approach on migration was adopted

that entail protocol on free movement, promoting management of regular migration, policy harmonization, control of irregular migration and human trafficking.

The gain in the implementation of the protocol was made manifest in the volume of human and goods traffic witnessed on the daily basis in spite of the official and artificial border restriction. The flow of population from the sub-region constitutes a relatively large proportion of all immigrants in most of the member States. For instance statistics from the Ghana Immigration Service shows that at least one-third of all arrivals in Ghana between 1999 and 2002 were from ECOWAS Member States. Though no accurate statistic is available in respect of such movement since the borders are porous and a trip to border points from Lagos to Accra on more than three occasions by the principal researcher revealed that the volume of human traffic through unofficial channels were more than the official channels.

The greatest challenges to the full realization of this objective include corrupt practices at the border, expulsion of citizens from member states, lack of coordination between ECOWAS secretariat and security personnel in all the border posts and language problems.

6.3 Enhancement of Transnational Transport System

One of the primary goals of the meeting of heads of State and Government, held in Abuja in March 2000 was the creation of a borderless sub-region. The issues of inadequate and poorly maintained transport and communication facilities were identified as major constraints to cross-border trade, economic activities and movement of persons and goods. To achieve this objective

the feasibility study of the road from Lagos to Accra and Lagos to Ouagadougou was carried out while the construction of the road later followed. Also, that same year ECOWAS launched ECOAIR, a private sub-regional airline all in an attempt to foster smooth movement of goods and services. In February 2002, at Ouagadougou, it was agreed that the 'certificate' for travelling within Community nations would become an ECOWAS passport.

In the same spirit, President Yayi Bori of Benin Republic called on Nigerian government to partner with his country to reconstruct Lagos and Republic of Benin road towards the end of July, 2012 (News Agency of Nigeria, 2012). A further step in integration effort was manifested in five-day meeting of fifteen countries in west African Road Safety organization that started on August 28, 2012. However, the common currency and ECOAIR that were expected to take off by 2004 (ECOWAS 2003) were not yet implemented. Also, the same problems confronting freedom of movement are true of transnational transport system.

6.4 Trade Liberalization

The Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) was designed to progressively establish a customs union among member states over a 15-year period from January 1990 when the scheme took effect. The goal was to ensure free movement of transport, goods and persons within ECOWAS, including the removal of all tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade. The groups of goods covered under ETLS are: unprocessed goods (i.e., agricultural products), handicrafts and industrial goods produced within the ECOWAS region.

The above manifested in various protocols formulated such as the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) which implies the charging of lower tariff on import produced by the member states. The Free Trade Area (FTA) stipulates that no tariff be charged on fellow members goods. The Custom Union on FTA provides for the usage of common tariffs on imports from non-member nations while the common market was designed to ensure the free movement of factors of production. The study opines that in spite of inherent constraints, the implementation of the protocol has achieved some measure of success.

In the spirit of the protocol, check points were dismantled and border patrols were installed by Niger, Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali to monitor and police national frontiers. This was confirmed by the researchers when they travel by road to Ghana in August, 2011. There also existed closer ties between the police and internal security outfits among member States. However, it only within the Nigerian side that offensive check points were still maintained as one of the researchers counted twenty six check points between Seme border and Agbara in Lagos on July 12, 2012.

6.5. ECOWAS Efforts toward Community Citizen

In principle, ECOWAS intends to promote and build a community citizenship among the member nations. This, Yaya (2012) perceives as the creation of a homogenous society leading to the unity of the countries of West Africa, by elimination of all types of obstacles to the free movement of goods, capital and persons' as contained in the Article 7 of the Treaty. The Treaty thus confers the status of Community citizenship on the citizens of member States, and also enjoins member States to abolish all obstacles to freedom of movement and residence within the Community. Citizenship according to Chatterjee, (2010) is defined as *the relationship between the state and its population. Rights and privileges, duties and obligations are the main elements that define this relationship*. Citizens in this sense possess certain rights and privileges and perform carry out certain obligations to enable the state function effectively and guarantee the rights. To achieve these objectives, seven protocols relating to free movement were signed. The study rightly observed that in principle, the political and legal frameworks instituted were pointers in the right direction that ECOWAS was committed to ensure that the goals of community citizenship are achieved but the institutional framework to make it a reality is lacking. Nonetheless, significant achievements have not been recorded because of some of the challenges earlier mentioned.

6.6 Peace Making

One of the primary achievements of ECOWAS is their invaluable role and significant progress made with specific reference to conflict management and resolution within the sub-region. The Community has been very active in preventing new crisis that could truncate the fragile peace and tranquility of the Community. This explains the provision for the protocols for democracy and good governance and zero tolerance for military coup (ADB, 2011:15). The establishment OF ECOMOC and the deployment of troops to Liberia, Sierra Lone among others have in no small way stabilized peace in the nations.

The ECOWAS suspended Guinea, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire following coups and worked relentlessly to frustrate dissent in those countries. Through these concerted efforts, Guinea now

has democratically elected leaders since 2010 while same is true of Niger. Also, ECOWAS supported the legitimate winner of Cote D'Ivoire presidential election. The intervened in Guinea Bissau by sending 600 peace keepers helped significantly to stabilize the government. In Mali with UN resolution 2056 of July 6, 2012, about 3000 military personnel is on ground while members States refused to recognize the secessionist region but exhibited the preference to adopt negotiation with the rebels.

6.7 Financial Integration

It is a statement of fact that the financial market in West Africa is not broad and largely shallow while there is limited financial transaction among member States officially. However, there is remarkable improvement in financial transaction among WAEMU countries as this has the potential to wake non WAEMU countries up from their slumber. The Francophone countries except Guinea Bissau formed West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) was formed in 1994. The countries equally have a common monetary policy under the control of a common Central Bank, the Banque centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) that is guaranteed by the French Treasury. This has indeed made their local sub-regional integration far ahead of the rest Anglophone nations. Such achievement manifested in the adoption of single currency (Cefa) Others include the adoption of Uniform Laws or Acts that transfer the development and enactment of uniform business laws from national authorities to a supranational body. The laws were further empowered through the adoption of the Common Court to have final jurisdiction over business law cases. The study acknowledges that there might be constraints based of frictions between the national courts and the Common Court, but that is not strong enough to undermine the achievement recorded.

Among the action taken by the ECOWAS was the introduction of ECOWAS travelers' cheques (WAUA). The West African Unit of Account is designed to harmonize the sub-region's monetary policy and facilitate cross-border relatively hitch free financial transactions. The adoption of a common currency by 2004 was muted during the ECOWAS' Ministers meeting in Ouagadougou. This was postponed several times before the roadmap for the ECOWAS Single Currency Program 2009-2020 was adopted in 2009. This has led to setting January 2015 as the new date for achieving the second monetary union. Though this is a commendable step as manifested in member States commitment to it, but the constraints associated with coordination and demonstrated inability of some of the institutions responsible for carrying out some of its activities are enormous. In addition, there is yet no effective integration of legal framework and payments infrastructure.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the idea of sub-regional integration is a pragmatic move towards economic growth and sustainable development though the challenges are huge as some are largely self-imposed by member States. Such challenges include crisis of confidence, unending conflicts, poor financial integration, restriction of movement, irrational expulsion of citizens of member States, political instability and language barrier among others. The study therefore argued that the challenges could be addressed so that the citizens could enjoy the gains of integration. In addition, as rightly observed by Orji (2012), ECOWAS still hold for enlargement of the local

markets, realization of the economies of scale and the strengthening of the bargaining position in global negotiation though the situation today may look contrary.

The study therefore recommends that there is the need by member States to accelerate the process of implementing the treaties or protocols entered into such that free movement of persons and goods is guaranteed. Also, member States must take proactive steps to minimize the spate of corruption and harassment of foreign nationals at the border posts. In particular, the 'uncountable' security check points by custom, immigration, anti-terrorist squad, NAFDAC, and health official as well as the uncivilized approach to checking between Seme border and Agbara constitute an eye sore and misrepresents the good image of Nigeria. It is as if Nigeria is indirectly working against sub-regional integration since such could not be found in other West African countries. Furthermore, the Anglophone States need to learn from the success of Francophone States with respect to financial integration and movement within their member States and adopt their procedures to ensure a better future for West African States. With sincerity of purpose, political will among the leaders, discipline and sound implementation of protocols, most of the barriers could be overcome.

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