

The ECOWAS Platform and the Persisting Challenges of Integrating the West African Region: A Discourse

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Abstract

This research work contends that since the establishment of the ECOWAS it has been far behind in the area of reconciling its objectives with potent achievements. The sub-region's combined market of above 300 million inhabitants with a combined GDP of about US\$565 billion, with 11 of its 15 member countries listed in the category of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), as well as worrying per capita income. There are persisting challenges in the areas of the economy of members, challenges of governance, socio-cultural challenges in the areas of inadvertent post-colonial divides and abysmal integration culture; the community has as well been unnecessarily pre-occupied with conflict situations and recent terrorist activities among others. These challenges have eclipsed the Community's objectives. Elaborated in this research are these challenges which when overcome by ECOWAS signals the take-off of progressive development of the region. It is the opinion of this paper that the ECOWAS platform remains a credible pedestal for the region to dive into this age of neo-globalism for economic survival and should be strengthened in this direction.

Key words: Community, ECOWAS, Integration, Governance, RECs

I. Introduction

In the bid for an economically integrated West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in May 1975 following a joint proposal between Nigeria and Togo. It is an institutional manifestation of the inevitable necessity for cooperation and collaboration in the socio-economic needs of the sub-region. Integration of the sub-region became inevitable in view of the need to prepare the sub-region, as well as continental Africa, to reshape to curb neo-colonial challenges at the first instance, and on the long run square-up efforts to take a strong stand in the global capital-driven economy. Granting that the post 19th century is spectacular in history, characterized by dramatic changes and transformation, and marked by the waning of communism and triumph of capitalism, and repackaging (in a more phenomenal term) as globalization which entails the ushering of a new trend of technological innovation which is a product of continuous research and experimentation in all human endeavors (Bundu. 1997: 30). West Africa is not left out; it is not a trend that could be boycotted. This state of flux (globalization) tends to dare Africa with naked challenges. Bundu (1997: 30) has pointed out that 'the changes are so overwhelming that [among other things] they are undermining the cultural values of our peoples and threatening the very existence of some countries'. He argued further that 'Social change elsewhere in the world tends to be just as fundamental but generally positive and desirable, whereas in this region the changes appear to be initiated and sustained by economic decline and decay'. This problem validates expression in the assumption that Africa needs integration for survival; and this could be better achieved by avoiding the disintegration of the community and arresting the deterioration of societal norms and values. Developing countries have only few options – to allow themselves to be swallowed up by this predatory quagmire and remain dominated, or to seek for alternative route (which is found within the corridors of integration) or better still avoiding regional disintegration as a veritable option. There is no doubt that throughout the world, regional economic integration has been a prominent element of economic development for a good number of decades. Africa has not been left out. It has been compelled by both the smallness of the states that make up the region as well as by socio-cultural cum economic challenges. As noted by Peter,

Of the forty-five states in sub-Saharan Africa, twenty-four have fewer than 5 million inhabitants. Only one – Nigeria – has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than that of Hong Kong. Of the thirty-three countries listed in the World Bank's World Development Report for 1982 as 'low income', eighteen are African (Peter 1983: 1)

It is worthy of note that while the figures put in the above observation may have changed, Notwithstanding the change, Nigeria alone accounts for 60 per cent of the GDP of ECOWAS region with a disturbing aggregate per capita income which are still comparatively at the lowest ebb of global economic scales. Eleven out of the fifteen states of the region are categorized among the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The region has been witnessing a declining per capita income since political independence. 'The modest annual rate of 1.5% achieved during the 1960s' has been on the decline, it got to 1.2 per cent in the 1980s (Bundu, 1997). Africa's economic

growth fell by nearly half in 2011 to 2.7 per cent from 4.6 per cent in 2010 (2012 Economic Commission for Africa Report). A preponderance of factors stemming from both internal and external forces has combined to rip off the region of meaningful existence. The yearning for a better standard of living has been more often than not truncated by experimenting on one - economic and political - structural adjustment to the other.

These naked challenges are enough signals to make the socio-culturally divided West African states to expel their differences and forge a common socio-economic front. However, it is unfortunate that commitment to a common strategy is yet to be absolved; integration culture is yet to come to full bear. The issue of who plays the denominator role is more surfacing than the question of what and how West African states can collectively overcome the hedge-hammer of globalisation. The situation is worsened by the obvious political disparities of member States. The States of the community have not recorded an appreciable clean bill in domestic socio-economic situations. Politically, the aspiration of member States is marred by an unstable polity. The economies of (West African) states are as well rocking the boat in the integration drive. This leaves much to be desired of the sub-region, if it wishes to record any progress in the direction of counteracting the negative effect of globalisation, and surviving contemporary global configuration of skewed economic networking.

To argue that the awareness of the need for integration is new in the West African sub-region is to state the unacceptable; however, what have not been clearly stated in feasible terms, is the stages leading to a proper economic fusion of the sub-region (Okonedo 2000: 58); the reconciliation of varying internal differences of member states of the community; the evolution of a favourable and fertile polity for the sustenance of integration; and the expulsion of the colonial relic; in all reducing the ECOWAS goals as the defining element of each of the member states' foreign policy. Integration experiment has recorded a remarkable success in the world. It is the only defining factor for the 'great rebirth' of the South-East Asian states and as well as the sterling economic success of continental Europe. Africa, especially, West Africa, should be no exemption.

II. Theoretical Framework

The obsolescence of the 'old alliance system' as well as the potentialities of the state as the main persona in human development which was dealt a big blow by the outbreak of two great wars occasioned scholars (especially idealists) of international politics to have a rethink on the pathways to peace, interaction and cooperation. The emergence and success of the European Union through the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) formed in 1952 later turned European Economic Community (EEC) in 1958 (culminating into the European Union) brought to a great intellectual credence the postulations of the integration theorists. The integration theorists are modeled as functionalists and neo-functionalists. Functionalism as spearheaded by David Mitrany, sprang from the increasing concern of the obsolescence of the state as a form of social organization, proposing to build a form of authority based on functions and needs, which linked authority with needs, scientific knowledge, expertise and technology, etc which will 'spill-over' to other areas. It provided a supra-territorial concept of authority. It disapproves of authorities built by states on the ground of territories (Ogbonna 2012:220). The neo-functionalists however, soon yanked out from the functionalist flank. Chief among the theorists, Hass centered his argument on the assumption that 'integration proceeds as a result of the work of relevant elites in the governmental and private sectors, who support integration for essentially pragmatic reason, such as the expectation that the removal of trade barriers will increase markets and profits (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff 1997: 422). Neo-functionalism as a theory and strategy of regional integration, re-introduces the concept of territorialism, though without downplaying its global dimension. It sees integration as being steered by such domestic factors as elites, political parties and interest group within a state; in all the interaction of the domestic political forces as a springboard for exporting community interaction to a beneficial pedestal.

As a point of departure, this research is situated within the theories of integration and cooperation relying on models provided by the functionalist and neo functionalist theorists. However, while the functionalists approach provides a model for the European Union, same. African countries collectively constitute consumers of manufactured goods and producers of raw materials. As such technical cooperation cannot guarantee same output as it were in the EU. But this is not to say that technical cooperation is not necessary. This is not to say also, that strengthened agricultural policies amongst member states, streamlining of beneficial mineral resources and telecom policies, and building of interchange transport networks, streamlining of banking services etc. will not yield positive result in any direction the sub-region would want to follow in its integration effort. These theories have direct bearing with regional integration. It places premium on the efforts of states as well as technical units.

III. Prospects of the ECOWAS Platform

The ECOWAS has recorded a noticeable milestone in its effort to attain set goals. In as much as the records show that achievements in this regard are at the lowest ebb of the needed input to drive the development of the region; it is however imperative to offer an analytical insight as part of a diagnostic effort to tackle the general impediments confronting the Community. It should be mention that the birth of the ECOWAS in 1975

concretized by the signing of its Treaty by pioneering members is a remarkable achievement for the region and the entire Africa. A region hitherto torn apart by both historical delineation coupled by 'alien complexities' foisted on these ex-colonies as a residue of colonialism (Ogbonna and Ogundiwin 2012: 221).

Indeed, The ECOWAS Treaty, the Revised Treaty of 1993, as well as a plethora of other protocols, conventions and agreements shows that the states of the region obviously have an understanding of the pathway to regional economic development. Therefore, a comprehensive framework is neither absent nor deficient for the attainment of an integrated West Africa. There is a clear understanding of the role of trade, infrastructure, private sector participation, inputs by self organising and autonomous associations and International Governmental Organisations (IGOs), free movement of goods, services and people within the Community, and more by member states. Within these foci, to mention but a few, the West African Gas Plant (WAGP) has been completed, and the states of the region are linked by a West African Highway. There is a trade liberalization scheme under the auspices of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) which was slated to take-off in phases. Closely related to the ETLS includes a more elaborate and intensified effort to render West Africa totally borderless by graduating the Community from ECOWAS of states to ECOWAS of peoples by 2020. The states of the region have also initiated a uniform passport scheme which allows a bearer 90 days stay within the Community without visa. There is an ultimate target to phase out the nine different and inconvertible currencies of member states with the introduction of a single currency for the Community to be handled by the West African Monetary Institute established in January 2001.

With the increasing effort at democratization by member states and the attendant economic imperative typified by an explosion of private sector participation across the region in areas ranging from banking, telecommunication, the oil sector and to the entertainment industry like Movie and Music industries. The establishment of an ECOWAS Tribunal and ECOWAS Parliament as well as the existence of a variety of other self-organising groups like the West African Manufacturers' Association (WAMA), West African Youth Union (WYU), West African Women Association (WAMA), the West African Road Transport Union (WARTU), (Akinbobola 2000: 92, 95) have all contributed in forging a Community spirit and integration culture among the self-organising and relatively autonomous members of the region. However, these efforts though commendable do not in any way obliterate the challenges that have persistently rendered the ECOWAS impotent.

IV. What are the Persisting Challenges Confronting the ECOWAS?

The ECOWAS is a troubled union with quite a number of challenges threatening its relevance. In as much as the nearly four decades union has managed to survive so far, it has only remain a talk-shop with its documents being a compendium of finesse intellectual rhetoric and policy option devoid of political will to set conventions flying and troubled by other socio-cultural elements. The persistence of these challenges portends the ECOWAS as defective and when overcome signals the renaissance of the Community among the comity of states. These challenges are discussed under two themes and elaborated herein below;

1. Trade, infrastructural and Regulatory Challenges

A. The Trade Factor and the Economy of Member states

Economic challenges are ever surfacing in the integration bid of the ECOWAS, posing one of the greatest challenges on the way of the establishment of an integrated market, with Common External Tariff (CET). The economy of the community has posed serious challenges to the attainment of its purpose. Member countries are ranked within the brackets of Highly Indebted Nations, poorest countries by wealth estimate and or within the parameters of any other measurement indicators commensurable with underdevelopment, rural economy or otherwise. The narrowness of the community's market is a serious challenge in this direction. There is no gain saying that the volume of intra West African trade is small. This is owed to the fact that states of the community are all developing and unindustrialized, as such suppliers of raw materials (see table 4.1). Trade is the nucleus of successful integration and as such a potent indicator for the measurement of performance, however, the ECOWAS has not fared well in intra-regional trade (Gbadebo 2004: 144 - 154). Trade within the community is yet to be *demonopolized*; imports are not streamlined and custom procedures not transparent. There is only a slight increase in the performance of export revenues usually from a few primary commodities or from a single product mineral commodity (Imohe 2007). As shown in table 4.1 - **the ECOWAS member countries as well as their primary commodity of trade**. Its disclosure is that the economy of all the member state of the community is import driven. This is owed to the fact that they are all producers of close to homogenous raw material with only exceptions in the area of export of mineral resources which as well is not a fair economic indicator in development. The best of integration, or better put, the essence of integration is best achieved when the economies of the integrating countries are so heterogeneously diffused in trade commodity as to accommodate a reasonable interdependence within the region first and secondly sustain a collective trading bloc in relation to other states outside the bloc.

Table 4.1: Primary Trade Commodities of ECOWAS member countries

COUNTRY	Primary Exports
Benin	Cotton, Crude oil, Palm products, Cocoa
Burkina Faso	Cotton, Livestock, Gold
Côte d'Ivoire	Cocoa, Coffee, Timber, Petroleum, Cotton, Bananas, Pineapples,
Gambia, The	Peanut products, Fish, Cotton lint,
Ghana	Gold, Cocoa, Timber, Tuna, Bauxite, Aluminum, Manganese ore, Diamonds and recently oil (at a small scale)
Guinea	Bauxite, Alumina, Gold, Diamonds, Coffee, Fish, Agricultural products
Mali	Cotton, Gold, Livestock
Niger	Uranium ore, Livestock, Cowpeas, Onions
Nigeria	Petroleum and petroleum products 95%, Cocoa, Rubber
Senegal	Fish, Groundnuts (peanuts), Petroleum products, Phosphates, Cotton
Sierra Leone	Diamonds, Cocoa, Coffee, Fish
Togo	Reexports, Cotton, Phosphates, Coffee, Cocoa

Source: Odularu, G. O. 2009.

In a 2006 study, the World Bank, estimated the entire sub-Saharan African region to be the poorest in the world, with a growing population (from 164 million in 1981 to 314 million as at 2006), but with savings rate hovering around zero (The World Bank 2006: 42). Four of the ECOWAS member states conspicuously ranked among the bottom-10 countries by total wealth in 2000; Chad ranked 2nd, Guinea-Bissau fourth, Niger sixth, and Nigeria ranking ninth after Burundi and before Ethiopia. A 2010 study puts 11 out of the 15 ECOWAS countries as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by wealth estimate, while the most recent ECA (2012) Report confirms that growth in African countries fell by nearly half in 2011.

B. Financial Sector disparities and Poor payment system

There is a wide gulf between the financial sectors of states of the Community. Countries like Nigeria boast of banks with a strong capital base while their counterparts are nowhere close in this regard. This is to say that the financial sector services amongst the community members are still rudimentary (Essien and Omanukwue 2004: 49), without existence of uniform regulatory/supervisory rules and an inefficient fund transfer and payment system characterized by delays due to interbank IT incompatibility platform as well as varying inconsistent national payment regulatory legislations. This is particularly unbridled in Nigeria. However, the diffusion of Nigerian banks operations in most West African states, seeks to arrest this challenge but to a molecular extent; banking correspondence is virtually low, leading to high transaction cost and low trade intensity. The West African Monetary Agency is yet to put in place an effective regional payments system. The payment system is still complicated; with most of the currencies of the region not convertible, and the various exchange regulations impeding the flow of capital within the zone.

C. Infrastructure and Regulatory Regime Challenges

As the case with economically weak states, infrastructure, which should be a rudimentary fuel to development, is at its worst state in the community. Inter and intra regional railings, road networks, energy, telecommunication facilities as well as expedient border ancillaries is still at an uncomfortable state. In the areas of telecommunication, ECOWAS's proposed fused telecom network- which will link the entire region is still an optical illusion as inter regional calls are charged at international rate while commuters bear the rage of roam tariff/charges. A modernized and expanded network which would have a direct bearing on business activities and trade is yet to be achieved. ECOWAS proposed West African Gas-pipeline, between Nigeria, Ghana, Benin and Togo has recently been completed though with less than optimal productivity.

A closer study of ECOWAS infrastructural as well as (physical) integrative development initiative reveals a voluntarily involvement of only few members of the community who feels that their development / interest is maximized individually by such projects. Only few of the states are out to make short term sacrifices for the long term benefit of integrated market of the region. The tenacity at which the member states of the community guide

their borders with quadrupled check-points is a reminder that the whole essence of market integration of the community is a theory yet to be absolved in practice by most states of the community. Odularu (2009) reported thus;

According to an ECOWAS study, there are seven checkpoints in every 100 km on the road between Lagos and Abidjan; two on every 100 km stretch between Accra and Ouagadougou, etc. The implication of this is that it has encouraged the corrupt government law enforcement agents to consistently harass and extort money from regional citizens, there by undermining regional economic activities.

Odularu's report is a worrisome reality. The duplicity of these checkpoints and its manning by unscrupulous and unchecked agents creates its own rather expansive custom regime; a blatant disincentive to intra-West African trade. Table 4.2 shows the numbers of official checkpoints operational within the community.

Table 4.2: Official Checkpoints on Selected Routes of West African Highways, December 2000.

Highway	Distance (Km)	Number of checkpoints	Number of checkpoints per 100 km
Lagos to Abidjan	992	69	7
Lome to Ouagadougou	989	34	4
Abidjan to Ouagadougou	1122	37	3
Niamey to Ouagadougou	529	20	4
Cotonou to Niamey 1036	1036	34	3
Accra to Ouagadougou	972	15	2

Source: ECOWAS Secretariat 2001, 'ECOWAS 1975 – 2000: Achievements and Prospects,' Abuja, Nigeria

Free movement of persons, goods, services and capital is very strategic for the actualization of the ECOWAS's vision of a borderless community with closely knit economic base that possesses the capacity to meet the social, cultural and technological aspiration of member states. Road network is the blood of transportation within and among the ECOWAS community. In respect to this, the ECOWAS member states have ratified certain Protocols; Protocol A/P.1/5/79; promotes the gain of migration as a development vehicle in the sub-region, and on Road Transportation and Governance, the Heads of States of ECOWAS states ratified Convention A/P.2/5/85 with intent of regulating interstate road transport. This Protocol is designed to encourage unfettered movement of persons, goods and services through harmonization of member states' transport policies (Anon. 2009: 13). Nevertheless, despite all these protocols, free movement of persons, goods and services exist only on paper.

By opening up the frontiers of the sub-region to competitive industrial activities, it helps to contribute to the process of building strong domestic economies by the participation of community citizens in the capital and industrial revolution in the sub-region. It is this anticipated gain that existing checkpoints, harassments, extortion and intimidation (at the borders) is choking to moribund. Unnecessary checkpoints and barriers are infrastructural disadvantages, totally militating against developments and needs effort to be expedited on the Free Movement Monitoring Team (FMPMT) in order to checkmate excesses in this direction. These incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the community highways are characterized by inhuman treatment and extortion from commuters; officers arbitrarily impose charges for stamping of passport at checkpoints as shown in the table (4.3) below:

Table 4.3 Showing different charges Imposed on Travelers on Various West African Borders

BORDER POST	CATEGORY OF PASSPORT	AMOUNT
Seme or Idi-iroko (Nigeria/Benin)	*Virgin passport holder (C)	N2,000 or 5000CFA (both Nigeria/Benin)
Hilakoji (Benin/Togo)		300 CFA for Benin officers for passing while Togo officials collect 3,000-5,000 CFA
Aflao (Togo/Ghana)		3000-5,000 CFA (by Togolese officers) 5-10 GhC (by Ghanaian officers)
Seme (Nigeria/Benin)	*First time particular route passer passport holder (B)	N500-N1000 by Nigeria officials N1,000 or 2000 CFA by

		Benin officials
Hilakoji (Benin/Togo)		300 CFA for Benin officers for passing while Togo officials collect 2000 CFA
Aflao (Togo/Ghana)		2,000 CFA by Togolese officers 5 GhC by Ghanaian officers
Seme (Nigeria/Benin)	*All route passer passport holder (Regular) (A)	N200 or 500 CFA (both Nigeria/Benin)
Hilakoji (Benin/Togo)		300 CFA collected by Benin officers for passing while Togo officials collect 1,000 CFA
Aflao (Togo/Ghana)		1,000 CFA by Togolese officers Ghanaian officials rarely collect any fee.

Note: that ₦ (Naira), GhC (Cedi), CFA are the national currencies of Nigeria, Ghana and Francophone West African Countries respectively.

***Virgin passport** is regarded as a newly issued passport that is about to be used at the frontiers (this was first practiced by the Nigerian officers and has gradually become a popular use among immigration officers in the sub-region)

***First time particular route passer passport** is applicable to countries with multiple route borders along the coast. Countries like Nigeria and Benin. For instance, a passenger who traveled to Ghana or Togo from Nigeria using Seme border, and was duly stamped at the border, when returning if he/she decides to come through Igolo/Idi-iroko border for the first time, will be regarded as a first time route passer as his/her passport was not stamped at that route. Same applies if the commuter does the reverse.

***All route passer passport holder** is a commuter who has a valid passport that has been stamped at all the various routes/borders.

2. Challenges of Governance, Conflicts and Socio-culture

The governments of the individual states of the community remain at the centre of driving developments in the direction of attaining integration. It is the governments that throw or withhold their consent on Conventions or Protocols as well as makes deliberate policies towards implementing such. They are the peddlers of the will to forge ahead in the integrative process. A success is achieved therefore, when the individual states have structured their polity in a way that it inevitably absorbs a marriage of policies with the regional bloc and or is not soaked in distractions from political instability, terrorism and conflicts. The challenges in the areas of governance militating against the successful establishment of a Common Market are as follows;

A. Lack of Political Will

Political will and governance amongst the states of the community has posed a serious challenge to the attainment of a common market in the West African region. Political will is the primary impetus and the requisite pipeline for the assimilation of a state's agenda into a dynamic policy. The domestication of the community's policies is vital for the achievement of its agenda. As noted by Nwoke (2005: 132), 'the record of the implementation of the numerous community Acts and Decisions is not very encouraging because many member states do not show necessary political will to follow through to implement the Protocols they have signed'. Thus most policies get stuck at the borders of implementation.

Contrary to what is obtainable in the other successful regional integration organizations of same standing, a collective view is absent in global issues. Osuntokun (2006: 115) noted that a common political worldview is pertinent if Africa wishes to attain integration. Member states pursue divergent of foreign policy objectives which has no anchor with their regional commitments in the areas of integration. A close observation of Ghana's John Atta Mills Inauguration Speech reveals that the issues of ECOWAS were not attended to. Nigeria's shift from 'afrocentric' foreign policy which it has engineered over decades to Late President Musa Yar' Adua's 'Citizenship diplomacy' signals a shift in focus as well as relegation of the zeal for regional integration to the bench. Financially, reports reveal that many member states have been lackadaisical in their payment of obligatory levies to the community. These levies are needed for the successful plowing of the community's

structures – policies and secretariat.

B. Challenges of Corruption and Political Instability

Politicking for development is still at the lowest ebb among the states of the region. Personalization of power and other political vis-à-vis development-suppressing malpractices involving the abuse of stewardship, looting of the states treasury, election rigging, etc. and its attendant regime of troubled and turbulent polity has been a bane in the development of the region. While most states of other regions of the world is grappling with developmental policies, most states of the African region as a whole is sunk into a dreaded regime of corruption, political instability, military ‘distractions’, and general subversion of public will. Political and social upheaval which most times graduate to full scale war is eminent in the region and led to the adoption of the Protocol on Non-Aggression and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence in 1978 and 1981 respectively. Even most of the democratizing regimes of the community are running governments with either sick legitimacy or fallacies of *electoralism*, where elections are held without instituting democracy. Prolonged military rule in West Africa not only deep-seated political instability, it has also fanned a growing culture of militarism which has combined with other factors, not least among them, deep-seated economic decline and wide spread youth disaffection to propel several countries of the community to a full scale war. Countries like Sierra-Leone, Liberia and Guinea Bissau (where it was reported that the military killed the President of Guinea-Bissau, after assassinating his Chief of Staff in the first quarter of 2009) were occupied with a serious civil unrest that though effectively intervened by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), they are yet to outlive its rubble; while Togo had a personalized transition of power from father to son – as Eyadema’s decades of military rule in Togo only but ended in a scripted hand-over of power to his son. Ghana before the advent of President J. Rawlings’ administration was sunk in a deep corruption menace which strangled both development and involvement of foreign investors in the country. It is only but recently that it started taking shape. Ivory Coast is yet to take shape while Mali is still boiling. Nigeria is yet to overcome its high scale corruption. Its anti-corruption agencies are yet to survive eclipse by both internal politics and power intrigues; aggressive reforms are slowed down by stiffening corruption. More recent is the *boko haram* nightmare that is shaking the very foundation of the unity of the state. The situation in the country has negatively impacted seriously on the entire African region; as a regional heavy-weight has shown but negative examples in the areas of political stability, corruption and economic stability. The region finds itself moving from one terrible twist to the other. Colonialism gave way to a regime of widespread coups, followed by a regime of civil wars and emergent of tyrants, and to political manipulators of self-rule. In all, (West) African leaders have held their citizens hostage (Ayittey 1991: 1) back-benching developmental policies as only but secondary options.

The worst remain that these instituted regimes of self-aggrandizement (by the politicians of the region) initiates a cycling tie of corruption that is all encompassing. In this direction while mass looting of the states’ treasury is perpetuated by public office holders and bureaucrats, a similar race is permeated at all other sectors; for instance politics becomes so attractive that politicians pay their way in (via the states’ electoral structure, at a close watch as well as participation of the law enforcement agents), the emergence of political financiers who stand close by to recoup their investments in quadruples and more, the legal regimes as well as other policy frameworks becomes sway, the other public officers are challenged to compete with their political contemporaries – the borders becomes porous, while the academics is frustrated out of quality; all at the detriment of good life. The situation becomes more controversial when few or no state of the region is immune with the moral locus, as well as has the finance to arrest the situation in the region.

Similarly, lack of policy continuity and military interregnum in politics barricades policy sustenance and development. Each regime and political dispensation in the community tends to assume power with its own scripted policies, giving disincentive to the maturity of fore-established policies. This makes the states to always come back to the take-off line each time a new regime is in power. This does not augur well with sustainable development planning and implementation.

C. Socio-Cultural Challenges emanating from Colonial Hang-over

ECOWAS as a community suffers setbacks emanating from the sphere of socio-culture. This is no doubt expected of a system with volatile historical antecedent as well as divergent colonial experience; the states of the community cuts across different and varying socio-cultural backgrounds with regards to colonialism as well as internally diffused ethnic groupings. Xenophobia is yet to be overcome by the region, and as such the socio-cultural challenges of the region include colonial hang-over, suspicion among member states, lack of integration culture, challenges of conflicts and duplicity of Regional Economic organizations among member states. Colonialism left the region divided on the basis of ex-British colonies (Anglophone), former French colonies (francophone), and also Portuguese former colonies. These divisions have instituted barriers in the areas of policy integration among the different blocs of the community. Most discouraging is the fact that these countries give preference to their former colonial over-lords and as such dance to their dictates at the expense of

regional cohesion. In the same vein, the imperialist states on their parts strive to retain their elsewhere colonies in the name of 'spheres of interest' and 'traditional allies', making them their primary call of trade, and undermining and frustrating arrangements towards their developments. The imperialist states tend to enjoy awry sentiments from their ex-colonies as necessary partners of their development. France has been active in this skewed arrangement, with an accelerated export to its former colonies, as well as mingling directly in the politics of the region. This is evident in its role in frustrating the establishment of ECOWAS and continued maintenance of military presence in its ex-colonies. This situation pictures a situation where the long term benefits of development is forgone to the unsustainable yield to colonial sentiment; a situation purposefully orchestrated by the imperial power for selfish interest. Deliberately networked by the ex-colonial over-lords, suspicion is instituted among member states of the community, balkanizing it on the basis of colonial leanings, making policy objectives to be approached as secondary. The required level of regional solidarity and community spirit is truncated by this divide. Community spirit has failed to develop over time, with deficit conveyance of perception of common interest. States of the sub-region tend to jealously guide their polity against suspected domination of Nigeria. Nigeria is a regional heavy-weight with both superior human and natural resources, in terms of population, Gross Domestic Products and mineral endowments (Bundu 1997: 39); the smaller states of the region strife harder for policy options to be footed only on the vague basis of counter-balance, rather than contents of developmental strongholds. Thus, Nigerian imperialism is feared more than underdevelopment.

D. The absence of Integration Culture

For the successful attainment of integration in the region, the member states ought to first see it as well as prioritize it as a vehicle of development. The states individually ought to be developmental minded and strategize towards the attainment of development, from which integration may be seen as an indispensable tool. In the words of Bundu (1997: 37), 'a developmental culture must be fostered, both within government and among the people, so that concern for a better future replaces preoccupation with satisfaction of immediate needs'. If development ranks high on the national agenda of the individual member states and ECOWAS seen as a vehicle that could convey it, Decisions of ad hoc Committees and Protocols, etc. would gradually and effectively graduate to well articulated and strategized development blue-prints. Nonetheless, the question remain since 1975, when the countries of West Africa committed themselves to forming an economic community, how many member states have drawn up national development plans or programmes with regional market as a point of reference? (Bundu, *ibid*: 37, 38). What measures have been introduced by governments as incentives for intra-West African business/trade, and what encouragement are the ordinary people offered to think in West African terms? An integration culture is yet to materialize and accorded the high priority it deserves on national economic agendas. There seem to be totally no incentive for integration culture to breed upon.

E. Duplicity of RECs among Member States

Most members of the community belong to one or more other regional economic communities. This results in duplication of integration effort. Amongst the 15 ECOWAS countries three (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) belong also to the Mano River Union, while five of the francophone countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo) belongs to UEMOA; Guinea Bissau belongs to the trio of ECOWAS, MRU and UEMOA. The UEMOA is a francophone duplication of ECOWAS's role, however with an advanced system having a common currency (FCFA), a monetary union (WAEMU), a common external tariff, and a common set of business laws (Obi, 2000: 12). This rivalry can undermine the opportunities and potential benefits of a pan-West African cooperation and integration project, as submitted by Nwoke (2005: 133).

Table 4.3: Showing members of the West African Region and their memberships of RECs

COUNTRY	ECOWAS	MRU	UEMOA
Benin	XXX		XXX
Burkina Faso	XXX		XXX
Cape Verde	XXX		
Cote d'Ivoire	XXX		XXX
Gambia	XXX		
Ghana	XXX		
Guinea	XXX		
Guinea-Bissau	XXX	XXX	XXX
Liberia	XXX	XXX	

Mali	XXX		XXX
Niger	XXX		XXX
Nigeria	XXX		
Senegal	XXX		XXX
Sierra Leone	XXX	XXX	
Togo	XXX		XXX

Source: UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics (2005) and African Development Report, (2000)

Conclusion

The ECOWAS platform is a fundamental one in this age of ‘new globalism’ and persistent retrogression and retrenchment of African economies. It is therefore imperative to infer as follows;

- Africa (whether as a region or as a whole) needs integration not for prosperity, but for survival;
- The issues of development of the region are overwhelming enough to receive treatments not veiled by ideological limitations and nationalist protectionism and conservatism;
- Conflicts and instability are distractive to the common good of the community
- Private sector participation is a requisite vista for an integrated West Africa.
- The states of the community should express the will and provide the requisite environment, politics and policies for such.
- The domestic policies of member states (and even their constitutions) should mirror policy options favorable to the community agenda while foreign policy of member states should express integration spirit.
- Civil society and other autonomous/self organising groups should raise the bar on democratic struggles knowing that the best of integration would be incubated by democratic regimes.
- The streamlining of custom duties among member states remain imperative, especially in areas with spill-over implications like automobile, textiles/clothing, etc.

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Appendix: Map of Africa, Highlighting ECOWAS member states



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