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## Regional Economic Integration and Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: The ECOWAS Experience

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined regional economic integration and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as case study. Regional economic integration represents a form of collective agreement and solidarity among nation states located within a given geographical or political entity who decide to jointly pool their resources together for improvement of their national and human welfare. ECOWAS as a sub-regional economic integration was basically set up for the advancement of regional integration and sustainable development of member states. Individually, the capacities of these states to embark and sustain meaningful socio-economic development were hitherto crippled by a good number of factors such as their uneven sizes, differences in resource endowments, ideological differences, poor technological take off, mono-cultural oriented economic base and leadership ineptitude. ECOWAS has continued to grapple with the challenges confronting it in a bid to realize the aims and objectives for which it was set up. The functionalist theory was found to be a suitable theoretical framework for this study. Methodologically, the study adopted the qualitative means of data collection. The method adopted for data analysis is content analysis. The paper reveals that although the goal of a full economic integration is yet to be attained among ECOWAS member States, ECOWAS has at least been recording some achievements since its establishment in 1975. The paper recommends among others an improvement on the quality of political leadership in the sub region, increased inter-regional trade and commitment to the implementation of ECOWAS protocols. In conclusion, ECOWAS should pursue developmental regionalism where the major focus should not just be on removal of tariffs.

**Keywords:** Regional Integration, Sustainable Development, ECOWAS, Sub – Saharan, Africa.

### INTRODUCTION

The European scramble and consequent Colonization of Africa not only resulted to fragmenting the countries but also disarticulated and dislocated their economies (Stiglitz, 1998). Several years after the political independence of the hitherto colonized territories, they continued to find it difficult to find their feat economically. Whereas the developed

countries have continued to maximize the opportunities occasioned by globalization, the poorer economies continue to grapple with the challenges of poverty, low standard of living, long period of military dictatorship, political instability, inter – state conflicts, weak and fragile economies, lack of skilled labour, institutionalized corruption and competitive economy instead of a complimentary economy. Among several other internal contradictions, the sub regional countries of Africa were left with no other option than to look inwards for the adoption of economic integration to bring about sustainable development (Siollun, 2021). Regional integration is premised on the fact that states that are homogeneous with shared common experiences, values, interests and aspiration stands to gain more by consenting to work together under a treaty (Aja, 2002). Regional integration arrangement by the Sub–Saharan African countries is attributable to their avowed commitment and aspiration towards addressing their identified common problems and concerted effort to work together to promote their well-being (Maduka, 2008).

Sustainable development which was the basis of regional economic integration as was conceived by the founding fathers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) denotes that kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ugwueje & Duru, 2021). Sustainable development advocates for judicious utilization of available limited resources with least minimal environmental degradation while maintaining the quality of life. The two main components of sustainable development are: the development that caters for the natural environment and reversing the current destructive pattern that threaten all forms of life as well as the development that relates to the sustenance of culture (Lele, 1991). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was set up on May 28, 1975 as a form of regional economic integration to enhance sustainable development of countries of the West African sub–region in particular. Initially, ECOWAS was composed of sixteen (16) member States of the sub region before the withdrawal of Mauritania in 1999 (Unya, 2016). ECOWAS has remained the main sub–regional arrangement for the advancement of economic integration process in the sub region.



ECOWAS has as its major objective the promotion of economic, social, cultural cooperation and economic integration which is expected to gradually lead to economic and monetary union. Ultimately, these arrangements are expected to result into enhanced living standard of the people as well as greater economic stability among member states (Alli, 2009).

Although the exact meaning of integration has led to divergent views among scholars, Adetula (2009) however defines integration as a much more formal arrangement that have to do with some political and economic sacrifices and commitments, concessions, processes as well as political-will on the part of the consenting members to redefine their participation in the international political economy". Regional integration has thus remained one of the credible features of the global economic system where concerted efforts have focused on joint pulling of resources by the countries involved to attain certain economic objectives collectively where such may not be easily realized individually. In line with the vision of the founding fathers, despite the short comings of ECOWAS over the years, the group has not been relenting in its strive to fulfill her major objectives which Adetula (2009: 30) expressed as follows:

The ECOWAS was established to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity, particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunication, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its people; of increasing and maintaining economic stability; of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent.

In order for the vision or objective to remain afloat to address contemporary sub-regional or global challenges, ECOWAS in 1996 revised its treaty to enable the West African integration arrangement confront new realities affecting the development of the sub-region. The new areas that have been incorporated as part of the focus of ECOWAS include; democratization, good governance, human rights, conflict resolution, illegal cross border migration (Dokubo, 2009; Unya, 2016). Arising from the above, this paper therefore examined regional economic

integration and sustainable development in sub Saharan Africa; the ECOWAS example.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Not quite long after the independence of the colonized territories of Africa in general and the sub-region in particular that these new states quickly realized the fragile and precarious nature of their economies. They actually saw that given their common historical or colonial experience, they needed to pool their resources together through regional integration mechanism in order to enhance their sustainable development. Several efforts put in place in the 1970s such as the declaration on economic cooperation as well as the development and economic independence advanced the view that African development could only be sought inwards through a framework and policy of self-reliance, South-South cooperation, regional integration and radical over hauling of the economic and political foundation of the states (Alli, 2009). Consequently, the various regions in Africa resorted to establishing their regional integration schemes.

ECOWAS is considered as one of the most successful regional integration arrangements in Africa. It has endured in a situation where several others have collapsed. The ECOWAS success may not necessarily be in terms of fully living up to the expectation of economic progress in the sub region, its success is measured more in the area of conflict management, peacemaking or peace building and commitment to democratic governance. It is however evident that although the ECOWAS is for the pursuit of the collective goal and economic objectives of member countries with a view to entrenching sustainable regional development, a lot of factors have crippled the chances of ECOWAS to realize this objective. Among others, countries of the sub region have continued to record trade imbalance in their trade relations with the advanced economies of the Western and Northern hemisphere due to their inability to develop local industrial capacity and the needed technology. In addition, the level of inter-West African trade has remained low vis-à-vis the increasing export and import trade between West African countries and the global economic giants such as the European Union and some countries of the global North (Nwokoma,



2009). The inability of ECOWAS member countries to rise above their reliance on tariff as a major source of revenue and low level of industrial and agricultural productivity and poor state of infrastructure among countries of the sub region have remained constraining factors in fully realizing the objectives of the integration. Moreover, dependency theorists have continued to insist that the neo-colonial and dependent character of virtually all member countries of ECOWAS can hardly enhance the development of member states. Thus, several decades after the independence of most countries of the global South, they still bargain from the position of weakness in international market and division of labour (Javed, 1999, Siollun, 2021).

### **Research Questions**

This study on regional economic integration and sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa with ECOWAS as case study is guided by two research questions as stated below:

1. What is the relationship between ECOWAS and sustainable development in sub Saharan Africa.
2. Has regional economic integration enhanced sustainable development in sub Saharan Africa.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine regional economic integration and sustainable development in Sub Saharan Africa with a major focus on ECOWAS. Specifically, the study centered on the following:

- 1 To examine the impact of ECOWAS on sustainable development on Sub Saharan Africa.
- 2 To show whether regional economic integration has enhanced sustainable development in Sub Saharan Africa.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

The functionalist theory was found suitable for this study especially in the understanding of the efforts and challenges of ECOWAS as a regional integration arrangement as it affects sustainable development in Sub Saharan Africa. The functionalist theory is traced to the works of David Mitraney and E.B. Haas. The functionalist theory holds that

nation states that share common interests, values, historical experience and are relatively homogenous can gradually transfer their sovereign will under given conditions to a supranational entity in their bid to create a political union (David, 1996). By cooperating in non-political issues, states may end up building some level of confidence whereby some causes of political conflict may be eliminated. The functionalist theory provides for the reduction of extreme forms of nationalism in order to bring about mutual trust and confidence (Aja, 2002). Mitrany made a case for a new world order with the ultimate aim of bringing about social peace and prosperity. This shall be based on trans-national cooperation with the integrating states and a focus on efficient administration and utilization of limited resources in order to achieve set targets. Mitrany foresaw a world system whereby the functions of every day social life and activity in the areas of transport, communications, health care, agriculture, education, industrial, technological and scientific development would no longer be handled within the frontiers of independent states but undertaken across regional, continental or universal basis (Unya, 2016). Gradually, it is expected that these activities would be coordinated by international organizations in the form of Board of Management (Archer, 2008).

Functionalism attempts to address the alteration of man's subjective conditions. As some unwholesome actions or attitudes of man often result to conflicts where war may be the resultant effect, functional organizations try to focus attention on areas of common interest and often encourage cooperation and constructive engagement rather than conflict. Thus, functional integration emphasizes that man is often separated away gradually from his loyalty to the state to that of a more serving and internationally driven organization in technical and functional areas (Unya, 2008). The depoliticization of welfare in this regard will ultimately result to a transfer of individual loyalties from national units to international organizations (Ndubuisi, Ukandu & Nwogu, 2021).

### **Application of the Theory**

ECOWAS was essentially set up as a regional integration strategy for bringing about sustainable development of Sub Saharan African States.





The regional organization has a focus on the elimination of tariff and non-tariff restrictions on trade among ECOWAS countries under the idea of functionalism; ECOWAS was also set up to enhance cooperation among member states on the various sectors of state need as well as the development of the economy, all in a bid to bring about sustainable development in the Sub region. The founding members consented to the protocols and conventions under which ECOWAS was established in May 1975 as it was believed that the body would serve as a veritable instrument for addressing the socio-economic predicament of member states. Just like some other regional organizations such as the European union, ECOWAS over the years has been grappling with some challenges which have hindered the full realization of the aims for which the regional body was established. Nevertheless, some impressive achievements have also been recorded in a good number of areas. To functionalist theorists, they contend that the performance of the functions for which ECOWAS was established will go a long way to addressing the socio-economic challenges of countries in the Sub region. The study on regional economic integration and sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa; the ECOWAS experience can therefore be examined under the functionalist theory.

### **Regional Economic Integration**

Regionalism denotes a belief in or sense of commitment to the realization of common interest, values and shared identities by actors in a particular region for the promotion of their common wellbeing. Simply, regionalism is the process through which regional goals could be pursued under well-defined mechanisms. According to Aja (2002:119) regionalism could be described "as the willingness and commitment or determination of states with strong sense of common interests, goals, values and orientation to live and work harmoniously in both domestic and foreign policies with a view to achieving a greater political and economic union as well as a secured community". Globally, regionalism has been noted to be a form of economic integration as it has continued to manifest in the form of economic and technical openness across the major regions of the world. The ultimate goal for the creation of regional economic integration is the creation of a single market out of a good number of separate markets

hitherto demarcated by national boundaries (Bruce, Harvey & David, 2006).

The idea behind most economic integration is the coordination of economic and related policies towards the free movement of goods, services, labour and capital across territorial borders with the major goal of promoting economic development and prosperity of the region. Although the exact meaning of integration has led to divergent views among scholars, the term is sometimes used to describe the bringing together of parts of an object in order to form a complete whole. One of the major objectives of integration is the abolishing of discriminatory practices among the integrating units or regions and the promotion of some form of policies aimed at the coordination of issues considered to be of mutual interest to the members. Economically speaking, integration is used to describe the coordination of economic policies by states within a specific geographical entity in order to enhance their level of socio-economic development. The European Union (EU) sees economic integration as the abolishment of the various constraints and trade restrictions among countries to embrace a good number of institutional arrangements that the process of economic integration may take. This include: Free trade area (FTA), Customs Union, Common Market and Economic Union. Nieuwkerk (2008) submits that economic integration has remained a useful instrument for the development of less developed economies as the process has the tendency of strengthening their efforts and united action in the management of their relations with their more powerful external partners. The success of economic integration no doubt may have the tendency of gradually reducing a region's economic dependence on the outside world as relations among the integrating states may be given a boost which may also impact significantly on their development (Fjader, 2012). Regional integration has also been described as an alternative development strategy on the part of the less developed countries in the sense that in certain regions, it has had the tendency of a gradual elimination of huge external dependence, exploitation and disarticulation of some domestic economies such as those of Africa.





## Sustainable Development

In its narrow perspective, development is defined as economic growth. In other words, the eradication of poverty, achievement of basic necessities of life, gender equality, political freedom, absence of discrimination and the capacity of individuals to realize their potentials in some critical areas of endeavour (Przeworski, 2008). Rogers (1976) and Rodney (1974) also conceived development as the widely participatory process of social and material advancement which ranges from greater equality, freedom as well as other values for a larger number of the people in their bid to gain greater control of their environment. In terms of monetary income or quality of life, Karadima (1979) submits that development focuses at the satisfaction of man's economic and socio-cultural needs in the most effective and rational way. Thus, development aims at ensuring man's humanization through the satisfaction of his needs of expression, creativity and overall survival as he attempts to decide his own destiny (Wignaraja, 1976). Generally, the concept of sustainable development is used to describe the form of development that is characterized by freedom and equality in the process of development and hence, is socially responsive to the challenges of poverty and inequality between the various classes in society, community, nation, or region (Godwin, Paschal, & Juliet, 2019). The scholars argue that sustainable development stresses on ecological and environmental balance to prevent development today at the detriment of tomorrow. Thus, emphasis is on certain observable indices of today's development not compromising the chances of future generations.

The concept of sustainable development was earlier popularized during the conference of the world commission on Environment and Development in 1987 popularly referred to as "our common future" (The Brundtland Report). The chair of the commission and the then Prime minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland defined sustainable development as one which meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the chances of future generations to meet their own needs. The Brundtland Report became a fundamental document as sustainable development was later placed on the international agenda which also led to the 1992 United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro. Similarly, sustainable development has been defined

as the totality of the efforts targeted at improving natural resources for the enhancement of the present living conditions of humans without at the same time compromising the needs of future generations. For Elem (2019) sustainable development has to do with environmental sustainability or ability to maintain the resources of the state for citizen's collective use in as much as efforts are also made to preserve such resources for use by future generations. Strategies on sustainable development are usually aimed at advancing the socio-economic wellbeing of the people in such a way that adequate provision is made both for the present and future generation. Onwudinjo (2010:55) opines that sustainable development undertakes the following objectives:

- i. Maintenance of high and stable levels of growth and development.
- ii. Social progress which recognizes the needs of every one.
- iii. Effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources.

For there to be meaningful sustainable development, lasting strategies or options that would endure over time must be put in place for a continuous and consistent good quality life of the people. Developing countries especially those of Sub Saharan Africa cannot talk of sustainable development if their process of economic integration through ECOWAS does not capture those strategies that would impact significantly on the lives of both the present and future generation of people in the Sub region. Sustainable development therefore attempts to strike a balance between the need for economic growth or advancement and environmental protection with emphasis on inter-generational transfers, the preservation of non-renewable resources as well as some defined principles with respect to the responsibilities of policy or decision makers (Iain & Alistair, 2003).

### **ECOWAS and Sustainable Development in Sub Saharan Africa**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was set up as an offshoot of the Treaty of Lagos on May 28, 1975. That marked the formal commencement of the process of integration in the Sub region. The sixteen (16) member Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries that assented to the Treaty were: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea (Bissau)



Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo. In year 2000, Mauritania however withdrew her membership over the way the Somalia debacle was handled (Unya, 2016).

The Treaty that established the ECOWAS mandated it to:

- i Eliminate between member states custom duties and other similar charges of equivalent effects on imports and exports;
- ii Eliminate quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among members;
- iii Establish a common tariff structure and commercial policy against non-member states;
- iv. Eliminating obstacles restricting the free movement of persons, services and capital between member states;
- v. Harmonize agricultural policies and promote common projects in the member states especially in the areas of marketing, research and agro industrial enterprises;
- vi. Evolve a common policy in, and work jointly to develop critical sectors such as transport, communication, energy, among others;
- vii. Harmonize policies among member states in areas such as economic, industrial, monetary, and to eliminate disparities in their level of development;
- viii. Establish relevant funds in the area of cooperation, compensation and development (Dokubo, 2009:166-167).

Since its establishment as a regional economic integration mechanism, ECOWAS has been striving to live up to the expectations of its founding fathers. Within the few years of its existence, several initiatives and lasting programmes were devised in order to actualize its mission of economic integration and sustainable development in the sub-region. The first three decades ushered in the signing of several multilateral agreements in the form of protocols, conventions and resolutions. Much of these were later adopted. The treaty of 1975 was also revised in 1993 to accommodate some other relevant areas not covered in the earlier treaty especially in view of some contending contemporary global or regional challenges or issues that directly or indirectly affect the realization of the goals of the organization. In addition, the ECOWAS vision 2020 as encapsulated was targeted at moving the organization from an

ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of peoples as the aim was the creation of a single economic space whereby the people transact business and live in dignity and peace under the rule of law and good governance (Oche, 2010). The Scholar further argues that ECOWAS has made some giant strides in the following areas:

**i. Remarkable improvement on the Article on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment**

Article 2 of the treaty provides that citizens of member states have the right to enter, reside and establish in the territory of member states up to a maximum period of ninety (90) days before they can formalize their VISA requirements. Although some member states have severally been abusing this provision, the fact remains that this Article has increased inter-state migration among member states.

**ii. Progress on Proposed Monetary and Financial cooperation among Member States**

Progress has continued to be made on the proposed protocol on monetary and financial cooperation. This is aimed at having an ECOWAS single currency by member states. Efforts have continued to be made in addressing the challenges arising from this protocol.

**iii. The Energy Sector**

The energy sector which its effectiveness is a sine qua non to sustainable development has been recording some improvement unlike what hitherto obtained. There has been the implementation of three of its major energy components such as the West African Gas pipeline, the West African power pool as well as the ECOWAS initiative on access to energy services. The realization of the pipeline project across some of the member countries such as Nigeria's Niger Delta to Ghana and gas delivery has enhanced developmental efforts in the countries. ECOWAS has also been intensifying efforts in improving the provision of electricity to some of the region's rural and semi-urban areas.

**iv. Improvement on the Telecommunication Sector**

The Telecommunication industry is another area that has been receiving serious attention in view of the importance of inter-state telecommunications in facilitating the connection of all ECOWAS States to the global network. Between 2012 and 2015 for instance, a whopping sum of \$55 billion was invested in the interconnection of virtually all African capital cities and villages. Presently, private



telecommunication global satellite systems (GSM) companies in the likes of MTN, Zain, Glo and Airtel among others are doing brisk business and playing key roles in the economy of member countries and enhancing their telecommunication needs. Better still, recharge cards bought in some of the ECOWAS countries can easily be loaded in others with little or no difficulty (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2010).

Furthermore, ECOWAS has also been making tremendous progress in the area of peace and security related issues in the sub region. Following incessant political and security challenges in some member states, it later dawned on ECOWAS that sustainable development would remain a mirage in the atmosphere of political instability and ranchorous social environment. To give effect to this, ECOWAS member states in 1978 adopted a protocol for members to refrain from the threat and use of force or aggression against a member state. Another protocol on mutual Assistance on Defence which provides for collective response whenever a member state becomes a victim of internal armed conflict was signed on May 29, 1981. Other notable efforts have also been put in place by ECOWAS in order to bring about the needed enabling environment in the sub region. Thus, in a bid to restore peace to some of the troubled or war torn countries in the sub region in the 1990s such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, among others, ECOWAS came up with ECOMOG which meant ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group. It was not in doubt that ECOMOG and other security arrangements put in place in the sub region played leading role towards the restoration of peace in those ECOWAS member states that were infested with war and related social and political upheavals.

As democracy and development are strongly related, ECOWAS, between 1991 and 2001 took a step further by coming up with declaration of political principles and democracy which mandated member states to be committed towards upholding human rights in the sub region, democratic principles, the rule of law, child rights and good governance. Others have to do with free and fair elections, civil-military relations and democratic consolidation which were aimed at checkmating unconstitutional regimes in the sub region. Concerted efforts have also been centered on forestalling those factors that trigger inter and intra

state conflicts. In the Gambia for instance, when former President Adama Barro scuttled the electoral process in his bid to perpetuate himself in power in 2017, he was forced out of office through a sub-regional Military coalition that assisted in restoring democratic rule in the country. The enormous role of the legislature and the judicial arm in stabilizing a polity for meaningful development led ECOWAS to establishing the ECOWAS parliament as well as the ECOWAS Court to serve as consulting and appeal bodies for countries in the sub region. These efforts were aimed at sanitizing and strengthening the legislative and judicial processes in the sub region in order for the people to have trust and confidence in the formal institutions. Although the resolutions and rulings of these bodies are not all that binding on member states, they at least serve as a watch dog over the activities of similar bodies in member states.

### **The Challenges of ECOWAS on Sustainable Development in Sub Saharan Africa**

Although ECOWAS has made some impact towards sub regional integration for sustainable development in the sub region in some notable sectors, yet, ECOWAS has continued to be confronted with a myriad of constraints which have continued to hamper the full realization of the objectives of the sub regional organization. Some of the challenges are:

#### **i. Undue Pressure On Sub-Regional Economy Arising from Globalization**

The benefits of globalization has continued to be in favour of the developed economies, leaving those of the developing world more pauperized and marginalized in the context of global political economy. Thus, sub-Saharan African countries have remained economically weak, subservient and fragile as they have not been able to come up with strong institutional capacity to raise their bargaining strength in international economic relations (ECOWAS Annual Report, 2010).

#### **ii. Political Uncertainty, Sectarian and Violent Conflicts**

Africa in general and the sub region in particular is a zone that has long been engulfed with series of political instability, uncertainty, sectarian and violent conflicts. These often result from the poor or weak democratic institutions and cultures, non provision of public goods, weak





observance of political, social and civil rights, youth unemployment and mass poverty. Political instability and violent conflict normally have severe implications on a country's economic development and national survival. Social order is often disrupted or distorted with the channeling of resources meant for productive ventures into managing the crises or even prosecuting a war. In Africa, the ugly and disruptive experiences of violent conflicts and wars in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo among others are still fresh in our memory. These have continued to negatively affect efforts being made towards regional integration in the sub region.

### **iii. Mutual Suspicion and Mistrust**

The seeming mutual suspicion and mistrust between the Anglophone and Francophone States coupled with the problem of overlapping membership of some members in similar integrative mechanisms across the globe has not been helping matters. For one thing, this has continued to affect the overall full commitment of some members to the realization of the goals of the organization. Worse still, there has been a challenge on payment of members remittances, dues and levies to the organization which is also hampering the level of implementation of some decisions of ECOWAS.

### **iv. Inadequate Personnel with Technical Competence**

Alli (2009) notes that another constraint confronting ECOWAS has been in the area of inadequate personnel with the requisite competence to manage the challenges of economic integration and cooperation. Even some leaders of the organization at their various forum have described this as worrisome. The challenging factor here has been the inability of the organization to set in motion modalities for assessing and harvesting the services of individuals with the requisite skill and expertise which abound in the sub region.

### **v. Differences in the Monetary System of Member States**

Although the establishment of West African Monetary System is among the objectives of ECOWAS, there has however been a lot of setbacks in realizing this noble objective several decades after the establishment of ECOWAS. The currencies of ECOWAS member countries are still linked to the hard currencies of the major powers such as the France Franc, the Euro and the U.S. Dollar. Up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has remained cumbersome for member countries to conveniently convert these

currencies among themselves for ease of business as well as private and official transactions in the sub region.

#### **vi. The Persistence of Economic Dependence on the Developed Economies**

Dependence is simply used to define an economic condition whereby the economy of a particular state or region is significantly conditioned or influenced by the happenings in another that is generally regarded as stronger or more developed. It occurs in virtually all areas of interstate relations, for example, in technology, trade, industry, food supplies, among others. No real economic development or integration can take place where the economy of virtually all the countries in the sub region are being conditioned by the happenings in the economies of the major world economic giants, agencies and institutions. In other words, these economically dependent states can hardly take autonomous economic decisions to embark on lasting strategies to either develop or embark on economic reforms for development without the influence of their major global partners.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

ECOWAS has come a long way as a major regional economic organization in the sub Saharan Africa. It came into existence on May 1975 as an organization that would harness and coordinate efforts and resources of member states for their overall socio-economic or sustainable development. The countries in the sub region have passed through a lot of political and socio-economic setbacks which partly resulted from their contact with Europe during the period of colonialism in addition to their internal contradictions. Although naturally dependent economies, European colonialism in several instances distorted and disarticulated these economies as they have been left weaker and more porous to withstand international political economic competition. Regional economic integration was therefore seen as a way out of the economic hopelessness faced by these countries. The revised Treaty of ECOWAS of 1993 was aimed at making the organization more result oriented and dynamic in confronting some other challenges that were not contained in the earlier Treaty.



Several protocols, conventions and Treaties have been entered into both among member states and with some European partners in a bid to usher in sustainable development in the sub region. Sustainable development is a multi-faceted development process that takes care of not just the needs of present generation but also that of the future. ECOWAS over the years has attempted to live above her limitations given the giant strides it has made in some areas such as the relative success on the realization of some protocols and conventions which have improved the life of people of member states. Improvements have also been recorded in areas such as democratic consolidation, human rights, good governance (in certain areas) and the rule of law. Despite the commitments ECOWAS has so far shown as a formidable regional economic integration mechanism, some members of the organization are still skeptical and unwilling in the fulfillment of part of the bargain of such an integration arrangement especially in the area of conceding their national power to the supra-nationality of ECOWAS for fear of such not being high jacked by the “Big partners”. Besides, member states are yet to fully do away with protectionist policies which run contrary to the true spirit of the integration, some member states often embark on this as a way of saving their decadent, fragile and dependent economies from collapsing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from this study on regional economic integration as a strategy for sustainable development in sub Saharan Africa: the ECOWAS example, the following recommendations are proffered;

- i. There is the dire need to vigorously pursue the ECOWAS regional agenda and focus mainly on sub-regional realities, not European.
- ii. As Africa in general and the sub region in particular is almost nowhere infrastructurally and technologically, no effort should be spared by the relevant authorities in the sub region in intensifying strategies towards improving the quality of infrastructure, technological capacities, constant electricity, good roads network, telecommunication and technologically driven economy. The availability of these is a sine qua non to sustainable development.
- iii. Genuine commitment to entrenching responsive and accountable leadership in the sub region. The role of the political leadership in charting the course for sustainable development cannot be over

- emphasized. Poor leadership and that bereft of good ideas have remained the bane of Africa's under development. The sub region must go for leaders that will demonstrate the needed political will, eschew corruption, self-aggrandizement and those that will be resolutely committed to the overall transformation of the sub region.
- iv. As ECOWAS has come a long way since its establishment in 1975 without significantly realizing much of its objectives, every effort should be made to remove all bottlenecks that have been working against the full implementation of the adopted protocols as such will go a long way to realizing much of the objectives of ECOWAS.

Above all, concerted efforts need to be made in checkmating violent conflicts across the sub region, rising insurgency and activities of armed bandits, terrorists, unknown gunmen and other criminal elements. It has been noted that the nefarious activities of these merchants of death has continued to frustrate the efforts being made on sustainable development in the sub region.

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