Regionalism in World Politics

Interrogating the Relevance of the ECOWAS in Global Political Economy

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Globalisation has promoted the connections among sovereign states in the international political economy. Despite the preponderance of neo-protectionist tendencies in the United States and some European countries, the import of regionalism in global political economy has not waned. While economic regionalism was adopted in the advanced capitalist formations as a logical consequence of and/or the instrument for the universalisation of capitalism, the emergence and/or revival of regional groupings like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was a reactionary outcome of the twin problems of colonialism and globalisation. Specifically, West African states reached out to one another in order to mitigate the negative effects of globalisation and advance their common interest through economic integration. This study interrogates the relevance of ECOWAS in the international political economy within the global resurgence of protectionism. Although ECOWAS is impaired by multifarious political and socioeconomic challenges, this study demonstrates that its achievements in free movement of goods and persons, promotion of peace, security, good governance, and democratisation make it remain relevant in the global political economy.

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Introduction

The phenomenal growth in the overall number of regional institutions and the range of their activities over the last century has correspondingly generated undue interest in the study of regionalism. Sovereign states have come to appreciate the realities of the prevailing international system, which largely thrives on interdependency. Although they still try to guard their sovereignty as jealously as possible, the era of rigid adherence to sovereignty by states is rapidly fizzling out. States are increasingly aware of their need to cooperate in the exploitation and utilisation of world resources for the benefit of all the members of the international community.[1] With the dawn of the 21st century, the concept of 'global village' has virtually become a reality; thanks to the renaissance of the ideals of regionalism as well as the revolution in information and communications technology which has deepened international economic interdependency. Accordingly, Nwangwu and Okoye argue that "the fairy tale of a legendary hermit – Robinson Crusoe – who lived and 'survived' in seclusion is completely out-of-touch with contemporary global realities where convergence of sovereign states has become a desideratum for survival and international relevance".[2]

Consequently, it is not possible for any state to recoil into its shell and have nothing to do with the outside world, given the growing interdependence of nations economically, socially and militarily. This assertion, however, is not prejudicial to the phenomenal developments within the international political economy since 2016. More than anything else, 2016 marked a watershed in the drive towards the reversal of some fundamentals of globalisation. Mercantilism resonates within and outside the global north, especially the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Germany. In June 2016, the United Kingdom overwhelmingly voted in a referendum to leave the European Union (EU) in what is now widely called Brexit. The rallying cry of pro-Brexit campaigners was: 'we want our country back'. By the same token, the victory of Donald Trump of the Grand Old Party can hardly be explained outside the purview of his protectionist orientations adroitly captured in the catchphrases 'Make America great again' and 'America first'. Similar fundamentals of economic nationalism also re-echoed during the 2017 French presidential campaign of Marine Le Pen of the National Front. Le Pen particularly advocated more stringent immigration policies and promotion of protectionism as alternatives to neo-liberal economic policies. Moreover, she was strongly opposed to EU's supra-nationalism by calling on France to leave both the Eurozone and the EU.

Notwithstanding, sovereign states have continued to break out of their shells and to reach out to one another. Discourses on regional security and economic integration have also continued to receive growing attention in both African scholarship and beyond.[3] Although the opportunities offered by the interdependence of nation-states in the present global system have not been fully exploited to satisfy the needs of all the members of the international community, new regional and sub-regional groupings have continued to emerge while old ones are being consolidated. Virtually no area of the globe is left untouched by the rising tide of regionalism. In Africa, for instance, there is the African Union (AU) (successor to the Organisation of African Unity, OAU); in the Americas, the Organization of American States (OAS); the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) for the Caribbean and in Europe, the European Union (EU) and the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Similarly, there are several sub-regional groupings throughout the world. In Asia for example, there are the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), among others. There is the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in the Middle East while Africa boasts of assorted sub-regional groups like Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), among others.

Regionalism has, therefore, become so pervasive that it is extremely difficult to find an independent state, except when it is deliberately barred by some special sanctions and circumstances, which does not belong to, at least, one regional/sub-regional organisation or the other. Thus, Imobighe argues that "the most distinctive feature of the pattern of modern regional groupings is not so much a question of their number and spread as to their purpose".[4] Whereas earlier regional/international organisations were mainly competitive alliance systems which were confrontational in outlook, most present-day organisations are generally development-oriented and more cooperative in nature. Although some relics of confrontational security groupings still exist, their continuing relevance has become increasingly open to question since the end of the Cold War. Thus, it accounted for the early demise of these earlier regional groupings that were designed essentially as competitive alliance systems.

The founding of regional groupings often comes as a consequence of or response to adverse and cataclysmic occurrence within the region in question or the world at large. This is the case with ECOWAS, which was established in 1975 with the mandate to facilitate the effective resuscitation and integration of the West African economy after the downturn that characterised the sub-region in the 1970s. Previous research emphasises the collaborative desire among ECOWAS members in order to tackle regional challenges.[5] Hence, ECOWAS have created networks that are useful for both formal and informal relations within the sub-region.[6] Scholars have also focused on the prospects of ECOWAS mechanisms and institutions for realising a single currency and the Custom Union.[7] Meanwhile, ECOWAS needs to move from rhetoric to reality and/or from words to actions in order to harvest its huge prospects and potentials as a sustainable people-oriented organisation in West Africa.[8] This article considers the relevance of ECOWAS in global political economy, and is guided by the following research questions: Do the achievements of ECOWAS in West Africa make it relevant in the global political economy? What are the challenges of ECOWAS as a regional organisation in West Africa?

Context and Methodology

This study was situated within the 15 member-states of ECOWAS, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The area of study is located between 13.5317° North 2.4604° West. The population of the study area is estimated at 377 trillion people.[9] The region plays host to Nigeria (the largest producer of crude oil in Africa). Nigeria serves as a hegemon in the region, providing political, economic and military leadership to maintain peace and security.[10] Nigeria's population and GDP are roughly equal to those of all the other members put together.[11] Hence, Nigeria occupies a vantage position to influence ECOWAS decisions and projects.[12]

Data for the study were collected through field observation, policy appraisal and reference to secondary literature. The study was conducted to generate information on the relevance of ECOWAS in global political economy as well as its challenges in regional integration. Realising the complications and complexities of the social world, this study adopted the constant comparative method (CCM) to analyse data. This approach is used in qualitative research to continuously compare collected data in order to identify regular repeating patterns and conflicting views.[13] CCM allows data collection and analysis to be done simultaneously. It is a logical way to make sense of and order information and is also one of the techniques used to ensure the reliability of the data collected.[14] In this study, field observations, policy appraisals and secondary literature were compared with each other and then related to the research context in order to confirm or dispute it. Field observation was done within ECOWAS major trade corridors between 6 and 12 November 2018. The West African transport networks that were observed to determine the trends of movement of goods and persons are the Dakar–Ndjamena, Dakar–Lagos, Abidjan–Lagos, Cotonou–Niamey, Lomé–Ouagadougou and Dakar–Bamako corridors.

Theorising Regionalism

The term 'regionalism' is derived from the root word 'region'. The actual meaning and significance of these terms for the theory and practice of global political economy are vigorously contested in the literature.[15] Both relate, in subtly different ways, to interaction at the regional level. To some, the term 'region' denotes no more than a geographical reality, usually a cluster of states sharing a common space on the globe. This may be a large continent, or a small group of contiguous states. Thus, Nye conceives a region as "a group of states linked together by both a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence".[16] However, the definitional boundary of a region could be expanded to incorporate commonality, interaction and hence the possibility of co-operation. Thus, regions are seen as units, based on groups, states or territories, whose members display some identifiable patterns of behaviour. Such units are smaller than the international system of states, but larger than any individual state. They may be permanent or temporary, institutionalised or non-institutionalised.

As a corollary, regionalism implies a policy whereby states and non-state actors cooperate and coordinate strategy within a given region. It encompasses efforts by a group of nations to enhance their economic, political, social or cultural interaction. It promotes integration schemes which derive from articles of association of member-states. Such efforts can take on different forms, including either or all of the following: regional cooperation, market integration, development integration and regional integration. Essentially, regionalism represents the "willingness and determination of states with strong sense of common interests, values, orientations and expectations to live and work together in both domestic and foreign policies in support of greater political and economic union, and by extension security community".[17] Aside from promoting economic, political and security cooperation and community, it tends to consolidate state-building and democratisation, check heavy-handed behaviour by strong states, increase transparency, make states and international institutions more accountable and help to manage the negative effects of globalisation.

The post-war period saw the proliferation of regional organisations — notably pan-regional groups like the OAU, OAS and LAS, as well as the NATO-inspired security pacts like the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) and the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). For the less developed countries in particular, regionalism had the added appeal of an independence movement. Such regional institutions like the OAU and LAS were used as platforms for the promotion of common positions on matters of importance to their members. These included decolonisation and apartheid (in the defunct OAU) and support for Palestine (in the LAS). The same was true of a 'pan'-Third World institution like the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 which were vehicles for projecting the general interests of the less developed economies onto the international stage. Thus, regionalism was used as an instrument for challenging the perceived asymmetrical relationship between the Economically Developed Countries (EDCs) and the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). It was also used as a weapon for advancing the external relations of some states as typified by the Arab States in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which raised oil prices in response to the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. According to William, changing economic orthodoxy, the example of Europe and a more narrowly defined set of security concerns pushed states into new cooperative projects, like the ASEAN, CARICOM, ECOWAS, SADC, SAARC and the GCC.[18] These groups, whether they aspired to pan-regional or sub-regional status, were products of the Cold War era, yet have survived to the present.

Since the late 1980s, globalisation has changed the international economic environment for regionalism. Despite, or partly because of, the parallel process of globalisation, regionalism has grown in salience. Both the number and membership of regional organisations as well as interest in what was dubbed the 'new' regionalism have grown exponentially. 'New' regionalism is a pro-market, inclusive and holistic scheme that marked the end of state-centric approaches and the rise of a multilateral approach to regionalism.[19]

The adoption of the multilateral approach by the EU has generated huge trade and investment benefits. This has led to competitive region-building in Africa, Asia–Pacific and the Americas. Akpuru-Aja[20] identifies nine economic integration schemes in Africa, three in Arab States, five in Asia, three in Europe, five in Latin America and Caribbean and one in North America. The expansion of regionalism has been attributed to the existence of a more permissive international environment where regions have been freer to assert their own identities and purposes.[21] The emergence of international trade agreements such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the development of European Single Market under the new regional framework have further demonstrated the importance of regional political cooperation and economic competitiveness. Thus, the regional momentum has remained considerable. Some issues of regional concern include public health challenges like HIV/AIDS and Ebola, free trade zones, democratisation, post-conflict peace-building initiatives, humanitarian support in war and disaster-prone areas, transhumant pastoralism, counter-insurgency strategies, and so on. Overall, regional initiatives help to create structures that perform certain roles with daily impact upon peoples and states, thereby softening the contours of globalisation and state power.[22] In the public space, regionalism presents an opportunity that gives voice and respect to individual countries, expands trade, promotes openness, encourages multilateral partnerships and exchange of technical experiences, thereby advancing effective regional integration.[23] Perhaps the overall relevance of regionalism makes both strong and weak states to subscribe.[24]

Overview of Regionalism in Africa

Regionalism is a central pillar in Africa's development strategy and is largely seen as a necessity rather than a choice. This collaborative effort has had profound effects on the foreign policies of African countries.[25] However, the success story of economic integration and development in Europe is the opposite in Africa. For sure, political and economic integration is not new in Africa. Regionalism in Africa has undergone two complementary waves. The first wave is associated with decolonisation and the pan-Africanist agenda. Immediately after the decolonisation process started, the first attempts at regional cooperation among independent states took place in Africa. Pan-Africanism constitutes the ideological framework for the liberation struggle and unity of this colonially plundered continent.[26] The defunct East African Community (EAC) illustrates how the newly independent African states tried to build upon and develop further regional schemes established by the colonial powers. The main instigators behind these processes were the UN's Economic Commission for Africa and the OAU. In this period, Africa experienced the establishment of a whole range of regional schemes for economic cooperation but most of them became nothing but 'paper-tigers'.[27]

The second wave of regionalism in Africa started in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The main instigator was the globalisation of regionalism as a potential counter-force to economic globalisation. In other words, the revival of interests in regional arrangements especially after the Cold War regime is due largely to the phenomenon of globalisation sweeping across the world. Regionalism, therefore, was adopted as one of the viable political responses to globalisation. This was underpinned by the belief that Africa would be further marginalised if it fails to regionalise. This phase arises from the need to provide an additional layer of governance in the international political economy that could protect participating states from the worst storms in the economy. Accordingly, the African Development Bank notes that:

> in the face of these trends, Africa must transform its weak production structures and fragmented markets by embracing economic integration with a renewed sense of purpose and direction. The alternative is that the continent would risk becoming increasingly marginalized in its participation in the global economy.[28]

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As a corollary, the renewed sense of focus in regional schemes in other parts of the world through the EU, NAFTA and ASEAN spawned Africa into greater regional economic integration. In particular, the plans for the single European Act led to a perception in Africa of a coming 'Fortress Europe' with high tariff walls against African products as abundantly encapsulated in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations conducted within the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) between 1986 and 1994. In addition, several African leaders were worried about what would be the outcome of the Lomé Agreement and other arrangements that gave these countries some privileges and safeguards in uncertain and volatile international markets. Consequently, the member-states of the OAU converged in Abuja in 1991, during which time the Abuja Treaty was signed. The treaty, among other things, establishes a timetable for the creation of a Pan-African Economic Community by the year 2025. It also underscores the importance of sub-regional initiatives like the ECOWAS, COMESA and SADC as executing instruments for achieving the goals of the treaty both sub-regionally and on the continental level. In other words, sub-regional groups are expected to be the springboards of continental integration. It holds that regional markets must be established in order to ensure economic security and sustainable development in Africa. This development is underpinned by the traditional idea from economic integration theorists that no African state is economically large enough to construct a modern economy alone. It has been argued that Africa as a whole has the resources for industrialisation, but it is split into too many states that do not cooperate.[29] Seen from a traditional economic perspective, one of the most glaring reflections of Africa's economic weakness is the small size of most domestic markets and the low volume of officially recorded trade among them. Despite the ECOWAS trade policy embedded in trade liberalisation programme, its imports from the rest of the world, especially Europe and North America continue to rise within the period.[30] The reasons for this pro-Western trade orientation are not far-fetched. As argued by Nwangwu and Okoye, the succession of mainly ideologically conservative national governments since 1960, especially in Nigeria, makes it little surprising that Africa has remained essentially pro-West in its economic orientation and international economic connections.[31] Africa's trade with China has increased astronomically from US$1 billion in 2000 to $221.88 billion in 2014.[32] Although China's trade with Africa also emphasises primary products and natural resources like their European counterparts, they are more diversified. China has invested heavily in transport and education infrastructure to deepen trade and investment in the continent that has been marginalised in the international political economy.[33] The next section discusses the achievements of ECOWAS in West Africa.

Achievements of ECOWAS in West Africa

ECOWAS was established on 28 May 1975 by West African States who are signatories to the Treaty of Lagos. Although Mauritania withdrew its membership of ECOWAS in 2002, the Community has remained one of the five regional pillars of the African Economic Community (AEC). Others are COMESA, ECCAS, IGAD and SADC. These bodies signed a Protocol on Relations in February 1998. However, slow progress towards economic and monetary integration under the Treaty of Lagos led to its revision in Cotonou on 24 July 1993. ECOWAS is also one of the largest and most diversified economic communities in sub-Saharan Africa. It may have been the only integration scheme which cuts across all colonial boundaries, encompassing the Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone countries of the sub-region. The main aim of the ECOWAS is to "promote cooperation and development in all the fields of economic activity… for the purpose of… fostering closer relations among its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent".[34] Essentially, the founding of the Community was necessitated by the economic crunch that bedevilled the sub-region in the early 1970s. By the mid-1970s, many West African countries were already in the throes of economic difficulties in the aftermath of the global oil price shock of 1973. Many of the countries in the sub-region, apart from Nigeria which produces oil, had serious problem of external balances. There was a need for increased foreign financial support, if they were to be able to maintain a minimum level of imports to ensure a steady process of economic growth and development.

After over four decades of ECOWAS existence, Akinyemi highlighted that one of its major area of achievement is entering into treaties and creating sub-units.[35] Some of the notable treaties of ECOWAS include Protocol for the Establishment of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; Peace and Security; Cotonou Agreement; and Agreement with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT). The sub-units created by ECOWAS include West African Monetary Zone in 2000; Regional Investment Guarantee Agency with $1 billion to mitigate political risks associated with investments in West Africa in 2013; Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) in 2013; and ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) in 2015. These agreements and sub-units of ECOWAS are crucial frameworks for promoting economic development, peace, security and good governance in the sub-region. In order to foster intra-African trade, ECOWAS welcomed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) treaty that was signed by several African countries during the Extraordinary AU summit in Kigali, Rwanda on 21 March 2018. The Community also encouraged its members who are yet to sign the agreement to fast-track the signing process.[36]

ECOWAS has also made some positive strides in the harmonisation of macro-economic policies, implementation of the CET, multilateral surveillance, research and development, youth empowerment, trade liberalisation, customs union, favourable industrial policy, mines development, agriculture and environment, infrastructure, telecommunications, energy and transportation. Under the regional infrastructure development programme of the Community, for instance, the construction of the Abidjan-Lagos Transport Project (Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Benin), the Dakar-Abidjan Multimodal Corridor (Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Cape Verde) as well as the Praia-Dakar-Abidjan Multimodal Corridor, is already underway.

The Community acquired a very different function in the 1990s when it intervened in the political uprisings in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. Approximately 8,000 troops from five African countries moved to end the civil unrest in these countries. These troops were collectively referred to as ECOWAS Monitoring Group or ECOMOG. They were drawn from Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. Although ECOMOG forces had some temporary success in Sierra Leone, they were withdrawn in favour of a United Nations (UN) Force in March 2000, when Sierra Leone further degenerated into brutal chaos.[37] Furthermore, through the adoption and application of the *ECOWAS Mechanism* of 1999 and the *Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* of 2001, the Community has been able to incrementally but progressively stabilise the region and promote democratic governance. Strict adherence to

Constitutional Convergence Principles has yielded relatively peaceful, transparent and credible outcomes in recent general elections in Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria and The Gambia. The zero-tolerance disposition of the Community to power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means has been able to put pressure on wayward and anti-democratic regimes to change their ways through a combination of sanctions and preventive diplomacy. Consequently, ECOWAS in the last ten years has suspended the membership of many defaulting member-states including Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania (not a member anymore but has applied for re-admission) and Niger. Working together with the international community, it later restored constitutional order and legality in those countries. ECOWAS member-states cooperate to tackle insurgency in Mali and Nigeria through the Multinational Joint Task Force. Similarly, ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC also cooperate to tackle the criminal activities in the resource-laden Gulf of Guinea. This inter-regional cooperation was consummated with the development and adoption of a regional framework, as embodied in the *Yaoundé Code of Conduct* of June 2013. According to Ifesinachi and Nwangwu "the transnational character of maritime insecurity has made trans-border cooperation a *sine qua non* in the mitigation of illicit maritime activities the world over".[38] In January 2017, the political instability as a result of the defeat of Yahya Jammeh in the 2016 Presidential Election in the Gambia was doused through the *Operation Restore Democracy* of the ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia (ECOMIG).

ECOWAS has also successfully implemented its *Protocol on Free Movement* which grants the citizens of the Community, like the EU's Schengen zone, visa to enter member states without visa for up to 90 days.[39] Out of every 100 would-be West African immigrants, only 15% go to Europe. Hence, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana absorb most of the West African immigrants.[40] The benefits accruing to ECOWAS members from the Protocol on Free Movement made Morocco, a North African country, to apply for admission into ECOWAS in 2017. Although Morocco's membership is yet to be approved, its trade with ECOWAS members, especially Nigeria and Senegal, has continued to increase.[41]

Challenges of Economic Integration in West Africa

A dispassionate assessment of ECOWAS shows that it has carved a niche for itself as a sustainable and vibrant brand in regional economic integration worldwide and a model for Africa. It has continued to earn and enjoy the respect, goodwill and support of a growing number of international development partners. Despite the relevance of ECOWAS to the global political economy, it faces multifarious challenges.[42] Poor infrastructure, non-implementation of regional protocols, prevalence of trade barriers and high levels of informal trade are major barriers to economic integration in the ECOWAS region. Specifically, barriers to economic integration in West Africa are discussed within economic, historical, administrative, political, security and socio-cultural challenges.

From an economic point of view, West Africa has generally remained poor. Although 5% of the world's population live in West Africa, its shares of world's total GDP and total exports is less than 1%.[43] Twelve out of the fifteen ECOWAS member-states are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In the UNDP's development index, the bottom ten countries have consistently come from Sub-Saharan Africa out of which four are ECOWAS member-states. This is not unconnected to the fact that the region comprises mainly primary and, in most cases, single-commodity producer countries which consume what they do not produce. The narrowing or elimination of the gap between production and consumption is required to enable the Community and its citizens break from the maze of exogenous dependency for the basic necessities of life. Moreover, the elusive convergence of national economic policies continues to delay the realisation of a much-desired monetary union in line with the objective of the 1978 ECOWAS Monetary Cooperation Programme. Despite their resilience, the largely agrarian and raw material dominated economies of ECOWAS member-states remain vulnerable to the shocks of exogenous factors. Although the region recorded a growth rate of 6.2% between 2010 and 2015, the figure masks significant disparity between the member-states. While Nigeria, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire account for 76%, 9.2% and 8.64% of total regional trade respectively, the remaining 12 ECOWAS countries shared 6.16% of the regional trade.[44] Our field observation shows that this trade disparity undermines free movement of persons and good in West Africa especially in trailing countries. No wonder ECOWAS countries largely failed to meet the goals and targets encapsulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nevertheless, overcoming this challenge presents an opportunity for ECOWAS countries to achieve Goals #8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work) and #9 (build resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While ECOWAS seems to have found a solution to the perennial financial problem dogging many multinational organisations or Regional Economic Communities (RECs) through its Community Levy mechanism, the challenge of inadequate commitment by member-states, especially delay in the payment of assessed dues, has remained unabated. Consequently, ECOWAS accepted the Chinese $31.6 million grant to build a new headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria because countries in the region do not have cash to spare for such projects.[45]

Similarly, the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment designed to facilitate the integration of national economies and peoples are yet to be fully implemented. At best they have been subjected to wanton violation by member-states through illegal road blocks and check-points for extortion, harassment and intimidation of travellers from other ECOWAS countries.[46] For example, the number of roadblocks/checkpoints in the 1020 km Lomé-Ouagadougou corridor which is freest corridor in the region increased from 14 in the second quarter of 2013 to 29 in 2015.[47] Our field observations further show that the extortion of travellers from other ECOWAS countries was most severe in the Abidjan-Lagos and Cotonou-Niamey corridors in West Africa.

Again, a lack of a centralized database among ECOWAS members to provide information on movement of persons and goods is a major hindrance to the implementation of *Protocol on Free Movement.* For instance, about 75% of intra-ECOWAS trade is not accounted for in official statistics because it takes place on an informal basis.[48] This constitutes drawbacks to the ideals of the protocol and subjects ECOWAS citizens to constant administrative harassment and extortion.[49]

Generally, these restrictions against free movement in the region exist at three different levels. First, member-states still impose restrictive measures to protect their national interest usually defined to include security, income and safety of nationals and their property. These measures manifest themselves in immigration laws, investment codes and indigenisation programmes. Second, the policies and activities of duplicitous RECs like the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) — a monetary union promoted by the French government — continue to impede free movement. Third, the contradictions in the ECOWAS Treaty itself and the *Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons* constitute restrictions in their own right. The interpretations of the protocol by member-states accounted for the famed *Ghana-Must-Go* crisis of 1983/4 in Nigeria as well as the 1999-2001 indirect expulsion of tens of thousands of migrants from Burkina Faso by the government of Cote d'Ivoire.

These economic challenges within the Community are exacerbated by cultural, historical political and administrative factors. Historical ties to different colonial powers constitute a structural barrier. These ties have culminated into the adoption of three official languages (English, French and Portuguese), different currencies, fiscal codes and public administration structures and practices within the sub-region. The relations between several of the member-countries have been marked by long-standing territorial disputes and political rivalries. In addition, political instability is prevalent in many ECOWAS member-countries. This has led to frequent, violent and unconstitutional changes in political leadership. For instance, between 2008 and 2015, the region suffered more than six military coups, particularly in Guinea Bissau (2008), Mauritania (2008), Guinea (2008), Guinea-Bissau (2009), Niger (2010), Mali (2012) and Burkina Faso (2015).

More importantly, relevant political decisions have been made at the regional level but there is a considerable lack of political will when regionally agreed decisions are to be implemented nationally. The divergence between regional rhetoric and national implementation is significant. While regional groupings are primarily concerned with policymaking, their implementation remains the responsibility of national governments. However, many member-states are hypocritically attached to their national sovereignties while at the same time canvassing for regional integration. This contradiction hampers the harmonisation of national policies and statutes into a supranational architecture. Further, there is often lack of continuity across election cycles in West Africa. Newly elected leaders, eager to establish their own identity and differentiate themselves and their governments from their predecessors, often abandon positions previously established. Thus, regional protocols are often not supported by national level legislation, regulation and procedures, and there is a general lack of enforcement and consistency. Accordingly, this scenario has been attributed to lack of regional institutional capacity, weak connection between institutions at the regional and national level, the absence of real political commitment to the regional integration process and lack of policy prioritisation mechanisms.[50] The prevalence of weak institutions undermines the inflow of Foreign Direct Investments in ECOWAS.[51] Consequently, the West African Monetary Union which intends to reduce transaction costs in cross-border trade and promote greater ease in cross-border investments, remains an area of frustration for supporters of regional integration. By the same token, the prospect of establishing a continental monetary union by 2023 as encapsulated in the *Abuja Treaty* of 3 June 1991 is still far-fetched.

Furthermore, the region has continued to suffer from low level intra-regional trade. It has also been reported that intra-regional trade in West Africa has hovered between 11% to 15% in the past 25 years.[52] The implication is that ECOWAS has failed to grow intra-West African trade. In fact, the EU absorbed 43% of ECOWAS agricultural exports and 48% of its food exports between 2010 and 2016.[53] In contrast, data from Eurostat indicates that intra-EU trade ranges from 69% to 85% of EU total exports between 2010 and 2017. Heavy reliance of ECOWAS countries on EU and China for their imports affects them negatively. For instance, Nigerian civil society organisations blame Chinese imports for the loss of several jobs.[54]

Although trade liberalisation schemes of the Community are meant to follow a three-phase implementation approach, its member-states have continued to practise economic protectionism which runs counter to the goals of the programme. While many African RECs have made significant progress in the area of trade facilitation such as Nigerian Export Trade Houses Ltd (NEXPORTRADE), much more effort is required to harmonise and integrate sub-regional markets.

For instance, issues relating to the CET, lack of complementarity and diversification of production structures, inadequate transportation infrastructure and communication technologies, high production costs, low utilisation of trade liberalisation regimes, cumbersome and complex custom procedures, cross-border anti-competitiveness practices and other technical barriers have combined to undermine intra- and inter-regional trade in ECOWAS domain and Africa generally. By extension, it has also eroded the actualisation of South-South cooperation.

Conclusion

This study posits that while the regional option was adopted in the EDCs of the North as a logical consequence and/or the instrument for the universalisation of capitalism, the emergence and/or revival of regionalism in the LDCs of the South was a reactionary outcome of the twin problems of colonialism and globalisation. Thus regionalism, whether in economic or security affairs, is a response to the dominant order. Using ECOWAS as a case study, the paper established that the capacity of sub-regional groupings in Africa to actualise the ideals contained in their charters, protocols and conventions is very weak. Commitment to regional integration in Africa generally seems marginal. This minimal commitment of the national governments to regional integration process has made the regional option elusive. In other words, the prioritisation of national interest over regional interest is the greatest obstacle to socioeconomic integration among ECOWAS countries. Despite the major challenges to regional integration in Africa, ECOWAS has made significant achievements in creating institutions and entering treaties that are relevant for promotion of trade, economic development, peace and security in the region.

In fact, regionalism in sub-Saharan Africa remains the most concrete African initiative for tackling the fundamental problems of African economy. Therefore, African national governments must exhibit greater political will towards the revival of extant sub-regional and regional groupings into more virile and viable organisations that can address the problems of western balkanisation of their territories, globalisation, underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance and diseases. Moreover, RECs in Africa should adopt prudent macro-economic policies, scaling up of investments in the social sector, formulation of economic policies within the framework of a regional development programme, and diversification of the export base by member-states to ensure sustainability and mitigation of the impact of future exogenous shocks.

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