

Economic Integration, Democracy and Regional Security in the Post-Military ECOWAS: Reflecting on Nigeria's Experience in the Twenty-First Century

Fred Ekpe F. Ayokhai Peter Naankiel Wilfred
Federal University Lafia, Lafia, Nigeria, Department of History

Abstract

The post-military West Africa has rubbished Western development theories that assume that economic integration and democracy are prerequisites for the transformation of African nation-states. This study interrogates the nexus between democracy, economic integration and regional security in West Africa within the framework of ECOWAS. It finds that the degenerating regional security has direct correlation with weak regional economic integration and the return of democracy. The study, therefore, concludes that the deficits in democratic governance and economic integration significantly contribute to the causation and escalation of insecurity in ECOWAS member-states and the sub-region. Finally, it recommends a radical revision of the social basis of economic integration and democracy in a manner that strengthens institutions and structures of ECOWAS to attain the goal of regional security. Nigeria must demonstrate exceptional capabilities to provide the leadership necessary for the attainment of this objective in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Democracy; Economic Integration; Regional Security; ECOWAS; Post-Military; Nigeria; West Africa.

Introduction

From the second half of the 1950s, West African states began the gradual attainment of independence from the colonial regimes foisted on them by the European powers. The 1960s was particularly rewarding in this regard as most West African states attained independence in the period. The citizens of the newly independent states had fought for independence from the colonial regimes in the belief that independence will bring with it every good thing of life they had been denied under colonial rule. Independence was, therefore, accompanied with great optimism. However, within a decade of independence, this great optimism had been replaced with general despair and despondency. By the second decade of independence, the democratic regimes that replaced the colonial regimes had given way to military regimes, and poverty and insecurity were on the rise in the region. Yet, West Africa was not insulated from the socio-political and economic variables intervening to shape and reshape the global environment and the international system. Internal and external factors therefore combined to rob the post-independence democratic regimes in West Africa of the much needed legitimacy. Consequently, they were overthrown by military juntas who made new promises and once again raised the hopes of the gullible masses. It was not however long before the impotence of the new military juntas became exposed and military regimes replaced each other in counter-coups in most West African states. In fact, in the case of Nigeria, a military regime had replaced another in bloody coups within six years of independence. The situation further degenerated into a thirty month civil war that effectively began in May 1967.

Poverty, unemployment, disease, illiteracy and insecurity gradually but steadily became the most outstanding features that defined the West African region under the military regimes that dominated the governance and political processes of the states in the sub-region till the last decade of the twentieth century. The failure of the military regimes to resolve the social maladies that held back the states in the sub-region from climbing up to the top of the ladder of development and the escalation of degenerative welfare conditions led to new waves of mass resistance against them and renewed demand for the return to democratic governance in the last decade of the twentieth century. In the case of Nigeria, the struggle to reinstate democratic governance took a tortuous decade (1989 – 1999) of mass and civil society agitations against the military juntas. Like Nigeria, most states in the sub-region have returned to democratic rule beginning from the last decade of the twentieth century.

Now into the second decade of the twenty-first century, West Africa is under democratic regimes, notwithstanding the many hiccups of instituting the culture of democratic governance in the sub-region. In spite of the success in establishing democratic governance, the social maladies that dogged the region under military rule have not shown signs of abating. Rather, there have been escalations of poverty, unemployment and insecurity in particular across states in the sub-region. Consequently, the citizens are becoming wary and replacing one political party with another in the course of seasonal elections. In the case of Nigeria, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lost power at the centre and in the majority of states to the All Progressive Congress (APC), a party that was barely a year old, in the 2015 elections. In countries like Niger, Ivory Coast, Mali, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Burkina Faso military coups have resurfaced resulting in constitutional crisis,

truncating democratic governance and escalating insecurity since the close of the last century. In Nigeria, the return to civil rule has been coterminous with the escalation of insecurity, with the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency predominating the era and the palpable fear of disintegration polluting the air of elections in 2015.

Insecurity is an indication that the major objects of economic transformation and social development are still far from being attained among West African states. Yet, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established forty years ago to:

...promote co-operation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in all fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural sciences, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to progress and development of the African continent.¹

This is also in spite of the fact that programmes have been identified and designed for urgent implementation in these identified priority areas. They include:

1. Consolidation of peace, security, democracy and human rights;
2. Acceleration of economic and monetary integration in the region;
3. Promotion of economic prosperity by establishing a viable regional environment that enhances investment and entrepreneurship; and
4. Building of relationships and mutually beneficial partnerships with all other parts of the Africa and the world in order to take advantage of the opportunities that they offer.²

This study's objective is to examine the level of success attained in regional economic integration and the practice of democratic governance. It also interrogates the degree to which these variables have impacted each other and contributed to the deceleration of regional security within the region, giving the historical reality of Nigeria since 1999. In view of the above, the study seeks to answer the following questions: 1. To what extent has economic integration been attained among member-states of ECOWAS? 2. How well has the culture of participatory democracy been entrenched? 3. How has the return to democratic governance among member-states facilitated economic integration? 4. What are the impacts of economic integration and democratic governance on regional security? 5. What are the policy options available for the acceleration of the attainment of the objectives of economic integration, the sustenance of democratic governance and the attainment of regional security among member-states of ECOWAS in the twenty-first century? Before we attempt to answer these questions, it is pertinent to explore the theoretical foundations of the ECOWAS.

Theorising Economic Integration in West Africa

The practice of economic integration began in Western Europe after World War II when the search for permanent peace and world order caused a spurt for integration initiatives. This was followed by the Eastern bloc's socialist integration scheme within the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) with the aim of achieving rapid economic, scientific and technical progress in all the member-countries, in addition to raising the material and cultural standards of their peoples through structural changes in the economy. These initial integration schemes were anchored on a theory of integration that centres on the effects of the economic union on aspects of welfare and the pattern and volume of trade in the union area. The theory of economic integration dealt almost exclusively with customs union of industrial economies, where the problem was not primarily one of economic development but that of relative marginal adjustments in patterns of production and consumption.

Prior to the work of Viner, it was a generally accepted view that a customs union increases world welfare since it represents a move towards free trade in the Haberler – Marshall sense. It was in order to expose the flaws implicit in this perspective that Viner introduced the concepts of trade creation and trade diversion within a customs union. He posits that integration leads to either trade creation or trade diversion which has implication for the welfare of the union members and the world at large. Thus, a customs union raises the world's welfare if its trade creation effect outweighs its trade diversion effect. From the point of view of free trade, trade creation is 'a move in the right direction while trade diversion is a move in the wrong direction'. Also, trade creation occurs when the constituent economies are competitive in products, rather than complementary, prior to the formation of a customs union.³ Although Viner's contribution was one of the important pillars on which customs union theory rests, and while we may derive some guidance from it on the

¹ See Treaty of the Economic Community of West African States, Lagos, May 1975, Article 2(1), 7.

² 2012 Annual Report (Updated), 'Integration and Political Stability in West Africa' (Abuja: ECOWAS Commission, May 2013), xii.

³ Jacob Viner, *The Custom Union Issue* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1950).

integration area, it does not make it possible... to judge the overall desirability of an integration scheme, especially in a developing region like West Africa.¹

In view of the limitations of the traditional theory of economic integration and the increasing attention being given to the problem of economic integration among Less Developed Countries (LDCs), including West African states, in the 1960s, a reformulation and extension of the theory was undertaken. In this regard, economic integration became elaborated as an approach to economic development rather than a mere tariff issue. In this case, it came to combine various aspects which could improve the international trade position as well as raise the level of economic development of LDCs. In addition, emphasis shifted from the static to the dynamic effects in evaluating the desirability of economic integration among LDCs such as post-colonial West African states. The dynamic effect refers to the various possible ways in which integration affects the growth rate of GNP of participating countries in such areas as:

- a) the economies of scale brought about by enlargement of the size of the market for firms performing below optimum capacity before integration;
- b) the external economies which shift specific or general curves downward;
- c) the polarisation effect which refers to the cumulative improvement of the relative, or absolute, economic position of a member country or some relative, or absolute, economic position of a member country or some regions in the integrated area due to concentrated trade creation or attractiveness of labour and capital;
- d) the effect on the volume and location of investment; and,
- e) the effect on economic efficiency and smoothness of trade transactions due to change in the degree of competition and change in the uncertainty and unilaterality of trade policies of individual countries.²

The LDCs were trying to introduce structural changes which net effect will not be felt over a short period of time. From the works of authors³ who contributed to the reshaping of the standard theory for LDCs, three strands of thought have been distinguished. These are:

- a) that customs union theory should contribute to a more equitable distribution of income;
- b) that trade diversion might be inevitable in a developing country; and,
- c) that the standard theory must incorporate dynamic aspects.⁴

Based on the foregoing, the strategy of economic integration in West Africa was rationalised on the perceived empirical economic setting of the post-colonial nation-states in the region and the development perspectives that were current on African and LDCs economies at the time it was initiated. Economic integration was conceived as a pragmatic development alternative strategy for Africa. For West Africa, this was hinged on the fact that, apart from Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, Ghana, the small size of the states was a serious obstacle to rapid economic development. In this regard, Green and Seidman observe that:

The greatest barrier to African economic development becomes apparent at this point. No African state is economically large enough to construct a modern economy alone. Africa as a whole has the resources for industrialization, but it is split among more than forty African territories. Africa as a whole could provide markets able to support large-scale efficient industrial complexes, no single African state, nor existing subregional economic union can do so... The only way to achieve economic reconstruction and development essential to fulfil the aspirations, needs and demands of the peoples of Africa is through a sustained shift to continental planning, so as to unite increasingly the resources, markets and capital of Africa in a single substantial economic unit.⁵

Also, it was reasoned that trade liberalisation within a grouping maximises economic efficiency from the group's point of view by comparison with a non-trade situation (autarky), and the effect of the cost and benefit of economic integration on member states was also considered in positive light. It was expected to maximise the comparative advantage of the economies and economic efficiency in production activities in view of the cost and benefit effects of trade creation and trade diversion in the community. Therefore, economic integration was conceived as mechanism for attaining rapid economic development, improving the welfare of the nationals of member-states, promoting political stability and enhancing regional security of the community.

¹ Uka Ezenwe, *ECOWAS and the Economic Integration of West Africa* (Ibadan: West Books Publisher Limited, 1984), 44.

² Ezenwe, *ECOWAS and the Economic Integration of West Africa*, 45.

³ See D. Seers, 'The Limitations of the Special Case', *Bulletin of the Oxford Institute of Economics and Statistics*, May 1963, 83; B. Balassa, *Economic Development and Integration*, Mexico, 1965, 16; T.A. Jaber, a Review Article, 'The Relevance of Traditional Integration Theory to Less Developed Countries', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, March 1971, IX, 3.

⁴ Ezenwe, *ECOWAS and the Economic Integration of West Africa*, 45.

⁵ Reginald Green and Ann Seidman, 1968, 22 quoted in Celestine Basse and Michael Nyong, 'Nigeria and ECOWAS in the 21st Century: Challenges and Prospects of Meaningful Sub-Regional Integration', In T.A. Imobighe and W.O. Alli (Eds.), *Perspectives on Nigeria's National Politics and External Relations: Essays in Honour of Professor A. Bolaji Akinoyemi* (Ibadan: University Press PLC), 271.

Forty years down the line, it is difficult to confidently state that these lofty objectives of ECOWAS have been achieved or close to being achieved. Sadly, for Nigeria which the community presents a double advantage of accelerated development, she is a miserable failure in terms of economic development and a pitiable example of political stability and national security.

The next section of this study interfaces economic integration, democracy and regional security in post-military West Africa while reflecting on Nigeria's experience with a view to correlate the plausibility of the theory of integration and its practice since 1999.

Economic Integration, Democracy and Regional Security in the Post-Military ECOWAS

It has been observed that ECOWAS currently functions on a regular platform with four pillars: peace and security, developing infrastructure, policy harmonisation to facilitate trade, and good corporate governance. These pillars are anchored on some growth and development theories. There are two major contending theories of convergence in the growth and development discourse. These are the neoclassical theory and the endogenous growth theories. The neoclassical school holds that over the long run there is the tendency of per capita income of different countries to converge to a steady state per capita income. Convergence is said to occur when a poor economy grows than a rich economy in a way that the poor country catches up in the long run with the rich country. This can be absolute or conditional. It is absolute if long run forecasts of per capita income differences tend to zero¹ and conditional when they tend to constant.² Some studies have demonstrated that absolute convergence does not hold in general. According to them, few poor countries have been able to join or converge with clubs of rich or advanced countries. Generally, it has been found that poor countries remain poor. According to neoclassical theorists, their balanced growth paths will be parallel but not necessarily coincident or the same. This implies that technological progress is equally available across countries. Thus, economies having their per capita income initially above their balanced growth paths will tend to grow slower in the long run (conditional convergence). For a poor country, convergence means moving from second best to the first case. However, the endogenous growth theory disagrees with the predictions of the neoclassical growth theory. They contend that social increasing returns to scale associated with human and physical capital cause divergence. They emphasise the importance of initial conditions and the possibility of multiple equilibrium and that there is no tendency for income to converge in the long run. Others contend that the structure of incentives to invest which are different among countries cause divergence.³ Yet a few others submit that policy and institutions (domestic idiosyncrasies, bad policy or geography) cause divergence. The supporters of endogenous growth theory insist that policy and institutions are among the major factors behind divergence. Jones' investigation of the problem of economic integration with specific reference to convergence in the West African sub-region using both cross-sectional and time series approach reveals that ECOWAS countries form a convergence club. In other words, it shows the tendency for per capita income to converge and a diminution of the standard deviation of per capita income over time.⁴

Western development theories on Africa generally presume that the continent has to move away from its primitive/tradition socio-economic systems to embrace the modern systems of Western societies to be able to attain development. At the core of such theories is the assumption that the absence of democratic culture and the attendant socio-political instability and insecurity, among other variables, are the major obstructions to socio-economic transformation of African societies into developed modern societies. The fragility of the post-colonial nation-state system and the underdevelopment in the region are blamed on her inability to evolve Western-type culture of democracy. It is assumed that democracy and security are conveyors and accelerators of economic growth and development. The colonisation of Africa and the subsequent conscription of her economies into the vortex of capitalist production system was thus rationalised on the perceived advantage of transforming and optimising the inefficient forces of production and the traditional economic system.

At independence, the Europeans handed down a heritage of Western democracy and capitalist economies to their lackeys in the newly independent African nation-states. No sooner did the African leaders realise that there were no quick fixes of the inherited underdevelopment quagmire. Yet the mass of the citizenry were quite impatient to reap the dividends of the hard won independence and democracy. The failure of the post-colonial African economies and polities to respond positively to the stimulus of capitalism and democracy and deliver the expected dividends led to public dissatisfaction and disaffection which manifested in different forms

¹ A. Benard and S. Dulauf, 'Convergence in International Output', *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, 71, 1995, 161 – 173; D. Ben-David, 'Equalizing Exchange: Trade Liberalization and Income Convergence', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 108, 1993, 653 – 679; 'Trade and Convergence among Countries', *Journal of International Economics*, 40, 1996, 279 – 298.

² P. Evans and G. Karras, 'Convergence Revisited', *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 37, 1996, 249 – 265.

³ W. Easterly and R. Levine, 'Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Division', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112, 1997, 1203 – 1250; J.R. Barro and X. Sala-i-Martin, 'Convergence', *Journal of Political Economy*, 100 (2), 223 – 251, 1997.

⁴ Basil Jones, *Economic Integration and Convergence of Per Capita Income in West Africa* (Africa Development Bank, 2002), 18 – 47.

of insecurity. The new African leaders began to seek alternative development paradigms. In West Africa, democracy was quickly supplanted by military dictatorship beginning in the first decade of independence. The new military dictatorships which took over the realms of power promised to restore social order and bring about quick economic transformation. It was not long before they too, like their civilian predecessors, found out that there were no quick fixes of the problems of development within the framework of capital development theories. As military juntas began to replace one another in counter coups, they began to seek alternative strategies to resolve the nagging development question. In West Africa, like most other regions of the LDCs, the alternative was found in economic integration and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was launched in May 1975 with 'fanfare and expectations' in Lagos, Nigeria 'in what was then widely acclaimed as a triumph of the collective will of the states in the sub-region for a considerably improved economic future through enhanced regional cooperation and integration'.¹

The military juntas in West Africa managed to hold on to power deploying the arsenals of brute force. The fact that mass and civil society actions in most countries forced the exit of the military dictatorships is an indication that economic integration under the mechanism of ECOWAS failed to deliver on the expectations of the peoples. The people led by civil societies across the sub-region began a process of long and tortuous struggle for the restoration of democratic rule after the disappointing realisation that military dictatorship was an added burden to the pains of underdevelopment and insecurity. By the 1990s, most West African states experienced the restoration of democratic governance. Nigeria returned to democratic governance on 29 May, 1999. The struggle for the restoration of democracy have been given fillip by the campaigns of the Western capitalist ideologues that military dictatorship and its attendant political instability and social insecurity were major obstacles to the realisation of the development aspirations of the post-independence nation-states in the LDCs in West Africa. The experiences of accelerated development of the LDCs of Asia after their restoration of democratic governance appear to substantiate the sophistry of the Western ideologues. A decade and half after the liberal democratic culture restoration and experimentation in the sub-region and forty years after the establishment of ECOWAS and efforts at institution-building and protocols relating to the promotion of trade, transnational industrial and fiscal harmonisation, the implementational balance sheet of the ECOWAS scheme has been generally disappointing 'with very little to show in terms of intra-regional trade expansion and industrial development.'

It has thus been argued that after two decades of 'stillborn resolutions' enthroning ECOWAS as the sole regional entity in West Africa, the ECOWAS Heads of State summit could only 'solemnly pledge to the relevance of a differentiated approach in the march towards integration', thereby allowing any group of states within the community to adopt concrete and pragmatic measures to accelerate their integration.² Bassey and Nyong argue that the reason for this dismal performance in the march towards sub-regional integration in ECOWAS is 'partly political and partly structural, relating to the overall dynamics of "collective action" and coalition formation in unsettled condition of existential degeneracy wrenched by a crisis of legitimacy, civil disorder, underdevelopment and misgovernance.'³ Consequently, they argue that economic integration has not brought about significant changes in the distribution of real per capita GDP across ECOWAS member-states. The distribution did not change much during the last four decades. Also, a large part of member-states are converging to a deteriorating average income per capita. However, they note that the finding of no convergence in ECOWAS does not imply that sub-regional integration is not an efficient strategy to make developing countries, particularly ECOWAS, converge. Rather, they suggest that the economic cooperation process within ECOWAS needs to be strengthened and supported by sub-regional cooperation in maintaining peace and security.⁴ The next section of this study interfaces the experience of Nigeria with respect to economic integration, democracy and security since 1999 within the framework of ECOWAS.

Economic Integration, Democracy and Security in Nigeria since 1999

Nigeria's experience ties into the general experience in ECOWAS in terms of economic integration, democracy and security. In this regard, Bach rightly observes that:

Nigerian expectations that ECOWAS would offer a conduit for the expression of its influence were frustrated by consensus-driven decision-making processes, repeated delays in the implementation of decisions, and the Francophone member-states' behaviour as a bloc, cemented by their common belonging to the Communauté des États d'Afrique de L'Ouest.⁵

It is on this note that it is argued here that the interface between economic integration, democracy and insecurity

¹ Bassey and Nyong, *Nigeria and ECOWAS in the 21st Century*, 271.

² ECOWAS/CEDEAO, 2000, 2; Bassey and Nyong, *Nigeria and ECOWAS in the 21st Century*, 272.

³ Bassey and Nyong, *Nigeria and ECOWAS in the 21st Century*, 272.

⁴ Bassey and Nyong, *Nigeria and ECOWAS in the 21st Century*, 285 – 287.

⁵ Daniel Bach, *Nigeria's 'Manifest Destiny' in West Africa: Dominance Without Power*, *Afrika Spectrum*, 2007, 2, 301 – 321.

in Nigeria since 1999 has produced negative outcomes that further complicate the process of accelerating the development of West Africa within the framework of ECOWAS. The failure of Nigeria to effectively assume the leadership position and drive the process of economic integration is an indication of the reality of her poor performance in national development. This has led to the suspicion by most other member-states of Nigeria's motive for aspiring to assume the leadership role in ECOWAS. Because of this, Nigeria lacks the moral support to drive the economic integration process. Her failure to make meaningful progress in her national socio-economic development drive makes her also an object of ridicule at the sub-regional level. Since Nigeria has not made meaningful progress in her national economic development in spite of her huge potentials, it is difficult for her to convince other member-states of the community of her good intention and convince them of her leadership capacity and capabilities. Corruption has also typified the governmental processes to the point that Nigeria has been consistently rated high on the corruption index. This has affected her international perception even within the community. Nigeria is not perceived as making any effort at redeeming the image of a corrupt people inherited from military dictatorship.

Also, since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, the electoral process has been fraught with monumental electoral fraud accompanied by violence. The loss of hundreds of lives and property worth millions of naira that typifies post-election violence which characterise the electoral process is a strong indication of causal relations and correlation between democracy and insecurity in Nigeria since 1999. Elections in Nigeria since 2003 have been marked by reprisal violence in certain regions of the country where it is believed that the opposition candidate from that region of the country was fraudulently denied victory in unfair electoral processes. The fear of post-election violence and its ethno-religious dimensions reached its peak during the 2015 elections. This manifested in the cross-regional and cross-ethnic mass migration of citizens that marred the 2015 elections which were only redeemed by the magnanimous concession of defeat by the incumbent president. This singular act of political sagacity saved the much anticipated conflagration and disintegration of the country and the unprecedented loss of lives and property that would have accompanied it. Mutual fear and distrust among Nigerians reached a crescendo during the elections and the feeling of insecurity that accompanied the electoral processes was unprecedented.

In addition, in spite of the huge wealth generated from the petroleum sector, the mass of Nigerians live below the poverty line and youth unemployment is alarmingly high. The economy has failed to industrialise despite the huge potentials and opportunities of the country. Also, youth restiveness and militancy in the Niger Delta region posed monumental challenges to national and regional security. Apart from the environmental injustice that motivated the youth restiveness, the failure of national integration in Nigeria aggravated the feeling of exclusion while the open pillage of the collective resources by the power elite complicated the process of negotiation, thereby resulting in violent struggle. These added up to the unresolved issues of the extra-judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental right activist, by the military regime of Gen. Sani Abacha and the nagging derivation principle and fiscal federalism. The resultant violent struggle which was characterised by kidnapping of expatriates and economic sabotage, among others, threatened to shut down the economy of the country until the declaration of amnesty in 2009. But the reprieve brought by the amnesty programme was quickly obliterated by the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-eastern part of the country with all its implications for national and sub-regional security and development. The terrorist activities of the group have cost lives in tens of thousands and led to the destruction and sacking of whole communities in the north-east region of the country. Their activities have been extended to some states in the north-western and north-central regions of the country, including the seat of the Federal Government and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja. Social and economic activities have been brought to near complete halt in their spheres of activities and millions of Nigerians have been internally displaced while thousands of others have escaped to neighbouring countries. Women and girls, including the over two hundred Chibok school girls, have been kidnapped and taken hostages by the terrorist group, with the Nigerian military being helpless most of the time between 2011 and 2015. The security situation in Nigeria has been so precarious as to convince the United States security agencies to make public the prediction that the nation would not survive the 2015 elections. Though the elections are over and the nation did not disintegrate, there is still no confidence that the worst is over yet as there is a resurgence in the activities of separatist organisations like the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). It is really difficult to predict the tide of events in the new democratic dispensation that came on board in May 2015 in terms of security and development as the early signals are ominous. The economy has continued to take a plunge for the worst while terrorist activities in the north-east are assuming new and worsening dimensions. All of these developments do not only suggest the fragility of the democratic system but also negatively impact the morality, legitimacy and ability of Nigeria to rise up to the challenge of providing leadership in the tasks of economic integration, democratic governance and security in West Africa within the framework of ECOWAS. While the balance sheet of Nigeria's performance with respect to mediating economic integration, democracy and regional security since 1999 is poor, it does not suggest that regional integration in West Africa is not an attainable objective or a viable alternative development strategy. Rather, what it does

suggests is the need for member-states to hearken to the call of the voice of wisdom to begin to perceive regionalism as an 'expression of a common sense of identity and purpose contained in the creation and implementation of institutions that expresses a particular identity and shapes collective action within a geographical region.'¹ The next section of this study demonstrates what Nigeria needs to do to earn the respect and confidence of other member-states of ECOWAS to trust her with the leadership of building economic integration, stable democratic governance and regional security in West Africa in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion: Prognosticating Nigeria's Role in the Twenty-first Century ECOWAS

This study interfaces the nexus between economic integration, democracy and regional security in post-military West Africa with particular focus on Nigeria since 1999. It reviewed the theoretical underpinning of economic integration in West Africa. ECOWAS was established based on the veracity of the theoretical assumptions of economic integration and the practical precedence of similar schemes in other parts of the world, including LDCs and Africa. In view of the dissimilarities between the development realities of the industrial societies and the LDCs, including those within Africa, the concept of customs union was elaborated upon to accommodate the broader problem of development in the LDCs. In the specific case of Africa, the new independent nation-states were too small to cope individually with the challenges of building modern and industrial economies hence the adoption of regional and sub-regional economic integration schemes. For West Africa, ECOWAS was established as economic integration scheme to drive the process of accelerated development in the sub-region. In addition to the task of regional economic integration, the tasks of building regional peace and security, developing infrastructure, policy harmonisation to facilitate trade, and good corporate governance which are believed to complement the process of rapid development were thrust upon the community. As has been observed earlier, ECOWAS faltered in bringing about the desired development of the region. Western growth and development theories blamed the failure of economic integration and regional development on the absence of Western democratic culture and insecurity in West Africa. Consequently, West Africa made courageous effort to wrest political power from the military dictators that dominated governmental processes since the attainment of independence from the 1950s and restored democratic governance in the 1990s. Despite of the restoration of democracy, the prospect of economic integration has remained largely elusive while regional security has suffered a major setback. The Nigerian experience since 1999 illustrates the failure of economic integration and a coincidence between the restoration of democratic governance and the deterioration of security. From the experiences of other parts of the world, including LDCs in Asia and some African countries, it has been learnt that there is theoretically and practically nothing antithetical to development in economic integration schemes, democracy and security. Therefore, it is concluded that the failure of the forty years old West African economic integration scheme under the platform of ECOWAS does not suggest its impotence and ineffectiveness to drive sub-regional development and promote security. Rather, it is suggested that there is an urgent need for member-states to redefine their commitment to the development strategy of economic integration and the social basis of their sense of community within the framework of ECOWAS. They must be willing to give up the individual loyalty of the respective constituent nation-states to their erstwhile colonial masters and other intra-sub-regional organisations and surrender same to ECOWAS. The institutions and structures of ECOWAS must necessarily be strengthened in a manner congruent with the new resolve of its member-states. The governments and peoples of the respective member-states must be galvanised towards achieving the goals of the community. The community requires visionary, committed and motivational leadership to achieve its developmental goals. Nigeria, being the natural leader of West Africa, must fill in this gap and live up to her leadership responsibility and be seen to be doing so. What should Nigeria do to earn the leadership of ECOWAS?

To drive the process of transformation in the sub-region, Nigeria must first make a success of her national development goals, or be seen to be doing so, to convince others that she has the conviction, capability and capacity to lead other member-states through it at the sub-regional organisation level. She must do this by making good her aspiration of being one of the top twenty economies of the world by 2020. Nigeria is the largest economy in West Africa. By virtue of her over one hundred and seventy million population, she does not suffer from the small size that inhibits the capacity of most other countries in the region to embark on unilateral industrialisation. She must be seen to be making serious progress in her national industrial development. Also, she is not a land-locked state like many others in the region. In fact, she is a coastal state and enjoys all the natural economic advantages that come with being one. In addition, she is abundantly blessed by favourable climatic conditions and natural resources conducive for economic transformation. With the right quality of leadership mix and a genuine commitment to redeem the image of the country as one of the most corrupt nations of the world, the transformation of the industrial and economic fortunes of the country can be taken for granted within the shortest possible time. Her ability and willingness to attain economic growth and development will

¹ Godknows Boladei Igali, *Perspectives on Nation-State Formation in Contemporary Africa* (USA & Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2014), 274.

not only restore confidence in her leadership but will also minimise the degree of distrust she currently suffers from other member-states.

She must also urgently consolidate her nascent democracy. She must quickly embark on the completion of the ongoing reform of her electoral system to ensure that the vote of every eligible voter counts in the outcomes of elections in the country. In this way, the level of voter apathy in Nigeria will be reduced to the barest minimum and the fratricidal violence that accompanies the electoral process will become a thing of the past. The fear of reprisal violence that characterises elections and militates against optimal voter participation, including the exclusion of huge populations of ethno-religious groups resident in certain parts of the country from participating in the electoral process, would be eradicated. A comprehensive reform of the electoral process in Nigeria will guarantee the election of the right candidates for the right positions and the removal of non-performing and corrupt politicians from power through peaceful transitional processes. The electoral process in Nigeria will cease to be a source of insecurity, the carnage of human lives and the destruction of property with its implication for de-marketing the economy to foreign investors and the disruption of the domestic economy. This will go a long way to improving democratic governance in Nigeria and West Africa at large.

In addition, she must quickly resolve the numerous types of insecurity plaguing her. Besides defeating Boko Haram, she must urgently resolve the pastoralists – farmers conflicts wherever they may exist, in addition to resolving the numerous communal, ethnic, religious and criminal violence that are making life in Nigeria insecure. She must also put in place mechanisms to prevent the outbreak of future violence in any part of the country. She must establish mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts without allowing them to degenerate into violence. Social, economic and political justice must be guaranteed. Pending issues of environmental and fiscal injustice must be satisfactorily addressed with a view to promoting national integration across the different ethno-cultural and religious groups in the country. Law enforcement agencies should be adequately equipped to nip in the board potential criminal violence, including kidnapping and armed robbery.

If Nigeria is unable to provide the desired leadership, she must, in the least, be willing to step aside, allow and support another member-country to provide the needed leadership for the community in the twenty-first century. She does not have to impose her leadership, it should be earned. Unless all the above are done, and urgently too, post-military West Africa will become a typical example of the failure of Western theories to accelerate growth and development through the strategy of economic integration within the framework of ECOWAS in the twenty-first century. This will amount to collective suicide. This is because the post-military West Africa is witnessing the resurgence of different forms of violent conflict that now threaten regional security than ever in spite of the economic integration process that has been on-going for forty years and the return to democratic governance since the 1990s. If the issues raised here are not addressed, economic integration, democracy and regional security will continue to decelerate. To reverse this trend, West African states, governments and peoples must recognise the fact that it will be much more difficult to achieve development working separately. For LDCs like we have in ECOWAS, it is easier to be greater together by working together.