



ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) AND SUB-REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract:

The formation of ECOWAS was seen as the beginning of a new era in the history of economic cooperation in West Africa. Its overall aim was to promote cooperation and integration, with a view to establishing an economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development in West Africa. However, since the emergence of ECOWAS, the organisation has been saddled with a lot of challenges and intra-subregional crises without much economic and overall integration being achieved. This study assessed the extent to which relations among the countries of the West African sub-region could enhance regional integration in West Africa. This work adopted the integration theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. The significant finding of the work revealed that even though there is ECOWAS as a sub-regional body of West Africa, member states do not engage in maximum cooperation and that there are many resources that remain underutilized due to a lack of close relationships, which in turn hindered the full integration of the sub-region. Other findings are that the implementation of ECOWAS protocol on free movement of people and trade is criminally exploited by cross border criminals in the region thereby affecting member States to fully open up their borders to each other. Again, a whole number of strategies have been put in place for the full implementation of the integration process to include but not limited to; the creation of the West African Monetary Union, as well as the West African Youth Union, the West African Women's Association and others. The work concluded by recommending, among others, that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) central and coordinating body should be backed by legal or legislative instruments and that would be respected by all member countries with the power to sanction recalcitrant members as well as given the recognition through adoption of formal national measure and given appropriate backing to its establishment

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and the right to operate and access public assets on resources. By this, member states will comply and participate fully in the integration process.

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1. Introduction

African nations have a prolonged history of making repeated endeavors to connect with each other. These attempts have taken various forms, including both smaller sub-groupings and more significant continental initiatives, all aimed at fostering regional integration and cooperation. These efforts have primarily arisen from a shared aspiration to address the perceived obstacles to growth linked with certain fundamental aspects of African countries' structures. Presently, regional associations cover every corner of the globe. The United Nations, established in 1945, has acknowledged the significance of regional organizations from the outset, recognizing their effectiveness in managing regional disputes and upholding global peace and security (United Nations Charter, Article, 52).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) operates as a sub-regional institution that centers its efforts on the seamless integration of economies within its member states. A core emphasis lies in the harmonization of distinct national markets and the synchronization of economic policies across the constituent nations. The overarching objective of this collaborative initiative is to catalyze substantial economic progress within the broader sub-regional landscape. A pivotal strategy in attaining this objective involves the dismantling of barriers that hinder the unrestricted flow of people, commodities, services, and capital across borders. This pivotal aspiration finds explicit articulation in Article 27 of the Community Treaty. This article underscores the profound commitment of ECOWAS to creating a sense of shared identity and belonging among its populace. It enunciates that the citizens of member states are not solely confined to their respective national identities; rather, they are esteemed as integral participants in the larger sub-regional community.

The fundamental tenets of this economic integration endeavor are rooted in the belief that a united and collaborative approach can yield more robust and sustainable economic growth than individual efforts. By pooling resources, expertise, and opportunities, ECOWAS seeks to create a synergistic environment where the collective potential of the member states is harnessed to propel the entire sub-region towards prosperity. This integration process is not merely confined to the economic realm; it also extends its purview to encompass social and cultural dimensions. As barriers are dismantled and connections are nurtured, the diversity of West Africa's cultures, traditions, and peoples become interwoven into a rich tapestry, fostering a sense of shared heritage and mutual understanding.

Through its resolute focus on the principles of economic integration enshrined in its foundational treaty, ECOWAS stands as a testament to the transformative power of

collaborative endeavors. It exemplifies how a unified vision, backed by a commitment to openness and cooperation, can lead to the realization of enduring socio-economic progress and the cultivation of a stronger, more self-reliant sub-region. Therefore, member states are dedicated to eliminating all barriers that restrict their freedom to move and reside within the borders of the community. By means of collaborative accords, member states pledge to waive the requirement for visas and residence permits for citizens of the community. This facilitation empowers them to partake in employment and involve themselves in commercial and industrial pursuits within the boundaries of other member states' territories (ECOWAS Treaty, 1975, Article 27).

By promoting such harmonious and cooperative cross-border dynamics, the ECOWAS protocol on movement fosters an environment where economic opportunities can be seized, cultures can be shared, and collaborative ventures can flourish. This not only holds economic implications but also cultivates a sense of shared identity and solidarity among the diverse peoples of West Africa. In essence, this protocol represents a tangible embodiment of ECOWAS's dedication to enhancing regional integration, sustainable development, and mutual understanding. It serves as a potent example of how practical measures, grounded in the principles of cooperation and unity, can pave the way for the realization of the sub-region's collective potential.

Consequently, the organization's principal objective revolves around promoting collaboration and progress in the domain of economic pursuits. This objective is particularly concentrated on crucial sectors, including but not limited to industrialization, transportation, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial affairs, and also socio-cultural dimensions. His all-encompassing aim is directed towards elevating the overall well-being of the populace residing in ECOWAS nations. It seeks not only to solidify but also to consistently maintain a state of economic stability across the geographical expanse of the region. Moreover, a pivotal facet of this aspiration involves cultivating stronger connections and bonds among the individual member states, thereby culminating in a collective environment of harmonious collaboration. Ultimately, these efforts are projected to exert a profound and positive impact on the advancement and expansion of the entire African continent. This goal underscores a comprehensive vision that extends beyond mere economic considerations, encompassing the social, political, and cultural dimensions that contribute to the holistic growth and development of Africa as a whole.

Nonetheless, the comprehensive enactment of this particular protocol remains unrealized within the entirety of the participating nations. As highlighted by the ECOWAS Commission for Trade (2020), the envisioned state of a boundary-free region, coupled with the establishment of a unified currency union within the ECOWAS framework, both of which are attainable through cooperative regional practices and integration strategies among the member states, continues to grapple with impediments attributable to the enduring existence of inter-state boundaries. This ongoing and persistent predicament represents an unresolved obstacle of notable magnitude, posing a substantial hindrance to the efficient realization of seamless regional integration

across West Africa. As a result, the central focal point of the present inquiry is directed towards a meticulous examination of the effectiveness of the mechanisms that have been instituted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). To this end, therefore, the objectives of the study are:

- 1) To examine whether ECOWAS member states cooperate in the implementation of the protocol on free movement of persons, residence, and establishment matters for the sub-regional integration.
- 2) To evaluate the relationship between ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and trans-border security.
- 3) To examine the significant strategies kept in place by ECOWAS to mitigate obstacles hindering the full implementation of the integration process.

2.1 Conceptualizing Integration

The concept of integration denotes the convergence of multiple economies, political entities, or abstract constructs driven by a shared objective. Specifically focusing on economic integration, it entails the fusion of two or more economies to achieve a mutual economic aim. Ernest Haas, in his 1971 publication, offers an interpretation of economic regional integration as a comprehensive concept encompassing the amalgamation of separate economies into broader political communities. Considering the inherent and intricate interplay between political and economic factors, any discourse surrounding the topic of integration necessitates a comprehensive examination of both its economic and political facets. In the process of expounding on this concept, it becomes evident that Ernest Haas expands the scope of integration to encompass a broader set of dimensions, incorporating:

The phenomenon encapsulates a transformative course wherein political agents operating within diverse national landscapes are persuaded to realign their allegiances, anticipations, and political endeavors towards a fresh nucleus, the establishments of which wield or require authority encompassing established national entities. The ultimate result attained through this progression of political integration is the emergence of an innovative political collective, overlaid upon the pre-existing ones (Haas, 1971). Haas' perspective regarding the notion of regional integration garners reinforcement from Karl Deutsch and other pioneers in the early theorization landscape, who resolutely noted that authentic regional integration envelops the complete "*system*" (Deutsch, 1971). This underscores the notion that the phrase "*regional integration*" should be employed in a comprehensive manner. According to Deutsch's viewpoint, regional integration takes the form of "*a nonviolent process aimed at constructing a more tightly interwoven political framework from formerly disparate entities, each of which willingly cedes a portion of its sovereign authority to a central entity and renounces the application of force to resolve disputes among its members*" (Deutsch, 1971).

In an era characterized by heightened globalization, integration stands as a potent strategy for driving economic and societal advancement, particularly within economically disadvantaged countries. Amid the compendium of compelling

justifications that underpin the drive towards regional integration across the continent, the yearning for amplified economic self-reliance and advancement assumes a position of considerable significance. The established theoretical framework of regional integration contends that the magnitude and character of integration can materialize in diverse formations, predicated upon the degree of political and economic dedication showcased by the involved countries. The array of arrangements available covers a broad spectrum that spans from fundamental decreases in customs tariffs to more ambitious models of economic integration, entailing clauses for collaborative monetary and fiscal strategies. Consequently, the foundational theory offers a diverse array of choices wherein the progression of regional integration grows more profound as impediments to trade and investment steadily diminish.

2.2 Conceptualizing Cooperation

Cooperation represents a distinct manifestation of collective action. In the lexicon of social sciences, cooperation is characterized as "*any form of collaborative effort in contrast to competition.*" In the realm of politics, political cooperation involves the establishment of mechanisms and the forging of bonds of solidarity, encompassing shared endeavors, collaboration, and development assistance. This is often implemented to offset disparities between developed and developing nations (Afonso, 1995:8). Within the framework of this study, cooperation transcends a mere dictionary definition and embodies the amalgamation of sovereign states for the pursuit of common international objectives. The proliferation of industrialization and modernization across numerous countries that have integrated into the truly globalized society has engendered the growth of international cooperation as a systematically institutionalized practice by governments. This phenomenon has emerged as a pivotal facet of international relations since the conclusion of World War II. Irrespective of whether nations are endowed with affluence and influence or are modest states with limited representation on the international stage, their respective governments have become integral components of a complex network of institutions devoted to the practice commonly referred to as "*international cooperation*" (Stein, 1990).

In essence, international cooperation encapsulates a proactive approach, harmonizing aspirations and concerns to foster joint initiatives that can yield benefits extending to multifarious societies, and at times, to the global community as a whole.

2.3 The Emergence of ECOWAS

Formally established in 1975, ECOWAS has a historical backdrop marked by several antecedent events that led to the signing of the ECOWAS treaty. The conceptualization of a West African economic community was believed to have originated with the Former Liberian President, William Tubman, which led to the initial signing of an agreement involving Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in February 1965, although this early attempt did not make significant progress (Amoako, 2003). However, the resurgence of this idea was ignited by two prominent African figures -

General Gowon of Nigeria and General Eyadema of Togo - in April 1972. Their efforts encompassed a journey through twelve West African countries to garner support. Given the pivotal significance attributed to cooperative endeavors in fostering worldwide economic well-being and advancement, the inception of the ECOWAS agreement unfolded in Lagos, Nigeria, on May 28, 1975. At this juncture, leaders from the West African region convened to embrace a multitude of facets pertaining to economic engagements. A central aspiration was to eliminate barriers that thwarted the seamless circulation of citizens, goods, and financial returns across the community's expanse. This impetus served as the driving force behind the creation of the ECOWAS agreement, which notably emphasizes the unfettered mobility of individuals, the prerogative to establish residence, and the unimpeded movement of labor (Aderanti, 2002).

The initial segment of this agreement stipulated unfettered entry for the ECOWAS population, exempting them from the need for formal travel documentation for a duration of three months. This provision was formally incorporated into the legal framework of various municipalities in 1980 and promptly took effect, ushering in a phase of unhampered migration for citizens across the ECOWAS coverage area. Nevertheless, the revised 1992 Treaty of ECOWAS bolstered this provision by ensuring the entitlement of community citizens to entry, residence, and settlement rights. This revision also mandated member states to uphold these freedoms within their respective jurisdictions. As a requisite for full implementation, the agreement necessitated the ratification of member states, thereby solidifying its comprehensive execution throughout the region (DeRosa, 1998).

In accordance with Wulf *et al.* (2009), the primary focus of ECOWAS was initially on advancing economic cooperation, but in recent times, conflict resolution has gained remarkable prominence. Annan highlights that at the core of ECOWAS lies the paramount aspiration to nurture economic cohesion. Hence, it remains abundantly clear that ECOWAS was conceptualized with the overarching mission of melding the economies of the West African nations. As a regional framework of institutions, ECOWAS is poised to orchestrate and elevate economic collaboration across the West African expanse. From the moment of its establishment, the Community has showcased praiseworthy accomplishments, notably within domains such as fortifying regional tranquility and stability, expediting trade processes, and advocating for the unrestricted flow of both individuals and goods across the expansive West African landscape. These achievements reverberate as a testament to the efficacy of the Community's endeavors in engendering a harmonious coexistence among member states, bolstering economic interactions, and fostering an environment where mobility and trade can flourish seamlessly within the West African sphere.

Without a doubt, the foundational establishment of the West African Community was firmly rooted in the ambition to cultivate collaboration and unity, forming the bedrock for an economic and monetary union aimed at reaping economic affluence and all-encompassing progression across the expanse of ECOWAS. This

inherent purpose becomes especially conspicuous within the realm of the Lagos treaty, originally conceived as a venture with economic aspirations. Yet, the existing political conditions during that period necessitated its recalibration, a process that broadened its purview and authority in 1993 (Adeniran, 2012).

As a result, notwithstanding its primary directive to invigorate collaborative economic ties among its member nations, the escalating tribulations within these individual states have compelled the regional economic entity to expand its scope, enmeshing additional dimensions that are equally momentous in the panorama of African advancement. These facets encompass not only economic interaction but also encompass pivotal realms of development such as conflict mediation, the strengthening of democratic structures, the sustenance of political equilibrium, and the harmonization of cultural identities.

3. An Overview of the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS)

3.1 Protocol on Free Movement of Person

Initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration and integration among the nations constituting ECOWAS have a historical foundation dating back to 1975, coinciding with the adoption of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) treaty by the participating member states. This pivotal treaty conferred the status of Community citizens upon nationals of member states, underscoring a shared identity and belonging. An essential directive within this treaty was the gradual dismantling of impediments obstructing the unfettered movement of individuals, services, and capital, as delineated by Adepoju (2005). Consistent with the tenets of the ECOWAS treaty, a significant stride towards this vision materialized in 1979 through the establishment of the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol. This protocol assumes a distinctly prominent stance by laying heightened emphasis on the principles integral to the Free Movement of Persons, while also encompassing the Rights of Residence and Establishment within the expanse of the Community. This multifaceted framework is designed to not only facilitate the unencumbered mobility of individuals but also to firmly safeguard their entitlements to reside and establish themselves within the regional milieu. The protocol underscores the pivotal significance of these principles, marking them as cornerstones in the larger architecture of the Community's cohesive and inclusive dynamics. Through this protocol, the Community underlines its commitment to nurturing a space where individuals can traverse borders freely, pursue opportunities for settlement, and engage in activities that contribute to the shared prosperity of the entire region. Over time, the ECOWAS protocol has undergone a dynamic evolution across various phases, encompassing both the inception and subsequent implementation stages.

4. ECOWAS and the Major Areas of Cooperation

4.1 Trade Liberalisation/Intra-regional Trade

At the heart of its role as a regional integration framework, ECOWAS is driven by a constellation of pivotal goals, each contributing to a cohesive and comprehensive purpose. These objectives encompass the elimination of obstacles spanning both tariff and non-tariff dimensions within intra-ECOWAS trade. Furthermore, the organization endeavors to institute a cohesive external tariff and a unified commercial policy in its interactions with nations beyond the ECOWAS sphere. A cornerstone aspiration lies in the eradication of hindrances obstructing the mobility of all factors of production, laying the foundation for an environment where the movement of labor, capital, goods, and services transcends borders seamlessly. Additionally, the harmonization of domestic policies across the array of member states stands as a crucial pursuit, signifying the integration of diverse strategies and regulations towards a unified and collective approach. These intertwined objectives collectively weave a fabric of integration that seeks to engender a dynamic and interwoven West African region, fostering economic growth, cooperation, and shared prosperity. To materialize these goals, a comprehensive trade liberalization program was meticulously crafted. Although originally slated to take effect in 1979, its implementation had to be deferred until 1990, when it was ultimately launched. This program was strategically structured into three distinct stages.

At its core, the ECOWAS trade liberalization initiative materializes as a phased endeavor marked by a progressive decrease and eventual eradication of impediments, whether in the form of tariffs or non-tariff barriers, which impede the fluidity of trade within the ECOWAS domain. The rates of tariff reduction that underpin this initiative exhibited a varied pattern, classified into three distinct categories based on the level of advancement within each country. The first category comprises the most advanced nations, slated for a comprehensive implementation within a span of six years. In the second category, a middle grouping emerges, projected to culminate in a timeframe of eight years. Lastly, the third group operates within a timeline extending up to ten years, signifying a carefully calibrated progression that accounts for the unique dynamics within each member nation.

In practical terms, the trajectory of ECOWAS has not yet yielded a substantial surge in intra-West African trade, an observation that finds ample substantiation within concrete data. A vivid illustration of this circumstance emerges from the quantified proportion of intra-ECOWAS export and import trade, which stood at a relatively modest 9.2% and 13.61% respectively, in relation to the entire West African export and import trade, during the year 2021. In glaring contradistinction, the magnitude of ECOWAS' trade interactions with the European Union commanded a more substantial footing, constituting 31.44% of exports and 45.5% of imports. This stark discrepancy portrays a notably pronounced share within the panorama of West African trade over the same duration. The persistently subdued stature of intra-ECOWAS trade evinces a

deficiency in furnishing the expansive market requisite to galvanize the expanse of contemporary industrial expansion. Concurrently, the intricate network of trade ties with more dominant nations carries profound ramifications for the proliferation of local industries within the contours of West Africa, particularly in the domain of manufacturing, casting a spotlight on the production of goods for eventual inclusion within the realms of intra-ECOWAS trade.

4.2 Regional Approach to Industrialization

The concept of industrialization played a pivotal role in the early post-independence deliberations surrounding regional integration in Africa. It was seen as a potential solution to address the challenges of regional fragmentation, small-scale economies, and limited markets that lacked the potential for economies of scale (Hartzenberg, 2021, p.20). This perspective pertaining to industrialization becomes manifestly discernible through the lens of the 1975 Treaty of Lagos, the foundational document that laid the groundwork for ECOWAS. Within this treaty, a triad of pivotal steps emerged as the delineated path towards achieving regional industrialization: (i) the active dissemination of information concerning major industrial undertakings, (ii) the harmonization of incentives pertaining to industry and the synchronization of development plans, and (iii) the seamless facilitation of personnel exchange, training initiatives, and collaborative joint ventures (ECOWAS, 1975). This conceptualization of industrialization is intricately woven into the fabric of the institutional structure, establishing its presence within the purview of the Commission on Industry, Agriculture, and Natural Resources. However, despite the earnest intentions encapsulated within these provisions, the translation of these aspirations into tangible transformative shifts at the regional level has witnessed a degree of limitation, thus rendering the pursuit of industrialization across the West African landscape a notably formidable undertaking. This challenge is further amplified by the overlaying objective of generating employment opportunities of high quality, a dimension that is underscored by the African Development Bank (AFDB, 2016).

Beyond the contours demarcated by Chapter V, specifically encompassing Article 28 to 32 of the ECOWAS treaty, which pertinently addresses the imperative of harmonizing industrial policies, the Treaty manifests an array of other articles that collectively converge upon the matter of industrialization. For instance, Articles 27 and 39 are expressly positioned to uphold the principle of unhindered movement of "factors within the community," signifying a broader commitment to fostering economic interactions. Nevertheless, despite these provisions, the treaty is devoid of a well-defined roadmap that delineates precise strategies for synchronizing the distinctive indigenous policies characteristic of the individual member states within the collective expanse of the community. Additionally, Article 50 plays a pivotal role by instituting the Fund for Cooperation Compensation and Development, a mechanism meticulously tailored to mitigate potential imbalances in development that could emanate from the implementation of treaty clauses pertaining to trade liberalization and the

harmonization of industrial policies. The resourcing of this fund encompasses contributions from both domestic and international channels, encompassing receipts sourced from bilateral and multilateral origins alike. Further dimensions unfold within Chapters VII and IX of the treaty, wherein the articulated provisions chart the course for collaborative initiatives aimed at the formulation of policies and the establishment of infrastructure within pivotal sectors, ranging from transportation and communication to energy, thereby encompassing a comprehensive canvas that encapsulates the overarching West African community (Oyewale and Osadola, 2018).

4.3 ECOWAS Cooperation on Climate Change

Climate change has emerged as a pivotal concern, posing significant obstacles to the sustainable development trajectory of the ECOWAS region. The implications of this phenomenon, as underscored by the ECOWAS 2013 annual report, portend dire consequences for West Africa. The region is grappling with a series of erratic shifts in weather patterns, indicative of the unfolding impacts of climate change. Within the ECOWAS framework, a notable demographic reality is the presence of 126.2 million inhabitants among the broader population of over 334.6 million individuals (ECOWAS RE and EE status report, 2021) who are currently devoid of access to essential electricity services. This predicament is exacerbated by the startling fact that a staggering 80% of the population remains bereft of modern, clean, and affordable energy sources. The primary recourse for meeting household energy needs remains biomass energy, perpetuating a reliance on unsustainable practices like wood fuel consumption, which in turn significantly contributes to CO₂ accumulation in the atmosphere.

Given the region's inherent vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, urgent action is requisite to both mitigate carbon emissions and champion contextually appropriate adaptation measures. Concurrently, the issue of energy poverty must be tackled head-on. Encouragingly, the realm of climate change mitigation presents a wealth of potential within the ECOWAS context. Beyond its capacity to curtail greenhouse gas emissions, mitigation endeavors offer a unique opportunity to nurture a vibrant Renewable Energy (RE) and Energy Efficiency (EE) sector, effectively addressing the region's energy access shortfall. In essence, the journey toward harmonizing climate change mitigation, energy security, and alleviation of energy poverty within the ECOWAS region is a complex yet indispensable pursuit. By leveraging mitigation strategies, the region can not only mitigate its environmental footprint but also pave the way for a sustainable energy future. It is crucial that ECOWAS harnesses these potentialities to drive positive change, ensuring that its inhabitants not only enjoy enhanced energy access but also thrive in an environment resilient against the ravages of climate change.

4.5 Challenges of Implementing ECOWAS Protocols among West African States

Embedded within the progression of the ECOWAS protocol, delineated across its initial, second, and third phases (A/PI/579; A/SP1/7/88; and A/SP2/5/90), lies an array of

pivotal provisions. Among their multifaceted dimensions, these provisions decisively summon member states to diligently uphold the rights and freedoms intricately associated with the realms of entry, residence, and establishment, all of which converge with the overarching objective of employment or economic engagement. This summons is marked by the force of legal obligation, rendering these tenets irrevocably binding upon the tapestry of member states that constitute the collective community. However, the uniform and comprehensive implementation of these responsibilities has proven to be a terrain marked by a conspicuous lack of parity. Consequently, the member states grapple with an intricate constellation of challenges and discordances, emblematic of a landscape that is yet to fully realize the harmonious synchronization envisioned within the provisions.

An illustrative example of these challenges lies in the persistence of cumbersome, arduous, and often vexing border procedures between member states. Despite the removal of visa requirements and the allowance of up to 90 days of stay within a fellow member country, this provision underscores the necessity of possessing valid and appropriate travel documentation. Nonetheless, a particularly notable obstacle pertains to the efficient determination of travelers' nationalities. This predicament arises because a significant number of travelers lack any form of identification or documentation. Moreover, despite the establishment of measures like the ECOWAS travel certificate, intended to serve as an alternative, expedient, and cost-effective means of documentation to facilitate smoother cross-border movement, a considerable proportion of commuters still find themselves without such documentation. In essence, while the ECOWAS protocols have laid down the framework for seamless intra-regional travel, the practical execution of these provisions remains beset by complexities. Challenges ranging from identification issues to the availability and possession of appropriate travel documentation continue to impede the attainment of truly fluid cross-border movement within the community.

However, nearly all nations within the region have officially ratified the movement protocol, resulting in the elimination of visa requirements and permitting stays of up to 90 days. This adjustment has played a significant role in fostering sustained movement of individuals, goods and the fortification of trade relationships among countries like Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Benin, and Ivory Coast. By achieving this measure of success in facilitating mobility, it was anticipated that this accomplishment could potentially extend its positive effects to the implementation of other strategies or protocols, akin to the concept of 'functional spill-over' proposed by Haas (1958). These apprehensions stemmed partly from the surge in oil exploration activities within Ghana during that period. Consequently, given its limited infrastructure and incapacity to conduct rigorous security checks on the substantial influx of migrants from neighboring states, Ghana found itself exposed.

In addition to the linguistic challenges of switching between official languages at border crossings or ports, an estimation reveals an excess of 120 security and border checkpoints between Badagry (the departure points from Nigeria to Benin) and Noe

(the entry point from Ghana to Ivory Coast). The protracted lines of vehicular traffic awaiting entry permits to traverse borders not only evoke frustration but also signify a significant squandering of time, economic resources, and stand as a formidable obstacle to realizing the ultimate aspiration of unhampered and seamless movement as envisaged in the ECOWAS treaty. To illustrate, although Ghana recently announced its intention to abolish all Customs road barriers by September 2017, the existence of numerous checkpoints along major trans-boundary routes in the sub-region has fostered a persistently unfavorable environment marked by incessant harassment and the illicit extraction of funds by unscrupulous officials.

Nevertheless, another significant impediment in the path of implementing the ECOWAS protocols stems from disparities in national migration policies and the presence of discriminatory clauses within the legal and labor frameworks of member states. This divergence has frequently furnished a basis for subjecting foreign nationals to harassment and expulsion. A case in point can be found in Mali, where foreigners are proscribed from pursuing employment within the public sector.

The dichotomy between these divergent national policies and the cohesive fabric of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (TLS) is strikingly evident. However, what further complicates this scenario is the shared trajectory of mutual protectionism that both countries have adopted, erecting protective barriers in an endeavor to shield their respective domestic industries. This mutual protectionist orientation, though pursued with the best interests of each nation's economy in mind, paradoxically culminates in casting a shadow on the otherwise harmonious trade dynamics and bilateral relations that the two nations otherwise share. The domino effect of this trajectory can often be witnessed in the form of governmental protectionist measures and instances of perceived harassment. This, in turn, has the potential to reverberate in the realm of anti-immigration policies and even scenarios involving the expulsion of individuals. These ripple effects are emblematic of a landscape wherein the interplay between protectionism and cooperation converges in a complex choreography that shapes the contours of trade and bilateral relationships within the West African region.

4.6 Theoretical Framework

The study has drawn upon the integration theories presented by Ernest Haas and David Mitrany (1958) to expound upon the necessity for the establishment and progression of regional international organizations aimed at promoting the collective well-being and cooperation of member states by unifying individuals with shared interests. As per this perspective, states collaborate as a means to further their shared interests, enhance their collective welfare, and address mutual concerns. The initial dimension, or principle, scrutinizes the institutions instituted within the organization, the decision-making processes, the binding nature of decisions, and the spheres of collaboration. The subsequent dimension, or principle, assesses the presence of a shared identity among the populations of member states. The third dimension, or principle, focuses on the

interactions between the involved societies, examining cross-border corporate collaboration and the exchange of tourist activities.

Mitrany (1933), a pioneer in the field of integration studies, perceived integration as the collective governance and tangible interdependence between states. Mitrany believed that states could integrate within delimited functional, technical, and economic domains. This would allow international agencies to fulfill human needs, leveraging expertise and knowledge, thus generating loyalty among populations, encouraging participation, and expanding the scope of integration. Haas (1958) elucidated the concept of integration as follows: the phenomenon of political integration entails the intricate orchestration through which disparate political entities spanning distinct national landscapes are incentivized to reconfigure their allegiances, aspirations, and political involvements, steering them towards a novel nucleus. This nucleus is characterized by institutions that wield or request authority over the pre-established sovereign states. The denouement of this intricate journey toward political integration culminates in the emergence of an entirely new political community that operates in tandem with, and often overlays, the pre-existing landscape of national states.

Lindberg (1963) provided a perspective on integration that encompassed two primary aspects: (1) the process in which nations relinquish their inclination and capacity to independently pursue foreign and vital domestic policies, opting instead for joint decision-making or the delegation of this process to novel central entities; and (2) the process in which political entities situated across diverse contexts are influenced to transition their expectations and political endeavors toward a new center. Lindberg's interpretation of integration, as per Laursen (2008), was characterized as more prudent compared to Haas's. Its focal point lies in the evolution of mechanisms and procedures for reaching collective decisions through means that diverged from autonomous actions by individual national governments.

Mitrany, a functionalist thinker, was motivated by a concern for mitigating conflicts and aimed to establish a system that could effectively prevent them (Mitrany, 1958:28). His conceptual framework proposed a blueprint for integrating nation-states, envisioning the creation of specialized institutions dedicated to the welfare and needs of all people. The idea was to unite common interests where they existed and to the extent that they were shared. Mitrany believed that through this approach, a portion of sovereignty could be transitioned from existing governments to newly established entities.

4.7 Communication Approach to Integration

Drawing upon the foundational principles of cybernetics, the science of control and communication systems, this approach operates under the premise that social processes adhere to the principles of cybernetics and subsequently influence interactions between nation-states (North, 1967). Grounded in this fundamental proposition, Karl Deutsch posited that the increasing intensity of communication patterns among states and the

growing information exchange among individuals would pave the way for the emergence of "Security Communities" (Deutsch, 1968).

At the heart of developing such interaction patterns among groups, individuals, and governments lay the concept of balancing loads and capabilities within the system. Similar to Mitrany, Deutsch's central concern was the establishment of "*security communities*" where the likelihood of conflicts would diminish and the prospect of enduring peace would increase. In his pursuit of identifying the essential conditions for nurturing "*security communities*," Karl Deutsch delineated nine critical prerequisites, namely:

- a) Mutual compatibility and shared core values;
- b) A distinct way of life;
- c) Anticipated stronger economic ties and benefits;
- d) Noticeable enhancement in political and administrative capacities of certain participating entities;
- e) Notable economic advancement within select participating entities;
- f) Uninterrupted channels of social communication;
- g) Widening engagement of the political elites;
- h) Mobility of individuals, especially among the politically relevant strata;
- i) A diversity of communication and transactional channels.

It is important to note that Deutsch exhibited a preference for federalism as a pathway to effective amalgamation. Criticism has been directed at both the concept of political communication and the approach to international integration. Utilizing a mathematical and technical concept to explain human behavior has drawn significant criticism from various quarters.

4.8 Relevance and Application of the Theory

The theoretical underpinnings of integration theory, particularly the functionalist and communication approaches, bear immense relevance to ECOWAS and its ambitious pursuit of regional integration. Both perspectives underscore the imperative not only of maintaining peaceful coexistence among nations but also of actively fostering their collaboration. They emphasize the power of robust communication networks between states and the increased exchange of information among their populations, ultimately giving rise to the emergence of "*security communities*." This conceptual foundation aligns with the notion that states engage in cooperation to advance common interests, promote welfare, and collectively address shared challenges. Consequently, this framework played a substantial role in the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. ECOWAS was conceived as a vehicle for sub-regional integration, uniting member states to collaboratively address the challenges facing West Africa and catalyze the region's growth and development. The integration theory also finds resonance within the neoliberal ideology, which underscores the pivotal significance of "*peace and security*" in the West African sub-regional integration endeavor. Notably, ECOWAS has achieved considerable success in the realm of peace

and security, which is prominently demonstrated by the activities of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which has been actively involved in various peacekeeping operations across member states. This strategic pursuit aligns with the core tenets of integration theory and is a pivotal aspect of ECOWAS' contributions to the lives of its citizens.

This paradigm underscores that the freedom of movement for West African citizens not only propels development and unity within the sub-region but also generates a mutually beneficial scenario. Consequently, the drive to ensure peace, minimize conflict, and bolster security, as encapsulated in Mitrany's stance on integration theory, along with the reinforcement of communication systems to enhance security among states, has further solidified the relevance of integration theory. This is particularly pertinent given the complex security challenges arising from the deepening integration agenda of ECOWAS in the sub-region. Thus, the theoretical pertinence of integration theory to the study lies in the interconnectedness between the foundational principles of integration theory and the objectives of ECOWAS as a pivotal driver of the integration process in the sub-region. This symbiotic relationship underscores the intrinsic alignment between theoretical underpinnings and the practical aspirations of regional integration through ECOWAS.

5. Evaluation and Analysis of the Study Objectives

5.1 Examining whether ECOWAS member states cooperate in implementing the protocol on free movement of persons' residence and establishment matter for the sub-regional integration

The pursuit of enhanced collaboration and integration among ECOWAS countries traces its origins back to 1975 when the ECOWAS treaty was adopted by the member states. This protocol was designed to streamline cross-border procedures by harmonizing immigration and emigration forms utilized by ECOWAS member states. As part of this protocol, ECOWAS member states are mandated to establish a unified immigration and emigration form known as the "Immigration and Emigration Form of ECOWAS member states" (Article 1). The realization of the interdependence between nations has underscored the need for strong political and economic ties among ECOWAS member states. This has led to the establishment of robust relationships aimed at fostering integration and economic viability within the West African sub-region (Omobowale and Olutayo, 2012).

The prevailing trajectory of global interconnectedness among nations has ushered in a paradigm shift, leading to the gradual erosion of conventional borders among member states. This transformative phenomenon finds tangible expression in endeavors championing the unimpeded movement of individuals, commodities, and commercial ventures across the expanse of the West African Region. The protocol centered on the doctrine of free movement emerges as a pivotal instrument in this progression, bestowing upon citizens within the community the privilege of

unrestricted access to any of its member states. This privilege is contingent upon the possession of a valid travel document, complemented by the prerequisite of an international health certificate to ensure public well-being.

However, it is paramount to recognize that even in the midst of this progressive stance on movement, member states retain the prerogative to exercise discretion. The protocol, while designed to foster seamless regional integration, does not infringe upon the sovereign authority of states to uphold their domestic laws. This power is epitomized by the latitude to refuse entry to individuals whose profiles fall within the realm of inadmissibility as defined by local regulations. In alignment with this overarching objective, the cooperative efforts of ECOWAS member states have culminated in the development of meticulously constructed policies and frameworks. These strategic constructs serve as the bedrock upon which the implementation of the free movement protocol is anchored within the expansive tapestry of the West African Region. The collaborative endeavors of these states, as highlighted by Omobowale and Olutayo (2012), underscore the collective commitment to nurturing an environment of unfettered movement that serves both the ideals of regional unity and the unique aspirations of individual nations within the ECOWAS community.

The modalities through which the member states of ECOWAS collaborate to enact the comprehensive tenets of the protocol governing free movement, residence, and establishment within the region are multifaceted and encompass a series of carefully delineated provisions. These provisions, intricately woven into the fabric of regional integration, exemplify the collective commitment to harmonize the rights and privileges of community citizens across diverse national contexts.

A foundational cornerstone of this cooperative endeavor lies in the issuance of valid travel documents to the citizens of the ECOWAS community. This essential step serves as the key that unlocks the doors to borderless movement, facilitating seamless journeys across the diverse landscapes that constitute the member states. These travel documents, embodying the spirit of inclusivity and unity, signify the recognition of individuals as members of a larger regional entity, transcending the confines of their country of origin.

Another pivotal facet of this collaborative effort is the bestowal of the right of residence upon community citizens, empowering them to partake in income-generating employment within the expanse of the region. This strategic provision acknowledges the role of labor mobility in fostering economic growth and harnessing the diverse talents of individuals for the collective benefit of the community. This right of residence represents an embodiment of the ideal of shared prosperity, creating opportunities for personal growth while contributing to the overall development of the ECOWAS region.

As a testament to the holistic nature of this protocol, measures are put in place to ensure the equitable and just treatment of individuals who may find themselves expelled from a member state. The principle of fairness extends even to the realm of deportation, with a commitment to refraining from mass deportations that may disrupt the delicate balance of regional integration. This approach underscores the intention to

cultivate an environment of mutual respect and understanding, acknowledging the interdependence of nations in a landscape where boundaries are transcended.

Furthermore, the protocol delineates the specific grounds upon which individual deportations may be grounded. These grounds are meticulously limited to reasons that encompass national security, public order, morality, public health, or the failure to fulfill essential residence conditions. This specificity serves as a safeguard against arbitrary or discriminatory practices, aligning with the fundamental values of justice and human rights. In sum, the protocol on free movement, residence, and establishment is not merely a collection of regulations; rather, it embodies a profound commitment to building a shared destiny where the people of the ECOWAS community stand united in their diversity. This collaborative effort, as elucidated by Opanike (2015), serves as a testament to the enduring aspiration to shape a West African landscape where the principles of mobility, residence, and establishment flourish, fostering a vibrant tapestry of cultures, economies, and aspirations.

Onwuka (2012) underscores that ECOWAS member states have established domestic-level policies governing migration that are aligned with the ECOWAS protocol. Additionally, the organization has ratified various international agreements to safeguard the rights of migrants and their families within the sub-region, mitigating instances of abuse. Echoing Onwuka's perspective, Addo (2006) suggests that ECOWAS member states have cooperated in establishing mechanisms to strengthen short-term, feasible, and implementable sub-regional collaborative programs and frameworks. These initiatives, reinforced by swift national enforcement measures, address the immediate catalysts of cross-border crimes in the West African sub-region. Based on the preceding analysis, it becomes evident that the ECOWAS member states have exhibited a collaborative spirit in effectively implementing the protocol on free movement, residence, and establishment within the sub-region. This collective commitment is a crucial stride toward bolstering the overarching goals of sub-regional integration.

By fostering harmonization of immigration and emigration processes through the establishment of the "Immigration and Emigration Form of ECOWAS member states," as prescribed in the protocol, ECOWAS member states have taken deliberate steps to simplify cross-border formalities. This initiative serves as a pivotal bridge to facilitate the seamless movement of individuals within the ECOWAS zone. The recognition of the imperative nature of mutual compatibility, main values, and distinctive ways of life, as highlighted in the Common Approach, underscores the deep-rooted commitment of member states to forge a shared socio-economic fabric. Moreover, the sustained efforts in combating human trafficking and ensuring the protection of the rights of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees reflect the region's unwavering dedication to ethical and humanitarian standards. The strategic approach of policy harmonization, coupled with the cognizance of the gender dimension of migration, lends credibility to the intention of fostering a comprehensive and inclusive environment for integration.

Furthermore, the proactive measures undertaken by ECOWAS member states to implement the standardized ECOWAS Travel Certificate, coupled with the adoption of the "Border Countries/Cross Border/Local Integration" concept, stand as tangible proof of their dedication to realizing the aspirations of sub-regional integration. Sierra Leone and Ghana's commendable achievements set promising precedents for others in the region, demonstrating that concerted efforts yield tangible results. In essence, the collective endeavor by ECOWAS member states to execute the protocol on free movement, residence, and establishment underscores their resolve to build a cohesive and interconnected West African sub-region. This cooperative approach serves as the bedrock for fostering mutual prosperity, shared security, and a dynamic framework for sustainable development. As the member states continue to collaborate, their commitment to this protocol reaffirms the region's determination to overcome challenges, forge stronger ties, and make significant strides towards a more integrated and harmonious West Africa.

5.2 Evaluate the relationship between ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and trans-border security?

In the realm of investigations that delve into the intricate landscape of sub-regional and cross-border crimes within the expansive tapestry of West Africa, a triad of scholars, namely Andrew (2008), Boister (2003), and Mueller (2007), have meticulously illuminated a host of challenges that loom large on the horizon. These challenges, akin to formidable obstacles, serve as complex tapestries woven from threads of socio-political complexities and economic intricacies, all intricately intertwined and posing formidable barriers to the pursuit of sustainable security and stability within the sub-region.

Andrew (2008) raises a compelling flag, shedding light on the persistent and pervasive weakening of the security sector. This unsettling phenomenon not only erodes the foundation of order and stability but also paves the way for the perpetuation of criminal activities that feed off vulnerability and chaos. Moreover, the proliferation of roadblocks, a seemingly innocuous hindrance, emerges as a significant point of concern. These checkpoints, while ostensibly erected for security reasons, can often metamorphose into conduits for extortion and corruption, eroding trust in institutions and distorting the very fabric of justice.

The specter of youth unemployment, as underscored by Mueller (2007), casts its long shadow across the landscape. The convergence of idle hands and aspirations stymied by a lack of opportunities becomes fertile ground for criminal entanglements and the allure of illicit activities. The repercussions ripple through the social fabric, manifesting as a menacing undercurrent of discontent that undermines the stability and security of the sub-region.

Boister (2003) adds another dimension to this intricate mosaic by highlighting the dire consequences of environmental degradation. The unchecked exploitation of natural resources, driven by inequitable forces, not only fuels conflict but also accelerates the

deterioration of the very ecosystems upon which communities depend. This degradation is closely interlinked with the fragility of institutional and civil society structures, which creates a void that can be exploited by those seeking to perpetuate criminal enterprises.

Furthermore, the vulnerabilities inherent in mass refugee movements and forced displacement, as emphasized by Andrew (2008), ripple through the sub-region. These phenomena, often born of conflict and instability, create spaces where criminal networks thrive, capitalizing on the desperation and vulnerability of displaced populations. The violations of human rights, including those of women, as illuminated by Boister (2003), stand as stark reminders of the human cost of the sub-region's challenges.

Collectively, these multifaceted issues, intricately unraveled by Andrew (2008), Boister (2003), and Mueller (2007), stand as tangible outcomes of the complex interplay between policy implementation and the real-world dynamics within West Africa. While the protocol on sub-regional cooperation strives to forge pathways toward security and stability, it grapples with the formidable forces of socio-political, economic, and environmental complexities. The sub-region's quest for sustainable security is thus a testament to its resilience and determination to navigate these multifaceted challenges and sculpt a future where peace and prosperity prevail.

The vulnerabilities of Nigeria's borders exacerbate the situation, with many of these borders transforming into zones of transnational criminal activities. The porous nature of these borders has compounded the national security challenges faced by Nigeria, with Boister (2003) explaining that effective border management is pivotal to a state's ability to protect its population from threats such as migration, international terrorism, and various forms of trafficking, including in humans, drugs, raw materials, and small arms and light weapons (SALW). In summation, the research findings spotlight the formidable challenges emanating from cross-border crimes in the West African sub-region, particularly those affecting Nigeria's national security and external relations. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons across porous borders, coupled with the associated violence, emphasizes the urgent need for strategic measures to mitigate these threats and strengthen collaborative efforts for the sake of regional stability and harmonious relations. In light of these findings, it is evident that the successful implementation of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement, goods, and establishment does not guarantee the desired regional development and unity. The complex array of challenges obstructing its smooth operation, especially the rampant cross-border criminal activities, undermines the potential for West Africa to achieve comprehensive regional security integration.

5.3 Examining the major strategies kept in place by ECOWAS to mitigate obstacles hindering the full implementation of the integration process in the West African Sub-region

In the annals of Africa's quest for economic integration and a harmonized path towards development, the signing of the African Economic Community (ACE) Treaty in the hallowed city of Abuja in June 1991 stands as a resounding testament to the aspirations of a continent eager to coalesce its diverse strengths. This milestone, etched into history with the ink of ambition, laid bare a blueprint of monumental proportions that aimed to sew the fabric of unity across the sprawling expanse of Africa. However, within the folds of this grand endeavor, a thought-provoking anomaly emerges—one that echoes with a critical resonance. Amidst the historic fervor and the resounding applause that followed the signing of the ACE Treaty, a curious lack of comprehensive analysis on the bedrock issues and challenges of regional cooperation and integration emerges. An endeavor of such magnitude, bearing the weight of the continent's collective dreams, embarked upon without the full depth of preparatory scrutiny—this is the nuance that flickers within the narrative of this historic event. While it is acknowledged that certain studies were indeed undertaken, there remains an echoing gap—a space where the intricate tapestry of West Africa's integration journey should have been meticulously woven and scrutinized.

The need for such a meticulous examination is no mere intellectual pursuit. It holds within its grasp the potential to illuminate the path ahead, to fortify the sub-region's participation in the grand continental endeavor that the ACE Treaty symbolizes. Furthermore, this introspective analysis extends its arms to embrace a more profound purpose: the enhancement of the role of regional integration as a fulcrum within the broader arc of the sub-region's development narrative. The pages of history, often marked with the ink of missed opportunities and unforeseen challenges, beckon to us. They underscore the importance of a comprehensive exploration, a candid assessment of the trials and triumphs that have accompanied West Africa's integration journey. This retrospective lens is not one of condemnation, but rather a clarion call—a beckoning to thread the needle of introspection through the fabric of experience. The evolving mosaic of West Africa's regional integration is a tapestry spun from the threads of aspirations, challenges, successes, and setbacks. To weave it with the precision it deserves, a probing analysis becomes the loom, a space to revisit the narratives, both celebrated and concealed, that have shaped the sub-region's trajectory.

In the larger tapestry of Africa's continental unity, West Africa's integration journey forms a vibrant thread. Its colors are imbued with the spirit of cooperation and the ardor of shared aspirations. Yet, to paint this thread with the shades of wisdom and insight, there arises an imperative—an imperative to delve into the chapters that were, the lessons they bear, and the wisdom they bestow upon a sub-region that strives not only to participate but to lead in the grand mosaic of Africa's shared destiny. After enduring a decade characterized by economic setbacks and the intricate challenges posed by structural adjustment, the nations of West Africa now stand at a crossroads,

embarking on a quest for viable development pathways. Amidst this transformative landscape, a growing realization dawns-regional integration and collaborative efforts possess the potential to infuse new vitality and guide the trajectory of development in a renewed direction. The core focus in establishing each of these three communities was to promote the liberalization of intra-community trade and associated forms of cooperation. ECOWAS, in particular, has played a substantial role in facilitating this objective through initiatives such as the development of regional road networks and telecommunication infrastructure. The sphere of ECOWAS' involvement extends to other dimensions as well.

6. Conclusion

The findings derived from this study underscore the multifaceted nature of regional economic integration within the ECOWAS framework. While the potential benefits for member states are abundant, the evidence of convergence across ECOWAS countries presents an intriguing revelation. This phenomenon indicates that cross-country income inequality is gradually being addressed over time, portraying a positive trajectory towards greater equity.

However, the study also highlights that the process of trade liberalization in West Africa has not yet reached its full fruition. This observation prompts contemplation about the potential hurdles that might obstruct the development of more robust social dimensions within the region. As deliberated, it is apparent that ECOWAS still has a substantial workload to tackle even after the enactment of its revised treaty. A noteworthy insight derived from the findings pertains to the realization that trade liberalization within West African countries has not entirely harnessed its potential. This is evidenced by the significant volume of trade and product importation taking place outside the sub-region, notably in Europe. Consequently, the results point towards the importance of proactive economic policy coordination to invigorate the region, promoting not just economic collaboration but also policy synergy. Furthermore, the study underscores the imperative of fortifying ECOWAS' trade activities, enhancing security measures, and cultivating robust institutions within the sub-region. These actions are deemed essential for fostering economic growth among member states. In light of these observations, it becomes evident that ECOWAS has not yet fully harnessed its potential for comprehensive economic unification and integration. A renewed emphasis on institutional strengthening and garnering the unwavering commitment of member states is imperative. In summary, while the journey towards regional economic integration in the ECOWAS region has been marked by gradual progress and numerous challenges, there are considerable prospects on the horizon. Notable advancements have been made in pivotal areas such as trade, transportation, communication, energy, knowledge exchange, freedom of movement, and peace and security. However, the study underscores that the challenges of economic integration in West Africa are formidable and demand sustained efforts to

surmount. Nevertheless, the strides made so far point towards a positive trajectory, suggesting that significant headway has been achieved despite the formidable challenges facing the process.

7. Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive research undertaken, the extensive literature reviewed, and the subsequent analysis, the following recommendations offer a way forward towards achieving a robust sub-regional economic integration within the ECOWAS region:

- a) **Strengthening the Institutional Framework:** It is imperative that the central and coordinating body of ECOWAS is fortified with legal or legislative instruments that command respect across all member nations. This includes the authority to impose sanctions on non-compliant members and formal recognition through national measures. Providing substantial backing to the establishment and operational rights of the central body will create the necessary impetus for members to actively engage and fully participate in the integration process.
- b) **Public Awareness and Support:** Member states should undertake comprehensive public education campaigns to elucidate the benefits of regional economic integration. Garnering public support for the integration process and obtaining approval for member states' investments in integration endeavors are vital. These efforts will contribute to fostering economic integration in the ECOWAS region by engendering a positive sentiment among citizens.
- c) **Cultivating Collective Identity:** Member states should exhibit a strong sense of allegiance and loyalty to the ECOWAS entity rather than fixating on colonial influences. Shifting from reliance on former colonial powers to prioritizing collaboration among fellow African nations will lay a solid foundation for a united effort towards achieving economic integration in West Africa. Trading amongst West African countries should take precedence over seeking initial engagement with former colonial powers.
- d) **Infrastructure Investment:** Member countries should embark on substantial infrastructural investments along their national borders. The strategic development of long-distance intra and inter-trade routes aimed at connecting neighboring nations will significantly enhance trading activities within the region. These infrastructural endeavors will serve as effective conduits for facilitating seamless trade interactions.
- e) **Overcoming Rivalries:** Overcoming historical rivalries and competition is paramount for ECOWAS to thrive. A robust ECOWAS framework would augment inter-state trade and strengthen the collective bargaining power of member states in global trade negotiations and debt relief initiatives. To achieve this, ECOWAS countries must adopt policies that replace existing unequal trade dynamics with a more equitable economic paradigm, thereby benefiting both

West Africa and the developed world. The responsibility for initiating this change rests with ECOWAS rather than external entities. Overcoming historical divisions and pursuing policies aligned with the original goals of ECOWAS will lead to an economically integrated West Africa that enhances economic prosperity and global influence.

- f) Streamlining Regional Membership: Member states within the West African sub-region should avoid excessive involvement in numerous regional bodies. Such widespread membership can dilute their effectiveness and potential rewards. By concentrating efforts on fewer regional affiliations, member states can fully capitalize on the benefits these organizations offer.

In conclusion, these recommendations collectively pave the way for a stronger and more cohesive regional economic integration effort within the ECOWAS sub-region. By enhancing institutional mechanisms, fostering public understanding and support, nurturing a collective identity, investing in vital infrastructure, resolving rivalries, and focusing on regional affiliations, ECOWAS can evolve into a more robust and impactful force in promoting economic integration and development across West Africa.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors, whose names are listed immediately below, certify that apart from submitting this manuscript to the European Journal of Political Science Studies for publication, there are no other affiliations with or involvement in any other organization or entity with a financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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