



The integration odyssey in West Africa: hopes and perils

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Abstract

The journey of a million miles begin with the first humble step taken is a well known adage and dictum in African, thus, this paper setting out to examine the humble odyssey (journey) of west African states toward regional integration. The economic community of West African states (Ecowas) was the end result of the odyssey that started way back into the period of the fight for independence and was meant to bring the benefits of integration to the West African sub region. The envisaged benefits had remain within the realm of illusion, as the journey so far is experiencing wobbling and fumbling thus the question whether the odyssey was indeed necessary and if so, what are the factor militating against the union (Ecowas). The attempt at proffering answers to the questions led the paper to several conclusions that includes the fragmentation and division of the sub region into pocket of small states and the continued allegiance of these states to their colonial masters had remain problematic and an obstacle towards the west African sub region ripping the full benefits of integration, thus, the recommendations canvass herein.

Keywords: integration, panafricanism, odyssey, international system, colonialism, development and underdevelopment. brexit

Introduction

The journey of West African states to forming the Economic community of West Africa (Ecowas) can best described as a mix grill of experiences, as Ecowas had failed to match words with action. Ecowas is wobbling and fumbling without any clear cut thrust on how best to march dreams with action. "Brexit" is a new buzzword that is resonating across the economic and political space of the world, with Nations, scholars and policy makers trying to wrap their heads around the world especially as it concerns fate of European Union and other regional economic unions. The world "Brexit" in most cases is used to describe the recent serving of notice(s) of withdrawal by Great Britain from the European Union and thus the frenzy by scholars and policy makers wanting to know the impact of the withdrawal on the European economic and political (space) block and by extension the world. For the African continent, since the end of second world war, there has been the eulogizing and rising status of European philosophy, concept, values and even models for development within African scholarship and societies, thus the European Union (EU) becoming a model for development for almost all the developing regions (Africa) of the current international system that has its root in the treaty of Westphalia (1648). The desire to correcting the ills of colonialism aggregated into the attempt at copying the European model for economic transformation, thus the beginning of the odyssey. The belief and euphoria that usher in the great expectations of rapid economic transformation for the region has faded into the horizon, as "Ecowas" since its coming into being in 1975 had been wobbling and fumbling, with the colonial masters still dominating and determining the thrust of economic transformation for the region.

For the reason(s) of colonialism and imperialism, the African continent according to Asante (2001), Ojo (2001), Adetula (2004) ^[3] all chorus in affirmation that colonialism and imperialism greatly fragmented the African continent

into states (nations) with scant economic coherence and relevance, thus the loud chorus amongst African scholars and policymakers for economic integration as alternative to the dependency foisted on the continent by leading European powers. It is against this backdrop that Adedeji (1983) posited, while giving flanks to the logic of African States being left in the conditions of economic and development irrelevance due to their fragmentations into entities that can barely lift or move out the masses of their people living in poverty. This logic and posture was the vent Adedeji (1993) needed to advance his position and logic by noting ...

The full implications of the efforts to achieve economic cooperation in West Africa cannot be fully realized unless it is seen within the context of the struggle of the developing world to achieve a new world economic order. The adjustment of relations between the industrialized countries of the North and the developing countries of the South...

Again, premised on the logic and analysis of Adedeji (1983), the crisis that had engulf international economic relations in the current international system can be summarized in three interrelated forms - (i) deterioration in the levels and conditions of living in developing countries (ii) a high degree of economic, financial and technical dependence of developing counties on advanced countries and (iii) the intransigence uncooperative and unsympathetic attitude of the developed countries. Adetula (2001) did follow through on the analysis of Adedeji (1993) by noting that during the struggle for political independence, the African continent did acknowledge the fact that regional cooperation strategy is the best insulator against foreign dependence and underdevelopment. This fact was underlined by African countries themselves and the international community in various "convergent policy

declarations and statements” as being indispensable for “socio-economic transformation and growth” of the continent. Consequent upon this vision and commitment to the principles of economic integration, African leaders in the post-colonial era pursued regional integration in all the regions of the continent, thus, the beginning of the odyssey of ECOWAS. This general strategy and framework of cooperation and integration was re-echoed and further given energy with the adoption in April 1980 of the celebrated “Lagos Plan of Action (LPA)” and the final Act of Lagos, that represented and marked the historic documents that constitute the first comprehensive continent-wide formulation and articulation of Africa’s preferred long-term development objectives. In this vein Asante (2001) noted that:

it is in the Lagos plan, describe as Africa’s economic magna carta that African leaders committed themselves to the creation at the national sub-regional and regional levels of a dynamic and independence economy: and thereby pave the way for the establishment of the African common market leading to an African economic community... This commitment to the strategy of regionalism was reinforced in such important African resolutions and declarations as Africa’s Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) (1985). Africa’s submission to the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Africa’s economic and social crisis of (1986), the United Nations programme of Actions for Africa Economic Recovery and Development 1986-90 (UN-PAAERD (1986), the United Nations New Agenda for the development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) (1991), the Cairo Agenda for Action (1995) and most recently, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD, 2001).

In all, these policy declarations contain proposals, directional thrust and effective approaches to the goals of economic integration. Herein is a pertinent question – whether integration is the same as collective self-reliance? The practical results of integration in the past decades had not impressed Adetula (201), as post-colonial African leaders have had to face the enormous task of generating sustainable economic development in restricted uneconomic domestic markets of several micro mini-state; that are desperately short of capital and skills and which before independence had survived through direct economic links with and financial and technical assistance from the metropolitan countries. Based on pre and post – independence realities, African states had no alternative but to forge inter-African economic links to replace links with ex-colonial powers (Asante, 2001).

It was against this backdrop that regional groupings: sprang up in almost all the African sub-regions like the central Africa – the economic community of central African states (ECCAS) 1983; East Africa – East African community (EAC) 1967 and subsequently, the preferential trade area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) 1981 which was transformed in 1994 into the common market for Eastern and Southern Africa (CMESA); Southern Africa, Southern Africa development coordinating conference (SASSC) 1980 and later transformed to Southern African Development Community (SADC) 1992, Northern Africa – the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) 1989; and in West Africa – the

economic community of west Africa states (ECOWAS) 1975. The euphoria that greeted the dawn of ECOWAS Economic Community of West Africa in 1975 marked the beginning of the odyssey of the union that holds out hopes for the people of the region. The hope it holds out for the region and its people had waned, thus, the examination done to know whether it (ECOWAS) had been able to meet the dreams and aspirations of the West African region.

Conceptual and theoretical foundation of regional integration: an overview

Before attempting any conceptual and theoretical overview, it is saliently important to state that there are five levels or degrees of integrations and by extension five ideal types that constitute the stages in the process of integration. These five stages are (1) Free trade area where tariffs and quota discrimination/ inhibitions are removed (2) Custom union which additionally establishes a common system of external tariffs that eliminates differential discrimination in respective third world countries (3) The common market in which obstacle to free trade, labour and capital is removed (4) Economic union that harmonizes economic, financial, and social policies of member states and may not include the adoption of common(single) currency and central bank (5) A political union where political institutions and structures are harmonized and brought under one political authority. From the typology of Axiline (1977) and Mytelka (1975) quoted in Ojo (2001) there are type I, II and III of integrations, with type III been mostly favoured and recommended for third world countries. Type I - integration involves laissez – faire and its concern is with market and trade expansion. Type ii integration is just an addition to type I (expansive schemes) through policy harmonization and regional development planning. Type iii – integration involves adopting regional measures to regulate foreign investment and technology transfer. Type I and ii is mostly common in the third world. From the standpoint of the salient facts above it is primarily important to note that economic integration is a process that requires or involved the collapses all forms of discrimination amongst states or the economic units that desire the integration. The need for the effective appraisal and appreciation of the task before this chapter necessitated some conceptual clarity between four major concepts – regionalism, regional integration, regional cooperation and economic integration. All of these terms (concepts) have been used interchangeably either consciously or unconsciously to mean the same thing in some scholarly works. while Asante (2001) did lend a helping hand in the clarification of these terms and concepts by noting thus that regionalism represents a regional approach to problem solving; including regional integration, regional cooperation or both, while regional integration and regional cooperation have the components of neighbouring countries/ states being involved in an collaborative ventures. However, regional cooperation implies that it is organized on an adhoc and temporary basis through contractual arrangements of some sort around projects of mutual interest, while regional integration involves something more permanent (Asante, 2001, Adetula, 2004 ^[3], Adedeji 2002, Ojo, 1986) ^[2]. Adetula (2004) ^[3] in his analysis corroborated the thoughts of Asante (2001) in an explicit manner by (2004) noting:

The concept of integration is elusive to define. In a simple sense it means bringing parts or units together to form a whole or creating interdependence. It could also represent a situation in which states becomes interdependent in whatever aspects of their relations they desire. Nonetheless, integration can be said to exist when units join together in order to satisfy objectives which they cannot meet autonomously. In this way, integration can be a process which hastens up the achievement of certain objectives in the interest of a larger body. Such a process would involved the shifting of loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new and larger centre whose institutions and processes demand some justification over those of the national states.

The elusive and fluid nature of the concept(s) integration accounted for the usage of regionalism, regional integration, Regional Corporation and economic integration interchangeably. Again the thoughts of Adetula (2004) ^[3] did bring to the fort the issue of integration having several strand and underpinnings to it – social, economic and political- due to reasons of perceptions and disciplines. Although economic integration is the dominant of the three strands, especially, in discourses that relate to “Africa’s development problematique”, other strands are no less important, as the interplay of these strands form the general cosmic of Africa’s underdevelopment, thus Ojo (2001) joining in the discussion by noting that:

Economic integration is a process by which the various forms of discrimination between economic units belonging to different national states are abolished. It is common to identify five levels of or degree of integration and by implication five ideal types that also constitute successive stages in a hierarchy, these are (i) free trade area in which tariffs and quota discrimination are removed (ii) custom union which additionally establishes a common system of external tariffs that eliminates different discrimination in respect to their world countries (iii) the common market or economic community in which additional obstacles to free flow of labour and capital are removed (iv) economic union which also harmonizes economic and social policies of members and may preferably but not necessarily include adoption of a single currency and a common central bank and finally (v) a political union where the structures and political institutions that harmonize policies are themselves harmonized and common under one politician authority....

The kernel of Ojo’s (2001) thought is that economic integration is a continuous process thus should not be construed and defined strictly from the lens of liberalization or from the absence of economic discrimination among economic unit. Consequent upon Ojo’s (2001) logic and analysis which convened the notion of restrictiveness did cause many self-styled common markets to emerge without necessarily promoting the regional integration among members or showing potentials to doing so. In all of these divergent views concerning “Africa’s development problematique”, there is unanimity amongst scholars of economic integration that “integration” can be construed as “processes or a state of affair(s) reached by that process” and that it can be vent for Africa developing a modern economy. Again the pertinent question here is whether

states should be the terminal point or intermediate point in the process; this Machuld (1976) answered with a declaration that there is “complete and incomplete integration”. Though “integration” and “cooperation” are commonly used interchangeably, there is a fundamental distinction between the two terms and concepts. The difference is both in quantitative and qualitative contexts. “Cooperation” represents or can be used to identify those forms of interstate activity designed to meet “some commonly experienced needs”, while “integration” on the other hand represents much more formal arrangement that has the perquisite of political, economic sacrifices, commitments, concessions, processes that can redefine participation in the international economy (Axline, 1977, Ihonvbere, 1981).

From the standpoint of the clarification of the terms and concepts, it beholds in this chapter to slide or turn its attention to the theoretical window or overview. Though, it common feature in the third world to find plethora or cesspool of reasons for regional economic integration, yet researches in this field are dominated by (European) theories based on European experiences. The European Economic Community (EEC), now European Union (EU) has thus become a model or living laboratory for regions that desire to emulate or copy. Premise on this euro centrist logic and experiences, it is not surprising that several volumes of literatures on “economic integration” and “development” coming to the consensus that developing regions of world do not meet or satisfy the criteria of “neo-classical customs union theory”. Their failure in not meeting these criteria as espoused by these literatures invariably means the developing countries or developing region not been able to reap the basic (traditional) gains of integration primarily because of the simple narratives of the concept of “trade” and “trade diversion”. These kinds of narratives cuts across an array of scholarly works and it came to crescendo in the works of Viner and Lipsey (1960), Balassa (1961), Meade (1955) quoted in Ojo (2001), Asante (2001) and Nyongo (2002). Asante (2001) in summarizing the thoughts of Viner and Lipsey (1960) in the following words by noting thus:

Viner defines trade creation as a shift in trade from high cost to low-cost sources of supply within the integration area, and trade diversion as state from a low-cost source of supply outside the integration area to a high-cost producer within it. in Viner’s view if there is more trade diversion than trade creation within a customs-unions then the net effect on world welfare and the welfare of the members will be negative since trade diversion (at least in a short run) will obviously prevail over trade creation in third world customs union as the members shift from low-cost producers in the developed world to high-cost producers among their neighbours. Viner and Lipsey are opposed to the creation of custom union among developing countries.

While taking a swipe at the thoughts of Viner and Lipsey (1960) and his cohorts, Asante (2001) corroborated the thoughts of Ojo (2001) who in one breath accepted in part the thinking and thoughts of neo-classical custom union theorist (theory) and in same breath rejected the other aspects of their thoughts. From the perspective and position of support of the neo- classical union theorist, Ojo (2001) declared by positing;

Conventional neo-classical theory advances economic integration of the customs/union common market genre as the ideal because it enables economic opportunities to be expanded (trade created) through specialization based on comparative (efficient use of resources) and economies of scale. The assumption of course is that the market conducts substantial trade with each other despite existing high tariffs barriers, have complimentary rather than competitive economies and have a relatively low ratio of foreign trade to the GNP. Otherwise, trade diversion would occur rather than trade. Creation... because these conditions are not easily met in the LDCs a conventional wisdom early emerged to discourage economic integration of the customs union/common market kind among third world countries...

The point of convergence in the thoughts of both Ojo (2001) and Asante (2001) is that the less developed regions or developing regions needs integration and cooperation, while they differ on the logic of reducing the thoughts of neo-classical custom union theorist to the operational level of society in the developing regions of the world. The crux of the matter is that the problems of economic integration amongst “peripheral countries” should be analyzed and interpreted within the context of development economies rather as a branch of tariff theory. It is against this backdrop that Adetula (2004) ^[3] took on the common assumption that was a fallout of neo-classical custom union theorist thoughts that crept and found location into the thoughts of dependency theorist that stated that the potentials of less developed countries for autonomous development are limited, more by externally infused dependency profiles, rather than internal process, thus, the logical thinking that auto centric development can be realized through disengagement from global system. Following through on this argument Adetula (2004) ^[3] concluded that the logical outcome of dependency would result in some dislocation of the weak (national) economies, since trade aid and investment relations with the metro poles would be impacted and reviewed. The impact of the dislocations would be far reaching for individual economies to bear, hence, the need for a collective action to “ameliorate” the effects of the national disengagement process by replacing North-South-vertical relations with South-South-horizontal relations of underdeveloped countries (Abutudu, 1988) ^[1]. From this view point, collective self-reliance does represent a strategy against dependence on external resources aimed at promoting the principles of autonomous development. However, the logic and argument about regional economic cooperation as a form of collective-reliance cannot be sustained or stretched too far especially if cognizance is given to the views of Abutudu (1988) ^[1] that noted inter alia when integration process is shaped and conditioned by the dynamics of dependence and underdevelopment, it would consequently creates a gap between economic integration and collective self-reliance, thus prompting Adetula (2004) ^[3] to take a swipe at the apologist of collective self-reliance (CRS) of failing to see this gap. Adetula (2008) further noted that when collective self-reliance (CSR) is adopted as framework of analysis of the crisis of development in Africa, it becomes difficult to understand the causes of underdevelopment beyond examples clandestine economic and political policies and its predatory needs. By the reason(s) of policy prescriptions of collective self-reliance

(CSR), collective self-reliance is to be pursued through the policies of import substitution, export substitution, export promotion, favourable balance of payment strategies that do not in any way address the structural problems of underdevelopment and dependency. This has left Adetula (2008) wondering whether the reforms advocated by the apologists of CSR within the purview of the current global capitalist system, for the reason of the inherent structural problems expressed in the forms of dependent, regional integration can bring about any successes. Adetula (2008) gave himself the answers he sort after by declaring that it would amount to nothing but autarky and definitely too, not the delinking in the form of subordinating external relations to the logic of internal development. The controversy over the terminology collective self-reliance and economic integration will not wane easily in nearest future especially in the face of undulating Africa’s underdevelopment crisis. But the salient fact to note concerning these terminologies is that there is both quantitative and qualitative difference between integration and cooperation, so too the existence of difference between collective self-reliance (CRS) and economic integration.

The Integration Odyssey in West Africa: Hopes and Perils

The odyssey of integration in Africa borrowed great impetus and energy from “Pan Africanism” and Africa’s unity. While acknowledging this fact Adetula (2008) quoting Ambassador Dudley Thompson (1993) of Jamaica at the Pan African conference on reparation in Abuja (Nigeria) who admitted inter alia:

It is very difficult, if at all possible to give a clear and exact definition of Pan Africanism. It means different things to different people to some. It should be confined to the continent: to others, it is lazy emotional dream embodying resentment against those institutions of inequality which exist. Yet to others it is a cry of racial pride emphasizing negritude, but in all its complexity, one can discern a hard core which is a common factor. This hard core includes the intellectual, political and economic cooperation that should lead to the political unity of all Africa. In short, it stands for the economic, technological and social and political advancement and modernization of Africa and the Diasporas and rejects all form of racial prejudices against black people.

The manifestation of these desires and dreams at the operational level of society in Africa is what Ambassador Dudley Thompson alluded to. These manifestations include the several regional integrations efforts that litter the continent. Simply put, one of the greatest achievements and dreams of “Pan Africanism” and Africa’s unity is the several economic block groupings in Africa. Even though it is common knowledge that “Pan Africanism” had transverse through several sociological and historic moments and dimensions before its current manifestation(s). while on its evolutionary course, “Pan Africanism” threw up great men and characters like Africanus Beale Horton of Sierra-Leone who had advocated for self-government for West Africa sub-region as far back as 1867 and J.E Casely Hayford who revived the West African community dream and initiated a move for the formation of National Congress of British West Africa in March 1920. Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi

Azikiwe were also in the league of great men thrown up by Pan Africanism.

The three phases of Pan Africanism includes (i) colonial phase up to 1957 (ii) the independence phase from 1957 to the 1960s and the post-independence phase from 1970 till date. A salient trajectory that should not go unnoticed is the fact that the West African sub-region was among the earliest beneficiary of the dreams of “Pan Africanism”. For the reasons of the changing global dynamics in the international system especially in the period after WWII, there was the political shifting of the focus of West Africans/Africans that were involved in “Pan Africanism” towards their regions/continent, for example Kwame Nkrumah and his co-travelers on both integration and nationalist path pursued simultaneously independence and integration. From the 1960s, the continental unionists and nationalist were pitched against one another because of convictions of those advocating a federation of self-governing countries under a common wealth of African states, led by Kwame Nkrumah and those advocating cooperation of a limited geographical and functional scope (Regionalist) led by Tafawa Balewa and Leopold Senghor.

Within the rank and file of the regionalist, there was the federalist and functionalist. The functionalist inclination was for regional integration preceding political federations and the integration proceeding in stages beginning with functional cooperation and moving towards regional common market. The unrelenting efforts of the great Pan Africanist leader – Kwame Nkrumah, Nasser Abdul, Patrice Umumba Sekou Toure and Obote eventually became fruitful and manifest in the formation of the OAU (Organization of African Unity). The dawn or the formation of the O.A.U significantly marked the death of the idea of cooperation at the continental level, but there was a distant echo of cooperation that later manifested in the continent as African Economic Community (AEC). Ojo (2011) was to argue by beaming his concerns on post-colonial realism that is making the OAU a shadow of the old continental union idea (thoughts) and also the presence of strict limits to the extent (degree) of changes and transformation of the old colonial economic and social structures within the framework of small weak and economically dependent states. Consequent upon these concerns, there evolved a new zeal and inspiration towards developing a number of cooperative and integrative schemes at the bilateral and regional levels in the continent and these schemes had the tacit support of the UN general assembly resolutions and the economic commission of Africa that encouraged the division of the continent into five cooperative zones. Being an early recipient of the dreams and desires of Pan Africanism, there was the creative and destructive transformation of colonial cooperative arrangement and formation of new institutions in West Africa. The Bangué central des Etats de Afrique de l’ouest was left intact as an issuing bank for all former French West African states except Guinea, Mali and Mauritania since 1973. The colonial federations of French West Africa and French equatorial Africa was transformed into organization commune Africaine et Mauricienne (OCAM). The objectives included harmonization of economic, social and cultural policies and activities, consultation on and coordination of development programs and foreign matters. In the course of OCAM growth, member states established air Afrique, the association of development Banks, the Afro - Malagasy organization for industrial property as well as a post and telecommunication union among others. In the words of Ojo (1985).

In Anglophone West Africa a similar trend occurred. While some colonial cooperative institutions such as the West African currency board and the West African airways corporation were dissolved and substituted with national replacement, others such as the West African examinations council were retained but revamped to meet post colonial needs and aspirations. By the mid 1960s continental cooperative efforts came to the centre on regional and sub-regional economic integration and other developmental schemes and mini schemes. Some of these dealt with specific issues areas, others dealt with a broad range of issues and yet others were concerned specifically with integration, that is with the progressive elimination of discrimination and barriers to movement of goods, services and resources among cooperating economies...

Today, in West Africa, there are more than forty of such schemes excluding those schemes that are considered “subsidiary institutions” of UN, the OAU or other continental organizations. These schemes are categorized and classified under four: (i) the first category comprises of schemes of economic integration (ii) the second being the schemes that embraces river basin exploitation and development (iii) the third being those of financial and monetary schemes and (iv) the fourth comprising of unclassifiable schemes one-of-a-kind schemes such as the African ground at councilor West African Rice development association. The integration schemes formed and developed to cope with post-colonial situation exigencies in West Africa fall into Mytelka’s Type I or II model, the one that is purely expansive in purpose seeking gains from trade expansion and attempting to distribute the gains more equitably via measures of a compensatory and corrective nature. These expansive schemes includes (i) the Mano River Union (ii) the Conseil del’ Entente (iii) the Communauté économique del’ Afrique quest (CEAO). The process that culminated in the coming into being of (ECOWAS) the Economic Community of West African states in 1975 was a long winding one that was spearheads by Nigeria and Togo. The historical roots of the economic cooperation and integration in West Africa has passed through several historical and sociological vistas with several leading West Africans (nationalists) playing part to the fruition of the organization. Though, the coming into being of ECOWAS was not without hiccups; spearheading the opposition to ECOWAS was Cote d’ Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Mali. These states had fears of Nigeria dominating the union, consequently the CEAO as functional and equivalent union. The stoking of the fire of opposition by these some West African states caused them making a “naïve” request of demanding “Zaire” to join the union, with the belief that she can counter the weight Nigeria’s huge influence in the region and union. France on her part did tacitly and clandestinely support the opposition by persuading the EEC to give technical assistance to CEAO – alternative union. For Nigeria, the country saw in ECOWAS something more than a means to economic development growth and self-reliance. Nigeria saw in the Union an instrument for its regional hegemony sine-qua-non to its regional security. Other Anglophones states in West Africa like the Francophone state saw ECOWAS as an alternative to CEAO. By reasons of the mandate territory, Togo with Anglophone and Francophone traditions was seriously uncomfortable in the all-French setting of the CEAO, but

was favourably disposed toward a mixed setting. Nigeria and Togo launched their “diplomatic” “blitzkrieg” that eventually brought 16 West Africa state to negotiating and signing the treaty establishing ECOWAS. The dawn and creation of ECOWAS was considered a response to the fragmentation of the West African (sub- region) countries/States which was – the outcome (product) of colonial balkanization – into narrow domestic markets represents a shift in the pattern of production, reduction of dependence that is both costly and difficult. In summation therefore, the inauguration of ECOWAS was the attempt by West African states to enhance their economic opportunity and to reduce their external dependency (Ojo 1986, Adibe, 1994, Asante, 1986). For over a quarter of a century existence, the questions that had become necessary is (1) Whether ECOWAS had meet the ever elusive development challenges of West African states (ii) How can one evaluate the achievements of ECOWAS (iii) To what extent has ECOWAS been able to translate its articulated objectives that is abundantly reflected in ECOWAS treaty into concrete results (iv) what are the measures adopted by ECOWAS to effectively responses to the challenges of the emerging world trading blocs and the challenges of human development.

Hopes and Perils: A critical Appraisal

Attempting to proffer answers to questions raised in the preceding page means and requires the examination of hopes and perils ECOWAS holds out to states and citizens of the West Africa sub region. The coming into being of ECOWAS was greeted with high hopes and aspirations of states and citizens of the sub-region. These hopes and aspirations are now been clouded with uncertainties and perilous politicking due to a combination of factors. These factors includes (1) lack or limited experiences at market integration. (2) disappointing and slow (little) performances by production structures (3) limited progress in infrastructural integration (4) challenges to the approach of integration (4) lack of political commitment (5) the challenges of multiplicity of inter-government organization (IGOs) or problems of rationalization. The interplay or combination of these factors had made the odyssey of ECOWAS turbulent and tragic, as the regional integration efforts had fallen short of the dreams of leaders of the West African sub-region and the West Africans.

Generally, it is not easy to assess the achievements of African integration schemes such as ECOWAS mainly because many of the relevant factors cannot be quantified. Since becoming operational, ECOWAS had channeled great attention not only to the establishment of functional structures of the institutions of the community, it has also taken some significant steps towards building a regional economic community in the principal areas of market integration, production integration, infrastructural integration, monetary and financial integration and in the maintenance of regional peace and security. While little progress had been recorded in the core areas of the mandate of regional economic groupings towards realizing the goal of establishing an economic union in West Africa, hence, the little progress had translated into very little or next nothing in the living standards of the people of West Africa. To Ojo (1985) the greatest challenge to the realization of the dreams and hopes of ECOWAS is what he rightly tagged and described in his analysis as the triple challenge–

globalization, liberalization and Euro-American regionalism especially in the new millennium. These challenges are essentially noticed in the interested spheres - globalization and regionalism and market liberalization. At first sight, the idea of regionalism and globalization appear almost in reconcilable and contradictory while in reality, one is the handmaiden of the other. Ojo (1985) had noted inter alia:

The main idea of globalization is to make liberalization global in the interest of capitalism and the chief capitalist North. Regionalism perfected in the European Union and in NAFTA and contemplated for the 34 states in western hemisphere have been instruments of strengthening capitalism at its own base. In deed it is the strength of capitalism of the home base (North) that derives the notion of it's taking over the rest of the world (South) of globalizing capitalism. Its strength enables it take advantage of the rest of the world via the philosophy of market liberalization... market liberalization is therefore the driving force of globalization in the interest of integrated capitalist North...

Indeed, market liberalization is at the heart of globalization, what becomes an imperative is how best the South (West Africa) deals with globalization, market liberalization and integrated markets of Europe and America's which are the dominant structures of world economy. Market liberalization is the underlying current or rules which is been foisted and demanded from Africa in this new millennium. The world trade organization requires African states/Nations to remove export subsidies and open their markets to goods from developed countries. One implication of this is that the sub-region will lose the trade preferences enjoyed under the generalized system of preferences and the Lome conventions. Again, it is pertinent to note that the EU having negotiated new deals and agreements with ACP states (numbering (77) seventy-seven members) was hoping to replace those of Lome conventions that had governed trade relations between Africa the EU member states and African states for over forty (40) years with the new agreements with the ACP states. The deals (agreement) demanded series of Economic partnership agreement in (5) five key areas. The EPAs, will operate on the basis of reciprocity starting from January 2008, demand the progressive abolition of tariffs and other obstacles to trade between the EU and the ACP partners. It is estimated that this would mean a reduction of tariffs rates on substantially all ACP imports from the EU by minimum of 90 percent. Exports to the EU from ECOWAS countries also will be faced with the loss of preferential margins ranging from 100% for coffee extracts and cocoa to 50% for phosphoric acid and over 30% for petroleum derivatives, fish and leather, among others. This has raised apprehension about the impact of such tariffs regime on the economic development of ACP countries. In the case of West Africa the loss of import duties revenue can be colossal especially when cognizance is given to the problems of infant industries protection and for the proposed common external tariffs in the integration schemes, particularly ECOWAS. There are concerns for over liberalization of the economies of ACP states attracting the intended benefits of promoting the transfer of technology, improving economies efficiency and helping them to integrate them into the global economy. The legitimate fear is that given their weak economies of

West African states, the agreement would put the manufacturing sector of ECOWAS countries on the slippery road to extinction (ECOWAS, 2001). These fears found large expression in the expression and thoughts of Ojo (1986) when he noted inter alia

All the evidence suggests that the NTO regulations and the EU-ACP agreement can only re-establish the old neo-colonial relationships of the Lome convention era on a new basis. The two regimes would ensure that current 55-65% of ECOWAS total trade that is with Europe and North America will not be bettered. They will encapsulate intra- ECOWAS trade at the current 6%-12% and guarantee political subservience as the African states are forced to jostle. In a keen competition for external markets for their raw materials and in even keener competition for external investors in their respective economies... this makes agreements on integrative measures even harder to achieve...

Another underpinning to the stunted growth or slow progression of ECOWAS was the existence of African Union with its African Economic Community (AEC) which was to be achieved over a period of 34 years. The idea of AEC is premised on the thoughts of an existing sub-regional integration schemes in the four zones of the continent which would be integrated for the purpose of AEC. ECOWAS was one of the integrated schemes billed for the United or continental integration. But the question is would ECOWAS and other integrating schemes in the continent meet the challenges of a United integration given the over bearing influences of globalization and market liberalization as driven by the EU and NAFTA? Again, attempting an answer to the question, Adetula (2004) ^[3] argued thus that the treaty establishing the African economic treaty/community (Abuja treaty) was signed in June 1991 in Abuja by the heads of state and government. The aim of the AEC as espoused in the treaty and quoted by Adetula (2004) ^[3] was:

to promote economic social and cultural development as well as African economic integration in order to increase self-sufficiency and endogenous development and to create a framework for development, mobilization of human resources and materials. The AEC further aims to promote cooperation and development in all aspects of human activity with a view to raising the standard of life of Africa's people, maintaining economic stability and establishing a close and peaceful relationship between member state...

From the exposition of the aims of AEC by Adetula (2004) ^[3] which was in tandem with those of Ojo, with Ojo (1986) relying on the views of the Executive Secretary Lansana (AEC) Kouyafe to express his position on the aims of AEC, who declared that they can meet the challenge by strengthening their structures and collaborating to enhance their relevance in the global market. But the snag when relating the views as expressed above by Lansana to ECOWAS like every other Union existing in other regions were mere footnotes in the continental efforts toward a United economic platform or integration of the continent. Consequently there was the salient problem(s) which was both moral and political in nature - drawing the line of

demarcation between the regional interest and continental interest. The moral question involved in discerning between regional interest and continental interest borders on regional leaders sticking together and adhering to the agreements of integration without sabotaging or jettisoning the collective efforts especially as noticed in ECOWAS. Politically too, there was the problem of ECOWAS leaders (by extension African leaders) not having the tact and abilities of insulating themselves from external influences. The interplay of the moral and political interest had caused Asante (2001) to summarize the worrisome failures of ECOWAS under the following: (i) difficulties in standardizing and harmonization of customs documents and tariffs schedules (ii) stringent rules of origin which often disqualified the buck of manufactured and agricultural products produced by member states from benefiting under TLS programmes (iii) problems of balancing distribution of benefits and costs of the ECOWAS economic integration, in particular industrial growth, in view of their possible polarization in more advanced member states; and (iv) the fear, especially on the part of the lesser advanced member states, of loss of fiscal revenue in the event of intra-West African trade liberalization.

Conclusion

The odyssey of ECOWAS from 1975 till date had been turbulent and tortuous with no respite in sight, thus, the hope it holds out at its formation been enveloped in the toxic haze of global / continental politics and economics, that has the underpinning of failure of leadership, poverty and governance in the sub-region. It is within this turbulent journey of ECOWAS that this paper canvasses for the following recommendations (i) rationalization of official integration schemes; only ECOWAS to remain (ii) letting the (100) hundred flowers bloom-governments allowing the free reign of all other unofficial activities which tend to increase the scope and level of integration. If government cannot be their enhancer, then it should not be log in their wheel of developing by criminalizing their activities (iii) governments and the private sector must mobilize and channel the energies and resources of the now sensitized people for productive investment in (a) private sector and (b) the non-profit sector i.e to assist the 100 flower programmes. (iv) Production integration: ECOWAS states and the secretariat must go beyond the acceptance in principle of production integration occurring simultaneously with market integration (v) governments and ECOWAS must accept the principle and go into partnership with private and non-profit sector.

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