

The Economic Community of West African States and its Members: A Success Story of Integrated Development

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Abstract

The effects of regional economic integration on trade and development of the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was chosen as topic for this article to examine how much impact regional integration has made among Member States. The history of regional economic integration is discussed to highlight the developmental trajectory of different regional groups. This paper has a critical look at the formation of regional economic blocs around the globe, with a view to show how they operate for the purpose of fostering regional cooperation among members. The history of the formation of the Economic Community of West African States and the challenges which have constrained its transformation into a complete regional economic union is also discussed.

1. Introduction

The global economic environment has witnessed the proliferation of regional economic blocs for the purpose of integration, increase in trade and removing restrictions to international trade and flow of goods and services, since the birth of the World Trade Organisation in 1995.¹ Integration means bringing different parts of an object into a whole. The purpose of integration is to present a common objective set for socio-economic attainment. Integration could be for different reasons.

For economic intents, Nations can agree on policies which would result in greater economic reliance. Regional Integration involves the process of removing barriers to trade among countries irrespective of their geographical affinity to each other. Regional integration aims to remove trade tariffs and dichotomy between locally made goods and those of

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1 World Trade Organisation (WTO).

foreign origin. Economic integration could be defined as a process and as a state of affairs.² It is viewed as a process where integration entails the removal of all forms of discrimination between economic units of various Nationalities; while as a state of affairs, it deals with the non-existence of different forms of discrimination between national economies.³ Economic integration is the method adopted to ensure the removal of limitations on global trade and others. This also involves the convergence of two or more national economies located within the same geographical area for the purpose of trade. Regional economic integration differs from economic cooperation; the latter entails the implementation of economic agreements on a temporary basis with regards to specific projects of mutual interest to both States. But regional economic integration involves agreements on a permanent basis; some of these agreements to an extent alter the sovereignty of both Member States. Economic integration does not necessarily suggest that there must be geographical proximity among partners.

‘Regional economic integration is a double trade off: it is a spatial trade-off between a local and a global solution and it includes forces of liberalisation within the region while upholding or even amplifying protection against outsiders.’⁴ This implies that barriers to trade within the regional economic bloc must be removed, for Member States to freely move goods and services while preserving the most favoured nation rules of the World Trade Organisation where goods produced from Member States enjoy protectionist bias and goods from foreign origin are treated with high tariffs.

Regional economic integration has been accepted globally as a panacea for economic development by members of any regional socio-economic bloc. There are various regional blocs⁵ in the world today; the most successful is the European Union.

The European Union (EU) model of regional economic integration serves as a guide for various regional blocs who are desirous of integration, such as regional blocs in Africa. Economic blocs within the African continent aspire to achieve regional economic integration through different partnerships such as Southern Africa Development Community⁶, Common Market for East and Southern Africa⁷, Maghreb Union, East African Community⁸

2 *Bela Balassa*, ‘Theory of Economic Integration’ (Westport, Connecticut, USA: Greenwood Publishing Group 1961) 173.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Jonne Brucher*, ‘Regional Economic Integration and Development: A Theoretical and Empirical Conceptualisation with Particular Focus on the East African Community’ (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Leipzig, Germany 2016) 11.

5 Some examples of economic blocs are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Organisation of American States (OAS), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and others.

6 SADC.

7 COMESA.

8 EAC.

and Economic Community of West African States.⁹ Some of these economic blocs have overlapping memberships, as some members of SADC are also members of COMESA and EAC.¹⁰ ‘The World Trade Organisation reports that, out of the total of 250 regional agreements of which it had evidenced up to 2002, 130 were notified to the organisation after January 1995.’¹¹ This shows the increase in volume of various forms of regional economic integration among Member States. It is essential that regional economic integration succeeds on the continent to enable Africa take benefit of the globalisation and economic integration process.¹² The main element of economic globalisation is to release businesses which leads to national economic competitiveness and then to movement towards integration into global markets.¹³

The objective of this paper is to examine the effects of regional economic integration on the development of Member States of ECOWAS to view how successful the organisation has been since its formation, in its desire to achieve complete economic integration.

2. History and Development of Regional Economic Integration

Economic integration originally developed from traditional trade theories and practices. Regional economic integration emanated from adopting methods of comparative advantage in international trade, reducing tariffs and removing barriers to trade. Economic integration began earlier in Europe than in North America. The European Community¹⁴ completed its Customs Union¹⁵ in 1968, to regulate the flow of trade on goods and services. The European Free Trade Area¹⁶ came into existence for the purpose of promoting trade in industrial goods. By 1974, the European Economic Community¹⁷ and the EFTA signed a bilateral Free trade Agreement which formed a duty free zone for industrial goods covering the region of western Europe. The single European Act was enacted in 1986 with a promise to establish a single market. The essence of a Single Market Act was to remove all barriers to trade within the EEC. In 1992, the European Economic Area Agreement extended its scope

9 ECOWAS.

10 Henry Tumwabeze Karamuriro, ‘Regional Economic Integration and Export Performance in the COMESA Region (1980-2012) [2015] (4) (1) *International Journal of Business and Economic Research*.

11 Carlo Altomonte, ‘Regional Economic Integration and the Location of Multinational Firms [2007] (14) (2) *Review of World Economics*.

12 Manone Regina Madyo, ‘The Importance of Regional Economic Integration in Africa’ (Msc Thesis, University of South Africa, 2008) 2.

13 Mehdi Hosseiny Naveh and Others, ‘Regional Economic Integration and its Effects on Economic Growth and Economic Welfare [2012] (17) (10) *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 1349.

14 EC.

15 CU.

16 EFTA.

17 EEC.

to implement EFTAs. It is important to mention that some African States were also associate members of the European economic Community through their former colonial powers.¹⁸ In Africa, regional economic integration has its fair share of history and development. Prior to the advent of colonial rule, some parts of Africa especially the east, had traces of integration in operation within the coastal regions of East Africa.

East African integration began as early as 1917, when the British administered the territories of Kenya and Uganda formed a customs union.¹⁹ In 1923, Tanzania joined the customs union and the area became an informal common market, with free movement of goods and services as an economic union. Overtime, there was a common currency shared and controlled by the East African Currency Board. Since the end of colonialism, African countries have struggled to embrace regional economic cooperation and integration. The major characteristic of regional economic integration is the removal of all forms of tariffs among Member States which have common trade policy to ensure free movement of goods and services, unification and adoption of national monetary policies. This form of integration is pursued for economic growth and development.²⁰ Several economic integration groups have been created to promote trade and development. From the 1960s to 1980²¹ African leaders, States and governments have made frantic efforts at achieving regional economic integration. The essence of these attempts to promote regional development, economic expansion, remove trade barrier and promote fiscal cooperation and others.

In 1991, the treaty establishing the African Economic Community was signed to set Africa on the part of economic integration. Ten years later, the policy discussions on regional integration led to the establishment of the African Union and the launch of the New Partnership for African Development,²² in a bid to promote trade on intra African level. There are about 14 major regional economic groups²³ on the continent of Africa, which includes the Economic Community of West African States being the focal point of this paper.

There are various stages of regional economic integration necessary to attain full economic integration,²⁴

18 Nigeria was an Associate Member of the European Economic Community by reason of her colonial ties to Britain.

19 *J.S. Woncsek* (ed), 'Economic Cooperation in Latin America, Africa and Asia': A Handbook of Documents (Cambridge: Massachussets 1969).

20 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

21 The Lagos Plan of Action was adopted in 1980 in response to the economic depressions of Africa with a proposed strategy to put the continent of Africa on the trajectory of sustainable development.

22 NEPAD.

23 Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and others.

24 *Bela Balassa*, 'Theory of Economic Integration' (Westport, Connecticut, USA: Greenwood Publishing Group 1961) 173.

- i) Free Trade Area,
- ii) Customs Union,
- iii) Common Market,
- iv) Economic Union, and
- v) Complete Regional Integration

i) Free Trade Area:

The free trade area is the first stage of precursory to attaining regional economic integration among Member States. This is used to eliminate discrimination of commodity movements among members. The long term goal of adopting a free trade area is to totally eradicate all forms of trade restrictions, however, 'the principal goal of a free trade area is to gradually achieve a state of perfect competition among industries of Member States.'²⁵ Under a free trade area regime, members recognise the necessity of development and strengthening commerce through removal of barriers within the region among other issues.

ii) Customs Unions:

The Custom union emanates from a free trade area, and this is considered as a formidable form of cooperation. Customs union operates to eliminate restrictions among Member States while imposing restrictions on non- members. The customs union also protects the common market within the union from external competition. The union ensures that custom duties among Member States are not increased indiscriminately and allow member countries to make commitments to reduce tariffs overtime.

iii) Common Market:

The common market stage of regional economic integration is the level after the removal of trade barriers. Common market deals with the trading and movement of goods and services between the territories of Member States, implement common external trade restrictions against non-members of the common market within the economic bloc. A common market as a higher level of regional economic integration than both free trade and customs provides Member States with strengthened unity, resolve to harmonise and coordinate regional economic policies. The common market further exists to promote free movement and access to goods and services among members of the bloc.

25 Mehdi Hosseiny Naveh and Others, 'Regional Economic Integration and its Effects on Economic Growth and Economic Welfare [2012] (17) (10) *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 1349.

iv) Economic Union:

The economic union as an advanced stage of economic integration desires a state where national economic policies are harmonised for the purpose of removing all forms of discrimination. ‘Economic union is defined as a common market in which economic policies such as monetary, fiscal, social and counter cyclical policies are unified, and in supra natural authority set up to administer these policies, and whose decisions are binding on members.’²⁶ The economic union is a very challenging stage of economic integration. This is aptly so because the free trade area, customs union or common market operates to remove trade restrictions, but economic union is an agreement to transfer economic sovereignty to a regional authority.

v) Complete Economic Integration:

This is the highest form of economic integration, with a monetary union. A monetary union deals with the making of fixed exchange rates between the currencies of member countries, harmonising fiscal policy and accepting the use of a common currency within the regional bloc. Common currency is a panacea for and one of the features of full regional economic integration, as the responsibility of implementing economic policies are transferred from individual Member States to a central regional authority. Political integration constitutes an integral part of full economic integration. This could be achieved through the establishment of a centralised regional banking system to handle macroeconomic policies. There are certain conditions necessary for a successful regional economic integration. The success or failure of regional economic integration among Member States of ECOWAS would depend on certain conditions which are by no means exhaustive;

- a) The incidence of trade among Member States must be substantial. The volume of exchange of goods and services between members of the organisation must be on the rise for the integration to succeed. Member States should reduce their volume of trade with European partners and should engage more in intra trade with fellow members of the bloc.²⁷
- b) The size of the population, sub region and income of its citizens must be on the increase and above the global poverty index to boost the chances of success at the regional economic integration efforts,²⁸
- c) The National economy must be wrested from the control of foreigners. The economies of member countries which are under the influence of foreign States especially those

26 *R.J. Carbaugh*, ‘International Economics’ (Ohio, USA: Thompson/South Western Publishers 2007).

27 *Abraham O. Agbonkese and A.G. Adekola*, ‘Regional Economic Integration in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Nigeria – A Member of ECOWAS’ [2014] (10) (19) *European Scientific Journal*, 363.

28 *Ibid.*

with colonial ties constitute an impediment to full economic integration. The problems of external influence, capital flights among other issues would prevent the attainment of complete economic integration.²⁹

There are different dimensions to economic integration because most regional economic blocs have the political economic dimension, the role of physical geography as well as the political system practiced by the Member State. The political economics of regional integration deals with benefits that comes with cooperation at regional levels, with responsibilities also thrust upon such Member State. The citizens of such Member State may resent the domestic application and enforcement of a particular regional policy, and the government would have a difficult time reconciling the interest of her citizens and at the same time keeping up to its regional economic integration responsibilities. The effect of integration is generally positive. However, it has three forms of effect, namely, the efficiency, status and position effects.

The efficiency effect addresses the benefits of economically integrating with neighbouring States under one economic bloc. The status effect deals with the new realities faced by each Member State after the integration. This is aptly so because of the drastic changes that occurs with regional economic integration in the key areas such as free movement of persons, increase in income distribution as both citizens and residents become entitled to welfare packages, the existence of a single market where there would no longer be favoured goods based on origin as all goods from members are treated equally. These realities come with the new status of being part of an economic integration. The position effect affects the size, population, of the Member State as well as its national political system. A Member State to a regional integration which large size, huge population and other advantageous features stands to benefit more from the bloc as it will gain a large share in the volume of trade. While another Member State with a small size and population may not gain more in the trade arrangement. In fact, this may likely work to the disadvantage of the Member State with a smaller size as her market may be flooded with goods from the other member with huge population and better means of production. This could lead to the death of local industries in the smaller Member State. The geographical location of each Member State also impacts on what share of trade it gets. For instance, under the Economic Community of West African States pact, the share of volume of trade that countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Senegal and other littoral States would gain by virtue of their proximity to the oceans where maritime activities take place will not be the same, as those benefits landlocked Member States like Burkina Faso and Mali. Also, the economic geography of integration helps in the understanding of why and how firms are located within the regional economic bloc, the direction of foreign investments among others.

It is also important to examine the political system of the Member States, where the State does not uphold democratic tenets or the regime is repressive, such Member State will lack political will to implement such democratic ethos as would be demanded from Mem-

29 *Ibid.*

ber States. ‘While regional integration is the driving force for Africa’s regional trade, challenges around common customs union, common market and common monetary area and fiscal integration need to be addressed. To establish common market for free trade at times based on common trade policies, monetary area and fiscal integration, Regional Economic Cooperations (RECS) have been established to improve inter and intra-regional trade.’³⁰

3. History of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The geographical area known as West Africa was host to many proud ancient kingdoms and empires before the colonialists came into West Africa. The foremost efforts at integration was as far back as 1945 with the creation of CFA Francs that brought countries under former French control into a single currency union. There existed some form of economic integration in the nature of institutional arrangements. There was the West African Currency Board,³¹ the West African Cocoa Research Institute,³² West African Airways³³ established for the Anglophone colonies. Then in 1964, President *William Tubman* of Liberia proposed an economic union for West Africa leading to an agreement which was later signed by four States, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa made efforts to bring about regional economic cooperation and integration among States. However, in 1972, a proposal for a Union of West African States was proposed by the then Nigerian Head of State General *Yakubu Gowon* and President *Gnassingbe Eyadema* of Togo. This agreement formed the Lagos Treaty of 1975. The Treaty of Lagos was originally viewed as an economic document. ECOWAS is meant to foster interstate economic and political cooperation. The mandate of ECOWAS under the treaty is as follows;

- i) Elimination of customs duties and other charges of effect in respect to importation and exportation of goods among Member States;
- ii) The abolition of administrative and quantitative restrictions on trade between Member States;
- iii) Removal of external tariffs and a common trade policy between Member States and third parties;
- iv) The removal of restrictions on free movements of persons within the region.

The sub-regional economic bloc called the Economic Community of West African States was established in 1975 with 15 Member States.³⁴ The objectives of ECOWAS includes

30 *Daouda Cisse*, ‘Regional Trade Integration in Asia and Africa: What Lessons can be Learned?’ The Emerging Powers Policy Brief no 1, 2014, 3.

31 WACB.

32 WACRI.

33 WAA.

34 28 May 1975 by General *Yakubu Gowon* of Nigeria and President *Eyadema* of the Republic of Togo. The fifteen Member States of ECOWAS include the Republics of Benin, Burkina Faso, Ca-

promoting cooperation in economic, social and cultural activities.³⁵ The structure of the organisation is made up of four institutions namely, the Commission, ECOWAS Parliament, Court of Justice and ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID).

The treaty established the regional economic bloc for the purpose of economic integration of Member States and the realisation of the African Economic Community.³⁶ The treaty establishing ECOWAS has its objectives clearly stated among others that, it exists to;

‘...To promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and social and cultural matters, for the purpose of raising the standards of living of its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African Continent.’³⁷ The treaty being the legal document founding the economic bloc intends to integrate Member States within the sub-region, through liberalisation of trade, free movement of persons, goods and services and common monetary policy among others. The concept of regional economic integration has become a global avenue for development. This approach has been adopted by the developed economies of the world. In ECOWAS, ‘the nexus of integration and development are apparent in the quest for liberalised economic policies which is a catalyst for the overall interest of the sub-region.’³⁸

ECOWAS was originally a regional organisation interested in political affairs of members with little interest in the full benefits of complete regional economic integration. Over the years, the efforts of ECOWAS have gained global recognition to the extent that other regional economic blocs have increased their interests to partner with the economic bloc.

4. Challenges of Regional Economic Integration under ECOWAS

Regional economic integration could be socio-economic, cultural or political. Regional integration is a strategy of the collective economic survival of Nations around the world.³⁹ The relevance of regional integration is a very persistent issue in Africa, specifically in view of political and economic backwardness. Africa is confronted with a deep-rooted level of poverty, a minimal share of world trade, and a low pace of development in human capital and infrastructure as well as being faced with an excess of challenges from external pres-

bo Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

35 ECOWAS Treaty 1975 Article 2 (1), 5.

36 *Ibid.*, Article 3, 5.

37 ECOWAS Treaty of 1975.

38 *Ali William Butu*, ‘Impact of ECOWAS Protocols on Political and Economic Integration of the West African Sub-Region’ [2013] (1) (2) *International Journal of Physical and Human Geography*, 47.

39 *Maiyaki Theodore Bala*, ‘The Challenges and Prospects for Regional and Economic Integration in West Africa’ [2017] (13) (5) *Journal Asian Social Sciences*, 24.

asures. Ensuring that regional economic integration succeeds in Africa is vital not only because of the prospective and challenges mentioned above, but also because the polices that are required to ensure its fruitfulness are the same as those needed if Africa is to benefit from the process of globalization and integration into the world economy.⁴⁰ The economic integration of the West African sub-region is patterned after the European Union in objectives and desires by implication, the factors affecting the developmental process of European Union in its journey to complete regional economic integration, would rub off on the ECOWAS treaty, the aim of the union is to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity among others. The treaty does not impose monetary union on members States, rather provides a monetary regime for the purpose of harmonising monetary policies. There are various challenges militating against the progress of regional economic integration. These challenges are economic in nature. Some of these challenges include, but are not limited to the following;

- i) Lack of Adequate infrastructure;
- ii) Lack of a Financial Institution;
- iii) Influence of Colonial Ties and;
- iv) Incessant Conflicts.

i) Lack of Adequate Infrastructure: The ECOWAS sub-regional bloc lacks infrastructure essential to the attainment of full economic integration. For Sub-Saharan Africa, this means, that the prospects from the start are not very good. First, its remoteness, expressed by lack of poor quality infrastructure is a critical factor that impedes further participation in global value chains. Second, its trade structure neither is a good starting position. For 15 Countries in sub-Saharan Africa one or two commodities make up 75% of their exports. Africa's share of world trade decreased from around 6% in 1980 to less than 2% in 1998 and has remained low since then.⁴¹ The physical infrastructures will drive economic integration through free movement of persons, goods and services, and tourism. But the facilities such as rails, energy, telecommunications and so on are grossly lacking within the sub-region as the inadequacies occasioned by these infrastructural deficits will hamper economic integration. 'Economic integration is the aggregate of the desire of Nation-States to garner their resources together for the purpose of gaining comparative advantage within the region.'⁴²

ii) Lack of a Financial Institution: Another challenge to economic integration under the regional economic bloc ECOWAS is the absence of a regional financial institution. The purpose is to regulate the monetary policy of the bloc, and work towards a single currency

40 Mengesha Yayo and Sisay Asefa, 'International Trade Effects of Regional Economic Integration in Africa: The Case of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)' [2016] (3) (2) *International Journal of African Development*, 64.

41 Evita Schmiege, 'Regional Economic Integration and Trade Facilitation: The Case of ECOWAS', A Paper Presented at the Trade and Development Symposium, Nairobi, Kenya 16th December 2015, 4.

42 *Ibid.*

regime. This feat was achieved by the European Union through the establishment of the European Central Bank.⁴³ The role of a regional financial institution extends to creating a workable common customs and monetary union to assist in expanding the blocs market base.

iii) Influence of Colonial Affinity: Member States of ECOWAS are still very dependent on their former colonial masters, who still wield a lot of political, social and economic influence over their erstwhile colonies. This glue will always constitute a stumbling block for full economic integration within the region, because the former colonial masters fifty years after their exit do not desire that former colonies be completely free from their political, socio-economic whims and caprices. They would rather have their former colonies remain tied to the strings of their economic apron as a dumping ground for cheap raw materials, substandard goods, and others. Complete economic integration of ECOWAS will be quite a herculean task as long as this challenge remains unaddressed.⁴⁴

iv) Incessant Conflicts and Political Instability: Incessant armed conflicts (internal and external) within the sub-region would render complete economic integration almost impossible. Conflicts within the region of ECOWAS breeds a lot of humanitarian crisis such as internally displaced persons, refugees, hunger and food shortage, destruction of available infrastructure and so on. 'Conflict might impede production diversification, infrastructure development within the occurring country, and make macroeconomic discipline impossible. Besides that, conflict might have a negative effect on Regional Economic Integration (REI) outcomes through its effect on political commitment. REI in order to be successful has to have convincing features of permanency and irreversibility, and a sustained political commitment is crucial for that.'⁴⁵ In a conflict situation there would not be any policy implementation of any kind from the Member State involved in such conflict whether its internal or external conflict.⁴⁶

The list of challenges is in exhaustive as lack of political will to implement these goals and policies also contribute to the slow pace economic integration. The lack of domestic ownership of the process poses a threat to the complete actualisation of integration as most regional economic integration models are foreign designed and driven. Furthermore, the volume of trade among Member States are quite low, it is reported that only 12% of trade was done between African States. Other challenges include the overlapping of memberships of other regional economic bodies with similar programs and objectives. The enforcement mechanisms for protocols and other legislative instruments which should have the force of law remains weak. The national institutions responsible for regional integration among Member States are also weak, as some governments do not have a designated office for the purpose

43 ECB.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 30

45 Adama Bah and Sampawende Jules-Armand Tapsoba, 'Civil Conflicts and Regional Integration Outcomes in Africa' [2010] Working Papers 201009, CERDI, 5.

46 The Liberian and Sierra Leonean armed conflict and civil war of the early 1990s greatly impeded ECOWAS' growth and development. The was marred by a humanitarian crisis of refugees, infrastructural deficits among others.

of interfacing with the regional economic body.⁴⁷ Some further challenges and constraints of regional integration under ECOWAS include lack of technical expertise in the use of technology to accelerate integration, inadequate resources for the implementation of programmes and inability to make integration objectives part of national plans. There is also the role of third parties in matters of trade, where Member States prefer to trade with third parties such as the EU, United States and others. This one of the challenges likely to reduce the volume of trade among Member States, and would encourage capital flight out of the region.

5. Implications of Regional Economic Integration on Member States under ECOWAS

The formation of the Economic Community of West African States has implications as provided by its treaty objectives. The desire for complete regional economic integration has consequent effects on the individual Member States and the bloc at large. Some of the implications are economic, political, institutional and would affect trade in goods and services, movement of persons among others.

Economic Integration: Under ECOWAS, Member States are required to share common interests in free trade areas, common markets, customs union and others for the purpose of attaining complete economic integration.⁴⁸

Political Integration: Political integration is part of the goal under the treaty, but to achieve this goal, Member States have to voluntarily submit their legislative sovereignty to a regional authority. In the process of attaining economic integration, political integration can also be achieved.

ECOWAS Institutions: The quest for regional economic integration creates institutions under the treaty to address issues arising from the incorporation of different Member States into a single regional economic bloc. Under ECOWAS, the Authority of Heads of State and Governments is the responsible for the general directions, administration and control of the regional economic bloc. The Authority has the duty to take decisions concerning the development of the organisation, realisation of its objectives, policies and so on.⁴⁹ The Council of Ministers is the next highest decision-making body, comprised of a minister from each Member State in charge of ECOWAS affairs and another.⁵⁰

The Council of Ministers make recommendations to the Authority of Heads of State and Governments for implementations.⁵¹ The council submits budgets and community de-

47 ECA Report 2006.

48 ECOWAS Protocol, Article 2.

49 ECOWAS Treaty (Revised) 1993, Article 7 (1).

50 *Ibid.*, Article 10.

51 *Ibid.*, Article 10 (3) (a).

velopment programmes.⁵² The Council has an executive secretary⁵³ whose responsibility is to ensure the preparation of projects, execution of decisions of the Authority etc.

Other organs of the institution include the Parliament which makes Constitutive Acts which are binding on Member States.⁵⁴ The ECOWAS Court of Justice⁵⁵ for the purpose of adjudication of disputes between Member States; as well as the ECOWAS Arbitral Tribunal⁵⁶ for the settlement of disputes alternatively to regular court processes. Freedom of Movements of Person: ECOWAS Citizens have the rights to freely come into any Member State territory, establish and reside there. This right led to the abolition of visa regime, and granted right of residence and establishment of business.

Trade Liberalisation: This is the major effect of regional integration on Member State. The treaty provides the guidelines for liberalisation of trade through the trade liberalisation scheme.⁵⁷ Removal of trade barriers to ensure free flow of goods, services and humans within the sub-region would enhance mutual benefits to trading partners.

Furthermore, under the Economic Community of West African States, the region has witnessed the rejuvenated resolve to achieve complete economic integration by restating its objectives, establishing functional organs of operation such as the parliament, Commission, Court of Justice and others. In the area of human rights, the regional economic bloc ECOWAS has successfully integrated human rights into the economic development regime. To the extent that, ECOWAS citizens can confidently seek redress in the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice (ECCJ) for various forms of violations to their human and environmental rights. In *Mr. Sikiru Alade v Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN)*,⁵⁸ where *Sikiru Alade*, a Citizen of Nigeria, applied to the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, alleging that on the 9th of March 2003, he (*Mr. Alade*) was arrested by a plain cloth person who claimed to be a police officer. He stated that the said police man forcefully dragged him to Ketu Police Station and detained him until the 5th of May 2003, when he was arraigned before a Magistrate Court, Yaba Lagos, Nigeria for an alleged crime of armed robbery. That after the arraignment he was detained and ordered to be remanded in prison custody under a procedure under the Nigeria Criminal Justice System known as 'Holding Charge'. Hence, he (*Mr. Alade*) filed an application against the violation of human rights pursuant to Article 9 (4) of Protocol A/P1/7/91 as amended for the reliefs stated. A declaration that the indeterminate detention without trial under the holding charge constitutes a violation of the right to fair trial within a reasonable time, presumption of innocence and the right to personal liberty guaranteed under Article 6 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights, Articles

52 *Ibid.*, Article 10 (3) (g).

53 *Ibid.*, Article 17.

54 *Ibid.*, Article 13.

55 *Ibid.*, Article 15

56 *Ibid.*, Article 16.

57 ECOWAS Protocol, Article 35.

58 (2001) AHRLR 60.

2 (3) sub (1) and (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, among other reliefs. The ECCJ held firstly, on the issue of jurisdiction, that the court has jurisdiction to determine cases of violation of human rights that occur in the country of any Member State.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Court upheld the application that the detention of applicant from 2003-2004 in Kiri Kiri Maximum Prison Apapa Lagos on a holding charge is a manifest violation of the applicant's human right as provided under Article 9 (4) of the Protocol of the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) Court and Articles 6 and 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the Court awarded the sum of 2.7 Million Naira damages to *Mr. Sikiru Alade* for the violation of his rights. The regional bloc has initiated a programme for Member States on the use of VAT as a means of increasing domestic revenue base.

In the area of preventing conflicts and restoring peace and security within the region, the bloc has performed very well with the successes recorded in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The ECOWAS Army⁶⁰ in these instances intervened for the first time in the internal armed conflict of sovereign States which are members of the regional economic bloc for the purpose of restoring peace and security. This could not have been achieved without the regional integrating platform provided by auspices of ECOWAS. This is the only regional economic bloc in the world with a standby Army. The development of ECOWAS security mechanisms emerged during the 1990s mainly as a consequence of ad hoc conflict intervened in countries facing domestic turmoil and fighting.⁶¹ The standby army of ECOWAS Monitoring Group became the mechanism for the conflict prevention, management and control.⁶² ECOWAS intervened in the political conflict in Guinea Bissau in 1998, and has also been involved in mediations over political impasse in Guinea, Liberia, Mali, to ensure political stability, peace and security of the sub region.

In the area of food security, 'ECOWAS has liberalised the trade which has multiplied the impact on movement of food produce within the sub region, notwithstanding the challenge of food security within the region. 'Food security exists where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'.⁶³ It is important to point out that the West African food market system depends on cross-border flows of food produced.⁶⁴ The sub-region of ECOWAS is the first Regional Economic Cooperation(REC) to take action towards the implementation of the African Union(AU) Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). ECOWAS took a step further the sign the

59 Protocol of ECOWAS Court, Article 9 (4), also *Afolabi v FRN* (2008) CCJELR (pt 1), paras 31-33.

60 ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

61 *Sheila Page and Sanoussi Bilal*, 'Regional Integration in Western Africa', Overseas Development Institute 2001, 21.

62 *Ibid.*

63 World Food Summit 1996.

64 *Jean Bossuyt*, 'Political Economy of Regional Integration in Africa', ECOWAS Report 2016, 36.

regional compact in 2009 for the Regional Agricultural Investment Plan (RAIP) in 2010.⁶⁵ To facilitate the implementation of RAIP towards achieving the goals of ECOWAS Agricultural Programme, and a Regional Agency for Food and Agriculture (RAFA) has been established with the Regional Fund for Agriculture and Food. In the area of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the region keyed into the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Goals (Rio +20) due to its importance in the quest towards achieving sustainable development goals at global, regional and national levels.⁶⁶ The economy of the region grew on an average of 4.5% due to the political stability of the region, high demand for the export commodities of Member States, better macroeconomic policies and other related factors.⁶⁷ The region also scored improvements under the good governance index by the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) in 2012, reveals that the overall governance index for West Africa (ECOWAS) in 2011 was 51.9 representing an improvement over the performance of 2006.⁶⁸

In the area of financial services, the bloc has influenced Member States to adopt internet banking services to ease financial transactions within the sub-region. Economic integration cannot be successful without the existence of infrastructures such as rails, roads and others. The bloc currently supervises the construction of the ECOWAS interstate highway project linking the Member States from Lagos to Abidjan, from Accra to Monrovia and beyond. For the ease of movement of persons, goods and services. In the area of energy, the West African Gas Pipeline Project is on-going, from Escravos in Nigeria to Accra, Ghana, and on to the rest of the region. The purpose of the project is to secure the region's domestic gas demands and create a global market for the marketability of Liquefied Natural Gas.

6. Effects of Economic Integration under ECOWAS

Economic integration has the capacity to affect the volume of trade among Member States. It also increases the negotiating strength of Member States in the global markets among others. The effects of economic integration are as follows;

- i) Increased production of goods among Member States,
- ii) Removal of tariffs on imports from Member States,
- iii) The establishment of a single enlarged market for commodities, as Member States would begin to compete for a fair share of the market,
- iv) Economic integration provides Member States the avenue to cooperate in areas of supply of commodities to the global market. This enables Member States to improve their bargaining ability in terms of trade.

65 *Ibid.*

66 Sustainable Development Goals for the West Africa Subregion Summary Report, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) 2015, 1.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

7. Conclusion

The overall effect of regional economic integration on Member States of ECOWAS has been positive in various ways. The Economic bloc has spurred the desire among Member States to pursue the set goals and strive towards improving the working conditions and living standards of ECOWAS citizens. The region now has a collective sense of unified vision for the benefits of the peoples. The breaking down of political, socio-economic barriers to trade, movement of persons, goods and services and the work towards complete regional integration through a single market, with a common currency zone like the European Union. This paper has found that the absence of strong institutions within the region at both national and regional levels would slow down the process of full economic integration. It is recommended that the economic bloc, in order to achieve complete integration, should adopt the following strategies;

- a) Adopt the European Union model, and shape it to reflect the realities of the West African Sub-region.
- b) The ECOWAS institutions must be strengthened for maximum effect, especially in the areas of Justice and policy implementations.
- c) There must be the Political will to follow through commitments and obligations under the treaty.

However, the positives derived from the regional economic integration are as follows;

- i) The removal of trade barriers and restrictions through the ECOWAS Liberalisation of Trade Scheme (ELTS), where Member States of the regional economic bloc can freely do business of moving goods and services without any form of discrimination as to its origins.
- ii) The abolition of visa regime where citizens of the regional economic bloc do not need visas to travel, reside and establish in any country of a Member. There is the unified passport regime known as the E-passport or ECOWAS passport which qualifies the holder of such travel document free to move within all countries of the region. This is the effect of regional economic integration through ECOWAS.
- iii) There construction of critical infrastructure such as the West African Gas pipeline project which begins from Escravos terminal in Nigeria to Senegal. The essence of such a huge project is to secure the energy(gas) supply of the region and also create a single market for the sale of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) for revenue generation. Such project cannot be undertaken by any individual Member State, hence the positive effects of regional economic integration on Member States. Also, the construction of the Lagos-Abidjan highway which would link the rest of the sub-region by road is another instance of the effects of regional economic integration, for easy movement of persons and goods.

- iv) The regional bloc has provided a platform for Member States to present a collective stand on issues affecting the region especially in matters of peace and security, preventing armed conflicts and resolving political instabilities within the region.
- v) The regional economic bloc ECOWAS has integrated human rights development into economic development for sustainable growth and progress of the sub-region.

Finally, it is the view of this paper that the effect of regional economic integration on trade between Member States of ECOWAS has improved since the birth of the economic bloc, although the quest for complete regional economic integration is still a good work in progress.