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Ecowas and Regional Integration in West Africa: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

Ikenna Ukpabi Unya

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia, Abia State.

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ABSTRACT

The formation of ECOWAS was seen as the beginning of a new era in the history of economic cooperation in West Africa. Its overall aim was to promote cooperation and integration, with a view to establishing an economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development in West Africa. Since the emergence of ECOWAS, the organization has been saddled with a lot of challenges and intra-regional crises without much economic integration being achieved. The paper sets to examine why ECOWAS lags behind in its quest to integrating the economies of West African region. Basically, the study is primarily qualitative. The findings reveal that ECOWAS needs serious reforms in order to maximally benefit from integration mechanisms the way other regions have done. The prospects are great. The paper concludes by affirming that the current economic turmoil afflicting the region may be seen as a temporary setback, and that a new ECOWAS with a new set of leaders will emerge to realize the dreams of the founding fathers of one larger political and economic union.

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1.0 Introduction

Regional organizations are a major feature of the global economic system. It expresses the interstates efforts towards integration or cooperation. Thus, the formation of ECOWAS was seen as the beginning of a new era in the history of economic cooperation in West Africa. It was seen as an extension of the liberation movements and an effort to construct geographical entities that were economically viable and politically united. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed on 28th May, 1975 by the Heads of States and Governments of the Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Although Mauritania left the organization in 2002, thus, reducing the number to fifteen (15).

Before the formation of ECOWAS, there were about four major regional attempts according to Onwuka (1982) at creating an economic community in West Africa. They include:

- a) The Liberia's initiative that set up the interim organization for West African Economic Cooperation
- b) The ECA-FAO sponsored Bamako Conference on coordination of industries that would have led to the establishment of a regional iron and steel industry
- c) The ECA sponsored Niamey Conference that was largely aimed at enlarging the CEAO and
- d) The Nigeria-Togo initiatives that led to the creation of ECOWAS in 1975.

The formal launching of ECOWAS was at the end of the first quarter of 1972, after several meetings between Nigeria and Togo. Nigeria and Togo issued an official statement indicating their decision to create an enduring economic organization, an embryonic West African Economic

Community, between their two nations. The two countries instituted a commission of experts to study the workability of the new association. The experts according to Onwuka (1982) met in Lagos to study and make recommendations on the proposed association. The conference agreed to work out broad areas of cooperation in such areas as transport and communication, trade, industry, and movement of factors between Nigeria and Togo.

The treaty was first studied by the ministers of West African States at a meeting in Lome in December, 1973, where the basic principles for the establishment of ECOWAS were adopted. Other subsequent meetings were in Accra, in February, 1974 and Monrovia in January, 1975, and the treaty establishing ECOWAS was adopted by delegates from four English speaking and seven French speaking countries. And it was submitted to the Heads of States Conference in Lagos, and was signed by eleven Heads of States and Four plenipotentiaries of fifteen West African countries on 28th of May, 1975 (Onwuka, 1982). Thus, ECOWAS was created according to Ichim (2006) with the purpose of becoming the most important international instrument for economic cooperation and development in West Africa. Its formation was seen by many as a decisive attempt to integrate the economies of West Africa inwards in order to achieve collective self-reliance, promote cooperation and development, remove barriers to free trade in the region, increase the free movement of people, labour, goods and capital across national borders, for the purpose of raising the standard of living of the people and maintaining economic stability amongst its members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent.

However, since the emergence of ECOWAS, the organization has been saddled with a lot of challenges – both internal and external challenges. ECOWAS has spent the substantial part of its existence on resolution of crises in

Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau, without much economic integration being achieved. The intra-community trade is another source of worry. The facts are, to say the least, very depressing when we look at the structure of the community trade and ECOWAS trade with other regions. ECOWAS trade amounts to approximately 11% of the sub-region's total trade with the world. According to the ECOWAS Handbook of the International Trade (1998), intra-community trade stood at \$1,813m for total imports and \$2,539m for total exports. Compare this with the region's import from and export to Europe of \$7,525m and \$8,114m respectively for 1997. Thus, the intra-regional level of investment and industrial development still remain much undeveloped. And the vision of unifying the two currency zones of the region – the sterling area and the franc zone is yet to be realized.

The questions that have been asked by a good number of scholars and policy makers are: given the objectives and visions of ECOWAS, has it been able to achieve its goals of integrating the economies of West African states? What are the factors responsible for the low percentage of intra-regional trade among members compared to the percentage outside the community? Does ECOWAS have a good future prospect? These issues and challenges of integration among the ECOWAS members are the driving force that informed this study. To achieve this aim, the paper will be divided into sections. With this introductory overview, we shall proceed to conceptualize integration and perspectives on ECOWAS, the third part discusses the challenges of regional integration in West Africa, and the fourth section examines the prospects of ECOWAS while the fifth concludes the study. We now proceed to limit the level of ambiguity by clarifying the concept of integration.

2.0 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Integration

In general literature, one can find countless definitions of integration. For instance, integration was viewed by Furtak (2015) as a process of extension of competences of community (sectoral integration), of consolidation of a community by transfer of competences by the members in favour of the institutions of a community (vertical integration) and territorial enlargement of a community (horizontal integration). Frei (1985) had suggested distinguishing between three dimensions of integration: Integration as a common political decision-making (institutional dimension), integration as a common awareness (social psychological dimension), and integration as societal interdependence (dimension of transaction). The first dimension observes the institutions that have been established within the organization, the decision-making process, the binding character of the decisions and the fields of cooperation.

The second dimension verifies the existence of a common identity among the people of the member states. The third dimension looks at the liaison between the included societies and examines the trans-border cooperation of companies and the exchange of tourists.

To be sure, regionalism is a useful formula to dealing with the new challenges the international system is facing today. It brings about the opportunity to improve cooperation and cohesion, to bring stability and, thus, to improve social problems. As noted by Ericson (2015), regionalism provides peace and security through an initial and deeper economic integration over time. With regard to West Africa, regional

integration is seen as a rational response to the difficulties faced by a region with many small national markets and landlocked countries. It also reflects a growing appreciation of the benefits to be derived from regional unity and co-operation in meeting the challenges posed by increasingly competitive world market. Nieuwkerk (2008) writing in favour of integration among the developing countries of Africa reasoned that integration can strengthen their efforts to manage relations with powerful external actors and facilitate the expansion of markets that will aid industrialization.

Regional integration today is very popular practically all over the world. Numerous integration organisations have been established and old ones revived after the end of the Cold War. But, what is regional integration? How can it be defined? The concept of integration is elusive to define. It has no generally accepted definition. The term is used sometimes in a confusing manner, in everyday language as well as in theorizing related to integration. The term has been used to describe both a process as well as an end of the process.

This problem has been recognized throughout the history of integration theorizing. Haas (1971) described these problems more than 40 years ago in the following way:

Even fifteen years of work have not quite sufficed to create a consensus on a clear delimitation. Amitai Etzioni treats integration as the terminal condition, not as the process of getting there. Philip Jacob and Henry Teune regard integration both as a process and as a terminal condition achieved when an unspecified threshold is passed by an unspecified mix of ten process variables. Karl Deutch speaks of integration as a process leading to the creation of security communities; I consider it a process for the creation of political communities defined in institutional and attitudinal terms, a condition also described by Jacobs and Teune. Federalists, finally see the end of the integration process in the growth of a federal union among the constituent nations.

So, it is obvious that we are certainly not lacking different possibilities to define this phenomenon, but on the other hand, we are still missing a clear definition of what we mean by the process and its end state after more than half a century of theorizing. Laursen (2008), reports that there were many discussions in the literature on how to define the concept. It was for instance discussed whether integration refers to a process or an end product. Of course the two can be combined according to Laursen, which, means that integration can be defined as a process that leads to a certain state of affairs.

Mitrany (1933) perhaps, one of the pioneer integration scholars viewed integration as the collective governance and material interdependence between states. Mitrany felt that states can integrate in limited functional, technical, and or economic areas. Thus, international agencies would meet human needs, aided by knowledge and expertise; which invariably would attract loyalty of the populations and stimulate their participation and expand the area of integration. Haas, (1968) defined integration as follows:

The process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states. The end result of a process of political integration is a new political community, superimposed over the pre-existing national states.

Haas shared his view on the processual nature of integration with other prominent integration theorists of the time, such as Lindberg and Deutsch.

Deutsch et al (1957), for instance, defined integration as “attainment, within a territory, of a ‘sense of community’ and institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a ‘long’ time, dependable expectations of ‘peaceful change’ among its population.” When a group of people or states have been integrated this way they constitute according to Deutsch et al (1957) a “security community”. ‘Amalgamation’, on the other hand, was used by Deutsch and his collaborators to refer to the “formal merger of two or more previously independent units into a single larger unit, with some type of common government”.

Lindberg (1963) defined integration (1) as the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs; (2) the process whereby political actors in several distinct settings are persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new centre. Lindberg considered his own concept of integration more cautious according to Laursen (2008) than that of Haas. Central to it was the development of devices and processes for arriving at collective decisions by means other than autonomous action by national governments.

These definitions of integration emphasize dominantly the political dimension of integration, but integration can also have many other dimensions. Integration is not only ever-closer cooperation of states in a political field, or evolution of a collective decision making system among states over time as Lindberg (1971) described political integration. It can also take place, for example, in the fields of economics, security and environmental issues. Balassa (1973) apparently defining integration from the economic perspective declares that integration denotes the bringing together of parts into a whole as a free trade relationship between independent states with national economies. Balassa moved ahead to define *economic integration* as the process or state of affairs which encompasses measures designed to abolish restrictions between economic units belonging to different nations or the absence of various forms of discrimination between national economies.

However, there is a distinction between economic integration and cooperation. For Balassa (1973), the term *cooperation* embraces actions aimed at lessening discrimination whereas *economic integration* comprises measures that are aimed at the suppression of some forms of discrimination. For instance, international agreement and trade policies belong to the category of international cooperation while the removal of trade barriers is an act of economic integration. Economic integration according to Balassa can take various forms that represent varying degrees of integration which are free trade areas, a customs union, a common market, an economic union and a complete economic integration.

If Balassa differentiated economic integration and cooperation, it was Bourenane (1997) that cleared the conceptual ambiguities of *regionalism*, *regional integration* and *regional cooperation*. Bourenane looks at the concept of regionalism as a regional approach to problems solving including regional integration, regional cooperation, or both. Bourenane argues that regional integration does not always

lead to unification as it is understood by some scholars. He went historical by giving the example of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which had successfully integrated economically but is far from constituting political union. Similarly, a union can exist without integration according to Bourenane, as was the case with the colonial Unions of South Africa.

To avoid confusion, Bourenane (1997) defined integration as the pooling of resources for a common purpose by two or more sets of partners belonging to different states. Based on this definition, it is clear that the unions imposed by colonial powers in Africa (French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, The Southern African Customs Unions etc.) were not the outcome of an integration process. These unions resulted from the outside imposition of unification policies on integrated partners and geographic areas. Viewed in this way, a union according to Bourenane can be the result of either integration or the submission of several contiguous areas to the same authority, with or without recourse to violence. In summary, Bourenane brilliantly distinguished regional integration from associated concepts along three main line: (a) it is voluntary (unions may or may not be voluntary), (b) it is collectively undertaken, brining into play the concept of community building (in contrast to the contractual and temporary nature of regional cooperation) and (c) it is geographically defined (in contrast to the notion of economic integration in the generic sense of the term).

2.2 ECOWAS

The goal of economic integration in West Africa according to Abutudu (1988) is to free the sub-region from external dependence. If political independence must be transformed into economic, the unviable economies of West African states must be rationalized through a merging process. Considering integration within the context of ECOWAS, Asiwaju (1983) asserts that, broadly, there have been two distinct but interrelated levels at which efforts at regional integration have been directed in West Africa, viz, the strictly functional and the rather emphatically political or constitutional types. According to him, the distinction between the two is analogous to the principles which led David Apter and James Coleman, in a joint study, to distinguish between what they called, “interstate functional unifications”, designed to provide collaborations of several distinct sovereign states for common political, economic, social and cultural task, on the one hand, and, on the other, the “super-state political unification”. In the views of Asiwaju, ECOWAS belongs to the functional category and has as predecessors, not only the post-independence inter-state associations of the former French Tropical African possessions such as the *Union Africaine et Malagach de Co-operation Economique* (UAMCE), where the formation were facilitated by the fact of a centralized European colonial heritage. Its ancestors, Asiwaju further avers, must also been seen to include these organs and institutions, established in the period of European colonial rule, which worked towards the purpose of regional integration.

The performance in this regard, according to Crowder (1968) was more remarkable in the French sphere, where the organic conception of government constituted the base of a rigidly centralized administration, which in turn helped the course of integration among the French West African colonies. French West, according to Crowder, was integrated not only administratively, but also in the economic and cultural sense.

In addition to a common currency, there was the tremendous uniformity of the impact of the French language which enabled this sector of West African sub-region to hang on together as a distinct political zone.

In British West Africa, Crowder (1968) posits that the approach to administration was decentralization. But even here, efforts at inter-state integration were not completely lacking. Institutions and organs of integration included the establishment of a common West African Court of Appeal, Common Currency and Marketing Boards. Of more direct relevance to ECOWAS, Crowder maintains, were the series of inter-colonial state relationships that were encouraged between the French and British Colonies which now constitute the bulk of independent states in the West African sub-region and therefore the dominant elements in ECOWAS.

Abutudu (1988) identified three major tendencies in the literature on West African integration depending on whether there is explicit recognition of the structural framework within which the integration process unfolds. In the first case, ECOWAS is seen as an augmented market that will help reduce overhead production cost, introduce lower prices, which in turn would stimulate demand and accelerate economic activity in the sub-region. Conceived as such, the structural framework within which ECOWAS exists and operates is treated as given. The issue according to Abutudu becomes the adoption of those optimizing measures under which an integrated market of the European model will be created. Thus, problems of integration and their solutions will now hinge on what Udokang (1978) sees as reasonableness of the demands and expectations of the respective units, the capacity of the member states to compromise and the quality of the community's leadership.

The second major tendency according to Abutudu (1988) are those who take cognizance of the structures of integration on but assumes that ECOWAS itself is the ideal vehicle for extricating individual members from constraints it imposes on national development. The third group according to Abutudu points out that the capacity of African states to embark on integration schemes is particularly affected by their structural connection to the international economy. The works Jalloh (1980) and Nnoli (1978) stand out. Jalloh observes that the crisis of African integration is traceable to the fact that they are designed to act within the existing international economic framework rather than transforming it. Nnoli proffers a similar argument when he points to the conditioning impact of the external orientation of African economies on their integration scheme.

In the final analysis, apart from the third group, most of the existing literatures on West African integration do not effectively locate the process within the conditioning impact of the external orientation which we can describe as the effects of globalization on ECOWAS. In essence, an adequate analysis of the character of the integration process in West Africa must recognize the historical and concrete manifestation of the accumulation process in the sub-region, and the specific economic forms assumed by member states of ECOWAS as a result of their participation in the world economy which conditions the integration process of the sub-region.

3.0 Challenges of Regional Integration in West Africa

ECOWAS has not been able to record any appreciable impact on the international arena because the member states' economies are still too weak within the existing trade arrangements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to exert

meaning pressure to their benefits. Essien (2006) cries out that ECOWAS remains of marginal interest to the western countries. Apart from Nigeria's oil export to the USA and Niger's uranium to France and possibly France's continuous alliance with its former colonies,

ECOWAS is only a source of strife and of economic, demographic and environmental crises. Its relevance to the West may be in the form of its ECOMOG forces in the security issues in the region and saving the western nations from direct involvements in foreign conflicts.

Chambas (2007) identified the following as some of the major challenges of ECOWAS:

- i. Wide proliferation of small arm and light weapons. It is estimated that about 10 million arms are easily and currently available throughout the community which constitutes one of the causes of extended conflicts in the region.
- ii. Respect for Human Rights and Civil Liberties. Human rights and civil liberties abuses are a big challenge which stem from bad governments. Chambas affirms that ECOWAS is building a network of National Human Rights Committees with international partners to address respect for human rights challenge.
- iii. Ensuring credible, transparent, free and fair elections. This is difficult because there are many crises in this area. Chambas observes that there are positive examples from many countries in the region such as Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin etc where opposition parties had won elections.
- iv. Migration. Migration is a very important challenge in West Africa because the youth do not see any future within the region and therefore are risking their lives to reach Europe or America. Economic opportunities must be created for the youth to stay and help develop the region.
- v. Drug Trafficking and Money Laundering. West Africa is a soft spot for drug trafficking and money laundering where organized groups use the region as a transport point because of weak and control of the community borders. Chambas noted that ECOWAS is working with the the UN Drug Control regional office in in Dakar to address the issue.
- vi. Global Warming. Global warming presents yet another challenge to the region which was exemplified by this year's severe flooding across West Africa. Chambas advises the ECOWAS leaders to focus on the management of common resources such as river basins, lagoons and other fragile ecosystem.

Other challenges affecting West African integration include the following:

a) The absence of a development and integration culture has been pointed out by scholars as one of the factors affecting integration in West Africa. One of such scholars is Abass Bundu. Bundu (1993) posed these questions to ECOWAS leaders: how many member states have drawn up national development plans or programmes with regional considerations or the regional market as their point of reference? What measures have been introduced by governments as incentives for their business communities to venture into cross-border investments and transactions, and what encouragement are ordinary people offered to think in West African terms? An integration culture is not yet fully developed in West Africa.

b) The differences in political ideology to some extent have influenced attitudes and approaches to regional integration in West Africa. Despite the linguistic, legal and administrative barriers inherited from colonial era, the status of Nigeria as a

sub-regional power with over 65 percent of the population and trade throws up several issues. The most important of these suspicions of Nigeria in Francophone West Africa and a lingering fear that it might dominate them. Bundu (1993) observes that Nigeria overshadows every other country in the region several times over in terms of population, gross domestic product, and natural resources endowment. The French tend to provoke and sustain this fear of domination, as they strive to maintain their sphere of influence in the region. It is this intervention of the French and its quest to maintain a sphere of influence in the West African region against the peoples' wish for integrated and economically viable West Africa that made Obiozor (1993) to declare:

There are certainly some countries, some leaders and some powerful people world-wide who it is in their interest to see Africa and Africans as non-actors or passive observers, chronic recipients of international generosity, marginalized and irrelevant, now and throughout the 21st century. It is our duty, indeed our obligation to prove the peoples and countries wrong by doing our best in whatever capacity we find ourselves to improve the African condition in a trinity of ways – political, economic and military/strategic.

c) Monetary and Exchange Rate Problems. The existing differences in the monetary and exchange rate policies of the countries of West Africa both before and especially after the adoption of structural adjustment programmes by ECOWAS members have adversely affected cross border trade. Obiozor, Olukoshi and Obi (1993) lament that the difference in monetary policies between the sterling areas and the franc zone has remained the main cause of the distortion in economic relationships in West Africa. They used Nigeria as a case study to explain how differences in monetary and exchange rate problems affect integration in West Africa. According to them: the devaluation of the naira by some 1,000 percent within six years has made products from Nigeria (both those produced locally and those imported) cheaper and more attractive to its franc zone neighbours. The result has been an apparently favourable balance of trade for Nigeria and the decline of the industries of neighbouring countries whose goods are no longer competitive in the Nigerian market and in the face of Nigerian imports into their home markets.

Obiozor, Olukoshi and Obi (1993) argued that it may appear on the face of things that Nigeria is gaining from the increased exports of its products and cash crops, while the industries of neighbouring countries go to ruin, it must be pointed out that in reality, very little is gained in terms of returns to Nigeria because of the convertibility of the CFA which is very attractive to cross border money launderers, speculators, traders and others seeking to transfer millions of naira from Nigeria to European banks. Obiozor, Olukoshi and Obi advised by suggesting that if any reasonable progress must be recorded in the economic integration of West Africa, there should be a dialogue aimed at the harmonization of the monetary policies.

d) Lack of commitment among the ECOWAS Leaders. It has been observed by scholars and commentators of African politics that Africa's current economic decline and social discontent reflect a leadership crisis on the continent. If this is true of individual countries, it is equally valid for the regional integration process. It is a well-documented feat in history that early industrialized nations as well as the Southeast Asian newly industrialized countries (NIC) benefited from the technology or industrial innovations of other nations because

of the kind of quality leaders they had. The US and Germany according to Owugah (2003) industrialized to a large extent by using British manufacturing innovations, Japan followed a similar pattern by copying US technological innovations, while Korea and other Asian tigers similarly achieved their technological development by copying from the US and Japanese products and process technology but Africa or West Africa are yet to achieve technological breakthrough. If African leaders can come up with a clear and well-articulated policy on technological development, sound macroeconomic policies, then regional integration will no longer be for the developed regions alone.

4.0 The Prospects of ECOWAS

ECOWAS no doubt has strong and brighter prospects of becoming the ASEAN of Africa. The documents of the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS (2009) in its analysis of the performance of ECOWAS stated that though the results of the integrational efforts might have been clearly below expectations, there are, however, promising signs which indicate better prospects for the future. The document observed that recent events in the political and economic scenery of West Africa have gradually helped to remove the principal obstacles to integration. Among these are:

- i. The advent of democracy in most ECOWAS countries, particularly, in Nigeria which is the dominant economy in West Africa;
- ii. The gradual withdrawal of the state from the sectors of productive activity, and the realization that private sector must be the mainspring of growth and economic integration;
- iii. The adoption of strategy for accelerating the ECOWAS process of integration in order to create a single regional market based on trade liberalization, to establish a common external tariff and harmonize economic and financial policies;
- iv. The harmonization of the programmes of ECOWAS and UEMOA in connection with the acceleration of the process of integration in West Africa;
- v. The liberalization of national markets and external trade that resulted from adjustment and reform programmes that led to some amount of convergence in macroeconomic policies;
- vi. The common challenge that is thrown by the creation of trade blocs in other regions of the world and globalization which risks marginalizing Africa, this makes it necessary to accelerate the transition towards an autonomous and self-financed development within the framework of African integration;
- vii. The restructuring of the Executive Secretariat and ECOWAS Fund within the framework of the improvement of their operational procedures.

The document concludes by pleading with the ECOWAS member states to lean on these prospects for enhancing the process of regional integration and accept the development challenge of the 21st century. To be sure, one can argue with conviction that the prospects for closer cooperation and integration among countries of West Africa are bright. Recent trends and developments show many of the countries to be on the side of increased commitment to the sub-regional cooperation and integration. Adetula (2004) observes that this resurgence of interest in closer cooperation and integration among West African States was largely influenced by developments at the national, regional and global levels. Adetula argues that: at the global level, the external environment has become less friendly to African economies. International economic environment has been increasingly

characterized by depressed world commodity market, discriminatory protection, debt crises, and the continuing distortions by TNCs. On the positive side, there is new global consensus on the validity of the basic principles of regionalism. The dominant idea, which is rooted in contemporary political thoughts, is that regional cooperation is still a very effective means of promoting the goals of self-reliance and economic development.

This arguably is underscored by the fact that the most powerful and wealthiest countries in the world-in Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia – now pursue prosperity through regional economic cooperation. As expected, many African countries are already responding to the global realities that have made regional cooperation very imperative.

At the level of national politics, Adetula argues that some progress has been recorded with respect to political reforms in many African countries. This in turn is enhancing the capacity of West African countries for regional integration in Africa.

5.0 Conclusion

From our discussions so far on ECOWAS and regional integration in West Africa, it is clear that the state of affairs of West African sub-region is far from being satisfactory. Given the precarious environment facing ECOWAS particularly under the trend of globalization, ECOWAS cannot afford to lag behind in its development. We recommend that:

- ECOWAS states maintain high and sustainable rate of economic growth and of exports. This requires them to sustain their economic reforms.
- ECOWAS members need to offer attractive investment opportunities for foreign companies. They should also encourage private sector participation in many infrastructure projects.
- The governments of the region must demonstrate both the political will and willingness to implement ratified protocols, treaties and programmes. They must take necessary remedial steps towards fiscal restraint, currency flexibility and introduction of supervisory mechanisms to keep pace with financial liberalization.

Due diligence must be accorded to:

- Development of physical and institutional infrastructure
- Peace and security
- Prudent economic and financial reforms to improve the business environment and improve the competitiveness of the region.
- Deepening of intra-African trade

In conclusion, regional integration can be seen as the modality that West Africa has to refine to meet the challenges of the inevitable onslaught of globalization. The current economic turmoil affecting West Africa represents only a temporary though painful setback to the onward march of West African economies. Hopefully, the bad leadership in West Africa will give way to excellent leadership as was envisaged by the ECOWAS founding fathers.

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