

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES AT FORTY-FIVE: A FOOL AT FORTY-FIVE A FOOL FOREVER?

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Abstract

Amid COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the year 2020, Economic Community of West African States hereafter called ECOWAS quietly celebrated its forty-five years of establishment. Widely, much was not heard of or written about the community probably due to the challenges of the pandemic. However, the address of the President of ECOWAS Commission to the staff of ECOWAS institutions on the occasion of the commemoration of the community's forty-fifth anniversary serves as a reminder that attention should also be given to this regional giant against all odds. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to celebrate ECOWAS at forty-five and then examine whether it is a fool at forty that is proverbially referred to as a fool forever. The paper, through thorough examination of the data collected from secondary sources finds that ECOWAS is still far from achieving its main mandate, its achievements as orchestrated by His Excellency, the President notwithstanding. The paper argues that the postponement of the establishment of ECO, a common currency for the region for the sixth time from 2020 to yet to be announced date, lack of realistic free movement of persons and goods among members and selfish interests of its leaders in the guise of national interest are enough reasons to conceive ECOWAS as a fool at forty-five. With the aid of constructivist theory, it concludes that even if ECOWAS at forty-five is still fooling around it has the chances of not being a fool forever if the leaders should turn a new leaf and pursue the attainment of the community's mandate before its fiftieth anniversary.

Keywords: ECO, ECOWAS, fool, fool at forty, free movement of persons and goods, mandate.

Introduction

Forty-five years ago, a regional organisation known as the Economic Community of West African States, herein known and referred to as ECOWAS was established. Precisely, ECOWAS was established on May 28, 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria by West African States that had gained independence from their different colonial rulers by that time. Although the 1975 treaty signed by the member-states in Lagos marked the starting off of ECOWAS, the protocol of association was actually signed in 1976. At inception, the member-states of ECOWAS were Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic, Liberia, the Gambia, Cote d'voire, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Niger Republic, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Guinea and Cape Verde (Joined 1977). So, from May 28, 1975 to May 28, 2015, ECOWAS had attained the mature age of forty, the age believed by many that when anything human or inhuman attains should be mature not to talk about now it is forty-five years on May 28, 2020. Thus, the age of forty is associated with maturity and not adolescence. It implies therefore that even if one has fooled around for thirty-

nine years, at a mature age of forty upward the person or thing should try to become more responsible and reasonable.

The fact that the sub-regional economic organisation has not achieved the main mandate for which it was established is not in doubt, a reason which has made this paper to conceive it as a fool. A “fool” according to Hornby (2000:460), " is a person who you think behaves or speaks in a way that lacks intelligence or good judgement." Going by this definition, this paper personifies ECOWAS on the ground that since it is an organisation formed by human beings to help solve their problems of regional cooperation, integration and development and represents the collective aspiration of the West African peoples, it should not be treated from the abstract sense of view. In this view, ECOWAS is conceived to be a fool because it has behaved and spoke in a way that suggests that it lacks intelligence and good judgment. For example, in the address of His Excellency, Jean-Claude KassiBrou Thus, if the leaders of ECOWAS were determined to end the age-long barriers and bifurcations imposed on them by nature and from outside and establish a homogenous society which could enhance the peoples desire for cooperation, economic integration and political stability reasons for which the organisation was established among others, that would have made them to be accepted as being wise. Contrarily, today what West Africa is known for is more political crises, economic backwardness, colonial cleavages leading to lingual and monetary divisions as well as fragmentations of various kinds, restricted movement of people and goods from member states and projection of selfish interest of leaders in the guise of national interest. These challenges have persisted for more than forty years. At forty-five, the worst happened, that is, postponing the launch of the common currency for the region known as ECO for the sixth consecutive time. This is coupled with the protectionist strategy Nigeria adopted by closing its four land borders from August 2019 to December, 2020 and Ghanaians' attacks on Nigerian traders in their homeland, actions that violate ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and Goods. Against the foregoing, this paper argues that ECOWAS has been fooling around just as it is living in a fool's paradise and as such, has made the prospect of genuine integration in the region to look very bleak.

Earlier, Daddieh (1993) has revealed that a careful review of the literature on regionalism in Africa has suggested that regional integration suffers some setbacks due to many internal and external factors. Using West Africa as an example, he argues that agricultural trade which has the potential to facilitate the meeting of basic needs of the people of the region and infect the region with the spirit of cooperation has been hampered by a combination of inadequate transport system, agricultural pricing and marketing for eg policies pursued by some countries. In addition, the love and protection of sovereignty of state by most West African States is a major impediment for ECOWAS (Ede, 2011) in achieving a truly functional regional integration as expected by the founders. Okogba (2020) in line with these facts writes that most African countries have abandoned the brotherhood template that Nigeria used to project while pursuing the interests of their citizens, a strategy he says that politicians (eg., Ghana's Nana Akufo-Addo) have leveraged to promote their electoral chances.

However, despite what might be the reasons for ECOWAS' failure namely; internal and external forces, this paper is of the opinion that it is still to be regarded as a fool because of knowing what is needed to save the sub-region and its peoples from the molestations of being one of the world's most backward and least developed areas but refused to do it. ECOWAS member states are too protective of their sovereignty in the face of a globalisation era when erosion of state sovereignty is already in place and regional integration is becoming more important especially for the disadvantaged, vulnerable and small economies. In this sense, a fool is also regarded as one who knows what to do that is right but fails to do it and rather gives excuses. For instance, the establishment of a common currency called the ECO for all member states as envisioned by ECOWAS a long time ago has not come to fruition even in the year 2020 when it was highly hoped to be adopted after its last postponement in 2014 notwithstanding the benefit it will attract. EUEURO's success is an example of how a successful common currency can be of benefits to member states in a region the Brexit saga notwithstanding. The potential of a successful common currency in the process of regional integration cannot be overstated.

Against this backdrop, the paper argues that ECOWAS should stop fooling around and be serious as a body charged with the responsibilities of fostering functional co-operation, economic integration and political stability among the peoples, the triple needs hoped by the founders of the community that if met should enable the region overcome the following disadvantages: smallness in size by some states, unequal natural and human resources endowment, colonial fragmentation and over dependency. Should ECOWAS achieve this, it is then that it shall be able to exploit the economies of scale, achieve greater rate of economic growth and development. On this basis, the main issues raised here are from this point going to be addressed in details.

Methodology

The research is designed in a way that the data used is collected from secondary sources. The interpretation of the obtained data is done through critical content analysis based on their face value. Taking a behavioural science tradition, the analysis is also enhanced by the everyday knowledge of the researcher on issues that border on regional integration in Africa and some other parts of the world, especially Europe where the success of the European Union and the juxtaposing Brexit saga is a matter of interest for researchers on international relations. It, therefore, means that the data collected and analysed are drawn from the print and electronic media for instance, books, journal articles, the internet, television and their like.

Who is a fool?

Fool, as a noun means a silly or stupid weak-minded person who lacks judgement or sense (the American Heritage Idiom Dictionary, 2002). According to Cambridge Dictionary (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fool>) fool is a person who behaves in a way without thinking. Institute in Basic Life Principles (2014) in approaching the explanation of who a fool is adopts five typologies namely; the simple fool, the silly fool, the sensual fool, the scorning fool and the steadfast fool.

- The simple fool as the Institute explains, opens his/her mind to any passing thought and opens his/her arms to any passing stranger. In other words, he/she lacks discernment. He/she also has simplified view of life and fails to recognize cause-and-effect sequences that affect every area of life. Because the simple fool is not discerning, he/she is easily captivated by all kinds of enticements and deceptions. He is dangerously immature extremely gullible, and intensely curious. In the absence of instruction and consistent discipline, the simple fool will naturally become more foolish. A simple fool is especially vulnerable.

However, to act or play the fool simply means to behave in a stupid way in order to make people laugh, especially in a way that may also annoy them. An example of how to use the word in this sense can be seen when one says “quit playing the fool and get some work done” (Hornby, 2000:460). Based on the foregoing attempt at clarifying the term “fool” there is no gainsaying the fact that ECOWAS has been fooling around and as well, living in a fool’s paradise. This is so because when a human being for example is born, he/she is expected to have stipulated periods of crawling, standing, throwing legs, walking and eventually running. After this period, the child grows through the stage of childhood to puberty and then, adulthood. Within these periods and stages, the human being is expected to play roles according to his/her age and gender. It is natural that a man should behave like a man and not like a boy because if a man in turn behaves like a boy, he is not only a fool but a compound fool. A man agreeably is a man only when he matures in character and action.

This is in line with the popular English old proverb that a fool at forty is a fool forever which simply means that if a person hasn’t become mature by the age of forty, he never wills (Learn English Today, www.learn-english-today.com). Sorious Samura in Addison (2008) in accord with the foregoing writes;

where I come from West Africa, we have a saying:
A fool at 40 is a fool forever,” and most African
countries have now been independent for 40 years.
Most are blessed with all the elements to help
compete on a global stage.... And yet today,
my continent which is home to 10% of the world’s
population represents just 1% of global trade.
I have no doubt we have to take responsibility of
our failures”

Although this paper agrees that ECOWAS by extension is a failure to a large extent and so a fool at forty and now forty-five, it argues that it may not be a fool forever if it stops fooling around. At forty-five years, ECOWAS, like a fully fledged man, has become fully mature and so, is expected naturally to stop fooling around; to stop playing the fool. To buttress this fact, former President Obasanjo in his Independence Day address in October 2000 reiterates that;

in most cultures and societies, the fortieth birthday is a significant landmark in any person's life. Any man or woman who reaches 40 years of age is judged to be truly mature, and worthy of being entrusted with sacred responsibilities. At forty:

1. It is time to part with youthful pursuits and settle to a life of reasonableness, decency, good family values, good citizenship and leadership;
2. It is also a time to henceforth enjoin the good and eschew the evils;
3. And it is the age to be realistic, candid and to abandon deceiving oneself and others (Dawodu, 2015).

At forty not to talk about forty five years, ECOWAS, like a full fledged man, has become fully mature and so is expected naturally, to quit playing the fool. The constructivist theory as shall be discussed below offers the solution ECOWAS may be waiting for.

Theoretical Connection to the study

This study is connected to constructivist theory, a relatively new theory in International Relations (IR). For decades before the end of the Cold War, the theory of IR has been dominated by two traditional approaches namely, realism and liberalism thereby making constructivist theory to be marginalised (Zhan, 2020). The marginalization as Barkin (2017 cited in Zhan, 2020) observes is as a result of these mainstream theories seeing constructivism as focusing on social construction instead of material construction. Following the collapse of the USSR and end of the Cold War as observed by Hopf (1998 cited in Zhan, 2020), a turning point came when people in the late 1980's started to reconsider the explanatory ability of the mainstream theories which consequently generated some debates. Lapid (2007) following the debates observes further that the development of Alexander Wendt's constructivist theory at this point gained attention and began to stand out. It should be noted here that Wendt's (1992) article is on "Anarchy is what states make out of it: the social construction of power politics." According to Wendt in this article, the claim that international institutions can transform state interests is central to neoliberal challenges to the realist assumption that "process" (interaction and learning among states) cannot fundamentally affect system "structure" (anarchy and the distribution of capabilities); systematic development of this claim, however, has been hampered by the neoliberals' commitment to rational choice theory, which treats interests as exogenously given and thus offers a weak form of institutional analysis. Wendt further stresses that a growing body of IR scholarship points to ways in which the identities and interests of states are socially constructed by knowledge practices. As contained in the abstract section, the article builds a bridge between this scholarship and neoliberalism by developing a theory of identities - and

interest - formation in support of the neoliberal further claim that international institutions can transform state interests(Wendt, 1992,). Wendt's (1999) work on "Social Theory of International Politics" further helped to consolidate the development of constructivist theory (Zhan, 2020). Since then many works on the theory have found their way into modern literature on International Relations (eg. Alder, 1997; Barkin, 2009; Chukwu, Nwogbaga&Nkwede, 2016; Zhan, 2020) but only a few of them have looked into issues pertaining to ECOWAS for example, Effoduh(2017). However, this gap remains to be filled.

The relevance of this theory therefore sits on the fact that more contemporary issues on ECOWAS need to be discussed, analysed and examined through the lens of the constructivists. With the aid of the constructivist theory, examining ECOWAS at forty-five years of existing as a human association is germane and apt. This is considering the fact that although Alexander Wendt as discussed by Zhan (2020) points out that the structures of human association are constructed by material forces, he disagrees with the notion that the structures of human association are constructed by material phenomena as defined by the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism. Notably, ECOWAS is a human association that is socially constructed by the actors and so deserves to be examined and advised using the constructivist theory as an instrument. Wendt in furtherance of his theory indicates that shared ideas are the most important elements in IR(Zhan, 2020), a point Alder (1997) amplified by adding that the key tenet of constructivism is the belief that international politics is shaped by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture and social identities which according to Chukwu, Nwogbaga&Nkwede (2016) define actors' interests, identities and perceptions of the world. To Wendt as captured by Zhan(2020), the actions of actors are also influenced by shared ideas and as such, the actions of actors depend on their interests. "The constructivists have a strong belief that shared ideas and experiences through communicative strategies could produce change in the identity and interest of actors" (Chukwu, Nwogbaga&Nkwede, 2016 p. 135). However, Risse et al (1999), as cited in Chukwu, Nwogbaga&Nkwede (2016) are of the view that institutionalized norms and ideas are seen shaping actors' identities and interests through three mechanisms namely; imagination, communication and constraints. In the realm of communication, an actor as emphasised by the trio, can justify to others his actions by exhuming the spirit of norms in defense of such an action. In this case, for instance, Nigeria's claim that its closure of the four land boundaries between August 2019 and December 2020 bordering it and some of its West African contiguous states is to checkmate debilitating smuggling activities that negatively impact its economy can be justified and not misconceived as being a deliberate act of inhibition to the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods. This is good for Nigeria's interest but remotely against the objective of ECOWAS in achieving its lofty ambition of removing all barriers to free trade and movement of persons. In fact, Nigeria's border closure as argued by Okogba (2020) implies extreme protectionist measure just as Ghana's policy of \$1 million needed by foreigners including Nigerians in their account before being allowed to trade in Ghana.

Regional Integration

Regional integration according to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org>) is a process in which neighbouring states enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules. By extension, it is a process by which two or more nation – states agree to cooperate and work closely together to achieve peace, stability and wealth (Carleton.ca/ces/enlearning/introduction/extension-what-is-regional integration) In a similar vein UNECA (2016) summarises regional integration as a key strategy for development and intra-regional trade which are expected to produce considerable economic gains. Further, regional integration is about overcoming barrier between countries and managing cross – border issues. Based on the foregoing clarification attempts, regional integration has been conceived as requiring the co-operation of the member states who are in an organisation and or grouping to pursue common goals be they economic, political, military or any other purpose.

The 20th century undoubtedly, was the century of regional integration considering the fact that many regional groupings emerged following the realisation by many regions that regional co-operation has become an indispensable feature of contemporary international relations. According to Thronhill (1972), interest in regionalism has ebbed and flowed since 1945, sometimes as a kind of gravitational response to proposals for local government reforms, sometimes for a variety of other reasons. To him, concern with regionalism can arise from diverse causes as the arrangement for the devolution of power from central government, the work of a number of geographers, and a large number of ad-hoc solutions to particular problems; too often, the regional solution has been an escape from existing unsatisfactory arrangements.

In the same vein, Ofoegbu (1980) is of the view that the growth of regional integration is largely due to many factors of which the most important are the growth in the size of the international system, multiplicity of roles and the functional demands for structural changes within the international system, a point that helps to justify the choice of constructivist theory for this paper. Wendt's (1992) and Zhan (2020) works have thrown their weight in support of the fact that power politics in International Relations can be socially constructed since anarchy for instance is what states make of it. This is also as a result of decolonisation, a process which triggered the growth of regional consciousness and cooperative efforts. Another reason for regional integration as identified by Deutsche et.al (1957) is that even if regionalism is unlimited, that is, if it does not operate solely on the matrix of functional co-operation, it seeks political unification; it progresses towards and induces loss of national sovereignties and the emergence, out of these, of a new and all embracing regional sovereignty.

Following from this, integrational and co-operative efforts were made in Europe, Latin America, Africa and most other places in the world before the end of the 20th century. These include but are not restricted to European Economic Community (later European Union), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), defunct WARSAW Pact, West African Economic Community (CEAO), Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEA), Southern African Customs Union (SACU), Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, the subject of discussion in this chapter). As far back as 1989, about 200 functional integration schemes were in existence (Daddier, 1993).

However, while there were these and other 20th century regional experiments and strategies, in the case of Africa as in some other regions, the gap between aspiration and achievements remain wide. In other words, in as much as various integrational efforts and the zeal to co-operate in practice have been made, little achievement is on ground in Africa in particular, a situation that makes the search for more functional and achieving strategies imperative. As such, ECOWAS is one of the regional integrational and co-operative strategies of the 20th century which is still operational in the 21st century.

Background to ECOWAS Formation

Before the creation of ECOWAS, the collective territory known as West Africa, from a regional point of view, was made up of an aggregation of states that had emerged from different colonial experiences and administrations which largely defined the boundaries of the 15 states domiciled in the area. However, since the attainment of independence especially in the 1960s, African leaders have consistently reaffirmed their desire to forge mutually beneficial economic and political linkages in order to enhance the continent's development prospects and promote the well-being of their people. The quest for greater co-operation has led to the creation of a dense network of regional and sub-regional organizations that makes Africa the premier arena for regional experimentation in the world (Daddier, 1993).

Nevertheless, history has it that efforts establishing a functional sub-regional co-operative body in West Africa could be dated to the period 1957 to 1965 when its political and legal foundations were laid (Ofoegbu, 1980). According to the author, it was within that period that technical and administrative experts met at Segou, Mamou, Dakar, Naimey, Bamako, Monrovia, Lagos and Accra, and as a result of these meetings, Economic Commission for Africa, ECA as well as expert working parties and consultants appointed undertook detailed studies which covered customs administration, transformation, credit coordination and the economic development of international river and lake basins in West Africa. The outcome of this step is that:

The technical experts and administrators were successful. They achieved understanding among themselves and were no longer in doubt of the use – fulness and need for limited integration. . . . These experts proceeded

from here to convince their political leaders to allow certain activities and state functions to be selected and organized (Ofoegbu, 1980:89).

The achievements made out of this first step, as Hodgkin and Schachter (1960) observe is that a West African feeling was created. As such, the prospects for regional co-operation became brighter. Following this new West African consciousness, the early “West African” African leaders and followers of the Aborigine Rights Protection Society, National Congress for British West Africa and inter-territorialists in the former Afrique Occidentale Française disappeared from political influence and power in West Africa (Hodgkin and Schachter, 1960; Ofoegbu, 1980).

Thus, the bureaucrats and technocrats who helped to chart the course of regional integration in West Africa from this time became new West Africans. Like everything that has good and bad sides, these new integrationists encountered some stumbling blocks on their way to forming ECOWAS not minding the good intention they had for the people of the sub-region. This manifested in the way and manner some political leaders who had territorial and national rather than inter-territorial interests misconceived the movement. However, this misconception was borne out of the quest by most nationalists and political leaders to create their individual national identities and as well, protect and exercise national sovereignties since most of them had just won political independence from their different colonial masters. As we shall see in the proceeding sections, this fear of losing one’s national identity and sovereignty has largely contributed to derailing the effort of ECOWAS in achieving its set objectives and aims to a large extent.

At this juncture, it is necessary to point out the fact that ECOWAS, following the background information and facts given so far was eventually borne out of the desire of the people of West Africa who had longed for regional co-operation at a more functional and effective level in order to collectively attack the enduring problems of underdevelopment and disunity in the region. From Nigeria to Togo, from Niger to Ghana and so on, evidence abounds that the yearning of the people were and are still the same; they wanted (and still want) to be helped out of the valley of abject poverty, food insecurity, backwardness etc. Lending credence to this fact, Ofoegbu (1980) and Isichei (1977) agree that the new consciousness led to the formation of Ghana-Mali-Guinea Union, the Niamey Act and Niamey Agreement that established the River Niger Commission; the treaties which established the Chad Basin Commission among many others. Also, between 1957 and the early 1970, the people of West Africa due to this new awareness, embraced some other areas of co-operation for example, during conferences in Accra and Dakar respectively, West African working parties and the Economic Community of Africa examined the magnitude of the problems of the people of the region and developed policy action papers based on the concept of regional co-operation. West African industrial co-ordination conferences were also held at Bamako and Monrovia within the same period.

In all, these conferences concentrated on four key industries: iron and steel chemicals and fertilizers, textiles and cement and as well assessed the needs of West Africa as a region, projected these into the future, analysed the productive capacity of the region, designed industrial co-ordination strategies that could meet the perceived and projected needs of the region, and do these without depending on imports (Ofoegbu, 1965). By and large, whether the foregoing efforts at West Africa's functional co-operation are appreciated or not, the fact remains that they culminated to laying the foundation for the establishment of the sub-regional body known as ECOWAS.

At the peak of these efforts at West African States' integration, General Yakubu Gowon the former Nigerian head of state and his Togolese counterpart, General Gnassingbe Eyadema toured the region in support of the integration idea in 1972. Eventually, the drafts that emanated from their efforts formed the basis for the emergence of the treaty of Lagos in 1975 which gave birth to ECOWAS (ECOWAS, <http://ecoslate.github.io/about-ecowas/history/index/htm>).

ECOWAS since 1975

History was made eventually on the 28th May, 1975 when fifteen West African States namely; Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Togo, Benin Republic, Senegal, Cote d'ivoire, Gambia, Mauritania, signed the treaty that established the Economic Community of West African States in Lagos, Nigeria. By this time, Lagos was the capital of Nigeria and so automatically became the headquarters of the Organisation until when Abuja was made the new capital city. Today, the headquarters of ECOWAS is situated in Abuja, Nigeria.

Another interesting thing is that while the treaty establishing ECOWAS was signed in 1975, its protocol of association was actually signed in 1976. Following this, ECOWAS was strengthened with a set of protocols, a fund, a secretariat and regular meetings of leaders and officials twenty two years later that is, from 1993 to 2015 after the revised treaty or better put, forty years after the Lagos treaty of 1975 that established ECOWAS, the Community has not been able to deliver the goods expected of it. The fact that West Africa remains underdeveloped, and in deep economic and political crises, more fragmented and unable to feed its people underscores the reason for branding ECOWAS a fool at forty. At best, ECOWAS can be labeled a toothless bull dog.

Interestingly in 1977, Cape Verde joined ECOWAS as a member state thereby making the members of community to rise to sixteen (16) but in 2002, one of the foundation members, Mauritania withdrew its membership. By this, the members of ECOWAS have remained fifteen(15) since then: Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Gambia, Burkinna Faso, Cape Verde, Togo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Ghana, Mali.

To achieve its goals, ECOWAS, from its foundation also has set numerous short-term objectives which include: elimination of customs duties, abolishment of trade restrictions, establishment of

a common tariff, and coordination of economic, industrial and monetary policies. ECOWAS Forum, 2016). According to this author, there were also plans for allowing the free movement of labour, goods, and capital on an intra-community level; Common infrastructure development projects, Broad plans for economic, political and monetary integration.

In fact, as Adebisi (2007) summarises, the community sought in addition to harmonise agricultural policies, establish a common tariff for external trade and commercial policy towards two thirds states.

However, eighteen years later, precisely in 1993, ECOWAS revised its treaty in order to reposition itself to face emerging global challenges following the melting down of the Cold War that was prevalent at the time of its establishment in 1975 and to be able to spur economic integration and political co-operation in the sub-region. In a nutshell, the revised ECOWAS treaty of 1993 aims to achieve for the sub-region an economic union which is the peak level of its target. In addition, ECOWAS aims not only to establish itself as a hegemonic economic community in West Africa for the purpose of economic integration but as well according to Adetula (2005) to extend integration to other sectors such as politics, security and physical infrastructure.

Is ECOWAS Factually a Fool?

Having personified ECOWAS in this work, it is necessary to refer to Napoli, Kilbride and Tebbs (1988) definition of personality;

... as the individual's unique and dynamic pattern of thoughts, feeling and actions. Most Psychologists agree that at least three characteristics of personality should be taken into account: uniqueness (no two personalities are exactly alike), adaptability (personality change) is not just a collection of behavior, it is a patterned response to the environment that shows some degree of consistency

In applying this definition here, ECOWAS as an organization is therefore conceived as a collection of behavioural as well as a patterned response to the environment. That ECOWAS is a community of states and not community of people (Akinterinwa, 2015) goes a long way to justify that it is a sub- regional body and not a body of people. As such the behavior of ECOWAS is a collection of the behaviour of the member states as well as a patterned response to the West African Environment that is somehow consistent. For example, West Africa is a region of many states with different colonial experiences and masters namely, those of the British West African, French and Portuguese backgrounds; different natural resources endowment different institutional and administrative systems. Implicitly, while Nigeria at one end is richly endowed with enormous resources, Burkina Faso at the other end is endowed with poor human and natural resources. These remarkable differences significantly and consistently determine the sub-

regional relations of people and states, a condition which further constraints and hampers meaningful participation of member states in ECOWAS Economic integration programmes.

Reacting to this situation, Akinteriwa (2015) on Good Morning Nigeria Programme, during a discussion on ECOWAS at forty bemoans the community for remaining a community of states and not community of peoples. His view is that if ECOWAS were wise it should have by its forty years of existence transformed into a community of people that is, putting in full practice the policy of free movement of people in place. If ECOWAS were wise and sensible, it should have known that mobility of factors of production within the region is very significant to the achievement of its economic integrational goal.

By being a fool, though a simple fool institute in Basic Life Principles, 2014 has given a simple fool as one of the typologies of a fool), ECOWAS has forgotten that one of the reasons for establishing it was mainly to foster unity among the peoples of the sub-region such that most identified areas of bifurcations and altercation to their growth, development and well being could be eliminated. Even when it has adopted the protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment signed since May 29, 1979, which came into effect since 1980 Iornumbe and Apinean, 2014), free movement of persons and by extension goods have not been free. Thus, Daddier (1993) while citing a World Bank report of 1989 concurs that boarder checks and unduly complex transit procedures cause long waiting periods that reduce intraregional trade and contribute to high cost of doing business in the region.

However, while ECOWAS believes in achieving community citizenship for citizens of member states as well as enhancing the smooth operation of the protocol towards achieving free movement of people's goals and services, it has launched

- ECOWAS Travel Certificate (ETC)
- ECOWAS Passport (ECOPASS)
- ECOWAS Liability Insurance Card (ELIC)
- ECOWAS Brown Card Motor Vehicle
- Insurance Scheme (EBCMVIS) (Iornumbe and Apinean, 2014)

These are major strategies that if adopted could enhance integrational migration and then boost integrational effort but like a simple fool who in the view of Institute in Basic Life Principle (2014), naturally becomes more foolish in the absence of instruction and consistent discipline, ECOWAS lacks the political will to implement the protocol. Several restrictions from members states as identified by Adetula (2005) such as immigration laws, investment codes indigenization policies and programmes vitiated meaningful efforts toward the implementation. Some other internal contradiction in the protocol, no doubt also contribute to its non- implementation. The implications of this failure are far-reaching especially as the lead to citizenship and indigenization crises in the sub- region. The recent attacks on Nigerians living in Ghana is a by product of the non- implementation of ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment.

Flowing down from this point is the fact that as a simple fool waiting to be instructed and consistently disciplined before being wise, ECOWAS would have implemented the above

Protocol to the letter if the former Colonial Over Lords especially Finance, had instructed and consistently disciplined them. Take for instance how the issue of having a common currency has been a serious challenge to ECOWAS; Member states especially those of francophone zone prefer maintaining close ties with France through monetary cooperation and other means. Thus, the Francophone countries inspite of their colonial experiences with France continued pegging their currencies to that of France (CFA Franc) well into the 1990s (Ede, 2011). However, while there are national currencies for most ECOWAS states some also use other foreign currencies such as Escudo for Cape Verde, Dollar for Liberia and CFA Franc for most Francophone states. All these, coupled with some fear of loss of national sovereignty have contributed to hampering the achievement of a single currency in the sub- region, a feat if achieved would enhance cross-border economic links and then make regional and external trading easier, cheaper and less risky. That ECO project (ECO is the name given to the expected single currency if achieved) has not materialised in the year 2020 is a thing of concern.

Like most other projects, programmes and strategies conceived and initiated by ECOWAS that are still in the pipeline or abandoned midway, the date for the actual establishment or achievement of a single currency (ECO) in West Africa has been postponed from 2003 to 2005, 2010, 2014 to 2020 and now to an unspecified year. Based on these postponements Thisday Newspapers (2016) concludes that ECOWAS single currency project is an illusion. Thisday further refers to the project as another self- deceiving project. On this note, ECOWAS is a fool (though a simple fool) at forty by leading a life of self-deceit because as a mature organization it should stop fooling around. Based on this ECO issue, Thisday writes;

The plan had been based on a degree of economic sanity and progressive integration of extant national interests that are nowhere near what is needed to create a common currency. That nothing of such happened has made many to laugh off the latest claim of “notable progress” in that direction, especially coming at a time the European Union (EU) seems to be unraveling with the United Kingdom now exiting (This day, 2016).

Now that ECO has been achieved

Conclusion and Recommendation

This quotation and other facts above, to say the obvious help us to conclude that ECOWAS is indeed a fool because it is behaving in a stupid way that makes people laugh and even get annoyed. It therefore means that one who knows what to do to be better but fails to do it until it is late is a fool. This is true in the case of ECOWAS because of the journey to its formation which had started since 1957 or even earlier down to 1975 when it was eventually established and forty years plus since its establishment it has not achieved its goals, it can best be described as a toothless bulldog, it has teeth but cannot really bite. Imagine the enormous potentials of

West Africa – human and material resources with enormous agricultural potentials as well as human population if ECOWAS were wise, it should have concentrated on the harmonization of member states' agricultural policies and achieving free movement of goods and people. If this had been achieved before now Ghana would not have been disturbing Nigerian business people in their homeland as it is presently or put differently, Nigeria would not have embarked on Ghana-must-go project in the distant past. Be that as it is presently, it is difficult for this paper to agree that the establishment of the common currency, ECO is going to change ECOWAS from playing the fool. This is not to conclude sheepishly that it is impossible for ECO to succeed like the EURO . The fact is that ECO is possibly a veritable instrument of integration and development for West Africa only if the protection of state sovereignty by individual member-states mostly for ethnic hegemonic and class tendencies and not purely on the excuses of national interest can be substantially reduced at this time smaller economies around the world are teaming up to withstand the demands of globalisation that are in favour of bigger economies. In addition, ECO's success is possible if the resurgence of economic nationalism in some parts of the world especially the case of Brexit will not confuse some countries in Africa to tow the same path. Nigeria for instance should not think of this notwithstanding its economic weight in the region as well as Ghana's present provocation due mainly for two reasons. One, the British pound is the most highly-rated currency in the world, a fact that encourages Britain to believe that it can succeed independently without the EU. Two, the existence of France in collaboration with its former colonies in West Africa should not be forgotten because if Nigeria should try to exit from ECOWAS for not benefiting commensurately ECO will collapse unlike the EURO which is most likely to retain its global weight even if Britain does not return to the Union. Furthermore, the suspicion of one country Nigeria, by most francophone members of establishing itself as the regional hegemon if given the chance should be eschewed. In conjunction with the foregoing, free movement of people from member countries' barrier should be removed for ECOWAS to achieve the economies of scale it was ab initio established to achieve. That West Africa remains the home of military coups in the 21st century when military intervention in politics is considered by the drivers of the globalisation project as the first enemy of democracy, Mali being the latest, a home of a great number of wretched people, home of a great number of food insecure people and worst still, home of terrorism and other forms of social, economic and political disorder simply suggests that ECOWAS, no matter what might be its achievement, has greatly failed in its mission and the vision of its founding fathers. In fact, no matter what might be its impediments namely; colonial hangover, suspicion of one another of dominance, dependency, globalization, resource curse, ECOWAS should sit up and quit playing the fool and get work done. It is in doing this that it can avoid being a fool at forty who is a fool forever. If ECOWAS should continue doing things it has done since forty-five years ago the same way, it will continue to get the same result. ECOWAS leaders should as a matter of urgency, solve the problems of fragmentation and suspicion among members as well as restricted movement of people from the member countries, and most importantly, stop reinventing conflict and military coup in an era of

democratic consolidation if it really aspires to achieve its aims. ECOWAS should remember that a house divided against itself can never stand.

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