

The ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision: Content, Context, Issues and Prospects

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Abstract: *This article examines the content, contexts and issues in the ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision with the goal of outlining the prospects for its actualization. Following an extensive review of extant literature on regional integration as well as relevant studies on regional integration in West Africa, the article argues that that as long as the structures that, in the last four decades, have worked to frustrate the ECOWAS' goal of an integrated community are still alive and active, the 2020 Transformational Vision, though an ambitious agenda, going by the philosophical ideas undergirding it, like similar ideas and visions of the distant and recent past, is likely to be unrealizable. It concludes that the 2020 Vision should be viewed as another 'development tokenism' by the sub-region's statesmen and policymakers to appease radical voices in the sub-region and not really as an attempt to democratize regional development.*

Keywords: development, regional integration, transformational vision, sub-region, ECOWAS

Introduction

In the 1960s, Africa joined the rest of the Third World to key into the global wave of regionalization which had emerged in Europe in May 1951. Resultantly, what developed across the different sub-regions of the continent, especially in the 1970s, were myriads of regional integrative outfits, initiated and promoted by leaders, to surmount the numerous challenges confronting

their countries.¹ In the West African sub-region, after three years of meticulous planning and diplomatic activities, an all-embracing regional integrative outfit, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), was established on 28 May 1975 with the grand objective of promoting co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity.² During the first decade of its existence, several activities were embarked upon by the institutions of ECOWAS, as well as the member states, to achieve the objective of regional integration; yet, the performance of the organization seemed to have fallen short of expectations, leading to calls for its reinvigoration in the globalizing era.³

The revised ECOWAS Treaty of 1993 did not only recommend the jettisoning of the intergovernmental system enshrined in the 1975 treaty for a supranational system, but designated the establishment of a common market and a single currency as a matter of urgency.⁴ Interestingly, with this institutional transformation, the major stake-holders were, perhaps, optimistic that, within the shortest possible time, the dividends of regional

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¹Michael Kehinde, "African Regional Integration: Lessons from the European Union", in: *The Constitution*, vol. 14, no.1, 2014, p.55.

²Adebayo Adedeji, "Collective Self-reliance in Developing Africa: Scope, Prospects and Problems", in: Bolaji Akinyemi, Samuel Falegan, Isaac Aluko (eds.), *Reading and Documents on ECOWAS*, Lagos, NIIA/ Macmillan, 1984, p. xxi.

³ See Kwesi Kufuor, *The Institutional Transformation of the Economic Community of West African States*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2006.

⁴ Babatunde Ajulor, "The Revised ECOWAS Treaty (1993): A Synopsis", in: *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.21, no.1, 1995, p.91.

integration would begin to accrue to the member-states and their citizens. Disappointingly, however, in spite of these renewed drives and commitments by the stakeholders to ‘fast track’ regional economic integration, it would appear that the vision of an integrated community where people and goods could move freely without official restrictions still remains a pipe dream as some of the objectives of ECOWAS set forth in the founding and revised treaties such as trade liberalization, common external tariff and single currency have not been achieved.⁵

Perhaps this state of affairs might have compelled the sub-region’s statesmen to craft a new transformational vision for the organization in the first decade of the 21st century. The promoters hope that the new vision, adopted by a resolution of the Highest Authority of the organization in June 2007 and mandated by the same body, to be given the necessary fillip by the President of the ECOWAS Commission, if domesticated and implemented by the member states, would launch the sub-region on the path of an integrated economic community. However, as it is today, barely three years to 2020, there are no convincing indicators that the much-publicized vision is likely to be a reality. Why? This is the core problem of this article. Specifically, this article engages the issues and contentions in the ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision. Following this introduction, which presents the article’s significance and purpose, is section two which provides the

⁵ Charles Ukeje, “From Economic Co-operation to Collective Security: ECOWAS and the Changing Imperatives of sub-Regionalism in West Africa”, in: Williams Fawole, Charles Ukeje (eds.), *The Crisis of the State and Regionalism In West Africa: Identity, Citizenship and Conflict*, Dakar, CODESRIA, 2005, p.142; See ECOWAS *Executive Secretary’s Annual Report*, Abuja, ECOWAS, 2009, p. 3.

theoretical framework for the discourse. This is followed by an examination and discussion of the background to and content of the ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision. It goes on to highlight the seeming achievements and challenges of ECOWAS. The article also undertakes a prognosis of the prospects of achieving Vision2020 and concludes with a number of submissions.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The starting question of our theoretical discourse in this article is: which model of regional integration does the ECOWAS Transformation Vision 2020 seek to promote? This is against the backdrop of the fact that the discourses on regional integration in international relations has been framed by divergent theoretical perspectives. However, it has to be stressed that, not until recently when the issue of bringing the support of the “people” into the regional integration project gained currency, debates about regional integration, since the end of the Second World War, have been shaped by two States-centred theoretical perspectives: the federalist and functionalist.⁶

The federalist (supra-nationalist) perspective celebrates the superintendent of states’ sovereignties, in the long run, i.e. common supranational institutions that could co-ordinate the co-operative efforts of

⁶ Sean Dosenrode “Federalism Theory and Neo-Functionalism: Elements for an Analytical Framework”, in: *Perspectives on Federalism*, vol. 2, issue 3, 2010, pp. 1–28.

all.⁷ The assumption of this perspective is that collective action problems that often confront an anarchical society in the absence of a common power could be better managed in a condition where sovereignties, albeit, voluntarily, are surrendered to a central institution.⁸ Specifically, the contention of this perspective is that regional integration would be better fast tracked and brought to almost a logical conclusion, if sovereignty and nationalism, the twin obstacles to regional development, are supplanted by supra-national institutions. The second perspective, on the other hand, favours incremental approach, to regional integration. According to Mitrany, the pioneer of functionalism,

Sovereignty cannot in fact be transferred effectively through a formula, only through a function. By entrusting an authority with a certain task, carrying with it command over the requisite powers and means, a slice of sovereignty is transferred from the old authority to the new, and the accumulation of such partial transfers in time brings about a translation of the true seat of authority.⁹

Mitrany's core thesis is that regional integration is better effected through the creation of a transnational complex of economic and social organization rather than through surrendering of sovereignties. Arguing within the same school, Haas posits that the creation of 'limited'

⁷ See Daniel Elazar, *Exploring federalism*, Alabama, The University of Alabama Press, 1987; Daniel Elazar, *Covenant and Civil Society*, New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1998.

⁸ Sharkdam Wapmuk, "In Search of Greater Unity: African States and the Quest for an African Union Government", in: *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2009, p.648.

⁹David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System. An Argument for the Functional Development of International Organization*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1943, p. 31.

supranational institutions would gradually bring political elites and interest groups of the country involved to supporting further integration ventures because they see benefit in it for themselves.¹⁰

At this juncture, it is instructive to note that though these two broad perspectives view regional integration through different lenses, nevertheless, both agree that regional integration, rather than the sovereignty-oriented framework of development, is the best option for managing the socio-economic problems confronting a group of States within a region. Instructively, both have, for decades, framed the discourses, on regional integration among African statesmen and policy makers. Again, it has to be stressed that, in some studies on regional integration in Africa, in the last few years, another perspective which is a contradiction to the age-long State-centered perspectives, has gained popularity. To be sure, this emerging perspective would seem to have framed the discourse on regional integration through the prism of the peoples, the supposed end of regional integration project.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the advocates of this perspective blame the problems of ECOWAS and other regional outfits in Africa on faulty theoretical premises drawn from the experience of Europe. Bourenane,¹² for instance, contends that the idea of copying institutions found in Europe is not only a delusion but an obstacle to building a regional community in West

¹⁰ Ernst Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*, Standard, Standard University Press, 1958, p. 13.

¹¹ See Stanislas Adotevi, "Cultural Dimension of Economic and Political Integration in Africa", in: Real Lavergne (ed.), *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective*, Ottawa, Africa World Press International, 1995, pp. 16 - 31.

¹² Naceur Bourenane, "Theoretical and Strategic Approaches", in: Real Lavergne, (ed.) *Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective*, Ottawa, Africa World Press International, 1995, pp. 33-47.

Africa, as the conditions that promoted integration in Europe are obviously not present in West Africa. Against this background, he posits that efforts by the policymakers to integrate a region should not be blinded to the needs and aspirations of the people of the region in the light of its social and economic reality, history and culture. In the light of the foregoing, it might be plausible to ask: which perspective does the ECOWAS Transformation Vision 2020 mirrors? We will come to this soon; however, it is imperative to put the content and context of the Transformation Vision 2020 in clear perspective.

ECOWAS Transformation Vision 2020: Navigating the Context and Content

It must be noted from the onset that the process leading to the adoption of the ECOWAS Transformation Vision 2020 could, in its remote origin, be traced to the late 1980s, when failures in service delivery, spurred by the contradictions in the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme, led to fundamental rethinking of Africa's development by leaders of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This culminated in the UNECA's sponsored International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process, in Arusha, Tanzania, in February 1990.¹³ The conference deliberated, on the relationship between development policy, popular participation and decentralization of the State.¹⁴ At end of the

¹³ See Said Adejumbi, "The African Experience of Popular Participation in Development", in: Said Adejumbi, Adebayo Olukoshi (eds.), *African Union and the New Strategy for African Development*, Dakar/Addis Ababa, CODESRIA/ DPMF, 2009, pp. 64 – 81.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

conference, the participants called for the full and effective participation of the people and civil society organizations in charting their development policies, programmes and processes.¹⁵ Indeed, in a forceful tone, the delegates declared that ‘Africa has no alternative but to empower its people urgently and immediately and failure to do so would cause Africa to become further marginalized in world affairs, both geo-politically and economically’.¹⁶ Perhaps, it was against this background that the idea of popular participation became a key feature of the continent’s development discourse.

Unfortunately, and disappointingly, too, African statesmen and the donor community rather than situating the developmental crisis that confronted the continent in the failure of the centralized states and the centrist developmental policies that have defined them, insisted on implicating external debts and other exogenous factors.¹⁷ But, with the newly-found awareness, in African governmental circles, in the first decade of the 21st century, that development must be centred on the people, efforts began to be exerted at multilateral levels to bring back into the regional integration discourse the issue of democratic regionalism. In the words of Sesay and Omotosho,¹⁸

¹⁵UNECA, *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation*, Arusha, Tanzania, UNECA, 1990, p. 6.

¹⁶*Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁷Adeniyi Basiru, “The African ‘Developmental State’ In The Age Of Global Accumulation Crisis”, in: *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, vol. 13, no.7, 2011, p. 179.

¹⁸Amadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, “The Politics of Regional Integration in West Africa”, in: *WACSERIES*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, p. 16.

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 organizations, CSOs, to get the citizens fully involved in national development processes as countervailing forces to the state.

Perhaps this new thinking might have spurred the arrival of the latest ECOWAS blueprint – the Transformation Vision 2020 – adopted by the ECOWAS Heads of State in June 2007.¹⁹ It might also have influenced the decisions of the ECOWAS Commission to prepare the ECOWAS 2020 Vision Document in 2010.²⁰ Specifically, the 2020 agenda is aimed at setting a clear direction and goal to significantly raise the standard of living of people through conscious and inclusive programmes that will guarantee a bright future for West Africa and shape the destiny of the region for many years to come.²¹ To achieve this objective by the year 2020, the ECOWAS leaders, in 2007, based on the experience of the past, in which regional developmental efforts were dominated by the states and their agents, were, perhaps, convinced that the erstwhile ECOWAS of States paradigm needed to be supplanted with a new framework which is people-oriented.²² Putting the seeming rationale behind the adoption of the new paradigm in perspective, Abbey²³ remarks,

¹⁹ ECOWAS, *Vision 2020 ECOWAS of the People: Towards a Democratic and Community*, Abuja, ECOWAS Commission, 2009, p.1.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p.2.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 3 – 4.

²² *Ibidem*, p.2.

²³ Joseph Abbey, “Regional Integration in West Africa”, in: *Modern Ghana News*, 7 May 2011, available at <http://www.modernghana.com/print/274624/west-african-regional-integration-process/>, accessed on 4th August 2017.

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.

To be sure, the overall objective of the 2020 agenda is captured in the Vision mission statement which reads *inter alia*: ‘to create a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region, built on good governance and where people have the capacity to access and harness its enormous resources through the creation of opportunities for sustainable development and environmental preservation’.²⁴

Here, it is instructive to note that virtually all the major provisions in the 2020 Vision Document frame the structural and institutional transformation of the sub-region, economically and socially, around the people. To be sure, at the level of community, the document projects that by 2020 the citizens of the sub-region, among other things, will:

- be living in a developed and integrated West Africa;
- have a dynamic regional economy driven by a regionally-inclined business community;
- have a highly skilled, flexible and mobile workforce;
- have affordable and accessible health and educational systems.²⁵

²⁴*Ibidem*, p.2.

²⁵*Ibidem*, p.2.

Beyond all of these, the Vision Document also imposes some obligations on the member-states at national level in order to realize the 2020 Vision. These are:

- Each Member State will have a national development policy with a strong regional orientation;
- All ECOWAS countries will show credible evidence of judicial, institutional and policy efforts that internalize regional integration in their national development strategy;
- Every country would demonstrably have undertaken the required constitutional and administrative measures to entrench regional approach;
- All Member States and their key institutional agencies demonstrate the spirit of “ownership” and provide conducive policy space in which national development agenda and strategies are designed;
- All Member State view the region individually and collectively as a mutually dependent economic space.²⁶

A critical look at the whole document shows that, aside from the general objectives, scope and values, the outlined issues of subsidiarity, equity, inclusion, representation, participation, accountability etc, the Vision Document contains many provisions, running through the many paragraphs, that if implemented by the concerned parties, could provide the dividends associated with people-centered regional integration. All these cannot be comprehensively reviewed within the confines of this article, but the key

²⁶*Ibidem*, pp.2 – 3.

provisions that are germane for the purpose of understanding the issues in discourse are highlighted. These are deemed to constitute the five Transformational building blocks of the Integrative Development of West Africa.²⁷ Specifically, it is envisioned that, by 2020, the following targets would have been achieved:

- an inclusive society achieved through human capital development and empowerment;
- a secure and socially cohesive West Africa devoid of conflicts;
- a unified region that is integrated into the continental and global economic space and governed using the principles of good political and economic governance;
- a single unified regional market with a common currency supported by an integrated and efficient financial market and payment settlement system;
- an ECOWAS of people where trade and commerce are conducted efficiently and with ease;
- an ECOWAS of people with a conducive policy environment in which the private sector will be the primary engine of growth and development.²⁸

Instructively, the afore-highlighted provisions and others were expected, if domesticated and operationalized by state parties and other concerned stakeholders, to be the spring board for achieving people-oriented

²⁷*Ibidem*, pp.8 – 9.

²⁸*Ibidem*, pp. 9 – 10.

regional community by 2020. In the light of the foregoing, a question is apt: how far have these actors journeyed in this project? Answering this question is the focus of the next section.

Towards 2020 Transformational Vision: The Bumpy Road

Unarguably, West African statesmen, diplomats and other stakeholders, like their counterparts in other regions of Africa, have a good record in expressing strong and open commitments to implementing developmental visions. As such, the ECOWAS 2020 Transformation Vision was therefore no exception. Indeed, since its adoption by the Authority of Heads of States of the community in 2007 and the subsequent presentation of the base document by the ECOWAS Commission in 2010,²⁹ there has been a flurry of socio-economic and diplomatic activities on the parts of the State parties, ECOWAS institutions, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other major stakeholders, to move the sub-region towards achieving the objective of a borderless region by 2020.³⁰ To be sure, state parties and the institutions of the organization, unarguably, even though marginal, have made good progress and have established a solid base for improved regional-cooperation.³¹ Firstly, and ironically, ECOWAS which was primarily established as an economic union has achieved most in the area of conflict

²⁹*Ibidem*, p.1.

³⁰Amadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, pp.17 – 18.

³¹J. O. Lokulo-Sodipe and A.J Osuntogun, “The Quest for a Supranational Entity in West Africa: Can The Economic Community of West African States Attain The Status?”, in: *PER / PELJ*, vol. 16, no.3, 2013, pp.260 – 261.

management. ECOWAS, through ECOMOG, aside from its efforts in restoring peace to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, in the last few years, deployed diplomacy to deal with recalcitrant sit-tight leaders in the sub-region. For instance, recently, the organization successfully resolved the Gambian post-election crisis that perhaps would have launched the sub-region into another round crisis.

Also, the organization has undergone major transformations and establishment of various institutions and mechanisms covering the broad range of social, economic and political area of co-operation. The Community Court of Justice, established in 2001, has undergone a tremendous transformation thereby creating opportunities for easy access to the community Court by the citizens. In the words of Bapah,³² ‘ECOWAS is today the only organization in Africa that has maintained a regional stance on the possibility of arbitration by its Court involving a citizen and a state without recourse to exhaustion of national remedies’. Beyond these, in the sphere of infrastructural provisions, the organization had made a bit of progress. For instance, it established a \$500m cross-border pipeline project (WAGP) that will transport natural gas from Nigeria to three other ECOWAS countries-Ghana, Togo and Benin.³³

It has to be stressed, however, that in spite of all of these, some of the age-long monumental challenges that led to the re-invigoration of the

³²Yaya Bappah, “ECOWAS and the Promotion of Democratic Governance in West Africa”, in: *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, pp. 86 – 102.

³³See Emmanuel Bensah, “Thirty Years of ECOWAS: An Appraisal”, *Modern Ghana*, 24th April 2012, available at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/391065/from-the-archives-thirty-years-of-ecowas-anappraisal.html>, accessed 16th July 2017.

organization in 1993, as well as the launching of the Vision 2020 agenda are still daunting as ever thus raising the fear and concerns that the 2020 Vision may be another unrealizable dream. Putting this scenario in perspective, with an assessment of the balance sheet of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, which came into force in 1981, Sesay and Omotoshosay,

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.³⁴

Unarguably, the challenges confronting ECOWAS are legion and their elaboration have been object of a wide range of studies³⁵ and as such should not detain us here. Notwithstanding these, however, Hammed-Hammed³⁶ sums up the key challenges, as following:

- Political instability and bad governance that have plagued many of the countries;
- Weakness of the national economies and their insufficient diversification;
- Insufficient political will exhibited by some member states;

³⁴Ahmadu Sesay and Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁵See Samuel Asante, *The Political Economy of Regionalism in Africa: A Decade of ECOWAS*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1989; Victor Adetula, "The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Challenges of Integration in West Africa", in: Joy Ogwu, WarisuAlli (eds.), *ECOWAS: Mile Stones in Regional Integration*, Lagos, Printserve Ltd, 2009.

³⁶Aliyu Hammed-Hammed, "The development of ECOWAS Administration, 1975-2005", in: Joy Ogwu, Warisu Alli (eds.), *ECOWAS: Mile Stones in Regional Integration*, Lagos, Printserve Ltd, 2009, pp.113 – 114.

- Bad economic policies in certain cases;
- Failure to involve the civil society, the private sector and mass movements in the process of integration;
- Defective nature of the international machinery in certain cases.

ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision: Issues and Prospects

As briefly remarked in the previous sections, West Africa, like other regions in Africa, has not been bereft of regional integrative ideas and strategies. However, in spite of these and the numerous development strategies that have been put in place, since the launch of ECOWAS in 1975, as well as the formation of other regional integrative bodies, by the sub-region's leaders, the socio-economic statistics of the area have been devastatingly debilitating. In comparative terms, the sub-region is not only the poorest region in Africa; it is also among the regions of the world with the highest poverty prevalence rate.³⁷ In 2009, for instance, an estimated 60% of the sub-region's 300 million inhabitants lived on less than \$1 a day.³⁸ Even more worrisome is the quantum of national income devoted by virtually all the fifteen members of ECOWAS to import food in order to feed their ever-growing population, due to their lack of capacities to produce enough food to feed their people in spite of fertile soil for agriculture.³⁹

³⁷Ahmadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³⁸ ECOWAS, Vision 2020 ECOWAS of the People, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁹Ahmadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

In the light of the forgoing, a question is apt: any prospect for the realization of the 2020 Transformation Vision against the background of the foregoing realities? We will examine this in the paragraphs below. However, it has to be stressed that foretelling any developmental programmes is often a daunting task. This is more so for regional blocs like ECOWAS, which, as remarked earlier, is yet to make any significant impact on the lives of the ordinary citizens in the sub-region. These notwithstanding, our thesis is that, given the socio-economic and political realities on ground in virtually all the countries in the sub-region, coupled with the subpar performance of ECOWAS, its institutions and the member-states, with regard to meeting targets, achieving the goal of a borderless, peaceful, prosperous and cohesive region, built on good governance, as envisioned in the ECOWAS2020 Transformation Vision, like other numerous visions and projects of the not-distant past, might be unrealizable. Specifically, this may not be unconnected with the fact and realities that some of the factors and forces that have individually and collectively worked against previous efforts at achieving the goal of an integrated sub-region are not only still at play but are not likely to disappear in the near future.

The first of such factor pertains to continual lack of commitment by the sub-region's political leadership to the overall objective of the ECOWAS.⁴⁰ Reinforcing this viewpoint, Sesay and Omotosho remark, '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

⁴⁰ See Oji Umzurike, *Introduction to International Law*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books Limited, 2006, p. 231.

as their actions sometimes betray their true commitment to the regional integration ideal'.⁴¹Instructively, this tendency often manifests at three levels. In the first instance, member states often fail to make a contribution to the organization as scheduled. Indeed, this situation became so critical that the organization had to devise a way out by adopting a Protocol instituting 5% of tax on all products imported from non-ECOWAS countries.⁴² Even at that, the responses of the members to the Protocol has not been very impressive, just as there have been problems with the collection and remittances of the levy by some member states to ECOWAS' account.⁴³

Interestingly, apart from the low appetite of member States to contribute to the organization's purse to support its projects, the lack of commitment to the ideals of ECOWAS manifests through the lackluster attitude in ratifying and implementing decisions reached by the highest decision-making organ of the organization, its member states. Most times, decisions reached on behalf of the community are often seen as constituting threats to national sovereignty and as such, reneged upon by member States. The ratification of the Protocol Relating to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment (A/P.1/5/79) is a case in point here. After the agreement had been officially signed by all countries, abolishing visas and other entry permit requirements, the citizens of the community, thereafter, are still subjected to harassment at the various borders within the sub-region.

⁴¹Ahmadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴²J. O. Lokulo-Sodipe, A. J. Osuntogun, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

⁴³Aliyu Hammed-Hammed, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

Also connected to lack of commitment to overall goal of ECOWAS by the leaders is the issue of divided loyalty of member states which are also loyal to other organizations within the sub-region. To be sure, multiple memberships of the rival organizations in the last few decades had raised issues of primary allegiance and conflicting loyalties not to mention the problems of overlapping, incompatible and potentially conflicting objectives.⁴⁴ More so, multiple sub-regional groupings also add to the work of harmonization and coordination and thus, complicate the eventual fusion of regional economic communities into larger regional groupings.⁴⁵ Reinforcing the above contention, Adedeji, situates the rivalry between ECOWAS and UEMOA thus:

So successful has UEMOA check-mated and undermined ECOWAS that all that the latter now spends a great deal of its time doing is to harmonize its programmes with those of the former hold joint ministerial meetings, seek the convergence of the economic and financial policies and the harmonization of the legal framework, accounting procedure and statistics of both ECOWAS and UEMOA. In any case, such convergence will for long remain a pipedream since UEMOA countries now constitute a majority of ECOWAS member countries and as such can play both judge and jury. In spite of the apparent unity that exists, ECOWAS is a home divided against itself.⁴⁶

The second factor is, perhaps, hinged on the fact that ECOWAS lacks the requisite supra-national institutions, like the EU, to achieve its

⁴⁴Adebayo Adedeji, "ECOWAS: A Retrospective Journey", in: A. Adebajo, and I. Rashid (eds.), *West African Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled, Region*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, p. 40.

⁴⁵UNECA, *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa I*, Addis Ababa, UNECA, 2003, p.18.

⁴⁶ Adebayo Adedeji, *The Role of the Private sector in the Economic integration of the West African sub-region*, keynote address at the 40th anniversary of the Nigeria Association of Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture, 16 August 2000, p.13.

objectives.⁴⁷ As regional integration is, really, beyond the realm of nation-states, it requires robust supra-national institutions to provide the framework for efficiency. More so, the international system within which integration takes place is devoid of the institutions of government available within nation-states. To this end, state-like institutions are needed to drive the integration processes internationally. Putting this in context, Cheong⁴⁸ avers that ‘supranational institutions represent a community of nations that could develop into federal systems or confederations and be great facilitators of integration’. Unfortunately, ECOWAS, beyond the formalism of supra-nationalism, enshrined in the 1993 revised Treaty, has no supra-national institution that could effectively implement decisions, particularly those relating to some of the provisions enshrined in the Vision 2020 document.

Till date, infrastructural challenges are as real within the West African sub-region as they were about four decades ago. To be sure, road, railways and civil aviation systems, the key drivers of regional integration in Europe and North America, are still too rudimentary to support integration objectives. Specifically, the transport and communication systems are still so disjointed that it is often difficult to move goods and persons between countries. For instance, it is, perhaps, easier to connect Accra and London or Abidjan and Paris by air than it is to connect Accra with neighbouring Abidjan.⁴⁹ Again, it is observed that countries in the sub-region have different

⁴⁷J. O. Lokulo-Sodipe, A. J. Osuntogun, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

⁴⁸Sam C. Cheong, “Establishing Supranational Institutions: European Lessons for a Unified Korea”, in: *East Asian Review*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2004, p. 73.

⁴⁹J. O. Lokulo-Sodipe, A.J. Osuntogun, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

rail gauges making it impossible for trains to move from one country to another. Furthermore, the current pattern of water transportation favours trans-continental trade. The combination of these continues to hamper intra-community trade within the sub-region.⁵⁰

Another significant factor which has impinged on the regional integration process in West Africa and has continued to persist is the continued dependent orientation of the economies of ECOWAS member states towards the developed countries of the North. As Sesay and Omotosho note, ‘West Africa’s trade and aid dependence on the traditional Northern development partners have remained virtually the same since the achievement of independence more than five decades ago’.⁵¹ More worryingly, virtually all countries are still dependent on budgetary augmentation from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in order to meet their development needs. The implication of this state of affairs, in the last four decades, is that West African countries are unable to exploit the complementarities of big and strong economies and are equally incapable of competing effectively within the global economy.⁵²

Equally important to be stressed is the fact that the democratic space in West Africa, in spite of the on-going democratization processes, is constricted, making the prospect of institutionalizing people-oriented

⁵⁰ Daniel Omoweh, “ECOWAS, Infrastructural Development and the NEPAD Initiative”, in: Joy Ogwu, Warisu Alli (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 207 – 224.

⁵¹ Ahmadu Sesay, Moshood Omotosho, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁵² Adeniyi Basiru, “Extra-African Powers and the Crisis of Regionalism in Africa: Background to and Reflections on France’s Engagement with Africa”, in: *Africa Review*, vol.8, no.2, 2016, pp. 96 – 107.

regionalism somehow bleak. Indeed, in spite of the adoption and ratification of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance by member states, there have been, in these countries, though in different degrees, documented cases of democratic infractions – human rights abuses, executive lawlessness, press censorships, electoral manipulation, exclusionary practices; all of which tend to threaten peace not only within the countries concerned but the entire sub region.⁵³ For instance, the cancer of tenure elongation of incumbent presidents beyond the constitutionally-mandated two terms, which started in 2001, when the Guinean President, Lansana Conte, stage-managed a referendum that extended his tenure beyond two terms, has spread to other countries – Togo (2002), Burkina Faso (2008) and Gambia (2009). The end of this practice might not be in sight, as the 2013 and 2015 episodes in Senegal and Togo clearly suggest.

To be sure, one sector in which the antithesis in the practice of liberal democracy in the sub-region has been more manifest is the electoral processes. Indeed, the situation appeared so grave that many observers, even doubt if elections could, ever, be mechanism for power transitions.⁵⁴ Every stage of the electoral cycle, especially when the incumbent President is an interested party, as was the case in the early period of independence, is usually characterized by electoral fraud and massive violence perpetuated by the incumbents against the oppositions. Most times, such state of affairs often

⁵³ Alexander Frempong, *Monitoring Democratic Governance within ECOWAS: The Theory and Practice*, in: Joy Ogwu, Warisu Alli (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 124 – 125.

⁵⁴ Adigun Agbaje, Said Adejumobi, “Do Votes Count? The Travails of Electoral Politics in Nigeria”, in: *Africa Development*, vol. XXXI, no. 3, 2006, p.32.

threaten the positive peace of the countries concerned. For example, the violence that characterized the 2010 presidential election in Cote D'Ivoire was so massive that the international community has to intervene to save the country from implosion. Even where the pre-election process was not marked by violence, there were still, given the illiberal environments in which elections are held, high expectations of monumental violence that may arise from incumbents' manipulations of the electoral process in order to hang on to power. The ECA report in 2009 notes that, 'the quality of elections remains suspect in many countries. Often, they are less a peaceful means of transferring power than a trigger of conflict'.⁵⁵

At this juncture, it must be stressed that while the foregoing issues are no doubt real and offer explanatory frameworks for why the goal of real regional integration continues to be illusive, our contention is that they cannot be divorced from the character of the post-colonial African states.⁵⁶ Though structurally and territorially weak, the African post-colonial states offer almost limitless opportunities for their custodians to deploy the states' awesome powers for the purpose of primitive accumulation within their territories.⁵⁷ Framed this way, it may then be posited that preserving the existing West African territorial state structures, from internal threats and external surrendering of sovereignties is of core value to the West African

⁵⁵ UNECA, *African Governance Report (AGR) II*, New York, UNECA/ Oxford University, 2009, p.3.

⁵⁶ See Sina Kawonishe, "Metamorphosis of the OAU to AU: Problems and Prospects", in: *African Journal of International Affairs and Development*, vol. 7, no.1, 2002.

⁵⁷ Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Ibadan, Spectrum book Ltd, 2001, pp.5 – 7.

ruling elites. Given this reality, it might be safe to posit that as long the states in Africa remain the central actors in the processes of capitalist accumulation; their custodians are likely to continue safeguarding them from being supplanted. Consequently, it may be argued that, beyond the rhetoric of occasional declarations and pronouncements by African statesmen at summits envisioning a borderless region, lie the hidden force of elites' self-preservation.

Concluding Remarks

This article has examined the content, contexts and issues in the ECOWAS 2020 Transformational Vision with the goal of outlining the prospects for its actualization. In furtherance of this objective, it presented the theoretical framework, reviewed extant literature on regional integration in West Africa. Most importantly, it analyzed the key provisions in the 2020 Transformational Vision that are germane to this study. Based on these reviews and analyses, the article noted that irrespective of the perspective that one deploys to assess the performance of ECOWAS in the last four decades, the goal of an integrated West Africa, accepted first in principle at Lagos in 1975 is far from being achieved. However, this is not a given, but has been nurtured by legions of factors and forces, the chief one being West African statesmen' aversion for any arrangement that would supplant the existing state structures because of the almost limitless opportunities they offer them in the capital accumulation sector. In the light of these, the article argues that

as long as the structures that, in the last four decades, have worked to frustrate the ECOWAS' goal of an integrated community are still alive and active, the 2020 Transformational Vision, though an ambitious agenda, going by the philosophical ideas undergirding it, like similar ideas and visions, of the distant and recent past, is likely to be unrealizable. Perhaps, it is another 'development tokenism' by the sub-region's statesmen and policy makers to appease radical voices in the sub-region.

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