Twenty-First Century Challenges Facing ECOWAS

Sani Shehu

University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Law and International Relations, Box.21300. Gongbadak campus, Kuala Terengganu.

Article history:
Received 23 Feb 2015
Accepted 6 March 2015
Available online 28 March 2015

Keywords:
ECOWAS, Regional Integration, West Africa, Challenges.

ABSTRACT

ECOWAS is a regional organization of fifteen West African countries, formed on May 28, 1975 to promote economic integration and cooperation among the member states, the West African region is rich enough in terms of hydrological resources, trans-boundaries rivers, lakes, water basins, oil and mineral resources, abundant human, land, energy and river navigation for transport system etc., but still west Africa left behind in terms of development and global competition due to some challenges that cripple and undermine its regional integration and cooperation. The primary objective of this paper is to discuss the challenges that hindered its development right from the time it was formed almost half of the decade doing nothing in global competition. The main results are the challenges that are discussed in the paper as the main critical issues, in conclusion, these persistent challenges need to be addressed and redressed.

INTRODUCTION

ECOWAS is a regional organization of fifteen West African countries, formed on May 28, 1975, with the Signing of Treaty in Lagos, Nigeria, its primary objective is to promote economic integration and cooperation among the member states so as to create economic and monetary union for achieving economic growth, as well as development in the region [1].

According to Jacqueline Mambara as cited in Amadu, regional integration means “the collaboration of countries which are close to each other in terms of economic linkages and geographical location to sign an agreement on trade and other economic activities” [2]. According to European Union as cited in Niekerk, it defines regional integration as “the process of removing political, physical, economic and social barriers which sharply differentiated one country from its neighbours, and formation of economic linkages which will manage and share resources among countries for achieving common national goals by common accord”[3].

Although, West African region has all what it needs for integration and development, still it faces some serious challenges that need urgent solution. According to African Development Bank, “West Africa almost possessed half of the African continent hydrological resources, trans-boundaries rivers, lakes, water basins(28 out of 60), oil and mineral resources and estimated 1,300 billion potentials. If all these resources are utilized and improved, the region will undoubtedly benefit from food security, sustainable development, resources boom, river navigation for transport system and generate hydropower” [4].

1.1. Challenges:
1.2. Lack of Adequate Regional Infrastructural Facilities:

For transportation that are the backbone of cooperation and regional integration such as Rail ways, airlines, water ways, and roads, so many African leaders tried to solve the problem, but still persistent. According Human Development Report as cited in Ibrahim et al., “in terms of social welfare and human development the one of the main regional objectives, but the ECOWAS member states face the severe problem of human right violation, social frustration, ethnic and religious tensions. The majority of the countries live in poverty like Burkina Faso, Benin, Gambia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria, over 70% of their population live on 1 or 2 US dollars per day’’ [5]. West African region is still left behind in terms of human development, whereby human right, social welfare, education, health care delivery, transport, poverty eradication, religious practices and other human needs were all neglected by the heads of governments and states.

Corresponding Author: Sani Shehu, University Sultan Zainal Abidin, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Law and International Relations, Box.21300. Gongbadak campus, Kuala Terengganu.
1.3. Lack of Single Market for Free Trade in the Region:
Lack of single market in West Africa undermined the integration policy whereby no sufficient free flow of goods, services, human and capital across the boundaries due to high custom duties and charges, unlike in E.U where single market plays a vital role for free flow of goods, services, human and capital that make it comfortable and active for integration and cooperation of European Union. Thomas states that, “In reality, integration leads to development, African Union Summit in Abuja in 1991 tried to establish an African common market to be based on the five sub-region integration which include: West, North, South, East and Central Africa respectively” [6].

1.4. Lack of Single Monetary Union:
The sub-region have been attempted to unify their monetary currency that will serve as a legal tender and clearing house in the region for ease of regional integration and cooperation. An imitation of a successful use of single monetary currency from EU as a legal tender known as Euro currency. According to Awoko, “The year 2015 has been recognized by the West Africa Monetary Institution as a year actualizing a single currency by the member of ECOWAS” [7].

1.5. Political Instability:
West African countries are among the most unstable countries in Africa due to the political crisis and instability. Traced back to their period of independence, majority of West African governments are not interested in allowing the formation of multiple parties in their various countries. Bamfo writes that, “The ECOWAS member states lack free and fair election. As a result, their leaders ending up as an authoritarian government due to one party system commonly practiced. Due to this, spite of wars had erupted the region such as civil wars in Nigeria in 1967, Liberia in 1989, Sierra Leone in 1991 and Cote d’Ivoire in 2010 which caused extensive violation of human right. Wars had several reasons starting from political, cultural and economic instability directly or indirectly harmed the people of West Africa” [8].

1.6. Security Challenge:
Security threats to the existing governments of ECOWAS member states have mainly started as a result of the internal rebellion against the ruling governments that caused the formation of other groups of rebels to fight. For, e.g., Nigerian civil war in 1960. According to Cham, “The member states have border tensions between neighbouring countries, such as Guinea and Sierra Leone, Nigeria and now ECOWAS member on Bakassi peninsula (Cameroon), attack and counter-attack between Guinea and Sierra Leone on Massadou, Pamalap and Macenta villages” [9].

1.7. Lack of Collective Regional Will:
ECOWAS in reality is declining from its real position of efficiency in collective conflict management in the region, its initiatives, policies, and decisions were more of rhetoric rather than practice. For instance, Malian crisis that arose recently, the majority of its members contributed nothing to end the conflict, and those who contributed, are not sufficiently adequate. Except Nigeria, Niger and Senegal that expressed their willingness in combating the rebels position.

Nwoke stated that “Lack of political will and governance are threats and challenges to the achievement of the common market in the region. Political will is the source of integrating the dynamic policies of the state’s agenda while the internalization of the community’s policies is essential for the attainment of its agenda. The main problem is not the record of the implementation of the numerous community acts and decisions, but lack of political will by the member states to implement the protocol signed, most of the policies are not implemented” [10]. Policy formulation is well documented and presented with all goals and budget for regional integration and cooperative development, the negative side and the threat when it comes to policy implementation due to lack of political will.

1.8. Lack of Legislative Power and Full Legitimacy:
The main problem of ECOWAS parliament is lack of legitimate and legislative power which cripples its roles and duties as regional community parliament, unlike in EU parliament whereby it has legislative power to enact law and play its roles accordingly without intervention from the Authority of Heads of States and Governments. For ECOWAS, parliament needs to be given this legislative power to discharge its duties, roles, and enact laws. Magbagbeola said that, “the parliament lacks legislative powers to make law, unlike national parliament that have completely constitutional mandate to make legally binding laws. As it considered to be transitional, it acts in an advisory and consultative capacity since it lacks legislative, binding, oversight or budgetary power, it just performs an advisory role on critical integration issues such as energy, human right, community citizenship questions and so on, the parliament is regarded as a toothless dog barking but never biting” [11].
1.9. Lack of Uniform Procedure of Recruiting Parliament Members:

ECOWAS Parliament members are not directly elected by their respective nations as discussed by Gasiokwu, “Community parliament members are appointed from their national parliaments to represent their nations in the parliament, unlike in European parliament where members are elected based on direct universal adult suffrage with uniform procedure in all Member States and on broad party platform that cuts across national alignment, due to this challenge, community parliamentarians are not direct accountable and transparent to the people” [12].

1.10. Colonial Historical Background:

Colonial impact is another challenge to ECOWAS community parliament due to colonial administration that caused a sharp difference among the member states; France colonized some, by Britain and others by Portugal. ECOWAS community members are more answerable to their former colonial masters than even ECOWAS community because of economic and political ties and linkages with the colonial masters. For instance, Côte d’Ivoire and Malian crisis are more French intervention rather than ECOMOG intervention.

As stated by Bundu cited in Chijioke, ‘‘colonialism played a negative role and left the region divided into sentiment of ex-British colonies (Anglophone), former French colonies (Francophone) and Portuguese former colonies. These divisions have constituted barriers in the integration process, each former colony prefers to deal with their colonial master than their fellow member states, and the imperialist countries maintain their ex-colonies as spares of interest and traditional allies for exploitation. France has been active in exploitative export from its former colonies and intervening directly in the politics of the region as well as maintenance of military base in its former colonies which frustrates the establishment of ECOWAS and its objectives’’[13].

Conclusion:

In nutshell, West African leaders have to witness these problems and think on how to solve them as they thought on the creation of ECOWAS, because these are the significant challenges to them and the region in totality due to the thousands of resources in the area but producing nothing in global competition and development.

REFERENCES