

Stresses and Strains of African Regional Economic Communities (RECs): A Case Study of Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)

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Abstract:- Regional integration effort in Africa dates back to the 1960s. It was a deliberate attempt by African leaders to raise the living conditions of African peoples. The felt need to rebase the economies and to respond to the growing post-independent pressures informed the creation of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The dynamic nature of the international system; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the widespread democracy wave coupled with the growing issues that worsened the economic conditions of Western and Central African states have transformed the activities of both ECOWAS and ECCAS to include other non-economic spheres. However, the study observed that the institutional structures of ECOWAS and ECCAS are being impeded by the intergovernmental nature of these economic groupings. Also, the non-observance of protocols on trade relations, deteriorating infrastructural facilities, and continual manipulation of electoral processes in ECOWAS and ECCAS militate against the realization of their set objectives. All these accounts for the low success in their activities with ECOWAS relatively outperforming ECCAS in the areas of intra-regional trade, free movement of people and goods and services, designing and implementing protocols on good governance and democracy. The study recommends that member states work assiduously for the coordination and harmonization of their domestic economic policies so as to eliminate the bottlenecks of trade facilitation and geopolitical preferences should be prioritized over national preferences in order to allay the fears of unequal benefits and polarization which could cripple the regional integration agenda.

Keywords: Regional Integration, ECOWAS, ECCAS, African Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

I. INTRODUCTION

The euphoria which greeted the independence of many African states in the 1960s was shortlived due to the economic, political, and social dislocation which bedeviled the African continent. The consequent effect of these was retrogression and economic stagnation that gave rise to worsening conditions of living and abject poverty in many parts of Africa. Although economic improvements among some countries, such as Nigeria, during that period, were evident, the effect of economic mayhem in the form of

political turmoil, military coups, and other numerous challenges were recorded in most parts of the continent. In a bid to overcome these challenges, African states began to be locked up in a regional project.

Regional projects have been advanced to enforce preventing mechanisms or even to function as such in political disputes. This is evident in the forerunner of today's European Union, the European Coal and Steel Community, which came into being immediately after the end of the World Wars. The Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Andean Community are some of the other regional organisations often cited as successful (Swanstrom, 2012). Regional integration is being seen as a deliberate response to the challenges of globalisation as well as a means to foster growth and development. The proliferation of regional integration agreements beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s, as a panacea to European protracted war, has made the concept of regional integration to gain popularity in development discourse and has come to be treated as a centerpiece of much global governance agenda (Schneider, 2017).

Regional effort in Africa dates back to the 1960s. It was a deliberate attempt by African leaders to raise the living conditions of African peoples. The felt need to rebase the economies and to respond to the growing post-independent pressures informed the creation of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU). It was designed to push for the emancipation of African countries and for nation-building projects as a response to the continued intra-state conflicts that featured most newly independent African states.

The end of the Cold War witnessed the intensification of regional integration processes across the globe. The US hegemonic power is in decline with increasing multipolar order coupled with emerging threats such as societal and humanitarian disasters in the form of poverty, diseases, and environmental degradation and intrastate conflicts. This reinforced joint effort and the development of a new wave of

regionalism. The recent wave of regionalism is different, as it is becoming no longer only about trade, but also includes a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural aspects and thus goes far beyond the objective of achieving region-based free trade regimes or security alliances. Rather, the political ambition of establishing regional coherence and identity seems to be of primary importance.” (Hettne, 1999). This New Regionalism seeks to promote certain “world values” as security, development, and ecological sustainability, better than globalism (Hettne, 1999).

Global governance, has, in the contemporary world, transformed in an international context, reinforced by the phenomenon of globalization framed in a world-wide process of changing and evolving levels of governance between city-regions, states, macro-regions, and the global level. Regional intensification effort became evident in Africa as the transformation was seen during the 1980s. Beginning with the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980 which provided a blueprint for Africa’s solution to Africa’s problem with the eventual formation of the Africa Economic Community (AEC) as enshrined in the Abuja Treaty of 1991, African leaders reiterated their commitments to deepen integration among the existing economic communities and the establishment of other regional groupings in other parts of the continent (Robert, 2005). Thus, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) all became integral parts of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to serve as building blocks for the acceleration of continental monetary and economic union (Tesfaye & Walter, 2007).

However, despite the lofty aspirations of regional economic groupings in Africa, there seems to be an obvious contradiction between the commitments or strategies and the implementation of these commitments. The puzzle has always been an understanding of the underlying political and economic factors that propel and impede the process of integration in Africa. It is against this background that this study seeks to highlight some stresses and strains faced by ECOWAS and ECCAS by exploring an in-depth understanding of the contexts, situations, and peculiarities of these economic groupings. The study also seeks to investigate how these factors shape the ways ECOWAS and ECCAS function over the decades.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF ECCAS AND ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on May 28 1975 via the treaty of Lagos. ECOWAS is a 15-member regional group with a mandate to accelerate economic integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries. Considered one of the pillars of the African Economic Community, ECOWAS was set up to foster the ideal of collective self-sufficiency for its

member states and as a trading union; it is also meant to create a single, large trading bloc through economic cooperation.

The Community aims to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa to raise the living standards of its peoples and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among the Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent (ECOWAS, 2016).

New developments created new mandates for the Community and a revised treaty was signed in Cotonou, the Benin Republic in July 1993 by the heads of states and government of the 15 member states. The signing of the revised treaty further bound the sovereign states into agreeing on 93 different Articles, which they have agreed to work together as a single regional economic bloc. By signing the revised treaty, member states reaffirmed the Treaty establishing the Economic Community of the West African States signed in Lagos on 28 May 1975, and considered its achievements. The member states were conscious of the over-riding need to encourage, foster, and accelerate the economic and social development of member States to improve the living standards of the peoples. (ECOWAS, 2016).

The Revised Treaty also introduced a Community Parliament and slightly strengthened the Executive Secretariat including the post of the Executive Secretary (which was later transformed into an ECOWAS Commission with a President). Over the years, additional protocols introduced new bodies and procedures. An entire, separate, institutional mechanism was thus introduced with the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security (ECOWAS, 1999).

On the other hand, The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) was established on the 18 October 1983 by the Central African Customs and Economic Union’s (or UDEAC from its name in French, Union Douanière et Économique de l’Afrique Centrale) members and the members of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL) (Burundi, Rwanda and the then Zaire) as well as Sao Tomé and Príncipe to achieve collective autonomy, raise the standard of living of its populations and maintain economic stability through harmonious cooperation. Its ultimate goal is to establish a Central African Common Market.

ECCAS has been designated as a pillar of the African Economic Community (AEC), but formal contact between the AEC and ECCAS was only established in October 1999 owing to the inactivity of ECCAS since 1992. The AEC again confirmed the importance of ECCAS as the major economic community in Central Africa at the third preparatory meeting of its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in June 1999. The vision of the ECCAS community is to develop capacities to maintain peace, security, and stability which are essential prerequisites for economic and social development, to develop physical, economic and monetary integration; to develop a

culture of human integration; and to establish an autonomous financial mechanism for ECCAS (ECCAS region, 2016).

In 1999, ECCAS was revived and its mandate was 'extended pragmatically to include issues intimately related to economic progress and human rights, such as democracy, peace and security and conflict resolution' (Viljoe, 2007). In this light, on 24 February 2000, it adopted the Protocol on the Council of Peace and Security (COPAX) to deal with the maintenance of peace and security in the region (ECCAS, 1999).

A careful review of the backgrounds of these two economic groupings suggests that regional integration is seen as offering an opportunity for states to enhance the standard of living of their people through cooperation. Equally, the Pan-African goal of creating a single African market through the bifurcation of Africa into several regions to serve as building blocs for a wider continental economic union is being echoed in the declaration of programs of these two regional economic groupings. However, there have been over the years the stresses and strains in the functioning of these groupings as there exists continued mismatch of aspirations and reality in the operations of ECCAS and ECOWAS. It is in this light, that this study, seeks to highlight the challenges militating against these economic groupings in the implementation of their commitments by exploring several factors that drive and impede their regional agenda.

III. THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND ECOWAS AND ECCAS RESPONSES

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) pursue rather similar goals: strengthening economic cooperation between their member states and promoting economic development in their regions. However, emerging threats such as intra-state discords in Central Africa and West Africa have rendered the groupings' activities rather limited. Although both economic groupings initially had purely economic objectives, their scope of regional cooperation has progressively widened to include peace and security issues. ECOWAS and ECCAS member-states have since the late 1990s, and to a greater or lesser degree, undertaken joint initiatives for the settlement and prevention of conflicts (Angela, 2011).

In 1993, for instance, ECOWAS through its revised treaty extended its mandate to include issues such as conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This gave rise to the creation of the ECOWAS ceasefire monitoring group (ECOMOG). More so, in response to the crumbling away of the State and the bankruptcy of governance mechanisms which paved way for the growth and dispersal of armed participants, with soldiers, dissidents, militias, rebels and/or mercenaries fighting with legal armed forces for political power, ECOWAS began to develop a framework, first, for conflict management, and then for conflict prevention, with standards for preventing unconstitutional changes of government and promoting

governance, the rule of law, and human rights (Faten & Luckystar, 2017).

In the same vein, ECCAS through its revival in 1999, extended its mandate to include issues related to economic progress, human rights, and conflict resolution. In 2000, ECCAS adopted the protocol on the Council of Peace and Security to ensure the maintenance of peace and security of the region. Also, at the 10th heads of state summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's capital, in June 2002, the development of capacities to maintain peace, security, and stability as essential prerequisites for economic and social development were listed among ECCAS's new priorities (Lopes, 1994).

From the above, it could be deduced that the lessons from the years of conflict and crises made it clear that regional economic cooperation could not succeed without regional peace and security. As a result, both ECOWAS and ECCAS's mandates were broadened to include the joint promotion of peace, security, and stability in the sub-regions. The extent to which they have been able to do so is another issue and this will be for the basis of the analysis of both economic groupings.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL COMPOSITION AND STRATEGY OF ECOWAS AND ECCAS

ECOWAS and ECCAS adopt an institutional strategy in the coordination of their activities. The Conference of Heads of States, in ECCAS, is the supreme organ of the economic grouping and it is composed of the presidents of member-states. It is assisted by the Council of Minister, the Consultative Commission, the Executive Secretariat, and the Community Court of Justice (which is not yet created) (ECCAS, 1983). Similarly, ECOWAS has as its supreme organ, the Authority of Heads of States and Government, and other institutions that oversee the functioning of the grouping.

However, these institutions in both of the blocs enjoy a less relative degree of autonomy. Although ECOWAS institutions enjoy some degree of autonomy given their laudable successes in the area of promotion of good governance and human rights protections, both blocs exhibit state-led regional integration frameworks due to their intergovernmental nature. The potency of ECOWAS institutional composition is premised on the Article 25 of the ECOWAS revised treaty, that authorises the Mediation and Security Council to decide on political and military interventions in member states in the "event of serious and massive violation of human rights and the rule of law" or if there is "an overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government" as well as "any other situation as may be decided by the Mediation and Security Council" (MSC).

The MSC can authorise all forms of intervention and decide on the deployment of political and military missions, approve the mandates of these missions, and review their progress (Hartmann & Stiebinger, 2015). More so, the ECOWAS court has the jurisdiction to adjudicate on matters binding on states.

The revised treaty also provided that the court can adjudicate on cases involving the failure of member states to comply with formal ECOWAS policies, disagreements over the interpretation and implementation of community laws, human rights violations, and the legality of regional laws and policies. ECOWAS citizens can equally cease the court without necessarily having to exhaust their national courts (Ebobrah, 2010).

Yet, the ECOWAS region is still plagued with the challenges of liberal democracy consolidation. Within ECOWAS member states, for instance, Bappah's (2014), maintains that democratic institutions are weak. He went further to describe the polity in West Africa as characterised by politicisation of administrative machinery, zero-sum politics, non-independence of electoral administration and management agencies, weak and ineffective political parties, marginalisation of youth, circumscribed media and defective constitution.

The author concluded that mass protests, political crises, and violence, which usually follow the above situations, are often met with systematic suppression using the state apparatuses and are most times threatening the security and stability in the region. This institutional challenge faced by ECOWAS, coupled with the illiberal nature of the democratic governments in the region, make political instability inevitable.

On the other hand, ECCAS' institutional structures and decision-making processes are built around the states, represented by powerful presidents and heads of governments, as the main authority. The General Secretariat and its directorates are primarily in charge of supporting and executing the decisions taken by the Conference of Heads of State. In Central Africa, such a centralised approach is problematic for several reasons. By concentrating power within the Conference of Heads of State, and regional action or regional ambitions are more motivated by particular individual economic and/or strategic interests than by the desire to give impetus to the regional integration process. This, consequently, is likely to conflict with other member states' competing interests instead of promoting more integration and stability within the region (United Nations Economic for Africa, 2016) .

V. TRADE FACILITATION IN ECOWAS AND ECCAS

It was anticipated during the Abuja Treaty of 1991 that all the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were to satisfy the conditions of the Free Trade Area by 2017. This would include the elimination of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade to facilitate trade within specific regions. Both the Economic Community of the West African States and Economic Community of Central African States have wide agendas, covering economic integration, infrastructure, energy, agriculture and peace, and security. The achievement of these lofty aspirations depends on the extent of coordination and harmonization of their domestic economic

policies. While ECOWAS is being adjudged to have made considerable progress in terms of free movement of goods and services and people having adopted a single ECOWAS passport, among some the other initiatives to ease the free movement of goods and services and people, there are still stockpile of impediments to intra-trade relations within the West African region. As a result, the trade performance of Sub-Sahara African countries has been limited. Mobility is sacrosanct for inter-regional trade as it brings communities closer to goods and services. However, road transport dominates motorized transport in Africa, accounting for 80 percent of the goods and 90 percent of the West African region (Oluwasolape, 2018). High transportation costs coupled with poor road and rail infrastructure are one of the obstacles to healthy competition. The cost of transporting goods across borders is extremely high and traders encounter bureaucratic bottlenecks in the hands of customs officers that cause a delay. This has the effect of increasing the production cost and worsens the standard of living of people in the sub-region given their low purchasing powers. Landlocked West African states also incur multiple high transportation costs due to poor road networks and non-existent railway infrastructure (Oluwasolape, 2018).

ECCAS also faces a lot of infrastructural challenges in terms of road networks and railways. High trucking charges and lengthy delays due to "stop and checks" before clearance are obstacles to trade facilitation. Traffic volumes on regional corridors are well below traffic thresholds and do not justify paving. Road quality is not very good, with patches of very poor roads along key corridors. No connectivity between the CEMAC countries and the DRC and Angola. More so, the air transport market dwindles and levels of air connectivity are very low. There is no connectivity between the CEMAC countries and the DRC and Angola.

VI. ECOWAS AND ECCAS IN THE AREA OF GOVERNANCE

West Africa's efforts to resolve geopolitical crises in the early 1990s made ECOWAS one of the first African organisations to develop legal standards and protocols on democratic governance and human rights. The community's involvement in managing violent conflicts in the region led to the revision of the ECOWAS treaty in 1993. The revised Cotonou Treaty included several peace and security standards along with norms on governance. Based on this treaty, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, member states introduced more legally binding agreements on democracy and governance.

The Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance is the ECOWAS response to the 1999 Mechanism's shortcomings in the areas of democracy and good governance. Drawing on lessons learned in mediating unconstitutional changes of government and conflict management, Heads of State decided by consensus in 2001 to adopt the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This not only coincided with efforts at the

continental level, notably by the then-Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo, to promote a common approach to democratic governance across the continent but was in direct response to ECOWAS efforts to broker a solution to the conflict in Sierra Leone. The Protocol, however, only entered into force after the ninth ratification in February 2008 (Faten & Luckystar, 2017).

In ECCAS, much has not been achieved in the area of good governance and democracy. Many of the African continent's longest-serving heads of state are in this region. The presidents of Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo have been in power for more than 30 years; Chad's president, Idriss Déby, for a quarter-century. Whereas crises and conflicts in Africa have tended to start, in most cases, after the holding of elections, some observers see in Central Africa a growing security risk in pre-election tensions. Causes may be constitutional changes to allow incumbent presidents to run for another term, or a controversial candidacy, such as in Burundi in April 2015; a postponement of elections; or opposition parties' anticipation of election fraud. Election-based violence in one state can have various negative impacts on the stability in other countries. One aspect is that it often leads to human displacement. Besides enormous economic and humanitarian costs for host countries, the influx of refugees could potentially trigger tensions which may serve as a catalyst for conflicts. Similarly, electoral violence is likely to increase the circulation of weapons across borders and thus jeopardize stability in already volatile regions. An election-based political crisis also holds the potential to fuel ethnic tensions which may develop a cross-border dimension. In Central Africa, moreover, where several countries are to hold elections soon, violent electoral contests in one state may also result in imitation effects in others.

VII. HEGEMONIC POWER

While ECOWAS has Nigeria, which has the resources both in material and human to provide leadership and stability for its scheme, ECCAS faces a power vacuum to lead and encourage member states to fulfill their commitment. The presence of Nigeria as a sub-regional hegemon has been advanced as being responsible for the ECOWAS success in conflict management, peacekeeping operation, and human rights protection. Its mobilization of troops and is the highest contributor to the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Cote d'Ivoire has earned ECOWAS global applause for restoring peace and upholding democratic values in member states. This underscores the assumption of the Hegemonic Stability Theory which stresses the presence of a dominant power as a custodian of stability in the international system (Joshua, 2005).

It should be mentioned that the current state of ECOWAS' weak institutional look is reinforced by Nigerian failure to meet the aspirations of its people at home. The sorry state of

Nigerian economy coupled with massive external debt and unemployment rate is undermining its commitment to ECOWAS, and the Community is becoming less vibrant to mitigate the newly emerging threats to regional peace and security (Osondu, 2015). Nigeria's vibrancy in regional activities has met widespread criticisms at home with many critics of the country's Afrocentric foreign policy positing that the country's resources deployment to ECOWAS could be used for the development of the home. This is because, in their consideration, the country's prestige at the regional and continental levels does not put bread and butter into the mouths of Nigerians.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted the stresses and strains of ECOWAS and ECCAS as African Economic Groupings. This is done by exploring the rationale for their establishment as parts of the building blocs for the acceleration of a wide continental African integration as enshrined in the Abuja Treaty of 1991. The dynamic nature of the international system; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the widespread democracy wave coupled with the growing issues that worsened the economic conditions of Western and Central African states have transformed the activities of both ECOWAS and ECCAS to include other non-economic spheres. However, the institutional structures of ECOWAS and ECCAS are being impeded by the intergovernmental nature of these economic groupings. Besides, the non-observance of protocols on trade relations, deteriorating infrastructural facilities, and continual manipulation of electoral processes in ECOWAS and ECCAS militate against the realization of their set objectives. All these accounts for the low success in their activities with ECOWAS relatively outperforming ECCAS in the areas of intra-regional trade, free movement of people and goods and services, designing and implementing protocols on good governance and democracy.

It is thus, imperative that member states work assiduously for the coordination and harmonization of their domestic economic policies to eliminate the bottlenecks of trade facilitation and geopolitical preferences should be prioritized over national preferences to allay the fears of unequal benefits and polarization which could cripple the regional integration agenda.

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