ECOWAS PROTOCOL ON TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on trade liberalization and the challenges of economic development in Nigeria. The study was built within the framework of Neo-functionalist approach. Information/data for the study were generated from both primary (interview) and secondary sources. The study revealed that ECOWAS has acquired many decisions but few are implemented with additional challenges of meeting targets. A major challenge discovered by the study is that ECOWAS Member States trade more with the rest of the world and in particularly with developed economies than with Member States. For instance, Nigeria's major trade partners are India and China, Mali's are China and the European Union (EU), Sierra Leone and Gambia's major trade partners are the EU, while Burkina Faso and Niger mostly trade with Europe, among others. The study established that the lack of political will among ECOWAS members to submit part of their sovereignty, lack of trust among member-states, refusal to fully implement the free movement of goods, persons and right of establishment provisions by member-states, language barrier, and colonial differences as challenges to proper implementation of the policies and protocol studied. Appropriate strategies or frameworks to deal with the excessive smuggling of foreign goods into Nigeria through her immediate neighbours must be put in place. The study recommends the

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creation of an agency called Border Defence and Management Agency (BODMA) by the Federal Government of Nigeria. In order to stop or reduce, the excessive importation of foreign goods into Nigeria and reap the industrial benefits of the scheme, Nigeria must venture into the domestic development and acquisition of high technology oriented industries or sectors so as to acquire the momentum or impetus for widening and diversifying the productive base of the economy.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Protocol, Trade, Liberalization, Challenges, Economic and Development.

Introduction

The current global trend is for groups of contiguous nations to pull their resources together under a regional cooperation for the wellbeing of their citizens. This is what is generally referred to as integration. Economic integration involves the process whereby States agree to subsume their individual ability to formulate policies on matters concerning trade, custom tariffs, immigration and trade among others under collective organ. The aims of economic integration are to promote economic advancement of member-states and the overall development of the region or sub-region. Alao, Atele, Auomola, Adewumi and Irewum (2012) however records that one of the largest and most sophisticated market-oriented trading system that encouraged interaction and integration in today's West Africa and beyond was the trans-Saharan trade network.

The practices then in West Africa demonstrated the prevalence of diplomatic practices that were sophisticated in precolonial era comparable to those of the twenty-first century. Among such he observes was adherence to diplomatic protocol and etiquette. This included the traditional African custom of warm welcoming of strangers into their midst Adepoju (2015) observes that colonial regime altered the motivation and composition of migration by introducing and enforcing various blends of political and economic structures, imposing tax regimes and establishing territorial boundaries.

With nations in West Africa becoming independent particularly in the 1960s, there emerged a new consciousness following the experiences in Europe in the implementation of Marshal Plan. It could rightly be concluded that the idea of economic integration in West Africa developed from the awareness of global economic interdependence. There is a wild recognition that regional cooperation is vital to tackling trade, economic and trance border trade and economic development challenges that may not be solved at a national level. For example, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 for the purpose of engineering economic growth and development of the sub-region, given her endowed resources. ECOWAS was primarily created to promote economic cooperation within the West African sub-region so as to move them from developing to developed states. To pursue this aim, it adopted at its inception an intergovernmental approach to governance, based on national sovereignty and non-interference in the affairs of its member-states. The regional commitment at that time was essentially that member states would integrate the lofty ambitions of ECOWAS in planning and directing their respective national economic policies. After about a decade and half, the sub-regional organisation had reasons to revisit her operations and strategies which led to the 1993 revised treaty to enhance its relevance in a fast changing global world. This marked an important change both in the structure and the character of West African cooperation. There was a shift to a more people-centred organization as opposed to the overly bureaucratic inter-governmental agency of the past reflecting a new model of integration that was then taking shape in the African political consciousness (Aryeetey, 2011).

ECOWAS has taken different steps to ensure that West African economy is at par with that of developed countries by putting in place several protocols, treaties and schemes to archive her aim of economic development and this study is considering trade liberalization protocol as antidotes to economic development of the sub-region. The ECOWAS economic integration, free movement of persons and right of establishment and Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) are major policies on trade agreement to promote economic development by increasing trade relations among its members.

Another decision relating to the adoption and implementation of a single Trade liberalization Scheme for industrial products originating from member states of the community dated 30th May 1983 was signed by the Authority completing the scope of products covered by the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ECOWAS, 2004). It is certain that the success of West African integration efforts will be judged by the volume of intra-community trade and by the degree of interaction between the citizenry and also between the business communities. This is why in 1987 the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government directed that both the member states and the institutions of the community accord the topmost priority to the promotion and development of intra-community trade. As a result, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) came into effect in January, 1990 with a view to eliminating customs duties and levies of equivalent effect, removal of nontariff barriers, and establishment of a Common External Tariff (CET) to protect goods produced in member states. The Trade Liberalisation Scheme is therefore meant to provide impetus to the process of economic integration and development in the West African region. It is also to provide easier access to markets in other ECOWAS countries and thereby encourage local manufacturing outfits to compete favorably with cheap imported products that may be dumped in the market. The scheme is to furthermore encourage entrepreneurial development because it provides preferential treatment among member states (CBN, 2011).

The link between trade liberalisation and industrialisation or economic development is that as the market for goods and services widens, it is expected that this would lead to increased productivity in manufacturing industry. The increased productivity in manufacturing will therefore act as a catalyst that will accelerate the pace of structural transformation and diversification of the economy. Consequently, since manufacturing in comparison to other sectors of the economy have greater spill-over effects, it offers a ready market for agricultural produce as well as providing intermediate goods for further production. This logic was the major reason Nigeria embraced the idea or policy of ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) (Mike and Charlse, 2020). It is against this background that the study attempted to examine the ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization and the challenges of economic development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

i. To investigate the challenges facing the implementation of ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization for improved economic development in Nigeria.
ii. To examine the measures adopted to ensure ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization improve on economic development in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Sam (2019) examined the effectiveness of ECOWAS Protocols in the drive towards statehood. The approach adopted for the study is basically a doctrinal approach. The author relied principally on secondary sources of data. The research design for the study was extensive consultation of secondary material from the internet, published works of Non-governmental organizations, public and private libraries. The study argued that the state of affairs in West Africa can be described as a mystery, mind-boggling and not fulfilling of its potentials. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the principal regional economic community in West Africa wherein the continental integration process, as advocated by the African Union, should take shape. The objectives of ECOWAS are to promote cooperation and integration in the economic, social and cultural domains. It is a process which should lead to an economic and monetary union, through a full integration of the national economies of its Member States, enhanced living standards and greater economic stability. It finds that some of ECOWAS policies towards statehood and regional integration have not been effective due to the peculiarities of inadequate funding by the members. The study recommended that there should be viable and sustainable enforcement mechanisms against member signatories to the ECOWAS Protocols to fulfil their financial obligations. However, the challenges facing the protocol on trade liberalization and the prospect for economic development in Nigeria were not outlined in the study.

Mamba & Balaki (2019) analysed the effects of trade policies on foreign trade performance of the countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) between 1996-2017. The study used two trade policies indicators including the index of the implementation of protocols and conventions of trade liberalisation scheme and the index from Wacziarg and Welch (2003) to analyse the direct and indirect effects of trade liberalisation policy on imports and exports. The study used the instrumental variable method to control the endogeneity of the variables of interest. The findings indicated that trade liberalisation promotes significantly trade performance, but increases more imports than exports. However, the findings are less robust to estimation techniques and disaggregated analysis (sub-samples and the manufacturing sector). By including interactions, trade liberalisation increases the elasticity of trade performance while it reduces significantly the price elasticities of trade performance. The findings are important for policymakers in terms of import and export liberalisation in order to improve trade balance. However, the study did not explain the challenges facing the protocol on trade liberalization and the prospect for economic development in Nigeria.

Bello (2015) assessed the ECOWAS Treaty and its application to the various imperatives of cooperation and integration of the economies of member states of ECOWAS. The study also focused on examining the role of law and its implication on the concept and practice of economic integration, and to provide findings with relation to problems and prospects of economic integration. The study established these findings to include, low level of awareness of integration initiatives which has served to impede effective implementation of most of the initiatives primarily aimed at deflecting the negative effects of globalisation especially in the area of trade and commerce, particularly under the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS). The study also found that poor governance and lack of political and institutional accountability is a common denominator of armed conflicts in most member states in the sub-region, and accounts in part for the failure of relevant

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agencies to perform substantially. An additional findings, is the absence of a common supranational legal tool which constitutes a major impediment to cross border practice and accounts substantially for the slow pace of intra-regional trade across the sub-region.

Flowing out of these findings, the study recommended the imperative of raising the level of awareness of national authorities, manufacturers and general public on the various integration initiatives of ECOWAS with a view to promoting inter-community trade, wealth creation and empowering community citizens, particularly when noted that ECOWAS has a large market that is vital for national and sub-regional development. It is also recommended that the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance should be enforced with a view to sanctioning erring member states that violate the Protocol through the suspension of such erring members voting rights on all matters relating to the ECOWAS. The study additionally recommends the harmonisation of Business Laws with the aim of eliminating the existence of different legal systems in ECOWAS. This would assist in providing a more secure legal environment and provide for certainty of laws, thereby enhancing the pace of intra-regional trade in ECOWAS. However, the challenges facing the protocol on trade liberalization and the prospect for economic development in Nigeria were not discussed in details.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the neo-functionalist theoretical approach. Major proponents of this theory include Keohane, Nye, Haas and Lindberg (1971). This study agrees largely with the position of neo-functionalism that the best way to achieve an effective regional integration is the formation of administrative institutions at the transnational level, which are specialized and have the potential of demonstrating the significance and vitality of regional integration to member states.

This study is also in agreement with the key position of the neo-functionalist approach that, "no state is capable of maintaining its economic growth and its existing economic structures and be capable of satisfying the economic needs of its people, if it does not cooperate with other countries Haas and Lindberg (1971). The shift of expectations, activities and (perhaps eventually) loyalties towards the new centre is also seen as one, which is primarily motivated by actors' interests. However, these self-regarding motives are not perceived as constant. They are likely to change during the integration process, as actors learn from the benefits of regional policies and from their experiences in co-operative decision-making (Haas, 1971). Neo-functionalists contest the inter-governmentalist assumption of interest aggregation exclusively at the national level through some hermetic process. Instead, Haas (1971:9-10) argued that membership in the integration altered the way that interest groups and, later, member governments, perceived their interests.

Neo-functionalist theory posits that once established, institutions can take on a life of their own and progressively escape the control of their creators. Concerned with increasing their own powers, employees of regional institutions become agents of further integration by influencing the perceptions of participating elites (both private and public), and therefore governments' (national) interest. The theory's early reformulations stressed the primacy of incremental decision-making over grand designs. Moreover, seemingly marginal adjustments are often driven by the unintended consequences of previous decisions. This effect arises from the incapacity of most political actors to engage in long-term purposive behaviour as they 'stumble' from one decision into the next, especially when engaging in such an innovative task as regional integration. Decisions in this arena are normally taken with very imperfect knowledge of their consequences and frequently under the pressure of deadlines (Haas, 1971).

The theory of neo-functionalism is built around the concept of 'spill-over'. This set of assumptions forms the basis for the initial neo-functionalist explanation of the integration process in Europe. Its conception of change is succinctly encapsulated in the notion of 'spill-over'. The term was first applied in two distinctive manners: (1) it was used as a sort of shorthand for describing the occurrence of (further) integration; and, (2) it was used to identify the driving force and inherent logic of integration via increased functional/economic interdependence.

Neo-functionalist approach perfectly suits the theoretical underpinning of this study, since this study recognizes the fact that, nations are not the only crucial players in international affairs, especially in trade, as the role of supranational institutions and non-state actors in international trade cannot be underestimated. The research also adopts the neo-functionalist approach because of its relevance in providing a much clearer path where the integrated body would be more competent through the support of member States. This appropriately explains why member states of ECOWAS cooperate with each other as well as with countries outside its catchment area for a profitable economic integration.

Methodology

The case study research design was adopted for this research undertaking. The main goal in using the case study model is to develop in largely an understanding of the case as possible, emphasizing its depth, natural setting, its complexity and its context. In the search for research materials for the study, various methods were used; that is, primary and secondary methods. For the primary method, interview source was employed and secondary sources were consulted. Purposive sampling technique was used to interview selected staff of the ECOWAS secretariat, Abuja, Nigeria's Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS), Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission, Abuja, Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), Abuja, Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Abuja. The justification for this cross section is that the institutions are central in providing useful insight as it regards the subject matter. The selected interviewees have cognate knowledge on ECOWAS economic integration, free movement of persons and rights of establishments and trade liberalization and they were able to give accurate and correct information on the subject matter.

Secondary materials came from various sources like official documents from the member-states and the regional organisation, such as the Treaty, Mission Statements, Protocols, Decisions, Regulations, Progress reports, Press releases, Newsletters, Research papers and academic works. The internet served as one of the main sources to gather information for the study due to its easily accessible nature and the ECOWAS Secretariat to obtain the required information. A qualitative content analysis of responses from interview and materials gathered became necessary for the study to achieve its purpose.

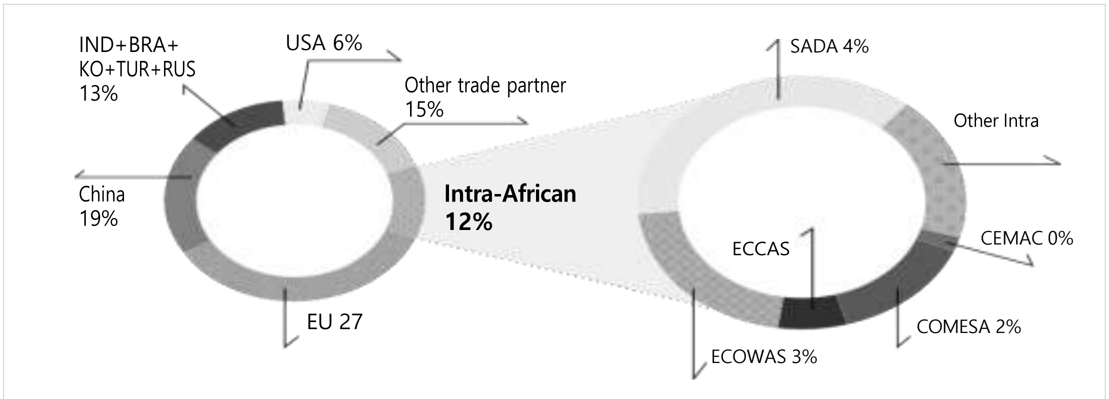
Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Research Objective One: Challenges facing the implementation of ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization for improved economic development in Nigeria.

Respondent 1 who is a staff of the ECOWAS secretariat, exposed that Nigeria's trade sector is bedevilled by the absence of infrastructure, or at best, poor infrastructure. Transportation and power appears to rank high in the category of infrastructure required by the Nigerian business to flourish and add value to the nation's economy. In terms of regional trade, whereas the energy to power and improve their productivity has staggered for a long time and kept many of the private sector operators out of business, transport – road, rails, sea and air are absolutely poor or deficient. For instance, the road from Lagos to Benin Republic (along Mile 2 in Lagos to the Seme border) has presently remained a dilapidated one, there is no presence of rail lines that could have made it easier to move goods in large quantities from the country across the other member states of ECOWAS.

Similarly, whereas there is absence of a regional airline to aid movement of persons and goods from one end to another (most of the national carriers are either dead or at best in coma leaving passengers at the mercies of an unreliable few airlines with a handful of aircrafts- e.g. Arik, Asky, Air Burkina and Air Senegal), the cost of movement of goods by sea is so exorbitant and almost unaffordable to inspire trade. The result of these epileptic infrastructures is that movement of goods and services is always slowed down; goods become more expensive to the consumer populace while profits are reduced to the detriment of the private sector operators who are naturally time conscious in their transactions to meet demand and turnover necessary for enhanced profit and breaking of evens. It is also largely responsible for high perishability of goods since a major chunk of goods moving across the region are unprocessed, primary commodities. It is important to note that women are the worse victims in this case since the petty traders that travel to the hinterlands are mainly females (April, 2023).

Figure 1: Africa's Trade Partners and Their Shares



Source: JUNG (2017).

Note: IND, BRA, KOR, TUR, and RUS stand for India, Brazil, Korea, Turkey, and Russia, respectively. SADC, ECOWAS, ECCAS, COMESA, and CEMAC indicate the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of CentralAfrican States, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, respectively.

Intra-continent trade in Africa, i.e., trade between African countries, however,barely exceeds 10% of the total trade of Africa as shown in Figure 1.The size of African regional trade is certainly smaller than other major continents'intra-regional trade such as Asia, Europe, and America and similar to the level observed in Oceania which consists of island countries. In terms of the size of theoverall trade, Africa takes only 3% of the share of world trade whereas 15% of theworld population resides in the continent. This discrepancy between many regionaltrade agreements and small intra-continent trade share tells that regional economicintegrations in Africa are very unsuccessful trade liberalization policies to promotetrade.

Respondent 1 continued that the other factors limiting the impact of ETLS and the growth of intra-ECOWAS trade are the inadequacy of trade-related infrastructure, trade information and finance as well as the lack of diversification and complementarity of the economies of the Member States. For example,it seems that the limited importation of the products of other Member States of ECOWAS into the huge Nigerian market has been partly due notonly to concerns that some of the products covered by certificates of origin are re-packaged products of European and Asian countries, but also to the fact that ECOWAS countries do not have manufacturing baseof any significance which Nigeria can benefit from. Also, limiting the growth of intra-ECOWAS trade is the absence of an effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the ETLS and of a legal framework for the settlement of disputes and enforcement of rights and obligations under FTA agreements and protocols. The lack of the mechanisms has reduced the effectiveness of the ETLS as an instrument for boosting intra-ECOWAS trade (April, 2023).

An earlier study conducted by Goodridge (2016) posits that ECOWAS trade integration represents the outgrowth of movement for West African states self-reliance. Its origins lie in the reactions of the countries in the sub-region to their former colonial power following independence. For such a political movement to be effective, it needed to be supported by a strong economic project. Additionally, due to the small size of most West African states, it is believed that only a regional approach would provide an economically viable path. As in many African regions, the ECOWAS countries are characterised by a lack of trade complementarities. Similar economic structures in the large majority of member states based on the export of primary products and the import of manufactured goods. Beyond these structural factors, trade is highly dependent on the context in which it takes place. ECOWAS trade is impeded by severe political instability, fuelled by climate change, lack of social inclusion and systemic poverty.

In addition, respondent 2 who is a staff of Nigeria's Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, explained that since most of the ECOWAS member states are basically weak in constructs, they lack strong socio-economic and political structures to absorb the shocks of adjustment in the process of integration per se. Thus, confronted with the problems of nation-building, member states policy preferences are wholly geared toward direct and immediate national gains, and the promotion of national unity. This is further compounded by the seeming recurring question of legitimacy on the part of the governments of member states, unlike the developed countries which derive their legitimacy through such structures as democratic governance, balanced economic system and near absence of social instability. As the discrepancies between long-term regional integration challenges and the urgent national exigencies of member states continue unabated, member states clearly demonstrated their lack of interest to simply delegate the powers of making binding decisions, monitoring and sanctions to the regional body resulting in the continuous inability to find solutions to the continued rivalry between ECOWAS long-term regional programmes and the immediate national preferences of member states by their sustained reluctance to submit to more supranationalism within the framework of ECOWAS. Even the pendulum too could not swing in favour of inter-governmentalism as reasonable bargains and prompt ratifications of community decisions and protocols remain difficult and time-consuming, in the face of high adjustment costs and very low degree of economic interdependence between member states (April, 2023).

Amongst the many challenges, the infrastructural deficit is the bane to the implementation of the free movement of persons across the region (Esekumemu, 2014). The difficult economic geography of the ECOWAS region makes it particularly important to adopt a regional approach to infrastructure development especially as it concerns the implementation of the Free Movement Protocol (Ranganathan & Foster, 2011). The lack of good roads, and well-developed seaports have hampered the free movement of persons and goods across the region. In most ECOWAS countries, the railway system is either poor or non-existent and there currently is not any rail line that connects ECOWAS countries. More so, several airports in West Africa do not meet international standards and in the region, the movement of goods is hampered due to the absence of cargo flights between countries.

Other constraining factors would be lack of electricity and high tariff rates, high transportation costs, poor telecommunication facilities and low levels of technology as most operations at the borders and other relevant offices are yet to be fully digitized. This not only slows down the speed of movement across borders but gives corrupt officials the leeway to carry on with their unscrupulous activities. Port delays and administrative charges account for the lion's share of the time. The high costs reflect the high transport costs in the region and the inefficiency of many ports. In the Ports sector, West Africa lacks a clear maritime hub and Ranganathan & Foster (2011) posit that this does not compare favorably with ports in other parts of Africa and is nowhere near global best practices and major shipping lines that serve West Africa do so via North Africa or Southern Spain but the creation of a regional freight hub would serve to consolidate sea freight and the movement of persons/goods throughout the region (Ranganathan & Foster, 2011).

Research Objective Two: The measures adopted to ensure ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization improve on economic development in Nigeria

Respondent 3, a member of the National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS), posited that when the necessary conditions including improved infrastructure and security, which will spur competitiveness of firms and attract major investments to the country have been put in place for firms to respond to new threats and opportunities, freer trade will clearly foster socio–economic benefits for Nigeria by enhancing growth and productivity and improving resource allocation. As Nigeria opens up to trade within the West African sub-region, the country will be able to export products that are lacking in other countries, thereby increasing productivity of the manufacturing industry. The increased productivity in manufacturing will act as a catalyst that will accelerate the pace of structural transformation and diversification of the economy, in addition to facilitating the country in fully utilizing her factor endowment. Since manufacturing in comparison to other sectors of the economy have greater spillover effects to other sectors, it offers a ready market for agricultural produce as well as providing intermediate goods for further production and supporting the services sector (April, 2023).

Respondent 4 who is an official of the Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that economic growth is the key to increased welfare in an economy. Except growth seriously worsens income distribution, welfare of the people in an economy will better as average incomes increases. The contrary view has no standing because there is no specific information on a strong case that a particular openness of an economy seriously worsened income distribution. As the market for Nigeria's goods widens as a result of the trade liberalization, it is most likely that the technological base will be improved upon through learning from the technology available in developed countries to meet up with the increased demand. This learning will take place through technology transfers either through efforts to imitate technologies or through importing capital goods. It is important to note that both of these activities are assumed to require only skilled labour. Thus, trade liberalisation avails Nigeria the opportunity of accessing new technologies to improve upon its productivity and on the other hand, having wider market to export its produce thereby bringing about technological progress and economic growth. An open trade regime is probably essential to the longrun achievement of trade stances and thus should be seen as a major contributory factor in economic development. The link between openness and growth operates at least partly by enhancing technical progress. The evidence that access to imports enhances performance is quite strong. Of course technological flows need not depend just on trade or technology policies, they may arise autonomously or through direct interventions in research and development in favour of a country (April, 2023).

Table 2: Share of Intra-Regional Trade in the External Trade of ECOWAS Member States (%), 2011-2016

Member State/Year	2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		Avg
	Exp	Imp	Exp	Imp	Exp	Imp	Exp	Imp	Exp	Imp	Exp	Imp	
Burkina Faso	7.8	25.6	7.6	22.8	11	22.6	17.6	25	13	18.7	13.9	22.3	**17.3**
Benin	29.5	20.9	28.8	19.9	26.5	16.3	20.2	11.6	22	15.6	20.9	13.2	**20.5**
Cape Verde	2.2	1.4	0.4	0.8	1.8	0.8	0.3	1.6	3.8	3.4	1.7	1.8	**1.7**
Cote d`Ivoire	26.4	24.9	29.1	27.3	32	24.6	23.4	23.2	19.7	19.5	25.2	22.6	**24.8**
Ghana	32.9	9.6	11.4	7.2	8.8	7.8	9.9	3.2	10.5	3.5	10.5	3.4	**9.9**
Gambia	86.8	26.6	84.3	33	88.8	29.3	84.7	25.9	77.2	33.4	84	29.6	**57**
Guinea	7.7	4.5	9.2	2.7	3.4	2.3	25.3	2.8	25	6.6	25.2	6.6	**10.1**
Guinea –Bissau	10.6	15.3	3	11	3.7	13.2	24.6	11.1	5.3	9.8	6.6	11.4	**10.5**
Liberia	6.7	21.2	28.7	22.4	17	22	55.1	16.8	60.9	13.2	57.6	13.2	**27.9**
Mali	15.3	41.8	11.7	46.5	13.2	39.5	10.8	38.3	13.5	34.9	13.5	34.9	**26.2**
Niger	12	14.5	30.5	18.9	41.7	20.3	40.9	17.7	24.4	13.9	34.5	13.9	**23.6**
Nigeria	2.8	1.2	3.9	0.4	5.3	4.9	4.4	0.6	6.5	3	5.1	2.8	**3.4**
Sierra Leone	6.2	24.6	1.2	32.7	6.7	34.7	6.5	44.1	32.9	19	11.4	28.3	**20.7**
Senegal	37	13.5	36	15.6	38.5	13.7	39.1	11.4	37.8	10.8	38.5	13	**25.4**
Togo	63.1	8.3	55.2	9.4	59.1	10.8	56.4	10.7	56.3	9.6	57.5	10.4	**33.9**
External trade of ECOWAS: Share of intra-community trade in % of external trade of ECOWAS													
Share of intra-community trade (%)	**10**	**8.8**	**8**	**12.2**	**11.8**	**13.7**	**9.8**	**9.7**	**13.5**	**10.7**	**11.9**	**11.1**	**10.9**

Source: ECOWAS Commission (2017).

The Africa Regional Integration Index Report 2016 also reveals a significant difference in the trade integration performance of ECOWAS Member States. The high performing countries whose trade integration index is higher than average include Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Senegal while Nigeria remains a key low performer. The low trade integration performance of Nigeria has been an important factor in the low level of intra-ECOWAS trade.

Although Nigeria accounts for 87 per cent and 41 per cent of intra-ECOWAS exports and imports respectively, its trade with other Member States of ECOWAS constitutes less than four percent of its total world trade. Regional hegemons are known to be in a strong position to influence the setting, the implementation and the impact of regional agendas. With ashare of 75 percent in the GDP of ECOWAS and more than half of the population, Nigeria is a regional hegemon and a powerful Member State of ECOWAS whose trade integration record has shaped the overall impact of the ETLS.

Consequently, governments of ECOWAS member countries must endeavor to maintain equilibrium between creating job in the member States and participating in the global markets. Presumably, there is the need for ECOWAS governments to formulate "local content laws" that will guarantee job placement for the indigenes in multinational corporations that operate within the sub-region. Thus, reserving a reasonable quota in terms of employment opportunities for the ECOWAS citizens will go a long way to increase employment in the member states. Governments, as a matter of policy, must also make the efforts to ensure that foreign investors in the local economies engage the services of ECOWAS citizens in jobs that may not necessarily require foreign experts and can be undertaken by the young people in the sub-region.

Respondent 6, a staff of the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission suggests that trade reforms should be designed and pursued in a manner that is employment-friendly so that the reallocation of jobs is more congenial for employment growth in the ECOWAS enclave. In addition, the deployment of foreign workers in the domestic labor market should be done strategically to avoid the clouding out of citizens of ECOWAS on the labor market. Member states must endeavor to support growth and expansion of infant industries in their jurisdictions to enable them stand international competition. That is to say, infant industries in most developing economies more often than not produce at a relatively higher cost, making price per unit cost of production uncompetitive. Eventually, most of these firms do not see the light of day and are unable to generate the needed employment. Tax rebates and holidays as well as state subsidies may help sustain infant companies and as such, foster their growth and expansion in order that they are able to generate employment opportunities for the jobless young people in the ECOWAS member states. Finally, respondent 7 who is a staff of the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Abuja concluded that, the sub-region also needs young entrepreneurs that are ready and eager to explore new business opportunities. To achieve this, ECOWAS governments must facilitate easy access to credit and financing that will motivate young entrepreneurs to be able to take risks and establish businesses that will ultimately make them employers on their own. More so, a deliberate and conscious policy must be formulated by governments to promote domestic investment via favorable credit conditions for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) that would provide substantial benefits for youth employment within the ECOWAS member states.

Discussion of Findings

i. The study revealed that ECOWAS has acquired many decisions but few are implemented with additional challenges of meeting targets. The ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) for example, was aimed to promote cooperation and integration among members of ECOWAS through trade liberalisation and progress towards the creation of common market. However, the decision making for ETLS and other related issues, remained with the Presidency and other bureaucratic institutions. Since the policymaking process did not consider the involvement of consumers and other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from the grassroots at the initial stage itself, the implementation of ETLS was fraught with challenges.

   A major challenge discovered by the study is that ECOWAS Member States trade more with the rest of the world and in particularly with developed economies than with Member States. For instance, Nigeria's major trade partners are India and China, Mali's are China and the EU, Sierra Leone and Gambia's major trade partners are the EU, while Burkina Faso and Niger mostly trade with Europe, among others. The study established that the lack of political will among ECOWAS members to submit part of their sovereignty, lack of trust among member-states, refusal to fully implement the free movement of goods, persons and right of establishment provisions by member-states, language barrier, and colonial differences as challenges to proper implementation of the policies and protocol studied.

The finding is in agreement with an earlier study conducted by Jung (2017) In terms of the size of the overall trade, Africa takes only 3% of the share of world trade whereas 15% of theworld population resides in the continent. This discrepancy between many regionaltrade agreements and small intra-continent trade share tells that regional economicintegrations in Africa are very unsuccessful trade liberalization policies to promotetrade.

ii. The study revealed that the establishment of an inter-state road transit trade for landlocked countries, border control and restrictions on the movement of businesspersons and introduction of region-wide motor-vehicle insurance are some of the measures taken by Nigeria government to ensure ECOWAS protocol on trade liberalization improved on economic development in Nigeria. However, the study equally discovered that Nigeria's restrictive trade policies (import and export restrictions) and protectionism is also an impending factor. Arbitrary border closures and import bans on certain goods from other African countries negates the idea of free trade.

The finding is in tandem with the submission by Olagunju (2021) that the closure of the Nigerian-Benin border in 1984-1986, 1996, 2003; the import ban on 100 Ghanaian items in 2003 and the border closure in 2019 (of which 4 of the borders were opened in December 2020) are good instances. Up to 26 goods are prohibited from being imported into the country whereas, the CBN has also denied foreign exchange at official market rates to importers of more than 40 other goods (CBN, 2015).

The finding also agrees with the position of Proshare (2021) that, efforts of the Nigerian government to sustain industrialization and increase non-oil exports, amount to nothing as the plans, policies and incentives they have set in place are yet to yield a positive result. This is probably because the institutional framework put in place to implement such policies are either weak or incompetent. In addition, political elites put their interest before the national commitment.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the idea of sub-regional integration is a pragmatic move towards economic growth and sustainable development though the challenges are huge as some are largely self-imposed by member States. Such challenges include crisis of confidence, unending conflicts, poor financial integration, restriction of movement, irrational expulsion of citizens of member States, political instability and language barrier among others. The study therefore argued that the challenges could be addressed so that the citizens could enjoy the gains of integration. In addition, as rightly observed by Orji (2012), ECOWAS still hold for enlargement of the local markets, realization of the economies of scale and the strengthening of the bargaining position in global negotiation though the situation today may look contrary.

Nigeria subscribes to the view that regional integration can serve as building block to attaining economic growth and development. Indeed, regional integration schemes can play a very useful role in reform and further liberalization of policy. In this regard, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and the attendant Common External Tariff (CET) are noteworthy. The advantages of the Common External Tariff in integration schemes are well known. They are first and foremost a measure of the degree of integration among contracting parties. An obvious advantage of the CET is that adopting it is a way of reducing asymmetry in the distribution of gains and losses. The CET thus helps lessen potential tensions between members by lowering external tariffs, this helps to generate the classical gains from trade. It is evident that trade liberalisation will, over time, continue to play important role in determining a country's trade relations in the global world. Beyond concluded trade agreements, these established networks greatly lower the risk and uncertainly involved in world trade. However, openness to trade should be accompanied by sound policies in areas such as infrastructure to provide sufficiency in electricity generation and distribution; and efficiency in transport and communication; market facilitation; competition; education and governance in order to achieve its desired goal.

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The conclusion of this study is also that the ECOWAS free-trade arrangement in the sub-region has not really aided the industrialisation process in Nigeria. To reverse this trend, the Federal Government of Nigeria must take drastic actions first to support and promote her local industries to become more efficient and competitive and second by putting a stop to the excessive smuggling/importation of foreign goods into the country through her immediate neighbours.

Recommendations

i. Appropriate strategies or frameworks to deal with the excessive smuggling of foreign goods into Nigeria through her immediate neighbours must be put in place. The study recommends the creation of an agency called Border Defence and Management Agency (BODMA) by the Federal Government of Nigeria. In order to stop or reduce, the excessive importation of foreign goods into Nigeria and reap the industrial benefits of the scheme, Nigeria must venture into the domestic development and acquisition of high technology oriented industries or sectors so as to acquire the momentum or impetus for widening and diversifying the productive base of the economy.
ii. Respective Governments including Nigeria should see to it that policies geared towards effective implementation of the trade agreement should not just be formulated but also be set in motion. The Machinery put in place to carry out these policy actions should be up and doing. Individuals and firms in Nigeria and Africa in general should look inwards and try to change the mind-set of patronizing products and services from non-African countries. It will increase intra-African trade and complement the commitments of the African leaders in the success of the AfCFTA.

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