

# Comparing and Contrasting ECOWAS and SADC: Successes, Failures, and Challenges.

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## ABSTRACT

The overall goal of the African Union in relation to regional integration is the attainment of the Africa Economic Community in which the identified eight regional economic blocs have been tasked to fast-track this aspiration as highlighted in the Abuja Treaty of 1991. This study undertakes a desk review to compare and contrast two regional blocs—ECOWAS and SADC. This is done by looking at the successes, failures and challenges faced by each of the regions. The study found that both ECOWAS and SADC have made indelible progress in ensuring peace and security in their regions and the attainment of some important regional integration landmarks such as the free trade area, free movement of people, and trans-national roads. On the contrary, these RECs have failed to ultimately achieve their integration goals. Both ECOWAS and SADC have failed to implement the customs union and a single regional currency. There are however several challenges faced by these RECs such as multiple membership, lack of political will to implement regional integration programs, and the pursuit of over-ambitious regional integration goals. Therefore, it is recommended that both ECOWAS and SADC undertake comprehensive effort to ensure that realist regional integrations goals are set with the needed political vigor to achieve them. Without which many regional integration programs will continue being stuck and never attained.

**Key Words:** African Economic Community, ECOWAS, SADC, Challenges, Failures, Successes, and Regional Integration.

## INTRODUCTION

The Abuja Treaty of 1991 establishes the African Economic Community in which eight regional economic communities have been recognized as building blocs to the continental regional integration. Some of these regional economic communities (RECs) have been in existence before the Abuja Treaty. The eight recognized RECs are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Community of Sahel Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) (Abuja Treaty, 1991). There are however many other regional communities in Africa. These Regional Economic Communities came into being to address specific issues of common interest in their respective regions. Therefore, their levels of performance can be well measured based on their objectives. In this paper, the purpose is to undertake a comparative study of ECOWAS and SADC, paying much attention to the successes, failures, and challenges. The rest of the paper, therefore, is divided into four sections. Section two provides a brief historical background to the establishment of the two RECS, their membership, and objectives. Section three presents the successes of each REC. Section four unravels the failures of each REC while section five provides the challenges faced by each REC.

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## BACKGROUND TO ECOWAS AND SADC.

The Economic Community of West African States was established by the Treaty of Lagos in May 1975. Currently, the regional bloc has a membership of 15 states with its Commission in Abuja Nigeria (Britannica.com, 2021). The membership of ECOWAS includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cape Verde, Guinea, and Niger. On the other hand, SADC was born in 1992 from its predecessor the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) of 1980. SADC's headquarters are in Gaborone Botswana. SADC is an intergovernmental organization of 16 Member States namely Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (SADC, 2021).

The main goal of ECOWAS is the promotion of cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union to raise the living standards of its peoples and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations—among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent (ECOWAS Treaty, 2010). On the contrary, SADC first set out to ensure the independence of southern African states and avoid the economic dominance of Apartheid South Africa. According to Thornhill and van Dijk, the primary aim of SADCC was “to reduce its members’ economic dependence on South Africa and to promote the members’ economic development” (Thornhill and van Dijk, 2002). With Apartheid rule eventually coming to an end in 1994, SADC had to reshape itself and its treaty was amended in 2001. In the 2001 treaty, SADC set out to achieve development and economic growth, alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration. Additionally, to promote and defend peace and security among others (SADC Treaty, 2015). From the objectives of both RECs, it is important to note that raising the living standards of people, and economic integration are priorities in these RECs. ECOWAS has not outrightly indicated in their objectives the promotion of peace and security, while SADC has placed peace and security a high priority. ECOWAS however introduces the aspects of peace and security in Article 58 of the Treaty, which enjoins Member States to work to safeguard and consolidate relations conducive to the maintenance of peace, stability, and security within the Community (ECOWAS Treaty, 1993).

## ECOWAS AND SADC SUCCESSES

The African Regional Integration Index (2019) provides the performance of the eight regional economic communities on five main dimensions—free movement of people, trade integration, productive integration, macroeconomic integration, and infrastructural integration. The African Union, African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa use these dimensions to determine the progress made in each REC.

ECOWAS has the objective of eventually becoming an economic union which is the second last stage of the linear integration model. Seemingly following the linear integration approach, ECOWAS launched a free trade area in 1990. Accordingly, the REC adopted a common external tariff in 2015. The attainment of the economic union in addition to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor includes the harmonization of economic policies such as coordination of monetary and fiscal policies, transportation, and competition policies (Vickers, 2017). The region performs well in the free movement of people dimension with a score of 0.733 moving the region in the right direction of creating a borderless region through the ECOWAS members’ open visa policies (ARII Report, 2019). To ease visa requirements among citizens of ECOWAS member states, ECOWAS introduced a regional passport in 2000 (ECOWAS, 2014).

SADC sets regional integration as its priority, and to achieve this, in 2008 SADC achieved a free trade area (SADC, 2021). Though SADC has not yet introduced a regional passport-like its counterparty ECOWAS,

the African Regional Integration Index (2019) shows that SADC is doing well in the free movement of people. This is explained by the community's adoption of the Protocol on tourism, travel, and the facilitation of the movement of people where some countries offer visas on arrival (SADC, 2021).

Regional peace and security in ECOWAS and SADC form the basis of their existence. Therefore, ensuring peace and security in these RECs is mandatory and a yardstick to measure their successes in this area. ECOWAS has been applauded for the successes made in ensuring peace and security in the region. The region established the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990. ECOMOG has succeeded in ensuring regional peace and security (Osolase, 2017). ECOMOG as a response to the civil wars in Liberia between 1989 and 1996 managed to oust Charles Taylor and ensure peace in Liberia. ECOMOG was equally involved in peace and security efforts during the civil war in Sierra Leone (Dumbuya, 2008). ECOWAS also played an important role in the ousting of Yahya Jammeh the former Gambian President who wanted to refuse to hand over power after losing the 2016 election, ECOWAS's involvement ensured that Jammeh never clung to power.

The SADC Organ of Politics, Defense and Security was launched in 1996 and successfully restored peace in DRC by managing armed conflicts in the DRC and in preventing political crises in Madagascar, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho (Munyaradzi, n.d). de Albuquerque and Wiklund (2015) on the other hand contend that most efforts to peace and security in SADC results from member countries' commitment and not on the established regional peace and security framework. The current crisis in Mozambique by an Islamic group has once again worsened the security condition in SADC, this insecurity led to Rwanda sending troops to Mozambique. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, SADC agreed to deploy troops under the Standby Force to combat terrorism and acts of violent extremism in Cabo Delgado. This decision was reached following the recommendations of the technical team deployed in Mozambique following the summit held in Maputo in April 2021. The technical team recommended sending a 3000-strong joint military force, comprising land, air, and naval capabilities (Demuyneck and Weijenberg, 2021). Though the outcome is yet to be determined, efforts by SADC to restore peace and security in Mozambique still indicate the determination of the REC to address peace and security issues in Southern Africa because the REC has been quiet since the insurgency in Mozambique.

To facilitate the flow of goods and services in the region, both ECOWAS and SADC have undertaken major infrastructure projects. For instance, ECOWAS managed to increase the road network by putting in place the Abidjan-Lagos High way which commences from Elubo and stretches through Aflao to Lagos Nigeria, and the Lagos-Nouakchott High way which links 15 west African countries (Osolase, 2017). SADC has also made indelible prints in transport infrastructure, for instance, the Maputo Development Corridor was developed as a regional infrastructure aimed at promoting integration and cooperation between Mozambique and South Africa. Another important corridor in SADC is the North Corridor connecting Durban (South Africa) to Lusaka (Zambia) and Lubumbashi (DRC) through Johannesburg (South Africa) and Gaborone (Botswana).

SADC Energy Protocol was signed in 1996 which aimed at harmonizing national and regional energy policies and cooperating in the development of energy and energy pooling to ensure security and reliability of energy supply and minimization of costs. In promoting energy cooperation among themselves, SADC's 12 national utilities of member states have been linked into one electricity grid duped the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP). For instance, the Carbora Basso Hydroelectricity in Mozambique supplies power to Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, and the Hwange Thermal Power Station supplying Zimbabwe and Namibia (Munyaradzi, n.d).

ECOWAS as indicated above that overall would want to become an economic union in which the region would have common monetary and fiscal policies and in preparation for this, in 2001, the West African Monetary Institute was launched and began operations the same year. The institute was to undertake

technical preparations for the establishment of a common West African Central Bank and the launching of a single currency for the West African Monetary Zone (ECOWAS, 2021). The establishment of this Institute was a great success as it was moving in the right direction to realizing the ultimate goal of the region. To facilitate regional payments, both ECOWAS and SADC have introduced regional payment systems; ECOWAS has established the West African Economic and Monetary Union for RTGS, automated clearing and card payment managed by the centralized and highly advanced infrastructure. On the other hand, SADC's RTGS is an equal effort to facilitating regional payments (Cooper et al., 2018).

## ECOWAS AND SADC FAILURES.

As one of its goals of regional integration, ECOWAS was set to launch the West African Currency known as the "eco". However, this did not happen and Tayo (2020) argued that this was the fifth time in about two decades that ECOWAS has consistently failed to launch the regional currency. Several reasons have been advanced in justifying the delayed launch such as different levels of economic development among members states like GDP, Inflation, Debt-to-GDP ratio, and French influence on its colonies whose monetary policies are managed by the French Central Bank. As a result of this failed attempt, ECOWAS postponed the launch of the single currency, the "eco" to 2027 (Bahgat, 2021). The single currency was first proposed in 2003 and has failed to be launched on the proposed dates of 2003, 2010, 2014, and now 2020. With the new deadline for the launch of the "eco" set, time will tell if West African countries will be able to finally launch the "eco" in 2027 or set for another failure.

The Economic Community of West African States has failed to address corruption along regional routes. This has been reported by both small and large-scale cross-border traders who have to pay hefty bribes to police officers in these borders and along the regional routes to access markets. Most policy check-points are marred with corrupt officers, Odularu (2009) states in one study conducted by ECOWAS that:

*"... there are two frontier posts or more on every 100 km bounded by between Accra and Ouagadougou. So also applies to the fact that in every 100 km on the road bounded by Lagos and Abidjan, exists seven frontier posts. The consequence of these behaviors, attitudes, and processes, is that it has given support and strength to the various corrupt, tainted, and polluted governments of the ECOWAS region, whose security and law enforcement agents, continue without end, to threaten, bully and extract money from innocent citizens of the ECOWAS community. This therefore dwindles and weakens the efforts of ECOWAS towards an integrated regional economic structure..."* (p.34).

Failure to implement regional integration programs among ECOWAS member states has continued to hinder the progress of the region. For instance, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, Common Industrial Policy, Common External Tariff among others are important regional instruments that can address several development issues in the regions. However, the implementation of these instruments by member states has suffered numerous setbacks owing to poor policy implementation by member states. This makes the attainment of full regional integration a mirage (Jimoh, 2016).

SADC has encountered failures which Bell (2017) argues are due to the setting of unrealistic goals which are overly ambitious. For instance, the SADC Trade Protocol had envisaged the achievement of tariff liberalization of 85 percent of intra-SADC trade by 2008. This target was missed by eight months which further affected the achievement of other targets such as the customs union. The SADC customs union had an original set target date of 2010 which was moved to 2013. The goal of achieving a common market was equally postponed which was set for 2015. Consequently, the achievement of monetary union and a single currency has also been postponed due to delayed common market (Bell, 2017). Put into perspective, SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan envisaged the achievement of a customs union in 2010, the SADC Common Market was set for 2015, the SADC monetary union was set for 2016, and the single currency in 2018 (SADC, 2021). All these timelines have been missed by SADC indicating a failure on most



of its regional integration targets.

The southern Africa region has undergone some security challenges, particularly in Angola, Lesotho, Namibia, DRC, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. The region founded the SADC Organ for Politics, Defense and Security in 1996 which was responsible for conflict prevention through early warning or preventive diplomacy, or mediation in peace-making. Breytenbach (2000) argued that none of these happened instead military interventions were undertaken. The organ, therefore, failed to perform its intended role. Unfortunately, the organ was later suspended after about 15 months of its existence in 1997 due to structural problems concerning its chair's position relative to that of the SADC chair. In the recent security threats in Mozambique, SADC was not swift enough to address this challenge and saw countries out of the region like Rwanda sending troops in Mozambique which SADC criticized. Though the region later sent troops in Capo Delgado, the delayed response of the community can be attributed to the lack of an effective peace and security framework.

SADC member countries are equally AU member states who are guided by the Constitutive Act which condemns unconstitutional change of government among others. In 2017 however, a coup d'état took place in Zimbabwe which ousted Robert Mugabe. SADC and AU failed to condemn the coup in Zimbabwe. SADC's acquiesces to the de facto coup in Zimbabwe questions the community's ability to handle cases of unconstitutional changes of government and sends the wrong precedence that the region would tolerate an unconstitutional change of government and military meddling in civilian rule (Aeby, 2018).

## ECOWAS AND SADC CHALLENGES

ECOWAS and SADC have been faced with several challenges as regional blocs economically, socially, and politically. These challenges have made it difficult for the RECs to achieve their objectives.

First, both regions have a membership at different levels of development. For instance, in ECOWAS, Nigeria is seen as an economic power as South Africa is in SADC. Different development levels make it difficult for regional communities to pursue some regional programs. For instance, among the reasons advanced for ECOWAS's failure to launch the regional currency are different levels of economic development of member states citing different levels of GDP growth, inflation, and debt-to-GDP ratio among others (Tayo, 2020).

Second, the lack of implementation of regional programs among member states in both RECs presents challenges to regional integration efforts. For SADC, member states were supposed to have reached an 85% tariff reduction by 2008 but this was delayed by 8 months due to failure by member states to reach agreements on the tariff lines. This further led to delayed implementation of other regional integration programs and targets such as the customs union, common market, and economic union to name a few.

The multiplicity of RECs to which ECOWAS and SADC member states belong presents another challenge to regional integration. Belonging to more than one REC has been termed as a *spaghetti bowl*. Different regional blocs may pursue different objectives and leading to duplication of efforts and resources. In addition, conflicting goals may entail that a member will have to decide which of the regional programs they would implement.

Cementing this view, SADC (2021) indicated that failure to launch the customs union was a result of member states belonging to more than one regional bloc. Take, for instance, both Botswana and Zambia belong to SADC, yet Botswana also belong to the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) while Zambia is not a member of SACU, and Zambia belongs to COMESA while Botswana does not. Botswana implements a Common External Tariff (CET) in SACU, yet when SADC would like to introduce any

different CET than that of SACU, Botswana would find it difficult to decide which of the two CET to implement. To address this dilemma, EAC, COMESA, and SADC entered a tripartite arrangement in 2012 and established a Tripartite Free Trade Area aimed at addressing some of the implementation challenges faced by member states belonging to more than one REC.

In ECOWAS, there are regional arrangements that too conflict with the goals and objectives of ECOWAS, for instance, the River Mano Union (RMU) consisting of Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. Other members of ECOWAS belong to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) which is a reproduction of exactly what ECOWAS is all about. Members of WAEMU are former French colonies whose regional currency the franc is managed by the French Treasury. WAEMU has a more advanced and sophisticated regional cooperating system (Osolase, 2017). Due to the influence of WAEMU in west Africa, the President of Cote d'Ivoire was once quoted saying that 'the franc should just be renamed as the "eco" which did not sit well with the English-speaking West African countries. In west Africa, colonial legacy can also arguably be presenting challenges to regional efforts. Drawing from the example of WAEMU which is a union of Francophone countries pursuing competing regional efforts with ECOWAS such as achieving an economic union that is already being implemented in WAEMU. It would therefore take a lot of negotiations and convictions to sway WAEMU members into supporting and launching the "eco".

Political will is a necessary drive that ensures the implementation of regional programs. Regional economic communities depend on member states to drive regional integration programs. However, Osolase (2017) argued that ECOWAS member states lack the political will to see regional protocols implemented. Instead, regional resolutions end up stuck due to the lack of this motivational force that creates and produces political action. Several regional decisions in both ECOWAS and SADC fail to materialize due to a lack of political will. For instance, failure to launch the "eco" in ECOWAS and to achieve a customs union in SADC is largely explained by a lack of political will among member states. Taking an example of SADC, the contested electoral outcome of 2008 in Zimbabwe led to SADC reaching an International Power Agreement (IPA) of power-sharing between President Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai who was appointed Prime Minister. Complaints emanated from Tsvangirai that Mugabe's government was not implementing some parts of the IPA. This did not attract any positive response from SADC as the implementation of the IPA was solely left to the government of Zimbabwe and the opposition. The lack of political will by Mugabe in this case undermined the regional efforts to ensure its decision is followed by the parties involved.

The implementation of community levy protocol in ECOWAS is another example that reflects the significance of political will in regional integration. The levy protocol was introduced in 2003 aimed at revenue collection for financing regional programs. According to the ECOWAS annual report (2016) issues of compliance among member states were raised.

Lackluster regional protocols and decisions are also an important impediment to regional integration in Africa. For instance, SADC established the SADC Tribunal (the Tribunal) which was a positive development as far as regional cooperation and integration is concerned, however, disagreements over its composition and functions have to some extent contributed to some of the challenges of regional integration (Mapuva, 2014). The Zimbabwean commercial farmers' case presented an opportunity for the tribunal in terms of conflict resolution SADC (Mapuva, 2014).

Zimbabwe was found guilty of the violation of human and property rights by the SADC Tribunal (Mapuva, 2014). The review culminated in further curtailment of access to justice by SADC citizens by an approach to the Tribunal (Mapuva, 2014). This is confirmed by the fact that the SADC heads of states not only promised to review the mandate of the Tribunal but amended the mandate of the Tribunal so that it would deal only with inter-state disputes, which are a rare occurrence (Mapuva, 2014). This was a backlash on regional efforts to dispute resolutions in a member state signaling that any national disputes cannot be handled by

SADC.

## CONCLUSION

Regional integration efforts in Africa dates as far back as the pre-independence period. Member countries saw regionalism as a tool to achieve development and improve the living standards of the population. ECOWAS and SADC are among the eight recognized RECs by the African Union which must among others lead to the African Economic Community. Both regional communities have made successes in addressing issues of regional peace and security. ECOWAS for instance managed to address the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as prevent a civil crisis in Gambia in 2016. SADC on the other hand managed to defeat the M23 armed group in DRC and ensured the country retained peace though pockets of insurgencies are still found. These RECs also managed to advance their integration efforts. For instance, ECOWAS became a free trade area in 1990 and SADC did so in 2008.

Despite the remarkable successes achieved by these RECs, there are recorded failures also associated with them. For instance, ECOWAS has consistently failed at least on five attempts now to launch the regional currency, the “eco” whose timeline has further been moved to 2027. On the other hand, SADC has failed to implement a customs union among others due to multiple memberships of its member states in different RECs. SADC also failed to promptly respond to the security situation in Mozambique.

These RECs have failed to ensure the implementation of regional protocols and programs due to many challenges. These include multiple memberships which present competing and conflicting objectives of different RECs. In addition, multiple memberships also lead to the competition of scarce resources that countries need to implement various regional integration programs. Most members of ECOWAS belong to WAEMU and RMU respectively, and in SADC some members belong to EAC, COMESA, and SACU for instance. This makes it difficult for member states to make a choice to which custom union they would like to belong in an event all RECs want to achieve a customs union as no one country can belong to two customs unions applying different CET. Another challenge explaining the slowness of regional integration in these RECs is the lack of political motivation which ensures that regional protocols and programs are implemented.

Therefore, it is recommended that both ECOWAS and SADC undertake comprehensive effort to ensure that realist regional integrations goals are set with the needed political vigor to achieve them. Without which many regional integration programs will continue being stuck and never attained.

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