

External Forces and Regional Integration in Africa: A study of Economic Community of West African States.

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Abstract

The paper examined the roles of external forces in regional integration in Africa using the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a case. The mission of ECOWAS that was birthed in 1975 by fifteen-member states was aimed at achieving a robust and dynamic economic community. The community has relatively made progress in some areas. Despite these remarkable achievements, the dream to actualize robust gains of economic integration has met a brick wall. The inherent contradiction in the ECOWAS notwithstanding, the interference of external forces promotes as well as undermines regional integration in the West African Sub-region. The paper adopted a dependency framework as its theoretical construct. The paper adopted the qualitative method as a data-gathering technique and content analysis in analyzing the secondary data. The paper unravelled that the ECOWAS depends on external aids from the foreign national government, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations System, among others, while the France national government undermine the scheme through her membership (Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine) of her former colonial francophone countries. The paper recommends amongst others that the francophone countries should withdraw from the monetary union with the French government.

Keywords: ECOWAS, external forces, foreign aid, regional integration, sub-region.

Introduction

The West African Sub-region has been a region vertically opened to the global community for geographic and historic reasons. It is a region where various foreign state actors have left their footprint. These vertical contacts with foreign elements were the European powers and Arabs. The European powers (Belgium, England, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) in Berlin Conference signed a Berlin Act, 1884-85 where Africa was partitioned and distributed among European States. This Conference was a “major historical turning point for the beginning of European colonial history and new imperialism in Africa” (Sıradağ, 2014, p.101). This Conference redefined and reshaped African borders. Afterwards, the African states were hegemonized leading to an alteration in political, economic, administrative, institutional, linguistic, and cultural heritage.

Most African States that gained political independence at the dawn of the 1960s anticipated rapid socio-economic development in the various countries. This was an illusion because political independence is not synonymous with economic liberation. The assertion collaborates Ake (1981) who posit that “there was an implicit assumption that the winning of political independence was a watershed in the history of Africa and that it was a change, which could reasonably be expected to have had a major, if not decisive, impact on the future

development of African economies.” It was not long; these newly independent states faced a development dilemma occasioned by inherent contradiction emanating from vertical integration to the global political economy. One of the strategies considered to undermine neo-colonial predispositions in Africa was self-reliance. Hence, in the 1970s, most African states ventured into Sub-regional economic integration to fast-track development. Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Anyanwu and Conceição (2014, p.1) revealed that regional economic integration “has been a key aspiration of African countries since the achievement of independence some [60] years ago.” This aspiration was predicated on the fact that most African leaders considered regional integration as a potential strategy of “driving more robust and equitable economic growth as well as promoting poverty and unemployment reduction in Africa” (Anyanwu, 2014).

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was birthed by fifteen member states in 1975 to achieve a robust and dynamic economic community. The ECOWAS aims are summarized in the treaty, which was anchored on economic growth and development through cooperation and integration. The ECOWAS Treaty was revisited in 1993 to make the integration process more responsive to the development. The community has relatively made progress in some areas such as free movement of persons, development in telecommunication links, construction of regional inter-state roads, the inter-regional trade though relatively low, among others. Despite these remarkable achievements, the dream to actualize robust gains of economic integration has met a brick wall. The inherent contradiction in the ECOWAS notwithstanding, the interference of external forces promotes as well as undermines regional integration in the West African Sub-region. The positive external forces promote the integration scheme through foreign aid. For instance, foreign aid has been among the largest sources of external capital inflows to the ECOWAS sub-region (UNDP, 2009; OECD 2010 and 2014; World Bank, 2014 cited in Izevbigie, Isikhuemen and Ogbeifun, 2020). Extant kinds of literature have several divergent views on estimating the effects of external aid on developing countries. Though it was observed that the aid-growth issue is of great importance to developing countries, yet some still believe that aid also undermines the integration scheme. For instance, some external forces such as the United Nations system, foreign national government, supranational organizations, African Development Bank, among others, support the scheme in their programmes and infrastructural developments ranging from transportation, electricity, among others, have impacted integration scheme providing projects that link two or more countries in the West African Sub-region.

Though, the intrusion of the foreign national government has a positive or negative impact on the ECOWAS. African regional integration schemes rely heavily on foreign aid to execute their projects. This predicated on the fact that most member states hardly contribute arrear due to them. For instance, “in 2016, six nations had outstanding contribution arrears to ECOWAS. What that means is either the organization will stop working or it will have to rely on foreign donors” (Marsh, 2018). Hence, regional integration in Africa depends on external funding to carry out infrastructural developments, among others. For instance, the first China-ECOWAS economic and trade forum held in Beijing in September 2008 deliberated extensively on natural wealth in agriculture, mineral wealth, and oil and gas reserves, financial institutions and stock markets, and infrastructural projects such as roads, railways, housing, construction and transportation (Akyeampong, 2015, p.13). In 2018, the Chinese government released a “\$31.6 million grant to build a new headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria” (Marsh, 2018). In view of this, the Chinese government has impacted positively in advancing beyond “narrow infrastructure for-resources deals and now touches upon a wide array of sectors and development issues” (Karonga, 2013). Though, many scholars queried the emerging influence of China in ECOWAS and Africa at large. The question has always been on why would ECOWAS accept a foreign power to build its headquarters? The answer is not farfetched. Though, this was not the first time the Chinese government has extended a gift at the heart of

Sub-Saharan Africa. In a study carried out by SWAC/OECD initiative in 2006-2007, it was unravelled that:

Between the 1960s and the early 1980s, the People's Republic of China was already providing development aid (approximately \$100 million per annum). During that time, 150,000 Chinese technical assistants were sent to Africa to implement projects in the areas of agriculture, transport infrastructure development (roads and railways), construction of official buildings (football stadiums), industrial development (almost half of Mali's industrialization process during the 1960s was supported by China). This aid was modest however compared to the sums provided by other bilateral partners: between 1971 and 1981, Great Britain, the United States and France spent \$250 million, \$800 million and \$1,300 million respectively each year (cited in ECOWAS-SWAC/OECD, 2007, p.3).

In recent time, China has also carried out projects in West Africa and Africa at large. Marsh (2018) revealed that "in 2012, it [China] handed over the ultra-modern African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia... In 2017, China broke ground on a fully-funded \$58 million parliament in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo."

Historical evidence has proven that there is no such thing as a gift without an ulterior motive in international relations, every gift is viewed from the Greek perspective, particularly when such gift hails from a global power that has the intent to increase its scope value in the region. Besides the growing influence of China in Africa, France's relationship with its former colonies adversely impacts the integration scheme in the West Africa region. Martin (1985) noted that "from the beginning, France's process of decolonization was designed in such a way as to perpetuate dependency links after independence." That is why France can sustain its neocolonial grip, wield considerable power and influence in francophone Africa through a monetary union called Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine (*Monetary Union of West Africa*) (UMOA). Akyeampong (2015) noted that:

The francophone countries, the majority in the bloc, their common currency (the CFA franc) and the close orientation to France posed a challenge to the development of a common market. Administered in a single federation during the colonial period, the former French countries have more common institutions and structures, from economic institutions to the uniform gauge on their railway lines. It is not surprising that the francophone countries in West Africa except Guinea were able to form in 1994 an economic and monetary union, Union économique et monétaire Quest-Africaine (UEMOA), to facilitate trade between countries that share the CFA franc (p.8)

The "UEMOA has developed a customs union and a common external tariff, and it has been described as one of the advanced integration schemes in Africa" (Banik and Yoonus, 2012, p.320). The advancement of UEMOA adversely impact monetary policy in ECOWAS. In the recent concluded 57th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in Niamey, the Niger Republic, President Muhammadu Buhari, on behalf of ECOWAS leaders expressed dismay on the Francophone Member States for not supporting the adoption of monetary policy of single currency.

Given the above, ECOWAS has been abysmally retrogressive in terms of enforcement of policies, self-reliance, funding her programmes but heavily dependent on external aid for sustenance for more than 50 years of her existence. Therefore, the study interrogates the roles of external forces in regional integration in Africa using ECOWAS as a case.

Conceptual clarification

External Forces

Webster dictionary defined force as strength or energy that has an attribute of physical action or movement. External is viewed as belonging to or forming the outer surface or structure of something. External means involving from the outside. Individuals, organization, nations, among others experience external influence from time to time. It could be a negative or positive influence from the outside, which impacts productivity. Muscalu, Iancu and Halmaghi (2016, p.135) noted that “influences between the organization and its external environment are reciprocal. The external environment is represented by a set of institutions and external forces that influence the survival and/or progression of the organization. It directly or indirectly influences the objectives, plans, procedures, activities and results, playing an important role in the organization.” Therefore, external forces perform on a structure from the outside. It is capable of changing or influencing internal forces, or stresses, within the materials from which the structure is made.

Regional integration

A region is distinguished from an area, which is usually a broader concept designating a portion of the surface of Earth. Area boundaries are arbitrary, established for convenience. Regional boundaries are determined by the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the section (see, Encyclopaedia Britannica.com). Integration is a process of bringing integral parts together. The Webster dictionary defined integration as ‘an act or instance of combining into an integral whole.’ Therefore, regional integration is a conscious act of coming together of two or more sovereign states within a region for socioeconomic and political gains. Regional economic integration allows the removal of economic barriers among the integrating countries such as free trade in goods, trade facilitation and regional infrastructure, increasing services, among others.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted a dependency framework that explains external influence on integration scheme from the standpoint of conditioning the relationship. As a critique to the development paths, policies and strategies foisted on the developing worlds of Latin America and some other periphery. Dependency theorists argue that development and underdevelopment as products of the same historical process such that the development of one lead to the underdevelopment of the other (Ogele, 2021, p.99). In same vein, Palma cited in Conway and Heynen (2008, p.92) argues that:

Dependency theory emerged as a critical lens through which the history of Latin American development, marginalized as it was by Western hegemony, could be better understood; the 'development of underdevelopment; no less.' The initial theorization was a structuralist perspective by economists who were associated with the United Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). This was soon transformed, and informed, by more critical dependency notions and the spread of Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques of imperialism.

This view was amply echoed by Hopkins (1979, p.27) when he stated that.

Whereas modernization attributed economic backwardness to internal constraints of traditional societies and pressured that external contacts would be instrumental in removing them, the dependency thesis argues that it is the external links that have created economic backwardness by forging chains of

dependence and inequality between a privileged core and an exploited periphery (Cited in Nna 2002,p.197).

Dos Santos (1973) explains that the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies and between these and world trade assumes the form of dependence such that some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and be self-sustaining while others (Dependent ones) can do these only as a reflection of that expansion which can have either positive or negative effect on their immediate development. Put in a simpler language, Nna (2002, p.192) explains that:

Dependency is conceived basically as a conditioning relationship between two or more economics in which one determines what obtains in the other, normally to its benefit. In this regard, a dependent economy is not in control of its affairs in an interdependent relationship and so most often loses out economically.

It is the contention of this theory that the forceful integration of third world economies into the global capitalist system through colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism led to the disorientation of their economies from the production of use-value to commodity production for exchange value. The result became clear that the third world economies became tied to the apron strings of the developed world as the former ceased to produce what they consumed and consumed what they didn't produce. Andre' Gunder Frank, (1967, 1979) a major proponent of this theory developed further, the idea of the comprador bourgeoisie as espoused by Baran (1957). He explained the dualistic capitalist relation which had occurred and would continue to occur between Latin America and core countries, as a result of the latter's continued political-economic domination. In the words of Conway and Heynen (2008),

Besides arguing that the dependent core-periphery relationship was best articulated at the national scale, Frank also posited that a similar metropolis-satellite relationship occurred at smaller (regional) scales. In particular, he described similar dependent circumstances occurring between cities in Latin American countries and their peripheral hinterlands. Within this more localized scenario, the city and its periphery become increasingly polarized as a result of the capitalist relations between them, namely the metropolis exploiting its satellites. Dense networks of metropolis-satellite combinations formed what for Frank referred to as "constellations across national space (Cited Desai and Potter 2008, p.94).

The roles of external forces have conditioned the ECOWAS and other regional integration schemes in Africa to be dependent on economic communities. The notion that the Core continues to maintain and perpetuate underdevelopment in the periphery through foreign aid to various integration schemes have weakened the integrative scheme and undermine the ability to internally mobilize her resources to counteract this dilemma. The theory has contributed immensely to the understanding of the historical development of Third World underdevelopment by locating the problem mainly on external interference in the integration schemes in Africa. It is therefore imperative that a more critical lens be cast on some internal collaborators who possess the capacity to either aid or impede development.

Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative method of data gathering technique. The paper made use of newspaper publications, journals and books on regional integration. The paper adopted

a content analysis in analyzing the data collected from the internet and library. These include the activities and programmes of ECOWAS and its relationship with external forces with a view of ascertaining its impact on advancing the scheme.

The role of external forces

The external forces in regional integration in Africa have played various roles to either advance the integrative scheme or undermine them. They are positive and negative forces. One of the instruments employed by the positive external forces on the integration scheme in Africa is foreign aid. Some African countries depend on foreign assistance infrastructural development. Though, there have been divergent views on the effects of foreign aid by various scholars. In the last two decades, reports have indicated that ECOWAS accounts for the rising share in foreign aid inflow globally (Kurihara, 2014). The rising rate of foreign aid could be attributed to numeral factors, which includes the decision made by some donor agencies and more advanced countries to provide the means to finance poverty reduction measures, attend to humanitarian needs and bridge the development gap in most less developed regions of the world (OECD, 2014; World Bank, 2014). Adamu (2013, p.1) noted that “aid contributes to economic development in two ways. First, aid can accelerate the attainment of a steady-state potential growth rate by a country with limited capital. Second, aid can improve a country’s ultimate steady growth rate because it brings transfer of technology (knowhow) and encourages good governance and practices.”

Undoubtedly, the growing influence of China in West Africa and African at large is overwhelming. The Chinese aid assistance has been at an increase with the intent of providing a robust overseas development programme estimated at tens of billions of dollars since 2000. It was revealed, “that at least 70% of China's overseas aid was sent to Africa from 2000 to 2014” (Marsh,2018). Though some scholars argue that “Chinese aid substantially improves economic growth” (Marsh,2018), while others maintain that the huge assistance is geared undermining the Western efforts to use aids in promoting “democracy and political reform, at a time when the US is pulling back on overseas spending” (Marsh,2018).

The impact of technical and financial assistance on the development of ECOWAS from both foreign national governments and nonviolent state actors are unprecedented. Adamu and Ighodaro (2011) noted that some ECOWAS countries such as Nigeria indicated that net aid inflow rose from 0.4 per cent in 2001 to 5.5 per cent and 9,0 per cent in 2005 and 2007 respectively, nevertheless, dropped to 5.5 in 2008 while that of the Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone recorded about 12.8,12.1 and 46.1 percent respectively in 2001. The table below indicates an annual growth rate (AGR) in foreign aid (FA) inflows to the ECOWAS sub-region between 2000 and 2017 (in billions of current US\$).

Table 1. ANNUAL growth rate (AGR) in foreign aid (FA) inflows to ECOWAS sub-region between 2000 and 2017 (in billions of current US\$)

Year	Foreign Aid	Annual Growth Rate(AGR) %
2000	3.17	0
2001	4.321	0.363
2002	4.839	0.12
2003	4.99	0.031
2004	6.613	0.325
2005	11.763	0.779
2006	17.683	0.503
2007	9.134	-0.483

2008	10.247	0.122
2009	9.856	-0.038
2010	12.158	0.234
2011	12.059	-0.008
2012	13.005	0.078
2013	12.151	-0.005
2014	12.366	0.018
2015	9.623	0.136
2016	10.05	0.044
2017	9.64	-0.041

Sources: Izevbigie, Isikhuemen and Ogbeifun (2020) World Bank WDI (2018)

Table 1, it has shown that there was a decline in the annual inflow of foreign aid which adversely impacted growth rates in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2017. The decline may be attributed to several factors occasioned by human security challenges in major recipient countries such as Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal. Nonetheless, the growth rate was positive and on average within the period under review (2000-2017). Considering the composition of the ECOWAS Sub-region, the foreign aid inflow is predicated on the colonial heritage of member states. The table below indicates foreign aid received as a percentage (%) of GNI in the ECOWAS Sub-region between 2000 and 2017

Table 2 indicates the foreign aid received as a percentage (%) of GNI in the ECOWAS Sub-region between 2000 and 2017

Years	Ang	Franc	Lux
2000	42.121	62.858	40.503
2001	44.561	75.672	29.988
2002	43.618	80.033	29.844
2003	38.755	71.868	50.7416
2004	43.973	78.575	30.449
2005	38.712	69.171	28.765
2006	34.838	73.931	27.87
2007	30.277	69.152	28.823
2008	19.273	74.544	28.457
2009	24.001	84.279	29.691
2010	23.508	77.195	35.394
2011	19.058	75.376	24.895
2012	17.74	71.768	22.878
2013	13.273	65.557	24.807
2014	24.361	61.992	23.584
2015	30.53	72.79	30.44
2016	29.76	73.46	29.77
2017	30.49	72.84	30.41

Sources: Izevbigie, Isikhuemen and Ogbeifun (2020) World Bank WDI (2018)

Note: Ang-Anglophone Countries, Franc-Francophone Countries, Lux-Luxophone Countries
 Table 2 above indicates the diversity and composition of the ECOWAS Sub-region from the colonial heritage. From the table, the Francophone is the highest, followed by the Anglophone and Lusophone countries. The average of Francophone countries is higher even when Anglophone and Lusophone countries combined. Izevbigie, et al (2020,p.110) opined that the reason Francophone countries quest for foreign aid “could be attributed to the fact that besides

sharing of a common currency with France alongside its inherent attendant effects, for example, having the potency of easing capital inflows, francophone countries are more in numbers.” Development and financial assistance to developing economics come in form of foreign aid. Several scholars have divergent views of the impact of foreign aid on the integrative scheme. Iyoha (2004) argue that large aid flows to Africa have done little to promote growth and alleviate poverty. Sachs (2004) see aid as the moral obligation of rich countries for alleviating poverty in developing countries. Easterly and Levine (2001, 2003) opine that foreign aid has contributed to bad governance, corruption and heightened poverty levels in Africa, hence, advocates the end of foreign aid.

The negative external forces on the ECOWAS

The vertical integration of the African economy during the colonial era is a major impediment to the self-reliance and collective economic cooperation of ECOWAS. One of such was monetary cooperation between France the member states of the CFA Zone formulated in the 1960s in a colonial pact. The CFA franc region epitomizes a state-controlled zone of cooperation based in Paris, from where the priority is the interests of France. The peripheral countries that are members of this zone are economically weak in West and Central Africa.

The operational logic of the CFA currency was entrusted to a common central bank (comprising BCEAO and BEAC). The inscription of African names is deception but in reality, have no economic impact. They are mere bureaucratic institutions whose monetary policies are dependent on French Bank. They merely exist to give the impression that the CFA countries have monetary control over their currencies, which in reality is not the case. The francophone CFA Zone countries have maintained a monetary system arranged by their former colonial master. Koulibaly (2011) revealed that “the CFA zone economies are relatively very vulnerable. This is occasioned by the operational mechanism of the CFA franc, which is considered to be asymmetric. The monetary solidarity of the CFA zone countries was designed to benefit France. The CFA monetary cooperation has not produced an efficient and major banking/financial system in the CFA countries.” For instance, in 1990, of the 107 banks within the CFA countries, 42 were declared bankrupt. To remedy the situation, the banking network was constituted, which increased the tie and strongly dependent on the banks in metropolitan France.

Given the above, France does not encourage external trade bilateral relations of a member CFA with other nations. For instance, when Senegal crude oil was discovered in Saint Louis, the country turned to Venezuela to help in its exploration instead of France. Paris considered this act as a betrayal of cooperation agreements that are tied to all CFA countries, and their resources solely to France. There are other instances, the crisis relating to uranium in Niger, gold in Mali, petrol in Chad, raw materials and the transfer of public utility shares in Cote d'Ivoire, DR Congo, all to protect French interests.

Several efforts have been made since April 20, 2000, in Accra, Ghana, when six leaders of West African countries indicated an interest in proceeding to monetary union among the non-CFA franc countries of the region by January 2003. As planned, the initial step was to guarantee a broader monetary union including all the ECOWAS countries in 2004. To actualize it, the six countries accepted to reduce their central bank financing budget deficits to 10, setting up a common central bank, among others.

Despondently, one of the impediments has always been whether the French Treasury's guarantee of convertibility of the CFA to the euro, at a fixed uniformity. The CFA franc is pegged to the Euro and that makes it challenge to facilitate monetary union among West African countries. The Chairman of ECOWAS, President Muhammadu Buhari while delivering a keynote address in the 57th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in Niamey, Niger Republic recognized “that some key unresolved issues remained

such as delinking the CFA franc of the UEMOA from the Euro” (Aliemen,2020). It is imperative to note that a large part of their foreign reserves of francophone countries is sealed within the French treasury under the colonial -era agreement with France, therefore limiting their ability to enact a meaningful monetary policy in ECOWAS.

Second, while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had agreed to embrace a single currency, the francophone countries hastily launched ECO. This action by the francophone countries had caused a division with the other anglophone and luxophone countries in the ECOWAS Countries who intended to adopt the new currency but are relatively slow. President Buhari noted that:

Foreign interference and so-called advice may not be in our best sub-regional interest...need for UEMOA to return to the agreed roadmap of the ECOWAS Single Currency by complying with the established framework under the roadmap and cooperate with other member countries in achieving the objectives of the programme (Aliemen,2020).

Concluding Remarks

External forces have greatly impacted regional integration in West Africa. The United Nations system, nonviolent state actors, among others have positively promoted regional integration in Africa including foreign national government such as China. While other foreign national government such as France has undermined regional integration of the Economic Community of West African State. France has officially granted political independence to francophone countries in the West African region, yet has strong integrative bond that determines and enjoys all the colonial advantages of pro-independence periods. Paris considers any relationship outside her with francophone Africa as a betrayal. French government controls their monetary policy of the UMOA, a sub monetary organization of eight francophone countries in West Africa. This integrative scheme with Francophone Africa has adversely impacted the ECOWAS monetary policy. This was predicated on the hasty launching of the ECO by the francophone members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), countries, and this has caused a division with the other Anglophone countries in the 15 ECOWAS Countries who want to adopt the new currency. Hence, I would recommend that since certain external aids appear to have an abysmal impact on self-reliance, hence, ECOWAS must be selective in accepting foreign assistance. Some of the foreign aids can mortgage the future of the West African Sub-region. Second, the francophone African States should reconsider their monetary union with France. The francophone countries should create an independent national currency that is elastic like the supranational organization such as the European Union national currency before the emergence of the euro. This will fast-track the ECO monetary policy of ECOWAS single currency.

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