

The Role of Parliament on Economic Integration in Africa: Evidence from ECOWAS Parliament

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Abstract: *The paper examines the role of the Parliament on Economic Integration in Africa, with focus on ECOWAS Parliament. The paper compared the activities of the ECOWAS parliament to similar parliaments in the globe such as the European Parliament, the Pan African Parliament, the Caribbean Parliament, and the East African Parliament. Using descriptive approach, the paper discovered that unlike other parliaments in the globe, the ECOWAS parliament is only a consultative and advisory body and lacks legislative powers. Consequently, trade between member states is still far from what it ought to be, while the movement of persons within the West African Sub-region is yet to be fully realized. Other issues such as single currency and a common position in trade with other regional blocks such as the European Union are still huge challenges. The paper therefore recommends the promotion of economic integration in Africa by transforming the parliament from a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus among representatives of the people to a co-decision making and subsequently a law making parliament. It also recommends the swift adoption of a case for the enhancement of the power of the ECOWAS Parliament presented to the president of the ECOWAS Commission without further delay. This would help to improve trade and investment in the Sub-region and enable ECOWAS compete favourably in the global economy.*

KEY WORDS: *ECOWAS, Economic integration, ECOWAS Parliament*

JEL CLASSICATION: *R11, F15, K33*

I. Introduction

Economic integration among developing countries is needed to accelerate their economic development by encouraging the establishment and growth of manufacturing industries, expanding intra-regional and extra-regional trade, increasing the gains from trade and providing benefits of the extension of competitive markets. Developing countries chiefly export primary products which are traded freely in the world markets. On the other hand, their imports consist mainly of intermediate goods and manufactures which majority of them do not produce or produce in limited quantities. Economic integration is essential to change the existing pattern of trade which require changes in the existing pattern of production. The aim is to industrialize their economies on modern lines and to mobilize and fully utilize their unemployed resources through industrialization. There is also need to attract foreign investment and utilize it profitably for economic development of the customs union or free trade area.

International economic integration refers to a decision or process whereby two or more countries combine into a larger economic region by removing discontinuities and discriminations existing along national frontiers, and by establishing certain elements of co-operation and co-ordinations between them. Tinbergen (1965) distinguished between negative and positive integration. Negative integration relates to those aspects of economic integration which involves the removal of discrimination and restriction on the movement of goods among the member countries. On the other hand, positive integration involves the modification of existing institutions and policy instruments and the adoption of new ones in order to remove market distortions within the economic region. In fact whether economic integration is negative or positive, it aims at free movement of goods and factors of production and removal of discrimination among nations in a regional group.

There are several difficulties confronting the achievement of economic integration in Africa. These challenges range from political, administrative, geographical, and economic to trade diversion and uneven distribution of benefits. It is against this backdrop, that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1975 to promote trading activities within the West African Sub-region. ECOWAS's mandate is to adopt measures to encourage the formation of economic integration among the countries in the Sub-region. Specifically, ECOWAS seeks to promote economic trade, national cooperation, and monetary union, for growth and development throughout West Africa. Its four commissions deal with the following functions: trading, immigration, monetary interaction: Industry, natural resources, and agriculture: transportation and communications: and social and cultural issues. There were 15 members initially: Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania (left in 2002), Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Burkina Faso (joined as Upper Volta). Cape Verde joined in 1977. A revised

treaty intended to accelerate integration of economic policy and improve political cooperation was signed on 24 July 1993. It sets out the goals of a common economic market, a single currency, the creation of a West African parliament, economic and social councils, and a court of justice. The treaty also lays the burden of settling regional conflicts on the treaty members. To this end there is also a Mutual Defence Protocol: a non-standing army deployed in the region as ECOMOG.

The institutions of ECOWAS include; the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Parliament, the Community Court of Justice, among others. The ECOWAS Parliament as one of the institutions of ECOWAS is a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus for representatives of the peoples of West Africa in order to promote integration. The Parliament was established in accordance with Article 6 and 13 of the ECOWAS Treaty. The Protocol establishing the Parliament was signed in Abuja on August 6, 1994 and entered into force since March 14, 2002. The Parliament is the Assembly of Peoples of the Community and its members represent all the peoples of West Africa. The Parliament consists of 115 seats. Each of the 15 Member State has five seats at least. The remaining seats are shared in proportion to the population. As a result, Nigeria has 35 seats, Ghana 8, Côte d'Ivoire 7, while Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal have 6 seats each. Other countries: Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo have 5 seats each.

ECOWAS aims to promote co-operation and integration in economic, social and cultural activity, ultimately leading to the establishment of an economic and monetary union through the total integration of the national economies of member states. It also aims to raise the living standards of its peoples, maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent. ECOWAS integration policies and programmes are influenced by the prevailing economic conditions in its member countries, the need to take the principal provisions of the AEC Treaty into account, and relevant developments on the international scene. The revised treaty of 1993, which was to extend economic and political co-operation among member states, designates the achievement of a common market and a single currency as economic objectives. The treaty also formally assigned the Community with the responsibility of preventing and settling regional conflicts.

Several analysts have argued that ECOWAS has not been able to achieve its objectives due to several constraints and the community's effort of promoting economic integration in the West African Sub-region has not been successful. Similarly, the institutions of the Community such as the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Parliament, and the Community Court of Justice are trying to make efforts to promote economic integration in West Africa. It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the role of ECOWAS parliament on economic integration in Africa.

Following this introduction, the remaining part of the study is divided into five sections. Section two deals with ECOWAS Parliament and its quest for legislative powers, while section three reviews the related literature. Section four examines the dimensions/elements of economic integration in West Africa, and section five investigates the role of ECOWAS Parliament in economic integration in Africa. The final section contains the conclusion and recommendations.

II. ECOWAS Parliament and its quest for Legislative Powers

The beauty of democracy is predicated on the independence of the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Parliaments at the federal and state levels in functional democracies enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed powers to make laws for the good governance of their people. The three principal functions of the parliament include law-making, oversight and representation. Dynamics of modern democracy have extended the scope and functions of parliaments to regional bodies seeking to improve inter/intra-border trade among member states. The 15-member Economic Community of West African States established the ECOWAS Parliament in 2000. It has a total of 115 seats occupied by members of parliament elected from National Assemblies of member states. At inception, it was mandated to serve only as a consultative and advisory body. Twelve years later; despite a desire expressed by the Authority of Heads of State and Governments in 2006, to have an ECOWAS Parliament with directly elected members and exercising full legislative powers, the original mandate has remained unchanged. This is unlike what obtains in similar bodies across the world.

In Europe, for example, the European Parliament shares equal legislative powers with the Council of the European Union. This empowers the EU Parliament to adopt European laws (directives, regulations, among others). It can accept, amend or reject the content of European legislation. According to the EU Parliament website, a member of parliament, working in one of the parliamentary committees, can draw up a report on a proposal for a "legislative text" presented by the European Commission – the only institution empowered to initiate legislation. The parliamentary committee then vote on the report and, possibly, amends it. When the text has been revised and adopted in plenary, it means the Parliament has adopted its position. This process is repeated one or more times, depending on the type of procedure and whether or not agreement is reached with the Council. In the adoption of legislative Acts, a distinction is made between the ordinary legislative procedure

(co-decision), which puts Parliament on an equal footing with the Council, and the special legislative procedures, which apply only in specific cases where Parliament has only a consultative role.

For example, on certain questions such as taxation, the European Parliament gives only an advisory opinion known as the consultation procedure. In some cases, the EU Treaty provides that consultation is obligatory, being required by the legal base, and the proposal cannot acquire the force of law unless Parliament has delivered an opinion. In this case, the Council is not empowered to take a decision alone. It can also ask the Commission to present legislative proposals for laws to the Council.

For some years now, the East African Legislative Assembly has been operating as a legislative body. The Southern African Development Commission Parliamentary Forum has embarked on a study to transform into a legislature. There are also studies aimed at transforming the Pan African Parliament into a legislature. Perhaps drawing from this practice which is fast becoming a major trend for Sub-regional and Supranational Parliaments even in Africa, Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, is seeking to enhance the powers of the ECOWAS Parliament to conform to global best practices. The lawmaker said, The ECOWAS Parliament is one of the community institutions established by the ECOWAS revised Treaty. It aims at accelerating and deepening the integration and development process among the people of the Sub-region.

Consequently, the Parliament was conceived as a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus among representatives of the people. The Parliament is currently on transition and therefore does not make laws according to the provisions of Article 4 (2) of the Supplementary Protocol establishing the Parliament. It provides that the Parliament “shall be progressively enhanced from advisory to co-decision making and subsequently to a law making roles in areas to be defined by the Authority. To achieve this objective, the ECOWAS Parliament instituted a study aimed at looking at areas in which its powers can be enhanced to enable it function better. The study resulted in the adoption of a Preliminary Draft Supplementary Act.

Ekweremadu argues that this is the best way to go if ECOWAS is to improve trade and investment and compete favourably in the global economy. The document entitled, “A Case for the Enhancement of Power of the ECOWAS Parliament,” has since been presented to the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Kadre Desire Ouedraogo. In it, the Speaker gave a summary of salient aspects of the Act which if adopted, will go a long way in enhancing the legislative powers of the parliament. ECOWAS Parliamentarians are proposing in Articles 14 and 15 to deal with the issue of elections to parliament by Electoral College. Under this proposal, National Parliaments are proposed to be the Electoral Colleges to elect ordinary citizens as representatives of ECOWAS Parliament. It also proposes in Article 7 to make either Parliamentarians or council to initiate Legislative Acts, which will be adopted by both institutions to become applicable. This process is also to be used to adopt the Community Budget (Article 7.1, 13). It is also being proposed that the Parliament be empowered to confirm the appointment of statutory appointees. This, the Parliament argues, will provide members the opportunity to assess the capacity of those to be entrusted to administer the community before they assume office.

The parliamentarians equally recommend that they be integrated into the Community mechanism on conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security. To achieve this, the Supplementary Act is making proposal in Article 47. This portion of the proposal reads: “The integration of Parliament into the Community mechanism on conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security. Parliament should also be involved in election monitoring. Parliamentarians are projected to augment the early warning channels and participate in conflict resolution. However, provision is made for emergency situations where consultation may not be practicable. The parliamentarians are also proposing for the establishment of an office of a Parliamentary OMBUDSMAN (Article 48). Under this proposal the Parliament said, the establishment of the office of the OMBUDSMAN is an innovative concept to forge closer ties with ordinary citizens by formalising a channel through which their grievances may be addressed without resorting to judicial processes.

Other areas include strengthening interactions between ECOWAS Parliaments and National Parliaments (Article 20, 35 and 46) and transition and coming into force (Article 54). It proposes that the Supplementary Act come into force immediately it is signed but that the present representatives will remain till the end of the 3rd legislature. New elections would hold at the end of the legislature in accordance with the new Act.

The Parliament is not going to legislate on domestic issues of nations but concerned with integration matters, community budget – ECOWAS institutions, trans-boarder issues among others. It is important to note that whatever laws the Parliament will propose for implementation will of necessity pass through the vetting process of the highest decision making body- the Authority of Heads of State and Government. Parliaments of each member state will be required to make inputs to strengthen the laws which will largely be model laws based on internationally accepted rules, conventions and protocols on trade, investments and in the area of the movement of persons, goods and services. Real integration within the ECOWAS Sub-region will remain a mirage until the needed framework is put in place to make it truly competitive. Trade between member states is still far from what it ought to be, while the movement of persons within the Sub-region is yet to be fully

realized. Other issues such as single currency and a common position in trade with other regional blocks such as the EU are still huge challenges. (See Alechenu, 2012).

III. Empirical Review of Related Literature

Several studies have been conducted on the relationship between regional parliaments and economic integration across the globe. Isaac, (2004) writing on Parliament's Role in Caribbean Regional Economic Integration contends that if Parliaments are themselves to remain relevant, their role in the economic integration process must undergo transformation in tandem with and responsive to the realities of the people and regions they serve. His paper traces Caribbean Community (CARICOM's) economic integration efforts to date. It argues that integration relies for its validity on the relationship that governments are able to develop with their people and that economic integration per se is not a viable goal that a people-centric approach to integration gives it essence, ownership and longevity. According to the author, the parliament has crucial role to play in achieving the objectives of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) which among other things include; to promote the expansion and diversification of trade in the area of the Association; to ensure that trade between member territories takes place in conditions of fair competition; to encourage the progressive development of the economies of the area; and to foster the harmonious development of Caribbean trade and its liberalization by the removal of barriers to it.

Herupyuda (2010) in his writing on the role of European Parliament argues that if the European Union is to meet the challenge of democracy by becoming fewer deficits, it is the European Parliament that has to play a vital role. This can be observed through the Europe Parliament elections, and how the European political parties aggregating the interest of their constituents. Commenting on European Parliament and its role in European Union, Herupyuda (2010) states that at every stage of the European integration process, the question of democratic legitimacy has become increasingly sensitive. The Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice Treaties have triggered the inclusion of the principle of democratic legitimacy within the institutional system by reinforcing the powers of Parliament with regard to the appointment and control of the Commission and successively extending the scope of the co-decision procedure. In order to balance the power of the Commission, Maastricht Treaty ensures the procedure of co-decision to the legislative body of the EU (the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union) on a wide range of areas such as transport, the environment and consumer protection, to give the same weight to the power already possess by the Commission. Besides, the Parliament also meant for the power over budget, legislative and supervisory over the activities of the EU

Examining the role of the European Parliament in the functional model, (Young, 1980) discovered that European Parliament is not only a conventional organization with buildings and officials, but of recognized patterns of practice around which expectations converge. In the functional model, the European Parliament is not only to ensure a fair system of 'check and balance' within the European Union, but to accommodate the views of members belonging to different nationality and ideology.

Donatella, (2000) examining the role of the European Parliament in the realist model, asserted that realism is hardly conducive with the supranational development of the European integration, regarded as anathema because it leads to an artificial system whereby the state loses the prerogative of promoting its bias (Weiler and Wessels, 1988, 238). As such, the realist thesis reaffirms the primacy of member states' governments and excludes any significant functions for supranational organs including the European Parliament. Realists argue that the general state of anarchy that characterizes the EP as a multinational platform for discussion does not make it a suitable and efficient decision-making institution, especially when dealing with foreign policy issues.

According to Haas (1958), Parliamentarians are part of the institutions which shape the emerging European political community. They are crucial actors on the stage of integration (as potential legislators and as catalysts for fostering the process of integration). This view is shared by Moravcsik who recognizes the fundamental role of the European Parliament in fostering the process of EU integration and pressing for further reforms by acting above the nation-state. Yet he rejects supranational institutionalism as a variant of neo-functionalism along with the assumption that international institutions and transnational interest groups play a major part in the integration process, independently from the member states (Moravcsik, 1991).

The integration process can be evaluated by the level of involvement of the above institutions and their capacity for representing and combining the conflicting interests of the various member states. The European Parliament can therefore fulfil an important mediatory role as a permanent forum for debate, conflict-resolution and coalition-building whereby members become acquainted with new rules and are progressively drawn to readdress their loyalties from the national to the central echelons (Pentland, 1973).

This view is not shared by David Marquand, who argues that neo-functionalism is apolitical if not anti-political and aparliamentary if not quite anti-parliamentary. Parliaments, after all, reflect political opinion and give expression to political demands. If integration were a technical process rather than a political one there could be no place in it for a Parliament (Marquand, 1980). On these lines, the powers of the Assembly of the

Coal and Steel Community and the Assembly of the European Economic Community were extremely limited. However, as Marquand himself admits, it seems clear that the founding fathers believed that the parliamentary element would expand as time went on (Marquand, 1980). In this sense, two fundamental neo-functional attributes need to be highlighted namely: supra-nationality and political élites. The application of the principle of supra-nationality would require certainly a more active role of the `supranational institutions in the EU decision-making process. The political élites could find in the European Parliament the forum to lobby their political and economic objectives.

According to the pluralists, integration consists of an international system of developed nations with no central governmental institutions. They admit the possibility of attaining in future a supranational European dimension, but deny that this might result from popular or parliamentary clout since governments still hold the monopoly over the destiny of their respective countries. Although designating the direct relationship between citizens and the European Parliament, pluralists acknowledge the restricted popular and therefore parliamentary involvement in international politics. In brief, in the pluralist paradigm no government is likely to put itself in a position of being swept out of power by a surge of popular internationalist (or Europeanist) feeling (Pentland, 1973).

The Federalists give a salient position to the European Parliament which represents the focal point for the integration process for its ability of promoting the European ideas and offering a platform for discussion. Together with the Council, which would become a legislative Upper House, the EP would rule with the executive over all the spheres of activity placed under its control by the federal constitution (Haas, 1958). Federalists demand the expansion of direct and indirect democratic controls over the execution of foreign policy and the realization of the democratic system of `check and balance' in the form of greater parliamentary powers at European, national and regional levels.

Ogochukwu (2008) probes the role of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) in the African Union (AU), given the documented struggle of African regional integration institutions for relevance in the highly intergovernmental milieu of African regionalism. The research found that despite its legal importance in terms of the AU Constitutive Act, the PAP in practice plays no effective role in AU decision-making. As a consultative body, the PAP has made no impact whatsoever in the decisions of the AU. Drawing from the institutional discourse, the research argues that although these institutional antecedents may not augur well for PAP's future in the AU, the PAP's growth strategy should take advantage of increasing tasks and unintended consequences in the expanding AU, to find its relevance in the continental polity.

From the empirical review above, much research works have been conducted on the role of the Parliament on Caribbean Regional Economic Integration, the role of European Parliament on European Union (Economic Integration) and the role of Pan African Parliament (PAP) on Regional Integration in African. But work is still scanty on the activities of the ECOWAS Parliament and how it can assist the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to achieve economic integration in the West African Sub-region. This research work intends to fill this vacuum.

IV. Dimensions/Elements of Economic Integration in West Africa

Economic Integration refers to the elimination of tariff and nontariff barriers to the flow of goods, services and factors of production between a group of nations, or different parts of the same nation. The recent global economic downturn has accentuated the importance of trade and economic integration as engines of growth and development. As was true in past times of turmoil, exports have served as a countercyclical force in the region's economies, propelling growth and economic stability. Further connecting countries via trade would help to set the entire region on a more prosperous plane and ignite cooperation in other areas. Since the 1990s, countries of Africa have pursued a multi-tiered trade liberalization strategy composed of unilateral opening; Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), which include Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Customs Unions (CUs), and Common Markets (CMs) and multilateral trade Liberalization (WTO). The following dimensions are examined:

4.1 Trade in Goods and Services

Trade refers to the exchange of goods and services for the benefit of man or for profit making. International trade means the exchange of capital, goods, and services across international borders or territories. In most countries, such trade represents a significant share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While international trade has been present since the history of man, its economic, social, and political importance has been on the increase since the last century. Industrialization, advanced transportation, globalization, multinational corporations, and outsourcing are all having a major impact on the international trade system. Increasing international trade is crucial to the continuance of globalization (Wikipedia). Without international trade, nations would be limited to the goods and services produced within their own borders. This is because barriers to accessing markets in the region are often lower than those for accessing global markets and

neighbouring countries' markets are often similar in taste, standards, distance, and culture. Creating regional markets can thus allow companies to expand operations and create economies of scale, making them more competitive. Gaining access to regional markets also increases incentives for more investment flows, and permits suppliers to specialize and integrate into regional supply chains that ultimately cater to both domestic and international markets.

It is usually more politically feasible to reduce trade barriers within a region rather than within global market. However, dealing with regional trade barriers and strengthening regional integration aids countries in small measure to fit into the international/ world markets. This is due to barriers to regional trade are often also impeding to trade with the world. In West Africa, both the processes, and degree of regional integration have lagged behind expectations and many political commitments have either not been translated into policy and regulatory reforms, or reforms are not implemented. According Mombert, and Aidoo (2012), the region thus remains weakly integrated with continuing tariff barriers (for example where restrictive rules of origin cannot be met) and substantial non-tariff barriers. There is still no agreement at the ECOWAS level on the precise structure of the common external tariff, and the existing scheme for regional free trade faces significant challenges.

4.2 Human Migration

Human migration among West Africans in general has been described as a way of life and it dates back to the pre-colonial era. This is because the people have migrated over the generations in responses to demographic, political and economic factors. Thus, long distance migration (across frontiers) is not a new thing in West Africa. In the ECOWAS Sub region, as it is in any viable regions, human migration remains one of the most significant form of mobility especially in search for employment. Pertaining to intra-regional migration, in 2005 close to 90 per cent of immigrants in Niger came from other West Africa countries, about 80 percent of immigrants in Senegal and two-thirds of immigrants from Mali were from the Sub-region. Perhaps, this was made possible by the ECOWAS protocol of Free Movement and the Free Trade Area (FTA) policies of the Community. These migrants may return to their home countries more often than overseas migrants due to geographical proximity. Therefore, it enhances the transfer of skills, expertise and financial assets aiding investments in better education, healthcare, housing and the accumulation of savings.

The free movement and free trade area policies are primarily aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship, and economic integration of countries of the Sub-region. Research has shown that Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Nigeria were among the top emigration countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2005. Burkina Faso – Cote d'Ivoire, Mali – Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana – Cote d'Ivoire as well as migration from Mali to Burkina Faso figured among the 10 most numerous migration corridors of Sub-Saharan Africa.. Pertaining to the migration within the Sub-region, close to 4.4 million migrants in 2005 migrated to another ECOWAS country (ACP, 2010). Juxtaposed with the overall 7.7 million international migrants in the Western African sub-region (UNPD, 2009), South-South migration accounted for more than half of it in 2005. There are huge differences existing between countries, with 88.3 per cent of Nigerians who left the country settled within West African Sub-region, 80 per cent of emigrants from Mali went to another country in the Sub-region, more than two out of three Mauritanian emigrants in 2006 and Ghanaian emigrants in 2005 moved within the Sub-region.

Countries that invested extensively in their education are particularly concerned about the emigration of highly skilled workers and rely heavily on them for public service delivery. According to data the rate of emigration from one ECOWAS country to another was only one per cent in 2000 while this rate is almost 15 times higher among skilled workers (14.8%). While a large share of emigrants from Western African States moves to other countries in the Sub-region and developing countries more generally, highly skilled migration from these countries seems to be a predominantly South-North phenomenon. Whereas merely 2.4 per cent of the labour force in Western Africa is skilled workers, more than two in five migrant workers from LDCs residing in OECD countries belonged to the tertiary educated. Nonetheless, more data and research are needed to explore whether brain drain might also represent a possible South-South phenomenon. Intra-regional cooperation in the field of labour migration could enhance mobility of workers, while promoting the transfer of skills, knowledge and assets and tackling possible negative socio-economic effects.

The widespread youth unemployment and underemployment as well as an exponential demographic growth of this part of the population are of great importance in the field of labour migration. Sequel to the global economic and financial crisis, youth unemployment has increased (ILO, 2010). Taking into cognizance that the 15 to 24 year old segment of the population will increase by further 15 million people over the coming decade (UN PD, 2008), there is the need for the formulation of policies to ensure access to the labour markets for the youth to avoid marginalization and to prevent further conflicts in the ECOWAS region (UNOWA, 2006).

Short-term labour migration is a significant migratory phenomenon in the Sub-region. Ranging from Fulani herdsmen crossing several ECOWAS countries to local farmers selling their products on the market across the border, these movements represent important social and economic facts. The ECOWAS Commission

pays therefore particular attention to cross border cooperation. There are no reliable estimations of these short-term migration flows either in terms of population on the move or in terms of economic value and its development impact for the Sub-region.

4.3 Movements of Capital and Integration of Financial Markets.

In 1990, ECOWAS launched a Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), aimed at achieving a Customs Union with a possible Common External Tariff (CET) in 2008. Though some teething challenges were encountered in this regards, ECOWAS has achieved a Free Trade Area (FTA), with the abolition of tariffs on products from member states of the community. However, according to African Development Bank (2011) bureaucratic procedures pertaining to rules-of-origin, discordant customs systems and procedures, difficulties with insurance and bond guarantees for transit cargo, and other non-tariff barriers (NTB), involving roadblocks and demands for informal payments, have impeded/ obstructed the objectives of the FTA. However, West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries have formed their own Customs Union which almost a parallel body to ECOWAS, with the adoption of a common external tariff (CET) in January 2000. An Inter-State Road Transit Convention, which made possible the creation of a cross-border insurance system, was also adopted. WAEMU also recorded a tremendous progress in the rationalisation of domestic taxation with the VAT ranging from 18%-20% and excise duty (ADB, 2011). In other words, there exists an appreciable level of free movement of goods and services within the ECOWAS Sub-region, though without common currency (like the Euro), custom union, etc.

The situation painted above does not mean that ECOWAS has failed in meeting its targets or core objectives but that though it has succeeded in certain areas of her integration, much is expected in her pursuit for economic integration. Economic integrations in the world can be distinguished essentially from four viewpoints based on the degree such as Free Trade Area (FTA), Customs Union (CU), Common Market (CM), and Economic Union (EU). More specifically:

- Free Trade Area (FTA) abolishes intra-regional tariffs and quotas;
- A Customs Union (CU) not only abolishes intra-regional tariffs and quotas, but also creates common external tariffs (CET);
- However, a Common Market (CM) is, a Common Union that also abolishes restrictions on factor movements (free movement of factors of production including persons and services), as a definition, a common market is an economic area in which free movement of goods, services, capital and persons (the “four freedoms”) is guaranteed; and
- An Economic Union however, is a Common Market with a higher level of harmonization of national economic policies in order to remove discrimination due to disparities in these policies.

Total Economic Integration in Economic Union means, unification of monetary, fiscal, social and counter cyclical policies and setting up of a supranational authority where decisions are binding for the member states. However, the objective of achieving monetary cooperation remains elusive despite practical & intellectual efforts. Unlike the European Union, common currency – Euro which is a legal tender in all the European Union member states, the ECOWAS Sub-region has not reached that maturity of economic integration. The flow of capital is a *sine qua non* for a successful economic integration.

V. The Role of ECOWAS Parliament in Economic Integration in Africa

5.1 ECOWAS Parliament and the Prevention and Management of Conflict.

A prime cause of violent conflict in West Africa is the failure of governance, including the lack of an effective and active Sub-regional non-military mechanism for preventing future and resolving ongoing conflicts. One of the major purposes of ECOWAS Parliament is to help address this gap by developing the capacity to exercise an effective role in preventing and managing conflict in West Africa. This will carry-out a series of seminars, training workshops, and working group initiatives to develop seed institutional mechanisms, individual and organizational capacities, institutional relationships and a strategic plan for the conflict prevention and management role of the ECOWAS Parliament. The Project will develop the understanding and awareness of ECOWAS Parliamentarians as to the underlying causes of, as well as the tools, approaches and skills for Parliamentarians in preventing and managing conflict at the regional and national levels. A strong emphasis will be placed on the gender dimensions of conflict in the region and the corresponding gender-based approaches to conflict management and prevention. The Project will help solidify and deepen existing institutional structures by developing and cultivating new working relationships between ECOWAS Parliamentarians and other ECOWAS institutions, civil society, policymakers and the public at large. ECOWAS has an important responsibility in providing a strong framework and capacity for parliamentarians to play an effective role in conflict resolution and prevention in the region, but it remains a weak institution in exercising this role. ECOWAS offers the potential to be the lynchpin between a practical understanding of the national

needs of member states and their parliaments, and the formulation and oversight of a regional strategy that addresses these priorities within a larger dimension of conflict prevention and resolution.

ECOWAS Parliamentarians are elected members in their home countries, creating the potential for a strong linkage between the national context of conflicts, and the regional strategy. If bolstered, this key linkage could serve to reinforce and deepen intra- and inter- state confidence-building measures (See CIDA 2007).

Furthermore, the regional law makers can help to ensure that electoral processes in member states are peaceful, transparent and credible, and that good economic and political governance as well as the fight against corruption should be institutionalized in our member states.

5.2 ECOWAS Parliament and Treaties & Legislation

The significance of good governance and greater transparency has resuscitated and rekindled scholars' interest on the institution of parliament and its inherent values and contribution to democracy and development. In recognition of the importance of the legislature to the society ECOWAS adopted her own parliament. One of the newest institutions created under the Revised Treaty, the Community Parliament held its inaugural session in January 2001. Unlike the national parliament, the functions of the ECOWAS Parliament are much diminished. For clarity, the ECOWAS Parliament has no specific decision-making (law-making) powers; rather it plays an advisory role in the Community. Therefore, it makes recommendation to the relevant cum appropriate Community institutions/ organs. This entails that until a resolution passed by the Community's Parliament has been adopted by the relevant Community organs, the provisions of the resolution is not binding on any national government. Also, ECOWAS parliamentarians are not directly elected, but are selected by the national parliaments of member states.

This institutional arrangement makes the Parliament much more of a deliberative body than a legislature and also means that its members are not directly accountable to West Africans. However, its permanence and regional focus make for an institution that is able to bring continuity to the political dialogue and contribute to technical analysis on issues relating to the social dimension of regional Integration (RI). Four out of the thirteen parliamentary standing committees are in fact charged with mandates that would make them appropriate venues for addressing ECOWAS social policy, including human rights and the free movement of persons, social affairs, employment, and women's and children's rights.

VI. Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

Africa cannot continue to build an institution that would continue to resist change and hold on to her national borders if the continent is to achieve the economic integration of her people. It was therefore recommended that:

- There is the need for the ECOWAS Parliament to be transformed from a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus among representatives of the people to a co-decision making and subsequently to a law making parliament.
- ECOWAS Parliament should be empowered to assist ECOWAS improve trade and investment and compete favourably in the global economy. A Case for the Enhancement of the Power of the ECOWAS Parliament presented to the President of the ECOWAS Commission should be considered without further delay. If adopted, this would go a long way in enhancing the legislative powers of the parliament. This would make either Parliamentarians or council to initiate Legislative Acts, which would be adopted by both institutions to become applicable. This process will also be used to adopt the Community Budget and empowered the parliament to confirm the appointment of statutory appointees.
- There is the need to integrate the parliament into the Community Mechanism on conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping, and security. To achieve this, the Supplementary Act making proposal in Article 47 should be considered. This portion of the proposal reads: The integration of Parliament into the Community Mechanism on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security.
- There is the need to involve the Parliament in election monitoring as this would go a long way in promoting democracy in the West African Sub-region.
- Strengthening interactions between ECOWAS Parliaments and National Parliaments is inevitable if economic integration is to be achieved in the Sub-region.
- Parliaments of each member state should be required to make inputs to strengthen the laws which would largely be model laws based on internationally accepted rules, conventions and protocols on trade, investments and in the area of the movement of persons, goods and services. Real integration within the ECOWAS Sub-region would remain a mirage until the needed framework is put in place to make it truly competitive.

- Achieving a common monetary policy (common currency) is central to the attainment of proper economic integration. Having a common unifying currency like the European Union's Euro cannot be ignored in ECOWAS' quest for a successful economic integration of her people and economies. Therefore, ECOWAS Parliament and other relevant arms of ECOWAS should work assiduously towards this.

6.2 Conclusion

The ECOWAS Parliament with a total of 115 seats occupied by members of parliament elected from National Assemblies of member states is only a consultative and advisory body. Twelve years after its establishment and despite a desire expressed by the Authority of Heads of State and Government in 2006, to have an ECOWAS Parliament with directly elected members and exercising full legislative powers, the original mandate has remained unchanged. This is unlike what obtains in similar bodies across the world.

In Europe, for example, the European Parliament shares equal legislative powers with the Council of the European Union. This empowers the EU Parliament to adopt European laws (directives, regulations, among others). It can accept, amend or reject the content of European legislation. For some years now, the East African Legislative Assembly has been operating as a legislative body. The Southern African Development Commission Parliamentary Forum has embarked on a study to transform into a legislature. There are also studies aimed at transforming the Pan African Parliament into a legislature.

Trade between ECOWAS member states is still far from what it ought to be, while the movement of persons within the Sub-region is yet to be fully realized. Other issues such as single currency and a common position in trade with other regional blocks such as the EU are still huge challenges. There is need to transform the ECOWAS parliament in order to promote economic integration in Africa

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