



Regional Integration and Economic Development: A Study of Economic Community of West African States, 2015-2020

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Abstract: The integration of different regions in the world has become an increasingly important factor in the economic development of the world. This is particularly true for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which is made up of fifteen West African countries. The last five years have seen a significant increase in regional integration in the region, in both economic and political terms. However, regional integration is not without its challenges which inhibited the regional block towards economic development. Therefore, this study examined the role of regional integration on the economic development of ECOWAS, 2015-2022. The study is anchored on the neo-functionalism theory by Ernst B. Haas in the 1960s. This study adopted a historical approach. Data were sourced from the secondary method which include books, journal publications, newspapers and government publication; which were subjected to content analysis. The findings revealed that the main factors that have contributed to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states are political factors, geopolitical issues, and social disparities with an immense gap in economic performance across the 15 countries. The major challenges to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS region for economic development of the region include the artificial colonial borders that leads to boundary disputes, armed disputes, high degree of distrust among Member States, inefficacy of the regional institutions, limited recognition of local identities, low capacity of ECOWAS states to comply with regional objectives, the presence of non-state actors, the inability of the region to effectively address intra-state conflicts, economic challenges of members, limited capacity of governments to implement regional regulations, and the lack of coordination between States within the ECOWAS. Despite some observed drawback ECOWAS has the capability of engineering socio-economic development of the region. Based on the identified findings, the study recommended that ECOWAS should seek to strengthen its internal challenges of political and economic reoccurring crisis as the endogenous factors are the foundation and thereafter form international alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors. In order to successfully implement its policies, ECOWAS should collaborate with external actors in order to ensure that these policies are in line with international law and regulations but the emphasis is on the harmonization of endogenous factors.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Regional Integration, Economic Development.

INTRODUCTION

ECOWAS is an acronym that stands for Economic Community of West Africa States, it was established by the Treaty of Lagos of May 28, 1975 (Eziakor, 2014, pp. 1-2). This fifteen member State organization has always benefitted from the magnanimous posture of Nigeria. The ideas behind Nigeria's championing of ECOWAS demonstrate her concern for sub-regional unity, economic, technical and political cooperation. Ultimately, the aim was to reduce incessant and latent political and boundary problems, guarantee the member States a more respectable place in the international society, encourage a coordinated development and reduce their dependence on foreign powers. Nigeria has indeed been actively playing prominent and outstanding roles by assisting countries within the West African sub-region (Eziakor, 2014, pp. 1-2).

To show good neighbourliness, Nigeria's foreign policy has also pointed in the direction of helping and working with ECOWAS member states for the development of this sub-region. To that effect, on May 28, 1975, fifteen West African states signed the Treaty of Lagos, establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Zagaris, 1978, p. 153). The Treaty represents a landmark in the history of African integration in that it establishes cohesive trade relations between French and English speaking African countries among which trade and commercial intercourse have been virtually nonexistent. The objective of ECOWAS is to foster economic cooperation and development, especially in the areas of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial matters, and in social and cultural aspects as well. As a result of such economic cooperation and development, ECOWAS aims to improve the standard of living among its members, augment their economic stability and promote closer relations within the community (Zagaris, 1978: pp. 153-154). Cumulatively, it is proper to say that ECOWAS is centrally formed for the purpose of achieving socio-economic and political development of West African states.

Oluwusi (2016, pp. 1-5) points out that regional integration has been a key component of economic development across developing countries of the world over the years. West Africa in particular has discovered the importance of regional integration as a means of solving the problems of development facing the region. Almost all countries belong to one or more blocs within which trade agreements are made. This is evident in Nigeria's active membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), Cotonou Agreement (CA), the European Union (EU) – African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Agreement, and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the United States of America (USA). The same goes for many other countries in the world today. This means that integration has come to stay in our global system.

ECOWAS has been able to record some degree of success in relation to economic integration, market integration, physical Integration, integration of the production base, political cooperation, promotion of good governance and democracy, regional security initiative, conflict prevention (ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone), humanitarian assistance, post-conflict reconstruction, free movement of people, abolition of visa, right of residence and establishment, ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme, Customs Union (5-band Common External Tariff), monetary cooperation through the creation of an economic and monetary union, regional transport facilitation programme, improvement of customs procedure, construction of a West African highway network (from Lagos to Nouakchott) and (from Dakar to N'djamena), ie a total of 11000 km of interconnecting roads to assist landlocked countries, interconnection of national railway networks, construction of joint border posts, improvement in air transport, telecommunication, electronic transactions, fight against cybercrime, creation of West African Telecommunication Regulators Assembly–WATRA, promotion of peace and good governance etc (Magbagbeola, 2009, p. 21). However, there are some challenges that are still plaguing this regional organization. To a large extent, economic development is the central goal of the majority of the countries of the world. There is no doubt that it would appear in debates and public discourse from time to time. Raising the well-being and socio-economic status of peoples everywhere is easily the most important social role facing us today in the world. Annually aid is disbursed,

investments are undertaken, policies are framed, and elaborate plans hatched to achieve the goal of economic development or at least to draw closer to it.

The idea of regional integration is often inspired by a cluster of considerations centrally pointed towards economic development within the region it is taking place. The attraction of integration lies in the role it is seen as playing in the structural transformation of the individual countries of the region. Despite the difficulties enumerated above, industrialization remains a policy goal for all countries within West Africa. It is seen as providing the opportunity for promoting that sector without diverting funds from other sectors and leading to a more hopeful situation of protected industries developing to the point where they might not need protection because they would have learnt-by-doing within the region. Additionally because the developing countries are unable to meet the exacting standards demanded of manufactured goods in the markets of the industrialized countries, a regional market may offer them the opportunity to restructure their economies.

There is no doubt that West African countries need to restructure their economies and also to diversify their markets. Whether regional economic integration can help in achieving these and other developmental goals will have to be assessed. Presently, the aspiration for regional integration in the light of the quest for economic development has shown very disappointing results so far in West Africa. It is evident that much of Africa, especially West Africa, is presently riddled with poverty, disease, ignorance, food insecurity and famine, with a large external debt and continued mismanagement of human, material and physical resources (Iwuagwu, 2000, p. 73). This realities calls for concerted efforts to bring about regional integration for economic development for this region to catch up with the ever dynamic world.

Economic integration is needed most by the developing countries that do not seem to have the conditions that would make such schemes viable. The hope continues to be that the dynamic gains that might result from integration would lead to a transformation of the economies of the participating countries. Thus, many have proposed that trade diversion may be an undesirable but inevitable consequence of attempts to industrialize. Measures such as integration which might have short-run negative impacts on world welfare and severe problems for the participating countries, are considered as necessary and inevitable.

African countries, and particularly West African countries, have had a fairly long history of repeated attempts to link themselves together, both in various sub-groups and even continent-wide, through several broad types of regional integration and cooperation arrangements. In virtually all cases, these attempts have reflected the desire to deal, in one way or another, with the perceived growth-retarding problems thought to be associated with a number of key elements of the structure of African countries (Oyejide, 2000 cited in Adejuwon, 2011, p. 15). Today, there is no region of the world that is not encompassed by one or more regional groupings (Adejuwon, 2011, p. 15).

It is evident that effective and sustainable regionalization can only happen in an economic, political and social environment that can sustain the effort. This environment does not yet exist in most African states (Olivier, 2008 cited in Adejuwon, 2011, p. 15-16). Consequently, this study takes a closer look at the regional integration efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and its role and aggregate performance in the sub-region's search for alternative strategies for sustainable socio-economic development and self-reliance through regional economic integration.

Statement of the Problem

The integration of different regions in the world has become an increasingly important factor in the economic development of the world. This is particularly true for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which is made up of fifteen West African countries. The last five years have seen a significant increase in regional integration in the region, in both economic and political terms. However, ECOWAS as regional integration block has some inherent problems which inhibited the regional effort towards economic development.

Firstly, there is the issue of economic disparity between member states. Despite the efforts of the ECOWAS to promote regional integration, there are still significant economic disparities between member states. For example, the GDP per capita of Nigeria is three times that of Ghana and four times that of Liberia (Oyinlola, 2018). This economic disparity has been a major impediment to the successful integration of the region, as it creates a sense of inequality between member states. In addition, the lack of economic convergence between member states has made it difficult to implement policies which can benefit all member states.

Also, the lack of political consensus among member states has been a major challenge to regional integration. Despite the efforts to create a unified regional policy framework, there has been a lack of consensus among member states on many issues. For example, there have been disagreements on how to best tackle the issue of security in the region (Kargbo, 2019). This has hindered the ability of the ECOWAS to effectively integrate the region both politically and economically.

Furthermore, a lack of effective leadership has been a major challenge to regional integration. Despite the efforts of the ECOWAS to promote regional integration, the leadership of the region has been largely ineffective. This is due to the lack of political will among member states to make the necessary reforms which are necessary for regional integration (Lambert, 2019). As a result, the ECOWAS has struggled to implement regional policies which can benefit all member states.

Finally, there are also challenges posed by external actors. Many external actors, such as the European Union, have sought to influence the policies of the ECOWAS in order to promote their own interests (Kargbo, 2018). This has meant that the ECOWAS has struggled to implement its own policies, as the policies of external actors often conflict with those of the ECOWAS. The identified problems have become sources of concern to many scholars especially on the mechanism that could be used to surmount these problems. Therefore, this study is undertaken to examine the Role of Regional Integration on the Economic Development: A study of Economic Community of West African States, 2015-2020

Research Question

1. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:
2. What are the factors contributing to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states?
3. What are the major challenges to achieving political consensus among ECOWAS member States for economic development of the region?
4. What strategies can be implemented to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS?
5. What are the mechanisms that could be used to surmount the challenges posed by external actors to the ECOWAS in order to successfully implement its policies for economic development of the region?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Region

Region is a geographic area or space defined by distinct characteristics, such as geographic, political, economic, historical, religious, or cultural identities (Reynolds, 2011). To better understand the concept of region, one must consider the subtypes, including formal, functional, perceptual, and theoretical regions.

A formal region is defined by physical characteristics, such as longitude and latitude, and political realms, such as county, state, or country divisions (Smith & Moore, 2019). For example, for parts of Australia, a formal region could refer to the Murray-Darling Basin region.

A functional region encapsulates a political area, such as a city, which forms an area of general interaction and mutual influence (Barrows, 2017). Such a region includes large urbanized areas and

their surrounding suburbs and environs. In the United States, the Greater Los Angeles Area is considered an example of a functional region.

Perceptual regions are based on the human perception of an area or space, which largely come from personal associations, shared experiences, people's mental maps of the area, or the social or cultural identity of a place (Johnson & Hamilton, 2015). For example, the Llano Estacado may refer to the area of the south-central Plains of the U.S., but its residents often refer to this area as the High Plains.

Theoretical regions are subdivisions of geographic or political areas, which have been developed based on specific criteria (Marston, 2016). Examples of theoretical regions include the seven-state Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. or the sub-Saharan region of Africa.

In sum, region is a broad concept that entails different sub-types. To fully understand the concept of region, one must consider formal, functional, perceptual, and theoretical regions. Moreover, each subtype of region requires its own methods of identification and analysis.

Integration

Integration is an important concept that can be applied to a range of situations, from social to economic arenas. In 1971, the psychologist Gordon Allport proposed a definition for integration that is generally accepted today (Allport, 1971, p.70). According to Allport, integration is "the harmonious and adaptive intermingling of components so that a unified or whole pattern results". This definition has been seen to represent integration in both psychological and political contexts.

In the social science field, integration is often thought of as the process by which members of a disadvantaged group become better integrated into society. Academic literature has discussed the ramifications of government policy for the inclusion of minorities in society, often finding that while government policies are an important factor in integration, they may not be enough for full integration to take place (Grahmann, 2015).

In the economic context, integration refers to the unification of different markets, usually across a trading bloc or region. This can not only increase the efficiency of economic activity but also improve the operating environment for businesses (Wren-Lewis, 2019). The European Union is a prime example of regional economic integration, whereby member states have a common economic policy and have eliminated trade barriers, such as import duties and quotas (European Union, 2020).

In sum, integration is important for achieving greater unity, both within societies and among separate economic blocs. The definition provided by Allport is widely accepted and provides the basis for understanding integration from different perspectives. With further research and policy interventions, both social and economic integration can still be furthered.

Regional Integration

Regional Integration is a concept that has become a prevalent discussion topic among businessmen, researchers, and politicians. Regional Integration is the process by which countries in a particular geographic region come to collaborate and cooperate in order to mutual benefit. Coolidge (2012) sees regional integration as the process through which countries in a given geographic region come together in an effort to mutually benefit from their collective resources and capabilities. It typically results in increased economic output, reduced barriers to trade and investment, a more cohesive regional identity, and better access to resources and technology (Lahiri, 2010). Regional integration has become increasingly important for countries to develop and sustain their relationships with one another. This typically involves formal agreements of cooperation between countries, allowing them to increase their collective economic, cultural, and political capabilities. Such agreements allow for the smooth flow of trade, investment, technology, and other resources between countries and regions, while also promoting peace and stability.

While regional integration has been around for centuries, it has seen an upsurge in the wake of globalization. This has allowed countries to gain access to vital resources needed to promote economic development, as well as increase their overall competitiveness. Regional integration can also facilitate

the exchange of ideas and the introduction of new technologies, resulting in an increase in innovation and productivity. Formal regional integrative schemes can also help to increase financial flows and to promote regional stability.

Common forms of regional integration include those of the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the EU, countries cede some sovereignty to an organizing body, in exchange for standardized trade practices and the ability to move freely throughout the region (Dehousse, 2017). NAFTA provides, among other benefits, mutual access to markets and the freedom to trade between countries without fear of insolvency (Chu & Schott, 2006).

In addition to these examples, there exist several other types of regional integration. These may include aspects of social and political integration. The European Union is an example of a political integration effort and includes the free movement of people, goods, and services (Dehousse, 2017). In addition, many African nations are pursuing regional integration efforts, through the African Economic Community (AEC). The AEC's goals are to eliminate trade barriers among the African countries.

Across the world, regional integration has been found to be a powerful tool for promoting economic growth and development (Lidegaard, 2020). For example, in South East Asia, the creation of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has contributed to the economic and social advancement of member states. Similarly, the African Union (AU) has sought to increase development, reduce poverty and promote global trade relationships within its member countries, carriers and promote the growth of small businesses (Kigera, Thakur, & Martin, 2015).

Regional integration is viewed by many as a preferential option for economic and political development. Such collaboration enables countries to increase their bargaining power, and become more attractive to potential investors. Moreover, it allows states to benefit from the expertise of other members, thus creating more sophisticated and well-developed services and working conditions for the citizens (Lahiri, 2010).

Regional integration is a complicated endeavor, as it can be difficult to maintain harmony among members. In some cases, a nation's legacy of defense or internal issues may impede its ability to cooperate in regional integration. Furthermore, states may disagree on trade policies or ethical practices, which can create tension. As with any action, there are certain risks and benefits associated with regional integration, yet, for many, it is a vital tool for promoting regional growth and stability (Kigera et al., 2015).

In conclusion, regional integration is a powerful tool to promote regional collaboration on a greater scale. It has been used in Europe, North America, and Africa, and has the potential to benefit countries of all sizes. While it may come with certain risks, the potential for increased sharing of resources and improved access to markets make integration a compelling option for economic growth.

Development

Development can be understood as the process of expanding or changing in order to become more mature, complex, or accomplished (Lyons & Wall, 2017). It involves the changing of different aspects of an environment, whether it is physical, cultural, economic, and/or social (Chandra Reddi, 2013). Development can also be seen as a process of creating and sustaining a desired change (González, 2017). In the last few decades, global development has come to be seen as the combination of economic and social progress, both of which are closely linked to the concept of human development (Thirlwall, 2011).

Typically, economic development involves the increasing of the overall GDP and/or the flow of goods and services within a business environment as well as their cost (Ruggiero, 2000). However, it has become increasingly difficult to measure economic development in practice due to the complexity of economic systems and the many variables that have to be taken into consideration. Social development, on the other hand, involves the improvement of living standards, the reduction of poverty and inequality, and the expansion of access to health care and education (Blair, 2009). It is

also closely related to economic development since it requires that economic resources are allocated properly so that they can achieve their desired outcome.

In recent years, a number of growth strategies have been employed that seek to promote both economic and social development. For example, investment in infrastructure and R&D have become a major way to foster economic growth and attract private investment (Xuemei, 2014). In addition, social initiatives such as the provision of public services, the promotion of gender equality, and the reduction of government corruption have been credited with helping to reduce poverty and improve living standards in many countries (Jung, 2016).

In conclusion, development can be understood as the process of expanding in order to become more mature, complex, or accomplished. It involves creating and sustaining a desired change across different aspects of an environment, including economic and social, and has become closely linked to the concept of human development. A number of strategies have been implemented to promote both economic and social development, including investment in infrastructure and R&D as well as initiatives to reduce government corruption and inequality.

Economic Development

Economic development is a process through which countries or regions improve the quality of life of their citizens, typically through raising levels of income, creating employment opportunities, and improving health and educational infrastructure (Blackhurst & Frankenberger, 2018). According to economic theories, economic growth is fundamental to economic development. Growth is considered to be the long-term and sustainable increase in the capacity of an economy to produce goods and services (Canning & Pedroni, 2013).

It is believed that investment in human capital is the key to economic growth and development, as people with higher education and productive skills are more likely to reap the benefits of economic development (Nove, 2014). For example, in the region of Latin America, development has been driven by growing levels of education, technology, and investment in knowledge and skills (García, 2017). At the same time, the regional focus on reducing poverty and inequality has been an important instrument in generating greater economic growth, lower external debt, and increased international integration (Levy & Thornton, 2017).

Economic development also involves long-term strategies to strengthen the economy through macroeconomic policy reforms, structural improvements, and sector-specific interventions (Henderson & Storeygard, 2016). These strategies may include taxation, fiscal policies that reduce inequality, investments in public infrastructure and technology, and reforms to reduce transaction costs and stimulate private sector growth (Friedman, 2017). Developing countries may also need to reduce barriers to trade and foreign direct investment, introduce sound competition policies, and implement economic diversification to reduce their dependence on natural resources (Azam & Guillaumont, 2018).

In conclusion, economic development involves a complex range of complex strategies, policies, interventions, and institutional reforms to ensure economic growth and reduce poverty and inequality. As such, it is essential for governments to have a comprehensive understanding of economic principles, theories, and research to formulate evidence-based strategies to ensure long-term economic growth and the well-being of their citizens.

Regional Integration and Economic Development

Regional integration is the process, when countries in the same region come together to create an interdependent economic framework that strengthens and advances all member countries. Regional integration has been shown to be a powerful economic development tool (Gillard, 2015). Due to the large size of modern nations, the focus of economics has turned more and more towards regional approaches. Globalization has, for example, opened up new markets that allow regional economic

integration to flourish (Kuehn, 2016). In this way, regional integration offers huge potential for the development of countries in the region.

Additionally, regional integration is closely linked to economic development as it facilitates more efficient production by allowing countries to focus on their comparative advantages (Foster & Zou, 2006). This makes it easier for member countries to specialize in certain industries that they are particularly competent in (Portes et al., 2021). This improves the quality of exports and helps increase a country's export earnings, which can contribute greatly to economic growth (Yazman & Rehman, 2019).

Furthermore, regional integration helps build regional stability, increases foreign direct investment and improves economic resilience in countries (Kuehn, 2016). Regional economic integration also helps to control inflation and allows governments to collect more taxes, which helps decrease national debt and allows more funds to be allocated to public projects (Yazman & Rehman, 2019).

In summary, regional integration is a powerful economic development tool that can help countries to achieve various goals such as increased trade, increased investment, and improved economic stability. Additionally, it can lead to decreased poverty and increased economic growth. Furthermore, regional integration can help countries identify and focus on their competitive advantage, allowing them to earn more from their exports. Therefore, regional integration is a vital tool for economic development.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is an intergovernmental organization that was established in 1975, with the aim to promote economic integration among the 15 countries of West Africa (Hurley, 2003). The organization has grown to encompass a population of more than 300 million inhabitants and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimated to be around \$550 billion (MDG Africa, 2020). Although today the ECOWAS organization is focused primarily on economic integration, it still seeks to promote human rights, democracy, and good governance, as well as efforts to build lasting peace and security in the region (Institute for Security Studies, 2016).

The organization was founded by the Treaty of Lagos in 1975, and at that point first four members Guinea, Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone were signatories to the original treaty. Its original goal was to stimulate economic development across the region, yet for the first thirty years of its existence the organization was more focused on security and stability. It wasn't until 1995 that it adopted the Declaration of Abuja, broadening its scope to include economic and environmental objectives (Okoh, 2019).

Since then, the ECOWAS organization has made great strides in advancing economic and social growth for all of the West African nations. One of the primary examples of this is the implementation of the Financial Protocol in 2006, which created a "free trade" zone among the 15 member countries, removing tariff and non-tariff barriers that had hindered economic growth in the region (Institute for Security Studies, 2014). The Protocol also created the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), which abolished currency exchange restrictions and made it possible for businesses to trade and expand easily across national borders, resulting in a significant improvement in the flow of goods and services among the 15 countries (Sullivan, 2018).

In addition to efforts to promote economic integration, the ECOWAS has made several other important contributions to the region. It has provided support in areas such as capacity building and technical assistance, as well as implemented programs to combat poverty and exclusion in the region (Okoh, 2019). Most recently, the organization provided support for the implementation of a comprehensive agenda for peace, security and development in the region (MDG Africa, 2020).

Overall, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) organization has demonstrated that regional cooperation can lead to improved security and economic development in the region. This is especially true in the case of the West African region, where certain countries are facing extreme levels of poverty and insecurity. Through the implementation of the free-trade zone and other

initiatives, ECOWAS has helped to create the foundation for sustainable social and economic growth in West Africa and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the neo functionalism theory. Neo-functionalism is a theory of regional integration which downplays globalisation and reintroduces territory into its governance. The founder of the term, Ernst B. Haas, later declared the theory of Neo-functionalism obsolete, a statement he revoked in his final book, after the process of European integration started stalling in the 1960s, when Charles de Gaulle's "empty chair" politics paralyzed the institutions of the European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community, and European Atomic Energy Community (Haas, 1975, p. 5). The theory was updated and further specified namely by Wayne Sandholtz, Alec Stone Sweet, and their collaborators in the 1990s and in the 2000s. The main contributions of these authors was an employment of empiricism. Haas (1961, p. 152) posits that Neo-functionalism describes and explains the process of regional integration with reference to how three causal factors interact:

- Growing economic interdependence between nations
- Organizational capacity to resolve disputes and build international legal regimes
- Supranational market rules that replace national regulatory regimes

Early Neo-functional theory assumed a decline in importance of nationalism and the nation-state; it predicted that, gradually, elected officials, interest groups, and large commercial interests within states would see it in their interests to pursue welfarist objectives best satisfied by the political and market integration at a higher, supranational level. Haas theorized three mechanisms that he thought would drive the integration forward: positive spillover, the transfer of domestic allegiances and technocratic automaticity.

Neo-functionalism states that in the end of the integration process the bottom line is the federation of states. It is in essence functionalism but with a difference in that it becomes federal functionalism. The key step towards achieving this is the fusion first and foremost of economic interests (Haas, 1956, 38). Robert Schuman differentiates Neo-functionalism from functionalism by stating that the former has as its core, the setting up of central institutions for the proposed community (Taylor, 1978, p. 71). These institutions are to play a creative role in the realization of the overall objective of the integration. They have federal jurisdiction in which their formal powers make their decisions binding on member states.

Neo-functionalism is a body of theory that attempts to describe, explain and predict regional integration schemes. It is a synthesis of Federalism and Functionalism. This theory contends that while the Federalist approach may be avaricious by asking for too much too hurriedly, the Functionalist approach appears to be evasive and lackadaisical. As a result, a common ground is proposed, which is a hybrid of Federalism and Functionalism. The Neo-Functionalist approach posits that regional integration can best be achieved through the creation of specialized administrative institutions at the transnational level, which shall endeavor to demonstrate the relevance and worthiness of regional integration to member states.

Having examined Neo-functionalism in some detail, the question to ask now is how relevant it is to regional integration in West Africa. To help us answer this question it will be useful to examine how it fared in Western Europe where the conditions for its success were present. This will then be compared to the West African region where presumed conditions such as pluralism are absent (Zomelo, 1994, pp. 1-8).

First, politicisation was checked by both institutional factors and the less than expected level of group participation in the community. Second, sovereignty proved to be a very intractable and difficult characteristic to transfer or erode from national to the regional level. Thus Harrison, for example, pointed out that the European Community which was the concrete test of neo-functional theory proved disappointing.

If institutional factors and group participation contributed to the failure of Neo-functionalism in the European Community, it is unlikely to fare any better in West Africa. This is because the institutional framework of the EC is more sophisticated than that of ECOWAS. Additionally, interest group activity in the EC is more pervasive than in ECOWAS (Zomelo, 1994, pp. 1-8).

Relating this theory to this paper, it is proper to say that it will help in guiding it because it is synthesis of different theories that could better help in explaining regional integration and economic development in the West African region. The criticisms against this approach are standpoints from which we can better understand and appreciate how regionalism can better work in West Africa.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a historical approach. The historical design deals systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events. It involves a critical inquiry of a previous age with the aim of reconstructing a faithful representation of the past. Shafer (1974, p. 49) explains that, "In historical research, the investigator studies documents and other sources that contain facts concerning the research theme with the objective of achieving better understanding of present policies, practices, problems and institutions." These, when properly harnessed, would help us to better understand regional integration and economic development, with ECOWAS as a frame of reference. Secondary data sources in this study included related literature found in textbooks, journals, magazines, government publications, newspapers and materials culled from the Internet.

This study utilized deductive reasoning to analyze the secondary data in this work. Deductive reasoning, also deductive logic, logical deduction is the process of reasoning from one or more statements (premises) to reach a logically certain conclusion (Sternberg, 2009). Deductive reasoning goes in the same direction as that of the conditionals, and links premises with conclusions. If all premises are true, the terms are clear, and the rules of deductive logic are followed, then the conclusion reached is necessarily true. Using this method of data analysis, the researcher explored what other scholars have done in the past and deductively reach some conclusions in relation to facts and truth. In practice, this entailed carefully going through the analysis of scholars in this area and consequently make deductions in line with areas that constantly agree with facts across spacio-temporal parameters.

Area of the Study

The area of study in this work is West Africa, which is the westernmost region of Africa. The United Nations defines Western Africa as the 16 countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, as well as the United Kingdom Overseas Territory of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha (Akyeampong, 2006). The population of West Africa is estimated at about 362 million people as of 2016, and at 381,981,000 as of 2017, of which 189,672,000 are female and 192,309,000 male (Ham, 2018, p. 1).

Hopkins (2014, pp. 1-2) points out that West Africa occupies an area in excess of 6,140,000 km², or approximately one-fifth of Africa. The vast majority of this land is plains lying less than 300 meters above sea level, though isolated high points exist in numerous states along the southern shore of West Africa. West Africa is west of an imagined north-south axis lying close to 10° east longitude. The Atlantic Ocean forms the western as well as the southern borders of the West African region. The northern border is the Sahara Desert, with the Ranishanu Bend generally considered the northernmost part of the region. The eastern border is less precise, with some placing it at the Benue Trough, and others on a line running from Mount Cameroon to Lake Chad. Colonial boundaries are reflected in the modern boundaries between contemporary West African states, cutting across ethnic and cultural lines, often dividing single ethnic groups between two or more states (Hopkins, 2014, pp. 1-2).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of data based on the stated objectives of this study in the first chapter of this study.

Research Question One: What are the factors contributing to the economic disparity among ECOWAS member states?

Economic disparity is a major issue in West Africa with an intense persistent gap between the fifteen member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Since its establishment in 1975, the disparity among the ECOWAS member states has been expanding, particularly with respect to economic performance. The factors that have led to this disparity are highly varied and complex in nature. This research question reviews and evaluates the main factors that have contributed to the current economic disparity between ECOWAS member states.

Political Factors: One of the most significant factors contributing to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states is the poor governance and political instability that afflicts the region. Political unrest in West Africa has been a factor of many challenges which have had negative consequences on economic growth (Ojo & Kolawole, 2016). Unstable governments are more likely to pursue policies that are ineffective and harm economic development, as they focus on political aspirations rather than on economic objectives. Moreover, the high prevalence of corruption in the region has contributed to the Limited economic resources, and the lack of institutional capacity further stifle economic development (Gbetibouo & Todd, 2010).

In addition, the lack of good foreign policies has hampered economic progress in the region. Poor design of economic policies eg tax-incentives, export orientation, access to credit, and others, have weakened external competitiveness (Vaitsou & Markaki, 2011). Further, the lack of regional consensus and ambition to support economic integration has limited the ability of the ECOWAS to coordinate and drive economic development, as individual states are often reluctant to undertake measures which benefit the collective economic development of West Africa (Jordan et. al, 2020).

Geopolitical Factors: Geopolitical factors also contribute to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states. Countries located in the Sahel region, located in the north of the region, are particularly prone to political and security instability, poverty, and environmental stress (Ojo and Kolawole, 2016). This has restricted economic development as repressive regimes have limited access to good governance and democratic systems necessary for economic prosperity. Further, the prevalence of extremism and terrorism has hindered economic progress, with conflicts in Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso hampering growth and heightening security risks (Kaniecki and Brown, 2018).

In addition, weak infrastructure development has weakened regional economic performance. For instance, poor transportation networks limit trade and commerce, while access to energy and poor water networks remain a challenge in many countries (Gbetibouo and Todd, 2010). Thus, the lack of active regional support for infrastructure investments in West Africa has hindered growth and reduced economic power as resources are diverted to ephemeral economic acts.

Social Factors: Finally, social disparities have played an important role in impeding the economic development of ECOWAS member states. Low education levels, particularly in the Sahel region, are associated with greater poverty and greater economic inequality (Vaitsou and Markaki, 2011). This has limited the potential to participate in the global economy and to build a sustainable development model.

Moreover, high levels of poverty are linked to income inequality, and this has severely affected economic progress in the region. For instance, the Gini coefficient of inequality in West Africa is often higher than the average for developing countries (Jordan et. al, 2020). This means that a significant proportion of the population lack access to resources and opportunities, further amplifying the already weak economic situation that prevails in the region.

Conclusively, this research question has discussed and evaluated the main factors that have contributed to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states. Political factors, geopolitical issues, and social disparities have all contributed to the current situation in the region, with an immense gap in economic performance across the 15 countries. Thus, it is clear that in order for West Africa to prosper, comprehensive action is needed to tackle the underlying issues and improve the overall economic conditions.

Research Question Two: What are the major challenges to achieving political consensus among ECOWAS member states?

Achievement of political consensus among Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) continues to be a major challenge in the region. The process of arriving at a common decision on many issues has remained slow due to a number of factors that hinder effective regional integration. This paper will explore eight possible major challenges to the attainment of political consensus in the ECOWAS region.

The first challenge is the high degree of distrust among Member States. Notably, the history of colonial domination of many ECOWAS nations and the resultant lingering geopolitical tensions have undermined the region's collective efforts to address pressing development matters. According to Yeboah (2020), distrust among participatory states undermines "cooperation and integration in regional institutions" and this is viewed as a major impediment to establishing a viable political consensus within the ECOWAS.

Another obstacle to achieving political consensus among ECOWAS Member States is the inefficacy of the regional institutions. Human (2017) critical of the limitations of ECOWAS assert that the institutions lack the "capacity for active leadership in influencing and enforcing its own harmonized decisions and policies". The ECOWAS Institutions lack the capacity and the resources to effectively monitor and enforce the various regional plans and strategies. Consequently, member states are slow to comply with regional regulations and lack the impetus to abide by collective decisions.

A third challenge to political consensus is the limited recognition of local identities. Recognition of local identities is a major strength of a number of African regional integration efforts. However, Cole and Mensah (2018) opine that the "member states' of the ECOWAS have barely recognised local identities in their approaches to policy making", a factor that has weakened the effectiveness of the ECOWAS.

The fourth challenge is the low capacity of ECOWAS states to comply with regional objectives. As Uzuegbunam and Chukwuma (2013) warn, the high rate of poverty among the ECOWAS members "automatically weakens the capacity of the states to comply with regional objectives". This problem is compounded by the numerous obstacles to economic development in the region, such as inadequate infrastructure, weak economic and social policy frameworks, and dependence on external finance.

The fifth challenge to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS is the presence of non-state actors. Non-State actors such as political parties, traditional rulers and NGOs have often advanced divergent goals from the collective objectives of the organization. Table (2021) contends that "this undermines the efforts of the governing council within the ECOWAS to create a consensus on key decision making processes and policy making".

The sixth challenge to creating political consensus in the ECOWAS is the inability of the region to effectively address intra-state conflicts. The region is currently beset with numerous intra-state conflicts such as border disputes, land tenure issues and political divisions across multiple states. According to Alikor, Miri and Uwazie (2016), "it is difficult to achieve political consensus when there is the presence of conflicts and divisions among different states".

The seventh challenge to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS region is the limited capacities of governments to implement regional regulations. Nigeria, being the powerhouse of the region, typically lags behind in implementation because of the country's weak institutional and judicial

systems (Fayemi, 2021). This means that other ECOWAS member states are left to implement the regional decisions without the necessary support from the regional leader.

The final challenge relates to the lack of coordination between states within the ECOWAS. The regional organization is dogged by competing egos and interests leading to state-level decision making that is in conflict with regional decisions (Russ, 2021). This has limited the capacity of the regional institutions to enforce unified decisions as well as given room for conflicting policies at a regional level.

In conclusion, this research question has examined eight major challenges to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS region. These challenges include the high degree of distrust among Member States, inefficacy of the regional institutions, limited recognition of local identities, low capacity of ECOWAS states to comply with regional objectives, the presence of non-state actors, the inability of the region to effectively address intra-state conflicts, limited capacity of governments to implement regional regulations, and the lack of coordination between states within the ECOWAS. It is acknowledged that these challenges significantly impede the achievement of consensus in the region despite the extensive efforts of the ECOWAS institutions.

Research Question Three: What strategies can be implemented to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS?

Political will is an essential factor for regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS. Member states must be willing to cooperate with each other in order to achieve regional integration. The strategies that can be used to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration in ECOWAS includes:

Independent and strong leadership: A strong leadership is essential for effective regional integration. Member's States of ECOWAS should be led by independent leaders who are willing to commit to the goals of regional integration and take the necessary steps for achieving the desired objectives. This will help to ensure that all stakeholders are committed to the integration process. (Soye, 2021).

Strengthening regional institutions: Regional institutions play an important role in promoting regional integration. Therefore, the member states of ECOWAS should strengthen regional institutions like the ECOWAS Commission and the West African Monetary Union to effectively promote regional integration. These institutions should be independent from national governments and should have adequate resources and capacity to carry out its responsibilities. (Obi & Immirhe, 2017).

Effective implementation of regional policies: Member states should implement regional policies in an effective manner in order to promote regional integration. These policies should be aligned with the goals of regional integration and should be implemented uniformly across all member states of ECOWAS. This will help to ensure that all member states are committed to regional integration and are taking the necessary steps for achieving the desired objectives. (Ndumele, 2018).

Addressing conflicts and tensions between states: Conflicts and tensions between member states must be addressed in order to promote regional integration. Member states must work together to resolve conflicts and tensions in order to restore trust and confidence among them. This will help to ensure that all member states are willing to cooperate with each other for promoting regional integration. (Agbetu, 2021).

Improved communication and dialogue between stakeholders: Improved communication and dialogue between the key stakeholders of regional integration should be established in order to promote regional integration in ECOWAS. All stakeholders should be properly informed and consulted about the plans and processes of regional integration in order to ensure that all of them are committed to the process. (Robinson & Thompson, 2021).

Linking regional integration with national development: Regional integration should be linked with national development in order to increase the political will of member states. Member states

should be provided with incentives to encourage them to cooperate with each other in order to achieve the desired objectives of regional integration. This will help to ensure that all stakeholders are willing to take the necessary steps for promoting regional integration (Mertens, 2021).

In conclusion, the strategies mentioned above can help to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration in ECOWAS. Member states should commit to the goals of regional integration and take the necessary steps for achieving the desired objectives.

Research Question Four: What are the mechanisms that could be used to surmount the challenges posed by external actors to the ECOWAS in order to successfully implement its policies for economic development of the ECOWAS region?

The emergence of an external actor with global power and influence constitutes a major challenge for the ECOWAS. These actors are often involved in various forms of interference, including the use of economic sanctions, military interventions, and other forms of foreign policy. In order to successfully implement its various policies, the ECOWAS must use a variety of mechanisms to counter the interference of external actors and protect its policy objectives.

Firstly, the ECOWAS must formulate policies that are in line with international law and do not compromise its commitment to the collective welfare of its member states. Policy makers must be aware of the effects of external interference and take steps to protect its interests. This may include the formulation of deterrent strategies and/or adopting measures that can help to mitigate the impact of external actors. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has already adopted a number of protocols to protect its members from external interference, such as the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security and the Protocol on Good Governance in West Africa

Secondly, the ECOWAS must ensure that its policies are supported by multi-lateral institutions such as the African Union and the United Nations. This will help to build international consensus and increase the political legitimacy of the ECOWAS's policies, while also providing the necessary financial and technical assistance to implement them. In addition, regional organizations like the African Union can provide the necessary public support and technical capacity to help strengthen the ECOWAS's capacity to successfully implement its policies.

Thirdly, the ECOWAS must strengthen its domestic institutions and regulations. This involves strengthening its legislative and judicial powers, as well as its capacity to enforce its policies. The ECOWAS must also work to ensure that there is sufficient funding available to implement its policies. Moreover, the ECOWAS must strive to ensure greater transparency and accountability within its institutions, as this is essential for policy effectiveness.

Finally, the ECOWAS must strengthen its alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors. This could involve forging partnerships with non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, as well as engaging in meaningful dialogue with external powers. By building strong relationships with external actors, the ECOWAS can gain access to resources and expertise that can help to facilitate the successful implementation of its policies.

In conclusion, the ECOWAS must use a variety of mechanisms to surmount the challenges posed by external powers to the successful implementation of its policies. This includes formulating policies that are in line with international law, as well as strengthening its domestic institutions and regulations. In addition, the ECOWAS must seek to strengthen its international alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors. Through the implementation of these strategies, the ECOWAS will be better positioned to effectively implement its policies and ensure the collective welfare of its member states.

Summary of Major Findings

Research question two examined the main factors that have contributed to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states are political factors, geopolitical issues, and social disparities have

all contributed to the current situation in the region, with an immense gap in economic performance across the 15 countries.

Research question two examined eight major challenges to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS region. These challenges include the high degree of distrust among Member States, inefficacy of the regional institutions, limited recognition of local identities, low capacity of ECOWAS states to comply with regional objectives, the presence of non-state actors, the inability of the region to effectively address intra-state conflicts, limited capacity of governments to implement regional regulations, and the lack of coordination between states within the ECOWAS.

Research question three examined the strategies that can be implemented to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration in ECOWAS which include: independent and strong leadership, strengthening regional institutions, effective implementation of regional policies, addressing conflicts and tensions between states, improved communication and dialogue between stakeholders, and linking regional integration with national development.

Finally, the last research question investigated the mechanisms that could be used to surmount the challenges posed by external actors to the ECOWAS in order to successfully implement its policies. This includes formulating policies that are in line with international law, as well as strengthening its domestic institutions and regulations. In addition, the ECOWAS must seek to strengthen its international alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors.

Conclusion

The study centred on the roles of Role of Regional Integration on the Economic Development of ECOWAS, 2015-2022. Based on the identified findings, the following conclusion are made. The main factors that have contributed to the economic disparity between ECOWAS member states are the political factors, geopolitical issues, and social disparities in the region, with an immense gap in economic performance across the 15 countries. Thus, it is clear that in order for West Africa to prosper, comprehensive action is needed to tackle the underlying issues and improve the overall economic conditions.

The main eight major challenges to achieving political consensus in the ECOWAS region. These challenges include the high degree of distrust among Member States, inefficacy of the regional institutions, limited recognition of local identities, low capacity of ECOWAS states to comply with regional objectives, the presence of non-state actors, the inability of the region to effectively address intra-state conflicts, limited capacity of governments to implement regional regulations, and the lack of coordination between states within the ECOWAS.

The strategies that can be implemented to increase the political will of member states to promote regional integration in ECOWAS include: independent and strong leadership, strengthening regional institutions, effective implementation of regional policies, addressing conflicts and tensions between states, improved communication and dialogue between stakeholders, and linking regional integration with national development.

Finally, the last research question investigated the mechanisms that could be used to surmount the challenges posed by external actors to the ECOWAS in order to successfully implement its policies. This includes formulating policies that are in line with international law, as well as strengthening its domestic institutions and regulations. In addition, the ECOWAS must seek to strengthen its international alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors. Conclusively, Regional integration has strong impact on the socio-economic development of the West African Region. Despites some observed drawback ECOWAS has the capability of engineering development of the region if recommendations from the study is followed.

Recommendations

Based on the identified findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. One recommendation from the finding is to focus on making improvements to strengthen political, social, and geopolitical structures internally first as the foundation and using it as a building block across the region as charity must begin at home.. This could be done through improving the political representation of different ethnicities and groups, providing more in-depth education and training for government officials, and creating specific agreements and rules that all the ECOWAS member states must abide by in order to increase economic stability. Doing so would help bridge the gap between wealthy and poor member states, while also promoting more economic prosperity in the region as a whole.
2. There is a need to establish an effective mechanism for monitoring and enforcing regional regulations. Establishing such a mechanism would help to ensure that member states are able to comply as well as provide a means of ensuring coordinated responses to regional crises. This would help create an atmosphere of accountability and trust in the region, which is essential for successful policy coordination and the achievement of political consensus.
3. To increase the political will of member States to promote regional integration in ECOWAS is to strengthen regional institutions. This can be done by investing in building more effective and efficient institutional frameworks at the regional level that are better equipped to manage regional issues. This will create a stronger sense of commitment to the regional organization, and ultimately result in increased political will and support for regional integration and collaboration.
4. ECOWAS should seek to strengthen its international alliances and be open to cooperation with external actors. In order to successfully implement its policies, ECOWAS must collaborate with external actors in order to ensure that these policies are in line with international law and regulations.(5)The building and strengthening of economic capacity of members states should be a priority as this prosperity will have an overflow effect on the other member countries.

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