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Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges of ECOWAS in fostering regional integration in West Africa. Anchored on the Marxist theory of the state and qualitative data generated through documentary method, the study observed that the production of homogenous raw materials by member states of ECOWAS has reinforced vertical trade relations with industrialized countries and thus hinder intra-ECOWAS trade. The study also noted that incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the Community highways, characterized by inhuman treatment, extortion, and arbitrary imposition of charges have undermined free movement of persons, goods, services and capital within the sub-region. The study thus posits that despite all the efforts put into integration of ECOWAS economics, intra-regional trade in West Africa has remained very low. Among others, the study recommends that member states of ECOWAS should ensure effective implementation of ECOWAS Treaties/Protocols in their territories.

Keywords: Economic Community of West African States, regional trade, West Africa, integration, free movement

INTRODUCTION

The growth of regional trade blocs has remained one of the major developments in international relations in recent years. Virtually all countries are members of one bloc or another, and many belong to more than one [1, 2]. Regional agreements vary widely, but all are primarily aimed at reducing barriers to trade between member states. Primarily, these agreements are aimed at removing tariffs on intra-bloc trade in goods [3, 4]. More fundamentally, these agreements often transcend tariff removal to cover non-tariff barriers as well as liberalization of investment and other policies. With respect to Africa, one of the major challenges facing the continent in the twenty first century is how to arrest the trend of economic decline and strengthen the capacity of African economies for effective participation in the increasingly competitive global economy [5, 6]. Promotion of regional economic integration has been identified as one key element in grappling with this challenge. This has for long constituted a significant aspect of African development strategy. Highlighting the essence of regional integration in Africa, [7] noted that African formations need to cooperate to be strong enough to deal with the powerful multinational companies operating in Africa; exert better terms from their economic relations with international organizations, development agencies and other regional organizations; overcome the constraints placed on industrialization and development by the small size of the internal markets; and mobilize more capital for large-scale development [8].

Regional integration is an “incubator style process whereby existing political systems continuously forgo the desire and ability to conduct key foreign and domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decision or to delegate the decision making process to new central organs" [9]. Regional integration is usually considered from two complementary perspectives. First, regional integration is seen as a means of achieving greater trade relations among nation-states by lowering trade barriers and making provisions for free movement of people and labour and strong economic linkages between people [10]. The second perspective has to do with the institutional character of integration. This is primarily a governance question, about whether regional bodies have the mandate to address general concerns, and if so, how they are in fact addressing them. The role, for example, which regional structures play in regulating trade, overseeing and enforcing free movement of people and goods, and ensuring good governance and human security [11]. The institutional perspective appears to be the core challenge facing integration in Africa due to the relative non-existence or recent creation of the law-making institution.

At the sub-regional level, West African states, in the last three and half decades, have equally been enmeshed in the struggle to attain sustainable economic development and self-reliance through regional economic integration. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was and has been at the vanguard of regional integration in West Africa, with focus on the development and expansion of the regional market as the corner piece of its comprehensive development strategy. ECOWAS came into being on the 28th of May 1975 after a Treaty signed in Lagos Nigeria by leaders of fifteen (15) countries that make up West African Sub-region it entered into force in July 1975. The first meeting of the council of ministers and the Authority of Heads of States and Governments took place in Lome Togo, on November 4-5, 1976, during which additional protocols to the Treaty were signed. According to [12] the birth of this community was to an extent a response to a call by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) since its birth in 1963 for economic integration among African countries as well as that of United Nations Commission for Africa. The formation of ECOWAS was also informed more by the desire among the member states for political stability and industrialization than a quick response to the emerging global system. It was the dominant believe that an economically strong sub-region will create the much-desired basis for political stability and become less economically dependent on the great powers. To this end, ECOWAS aims essentially at promoting cooperation and integration with the goal of creating a regional economic bloc [13].

In 1992, the revised Treaty of ECOWAS, among others, affirmed these rights of citizens of the Community to entry, residence and settlement and enjoined Member States to recognize these rights in their respective territories. It also called on Member States to take all necessary steps at the national level to ensure that the provisions are duly implemented. The aim is to achieve a vibrant, closely knitted economic zone where the development potential of individual member of the community can translate to effective economic building bloc for the entire region. The Revised ECOWAS Treaty was also designed to accelerate economic integration among member states. The Preamble of Chapter 2 Article 3 of the Treaty seeks to achieve economic integration through liberalization of trade between member states, removal of all impediments that hinder free movement of factors of production. Thus, it was envisaged that ECOWAS would generate enormous opportunities and benefits by fostering trade between members. However, despite these efforts aimed at accelerating economic integration in West Africa, intra-ECOWAS export and import shows dismal performance. On the average intra-ECOWAS trade is only about 11% of trade with non-ECOWAS countries [14]. Thus, the dismal performance of intra-ECOWAS trade relations, despite the efforts that have been made to accelerate economic integration in West Africa is the problematic this study intends to explore.

Although the extant literature is rich, educative and quite revealing, it, however, appears to fall short of a systematic analysis of the link between the production of homogenous raw materials by member states of ECOWAS and vertical trade relations with the technologically advanced countries, as well as the ineffective implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of person and trade relations among member states and the establishment and resolutions of ECOWAS Parliament and weak institutional capacity of ECOWAS integration. This study is poised to examine this knowledge gap [15].

Theoretical Framework

We anchored our analysis on the Marxist theory of the state. The theory arose as a counter to the proposition of the western liberal theory that the state is an independent force and an impartial arbiter that not only caters for the overall interest of every member of the society but also regulates equitably their socio-economic transactions and processes [16]. On the contrary, Marxist theorists maintained that the state which arose from the conflict between classes is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful and economically dominant class.

The classical Marxist theory of the state has been further developed and employed in the elucidation and understanding of the peculiarity of the neo-colonial state by scholars such as [17, 18, 19] and others. The major contention of these scholars is that the post-colonial state is a creation of imperialism and as such, has followed a developmental strategy dictated by the interest of imperialism and its local allies rather than that of the majority of the indigenous population. According to [20], the post-colonial state rests on the foundation of the colonial state whose major pre-occupation was to create conditions under which accumulation of capital by the foreign bourgeoisie in alliance with the ruling elite would take place through the exploitation of local human and other natural resources. Therefore, the post-colonial state that now emerged, though ostensibly independent and sovereign, was no less a creation of imperialism than the colonial state. The post-colonial state is a creation of imperialism because the class that now controlled it was a creature of imperialism and, as such, sought always to dovetail its interests with those of the foreign bourgeoisie [21].

One basic character of the post-colonial state, as articulated by [4], is that it has very limited autonomy. This means that the state is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys limited independence from the social classes, particularly the hegemonic social class, and so, is immersed in the class struggles that go on in the society. The post-colonial state is also constituted in such a way that it reflects and mainly carters for a narrow range of interests: the interests of the rapacious political elite in comprador and subordinate relationship with foreign capital. This lack of relative autonomy is one reason why the post-colonial state in Nigeria is incapable of mediating political conflicts [5].

For [11], the colonial state, due to the distinct colonial experience at the stage of "extensive growth" of capital in which they emerged, did not strive for legitimacy as the raison d'être for their constitution was "principally for conquering and holding down the peoples of the colonies, seen not as equal commodity bearers in integrated national markets, but as occasional petty commodity producers…" [13] As a result of this, there was no effort made to evolve, routinize and institutionalize "principles for the non-arbitrary use of the colonial state by the colonial political class. And when in the post-colonial era this state passed into the hands of a pseudo capitalist class fervently seeking to become economically dominant, it becomes, for the controllers, a powerful instrument for acquiring private wealth, a monstrous instrument in the hands of individuals and pristine ensembles for pursuing private welfare to the exclusion of others" [13]. Following the above, therefore, we contend that the kind of regionalism seen in this sub-region as exemplified in ECOWAS is open regionalism in the sense that the process of globalization still goes on despite the regional integration and this is as a result of the character of the states that make up ECOWAS. In that process, there is a complex web of interconnectedness and interdependence not among the West Africa States under the auspices of ECOWAS but between the member countries of ECOWAS and the rest the world through globalization. Thus, in compliance with demands of the contemporary global order and the character of member states, ECOWAS remains a viable instrument in the hands of industrialized countries for promoting trade, investment and financial liberalization between members and the rest of the global community.

Production of Homogenous Raw Materials by Member States of ECOWAS

West African exports consist of a much higher share of primary commodities (over 60 percent) than the average for the world (less than 25 percent) and for Asia and Latin America [17]. The primary commodities on which so many West African countries so heavily depend have experienced a long-term decline in real price. According to Odularu, West Africa's market share for many of the key primary commodity exports experienced significant erosion between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s. Market share losses were 40 percent for such commodities as copper, timber, and coffee; almost 60 percent for iron ore, and close to 30 percent for cotton and cocoa. One would have thought that the decline in real price for primary commodities produced by West African countries in the international market would have enhanced intra-trade relations among West African countries. It is indeed a disappoint to realize that intra-trade relations in West Africa have declined in recent times, with more emphasis on vertical trade relations with advanced capitalist countries despite the decline in real price of primary commodities. The explanation for this ugly scenario is two-fold: high export share of primary commodities and low share of manufactures in exports. One of the major trademarks of West African political economy is the production and export of primary commodities. The accident of colonialism, when African countries were coerced to produce for the domestic industries of the imperialist powers, partly explains this unpleasant. Thus, the trend of producing what they do not consume and consuming what they do not produce has subsisted. Table 1 below highlights primary trade commodities of ECOWAS member states.

Table 1 Primary Trade Commodities of ECOWAS Member States

COUNTRY	PRIMARY PRODUCTS
Benin	Cotton, Crude oil, Palm products, Cocoa
Burkina Faso	Cotton, Livestock, Gold
Cote d'Ivoire	Cocoa, Coffee, Timber, Petroleum, Cotton, Bananas, pineapples
Gambia	Peanut products, Fish, Cotton lint.
Ghana	Gold, Cocoa, Timer, Tuna, Bauxite, Aluminum, Manganese ore, Diamonds and recently oil (at a small scale).
Guinea	Bauxite, Alumina, Gold, Diamonds, Coffee, Fish, Agricultural products.
Mali	Cotton, Gold, Livestock.
Niger	Uranium ore, Livestock, Cowpeas, Onions.
Nigeria	Petroleum and petroleum products 95%, Cocoa, Rubber.
Senegal	Fish, Groundnuts (peanuts), Petroleum products, Phosphates, Cotton
Sierra Leone	Diamonds, Cocoa, Coffee, Fish.
Togo	Re-exports, cotton, Phosphates, Coffee, Cocoa

Source: [7]. "Export diversification as a promotion strategy for intra ECOWAS trade expansion. *African Journal of Business Management,* 3 (2): 34

Table 1 clearly indicates that member states of ECOWAS produce and export more of primary commodities than industrial products. As a result of this, they tend to trade more with industrialized countries that need the primary products than the countries of West Africa, and the entire Africa even. For instance, as Table 1 indicates, cotton, cocoa and coffee, are simultaneously produced by six, five and three member state of ECOWAS respectively. On account of this, intra-ECOWAS export and import has shown dismal performance. Only about 6% of Nigeria's exports (mainly oil) were traded with ECOWAS members (mainly to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire) [4]. The implication of this is that outside crude oil, Nigeria would not have anything to export to other West African countries. As regards import, less than 2% of Nigeria's imports originated from ECOWAS states (mainly Benin, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire). On the average intra-ECOWAS trade, according to [3] is only about 11% of trade with non-ECOWAS countries. Intra-trade relations is low because ECOWAS member states produce and export almost the same products. They are therefore compelled to look for markets for their products. This explains the penchant of ECOWAS member states for vertical trade relations with industrialized countries.

Another factor, which is related to the dependence on primary products, and which explains the commitment of ECOWA member states to vertical trade relations with industrialized countries is the region's inability to develop and expand alternative export products, such as manufactures. [11], has noted that an increasing share of manufactured goods in a country's export basket can be an important indicator of its exposure to international technology, its access to learn and gain from technology transfer and its ability to produce at international competitive standards. According to him, compared to other developing regions of the world, including those of Africa, West Africa has the lowest share of manufactures in exports and the lowest growth rate of the share over the last two decades. The regions low export performance in manufacturing is a major factor that reduces its share of world trade. Some countries in the region continue to receive 3% or less of their merchandise export earnings from manufactures. Nigeria, for instance, received 99% of its export earnings from fossil fuels and just 1% from manufacturing in 1999 [7]. Efforts at improving on this, especially the international competitiveness of such products, have not always been successful. Therefore, high export share of primary commodities and low share of manufactures in exports have inextricably committed member states of ECOWAS to vertical trade relations with industrialized countries. We proceed now to discuss the commitment of ECOWAS member states to vertical trade relations with industrialized countries.

Commitment of ECOWAS Member States to Vertical Trade Relations

As former colonies, West African sub-region has long tradition of ties with industrialized countries. France, Britain and US can be regarded as the superpowers in West Africa, even though their engagement has varied over the years [12]. France has traditionally maintained close political, economic and military relations with her former colonies. Britain, Portugal and U.S. have maintained more moderate relations for many years. However, in the aftermath of the Cold war, there has been a growing global interest in West Africa. France, Britain and U.S. have, in different ways, supported the development of ECOWAS and ECOMOG. The most important explanation for global attention is perhaps an awareness of the supply of natural resources. The continent in general and the West African sub-region in particular has become a vital arena of strategic and geo-political importance for the US, EU, China, India and other emerging powers, particularly in the areas of oil and natural gas supply in the light of increased instability in the Middle East [16]. The European Union has extensive relations with West Africa, in addition to the ties of member states due to their colonial past, foreign aid, trade and peacekeeping are some areas in which connections are well developed. EU is the West African states' leading trade partner, accounting for almost 40 percent of the regions' trade in 2005. West African exports to EU are dominated by minerals (almost 50 percent) and agricultural products. EU exports to West Africa are dominated by electrical and transport equipment, medicines and dairy products. France and Britain dominate trade between African and EU (Ann-Sofi, 2014). China is now Africa's third largest commercial partner after the United States and France. China exports a wide variety of products to West Africa. Investments in Nigeria's petroleum and gas production have increased dramatically in recent years. China has invested in Nigerian oil refineries and infrastructure, and in fact, has become a very important arms supplier to Nigeria [14]. State-owned Chinese petroleum companies can make long-term investments without a demand for short-term profits. India's relations with West Africa have historic roots in shared experiences as former British colonies. Trade relations between India and the British West African colonies developed during the colonial era and bilateral relations continued to evolve economically and politically, after independence. After its own successful struggle for independence, India encouraged West African colonies to do the same. Today, Nigeria is India's largest trading partner. Indian investments in Nigeria and other West African countries are expected to increase in the future, even though they are competing with China and other countries. Petroleum dominates Indian imports from West Africa. In recent years Indian foreign policy towards West Africa has been more focused on building stable economic relations. One of India's foreign policy goals is to significantly increase the country's role in the West African region [4].The vertical relations of West African states with the technologically advanced countries, as painted above, constitute a major economic challenge that undermines regional integration. In fact, economic challenges are ever surfacing in the integration bid of the ECOWAS, posing one of the greatest challenges on the way of the establishment of an integrated market, with Common External Tariff (CET). The narrowness of the Community's market is a serious challenge in this direction [7]. There is no gain saying that the volume of intra-West African trade is small. Truly, intra-regional trade in West Africa has remained abysmally low despite all the efforts to integrate the economics of ECOWAS Member States. Whereas intra-West trade is decreasing, trade with industrialized countries is increasing. The structure of West African political economy which relies heavily on the production of primary products accounts for this. Table 2 below shows more succinctly the volume of intra-regional trade and vertical trade with industrialized countries, between 1996 and 2011.

Table 2: Percentages of Intra-regional Exports and Imports, 1996–2011

	Exports			Imports		
	1996–2000	2001–2006	2007–2011	1996–2000	2001–2006	2007–2011
Developing Africa*	9.7	9.8	10.9	13.3	13.5	12.7
Eastern Africa	12.4	14.1	13.9	8.8	9.3	7.1
Middle Africa	1.2	1.0	1.3	2.6	2.5	3.1
Northern Africa	3.2	2.9	3.9	2.8	3.7	3.8
Southern Africa*	4.4	2.1	2.1	11.9	10.7	7.9
Western Africa	10.2	10.0	9.0	11.3	12.5	10.2
Developing America	19.1	17.6	20.6	17.6	19.0	21.1
Developing Asia	41.5	45.1	50.1	40.6	49.3	53.0
Developing Oceania	1.3	3.0	3.3	0.9	2.3	2.7
Europe	67.3	71.4	70.0	68.3	67.0	64.4

Source: UNCTADstat database.
* Figure for the period 1996–2000 refers to the year 2000 only.

Source: UNCTAD (2013) *Economic Development in Africa: Report 2013*. New York: United Nations. P. 13.

From Table 2 above, it is easily deducible that intra-regional trade in Western Africa, between 1996 and 2011 was not only dismally low, but also decreased rather than increasing. In the period 2001-2006, exports and imports were10.0 percent and 12.5 percent respectively. Rather than increasing, exports and imports, in the period 2007-2011, decreased to 9.0 percent and 10.2 percent respectively. The implication is that trade relation in the sub-region is mostly between ECOWAS countries and non-members, particularly industrialized countries. Obviously, what accounts for low intra-West Africa trade is the fact that states of the Community are all developing and unindustrialized, and as such suppliers of primary commodities. Table 3 and 4 show exports and imports of member states of ECOWAS.

Table 3: Exports of Member States of ECOWAS by Main Destination (%), 1996–2012

S/N	Country	Percentage of Total Exports					
		Developed Europe		Developed America		Developing Asia	
		1996-2000	2007-2012	1996-2000	2007-2012	1996-2000	2007-2012
1	Benin	23.5	9.3	3.6	1.1	31.5	49.0
2	Burkina Faso	43.1	38.4	1.1	1.7	21.8	38.1
3	Cape Verde	47.7	83.4	2.2	1.8	2.1	2.2
4	Cote d'Ivoire	52.2	46.0	8.6	11.6	4.8	6.6
5	Gambia	74.2	26.9	1.2	2.1	4.8	53.7
6	Ghana	64.2	46.6	11.3	6.5	8.4	16.8
7	Guinea	55.8	36.4	19.3	10.1	5.1	22.0
8	Guinea-Bissau	19.3	1.7	0.3	6.2	46.3	91.0
9	Liberia	73.3	46.0	3.2	17.1	18.6	24.9
10	Mali	23.0	13.1	4.2	1.7	29.3	29.3
11	Niger	24.2	44.0	4.0	15.6	31.2	4.1
12	Nigeria	29.1	24.3	39.3	39.1	16.1	14.9
13	Senegal	44.5	22.9	1.0	0.6	16.3	16.0
14	Sierra Leone	79.3	61.3	13.7	14.6	2.7	13.8
15	Togo	23.9	18.9	9.9	1.0	27.2	25.1

Source: UNCTAD (2013) *Economic Development in Africa Report 2013: United Nations publication: Intra-African Trade: Unlocking Private Sector Dynamism*. New York: United Nations. P: 15.

Table 4: Imports of Member States of ECOWAS by Main Destination (%), 1996–2012

S/N	Country	Percentage of Total Exports					
		Developed Europe		Developed America		Developing Asia	
		1996-2000	2007-2012	1996-2000	2007-2012	1996-2000	2007-2012
1	Benin	46.1	23.6	4.3	8.1	25.6	56.1
2	Burkina Faso	45.6	34.0	3.6	5.0	6.6	15.2
3	Cape Verde	77.8	80.9	8.0	1.5	4.4	6.0
4	Cote d'Ivoire	51.2	29.7	5.4	3.0	11.5	20.7
5	Gambia	41.1	21.4	3.9	3.9	33.8	44.1
6	Ghana	45.4	27.7	10.8	9.1	14.2	32.2
7	Guinea	50.0	44.9	9.9	5.4	17.4	29.7
8	Guinea-Bissau	50.7	44.5	2.5	2.0	25.2	17.5
9	Liberia	32.0	9.3	1.3	1.2	39.0	72.5
10	Mali	43.5	32.1	4.5	3.9	10.3	13.9
11	Niger	40.9	35.6	6.8	5.5	21.2	27.2
12	Nigeria	48.2	35.8	12.7	11.0	23.3	33.5
13	Senegal	56.6	46.6	5.1	3.7	13.9	22.6
14	Sierra Leone	53.2	19.7	10.5	11.5	12.3	18.2
15	Togo	43.7	29.3	4.2	4.7	24.4	47.0

Source: UNCTAD (2013) *Economic Development in Africa Report 2013: United Nations publication: Intra-African Trade: Unlocking Private Sector Dynamism*. New York: United Nations. P.16.

The information in Tables 3 and 4 above clearly indicate that external trade of Member States of ECOWAS with developed countries of America and Europe and developing countries of Asia was far more encouraging than intra-trade relations among ECOWAS members. This is so because ECOWAS members principally produce and export primary products to these countries that need them, and import finished goods they produce. Thus, while member states of ECOWAS essentially export mineral fuels, food and live animals, and crude materials to the EU, they import machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, and manufactured goods. This scenario accounts for the dismally low intra-trade relations among ECOWAS member states and relatively higher imports and exports with industrialized countries. Member states of ECOWAS produce primary products which only the industrialized countries can buy and they need manufactured goods which they do not produce, and as such, must buy from industrialized countries. This has inextricably committed member states of ECOWAS to vertical trade relations with industrialized countries. This, to a very large extent, has hampered regional integration. At this point, it is quite evident that member states of ECOWAS produce more of commodities than industrial products, which in most cases account for about 25 per cent of GDP [8]. Hence, member states of ECOWAS tend to produce the same types of products, and this has not only fostered and reinforced vertical trade relations with industrialized countries, but has hindered intra-West African trade in particular and the whole process of regional integration project in general.

ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed on 1975 to among other things encourage, foster and accelerate the economic and social development of the Member States in order to improve the living standards of their peoples [10]. This was based on the conviction that the promotion of harmonious economic development of the Member States required effective economic co-operation and integration largely through a determined and concerted policy of self-reliance. The recognition of the need for economic integration including free flow of persons, goods and services stimulated the enactment of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and the right of residence and establishment in 1979. The first phase of the Protocol guaranteed free entry of citizens from Member states without visa for ninety days and it was ratified by all member states in 1980. The second phase of the protocol, right of residence became effective in July 1986 and all member states ratified it. With the coming into force of this protocol, the member states abolished visa and other entry requirements for citizens traveling to a sister country. This means that a citizen of ECOWAS member state who possesses a valid traveling documents and international health certificate can spend a period not exceeding 90 days in another state. In 1986, the second phase of the protocol (right of residence) was ratified by all member states. In order to facilitate the movement of persons, restrictions on the entry of private or commercial vehicles in member states were to be removed subject to possession of valid driving licence, Matriculation Certificate (Ownership Card) or Log Book, Insurance Policy and International customs documents recognized within the Community. Whereas a private vehicle can remain in another member state for up to 90 days, commercial vehicles are restricted to 15 days (within which it is not allowed to engage in business). Both types are subject to renewal upon request when its permit expires. In furtherance of increased movement of people, ECOWAS has issued 'brown card' insurance scheme for inter-state road transport to facilitate effective movement of persons, goods and services [2].

Rationale for ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons

Article 27 of the ECOWAS treaty affirmed the need for economic integration, which includes free flow of persons, goods and services by calling on the Member States to ensure graduation removal of all obstacles to free movement of persons, services and capital (Paragraph 1 of Article 27). ECOWAS member states were as a matter of fact required to stop demanding visa and residence permits, and therefore allow

West Africans to work and undertake commercial and industrial activities within their territories (Paragraph 2). The re-creation of borderless West Africa was in consonance with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and UN human rights. In addition, they were of the opinion that the integration of the Member States into a viable regional Community may demand the partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the Community within the context of a collective political will. It was believed that the existing bilateral and multilateral forms of economic co-operation within the region open up perspectives for more extensive cooperation. It was also based on the view that the sub-region needed to face together the political, economic and socio-cultural challenges of sustainable improvement in the welfare of their populations; and pooling together of their resources, particularly people to ensure the most rapid and optimum expansion of the sub-region's productive capacity. These constitute the main rationale for re-creating free movement of persons in the sub-region.

ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Person and Trade Relations among Member States

Regional integration is driven by quality infrastructure. Thus, the worst state of infrastructure which characterized the West African sub-region appears to hinder the process of economic integration in West Africa. Inter and intra-regional railways, road networks, energy, telecommunication facilities as well as expedient border ancillaries are still at an uncomfortable state. In the areas of telecommunication, ECOWAS's proposed fused telecom network- which will link the entire region is still an optical illusion as inter regional calls are charged at international rate. A modernized and expanded network which would have a direct bearing on business activities and trade is yet to be achieved. In fact, a closer examination of the state of infrastructure within the West African sub-region reveals voluntary efforts by few members of the Community who feels that provision of such projects would maximize their interest. Truly, it is just a few of the Member States are out to make short term sacrifices for the long term benefit of integrated market of the region. To this end, Ibeanu (nd) argues that regional integration has a tendency to present a paradox of a cohabitation of integrative and separatist dispositions among integrating States. This paradox is often expressed in "a contradiction between the provisions of legal instruments – Treaties, Conventions and Protocols – and actual practices of States." [7] , What can be deduced from the above assertion of Ibeanu is that member states hardly enforce ECOWAS' Treaties, Conventions and Protocols, particularly the protocol on free movement of persons, services and capital. Sub-paragraph (d) of paragraph 2 of Article 2 of the ECOWAS *Protocol A/P.1/5/79 of 1979* calls on Member States to ensure by stages the abolition of the obstacles to free movement of persons, services and capital. In addition, paragraph 1 of Article 27 of the Protocol confers the status of Community citizenship on the citizens of Member States and also enjoins Member States to abolish all obstacles to freedom of movement and residence within the Community. Furthermore, paragraph 2 Article 27 provides for Member States to exempt Community citizens from holding visitor's visa and residence permits and allow them to work and undertake commercial and industrial activities within their territories. These provisions were reiterated in the revised Treaty of ECOWAS. Article 3 (2) (d) states that an objective of the Community is the establishment of a common market. The tendency to breach the provisions of ECOWAS legal instruments on freedom of movement by Member States is compounded by the tenacity at which they (member states of the community) guide their borders. Multiple check-points within the West African sub-region as presented in table 5 demonstrates that the whole essence of economic integration of the community is a theory yet to be absolved in practice by most states of the community.

Table 5: Official Checkpoints on Selected Routes of West African Highways, December 2010.

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

Source: [9]. “The ECOWAS Platform and the Persisting Challenges of Integrating the West African Region: A Discourse”. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4 (1): 108.

A commonly adduced reason for breaching the provisions of ECOWAS Protocols on free movement is the rising level of trans-border criminal activities. The problem of trans-border crimes has remained a dominant theme. In 2003, for instance, the Nigerian government officially closed the border with Benin Republic over the activities of a criminal gang. As to be expected, the emphasis on trans-border crimes has made prominent the activities of law enforcement officials along West African borders vis-à-vis the free movement of persons, goods and services. The provisions of ECOWAS legal instruments notwithstanding, free movement of goods and persons has remained difficult across West Africa. Though the uncomfortable state of infrastructure hinders freedom of movement within West Africa, the negative role of law enforcement officials has become the most immediate obstacle.

The incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the community highways are characterized by inhuman treatment and extortion from commuters; officers arbitrarily impose charges for stamping of passport at checkpoints. Even, the law enforcement officials themselves have come to acknowledge this. The joint meeting of Nigeria-Benin security officials in Abuja in August 2006, chaired by Mr. Sunday Ehindero, Nigeria’s Inspector-General of Police, for instance, lamented that the proliferation of security agencies along the border of the two countries constitutes a barrier to the principle of free trade of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Ibeanu, n.d). In fact, the story of what West African citizens go through in the hands of border security officials such as harassment, extortion, deportation, brutality and torture is the same in the West African sub-region.

The social and economic consequences of this state of affairs in terms of regional integration and trade are enormous. Free movement of persons, goods, services and capital is very strategic for the actualization of the ECOWAS vision of a borderless community with closely knit economic base that possesses the capacity to meet the social, cultural and technological aspiration of member states. Road network is the blood of transportation within and among the ECOWAS community. In respect to this, the ECOWAS member states have ratified certain *Protocol A/P.1/5/79*. This Protocol is designed to encourage unfettered movement of persons, goods and services through harmonization of member states’ transport policies. Nevertheless, despite all these protocols, free movement of persons, goods and services exist only on paper (Ibeanu, nd). The multiple checkpoints, harassments, extortion and intimidation at the borders of member states of ECOWAS is more than ever choking to moribund the objective of the Community, which is the establishment of a common market. Incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the community highways are characterized by inhuman treatment and extortion from commuters;

officers arbitrarily impose charges for stamping of passport at checkpoints. This has adversely affected free movement of persons, goods, services and capital which is very strategic for the actualization of the ECOWAS vision of a borderless community and trade relations among member states. Thus, despite all the efforts put into integration of ECOWAS economics, intra-regional trade in West Africa has remained very low. According to [5], intra-ECOWAS export and import shows dismal performance. On the average intra-ECOWAS trade is only about 11% of trade with non-ECOWAS countries. Thus, ineffective implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of person as seen in incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the Community highways that are characterized by inhuman treatment and extortion from commuters and arbitrary imposition of charges for stamping of passport at checkpoints has adversely affected the movement of persons and goods across the boundaries of ECOWAS member states.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the challenges of ECOWAS in fostering regional integration in West Africa. The study specifically seeks to ascertain the link between the production of homogenous raw materials by member states of ECOWAS and vertical trade relations with the technologically advanced countries, ineffective implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of person and trade relations among member states as well as the establishment and resolutions of the ECOWAS Parliament and weak institutional capacity of ECOWAS integration. The findings indicate that member states of ECOWAS produce and export more of primary commodities than industrial products. As a result of this, they tend to trade more with industrialized countries that need the primary products than the countries of West Africa, and this has not only fostered and reinforced vertical trade relations with industrialized countries, but has hindered intra-ECOWAS trade in particular and the whole process of regional integration in general. Our findings also indicate that the ineffective implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of person as incessant checkpoints on selected routes of the Community highways are not only rampant, but also characterized by inhuman treatment and extortion from commuters; arbitrary imposition of charges for stamping of passport at checkpoints. This has adversely affected free movement of persons, goods, services and capital which is very strategic for the actualization of the ECOWAS vision of a borderless community and trade relations among member states. Thus, despite all the efforts put into integration of ECOWAS economics, intra-regional trade in West Africa has remained very low.

On the basis of the findings of this study, we put forward the following recommendations:

- Member states of ECOWAS should ensure effective implementation of ECOWAS Treaties/Protocols and also respect the rights of migrant workers in their territories. They should also realign domestic national laws with sub-regional, regional and international laws and conventions, especially those that discriminate against foreigners in the labour market.
- West African countries should also embark on massive industrialization so that they can no longer only be the exporter of primary products but also manufactured products. This will also enhance intra-regional trade because each country will have something to import from, and export to, other countries of the sub-region.
- West African countries should adopt "open regionalism" in place of the inner-directed regionalism which ECOWAS symbolizes. This will enable them reap the benefits of both globalization and regionalism.

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