The Roles of Ecowas Parliament on Regional Integration of the West African Sub-Region

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A B S T R A C T

Parliaments are created globally to give vague legitimacy to good governance under democratic system of government, and the representatives must be elected by the people, so the ECOWAS parliament is entitled to have this legitimacy, where members must be elected by adult people among the citizens of ECOWAS member states. The primary objective of this paper is to discuss the roles that ECOWAS parliament plays for the achievement of regional integration, economic development and cooperation in the sub-region. The main results of this paper are: Regional integration, peace and security, good governance and democracy and human development, these are primary roles of ECOWAS Parliament for the purpose of regional integration of West African region. In conclusion, Community Parliament is the most imperative among the ECOWAS institutions due to its significant roles for being the backbone of achieving the ECOWAS objectives.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

ECOWAS is a regional organization of fifteen West African countries, formed on May 28, 1975, with the Signing of Treaty in Lagos, Nigeria. ECOWAS is one of the organizations of the African Economic Community; its primary objective is to promote economic integration and cooperation among the member states.

According to Chijike, "Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on May 28, 1975 by two Generals. The main ambition is to bring cooperation and collaboration in the socio-economic policies of the region. The integration of the sub-region became unavoidable need to set up the region as well as the African continent and redress the neo-colonial challenges and prepare for the global capital-driven economy. 19th century characterised by so many changes and transformation and marked by communism, capitalism and globalisation which involve general direction of technological innovation which is the product of progressive research and experimentation in all human effort"[1]. Globalisation forced West African countries leaders to think for the creation of organization after their independence which will solve their regional problems and differences caused by their historical background of colonial administration of being British, French and Portuguese colonies.

The treaty of creating ECOWAS Parliament was signed in Abuja on August 6, 1994 and was inaugurated in 2000. It agrees that, it is a forum of consultation, dialogue and having consensus among the representatives of the people of West Africa for the achieving economic integration and cooperation and it is an assembly of the ECOWAS community. According to the ECOWAS Treaty: "There shall be an establishment of ECOWAS Community Parliament, election of the members, its composition, functions, powers and organization, all these shall be defined in the protocol"[Article 13][2].

According to Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, cited by Philip, parliament as "an assembly of law making provided under the nation's law at the national, state, province, territory, working in a parliamentary system. It is a forum for varied interests and translates it into policy decision-making. The main parliamentary functions contain representing people, law making, ratifying and incorporating international conventions into
municipal law, peace and conflict resolution in a society, and an elected parliament serves as a building blocks of democracy” [3]. But community parliament is less powerful to make law.

According to Ehigiamusoe and Udefuna, “the ECOWAS parliament is one of the ECOWAS institutions which serves as a forum for advice, dialogue, consultation, consensus and representing the West African people for the achievement of regional integration in the region” [4]. ECOWAS parliament as a group for giving meaningful advice to the people of sub-region and representing them on the issues relevant to them for regional integration and sustainable development.

Musavengana stated that, “the parliament basic role is to represent the people of sub-region and be in charge of the responsibility of member states, while that role is limited to the making of recommendations to the organs of ECOWAS and it lacks the legitimate power of making laws” [5].

According to Gebe cited in Philip, “the idea of creating community parliament started in 1994, when the authority of ECOWAS in Abuja, Nigeria decided to establish a community parliament. This was stated in protocol number A/P2/8/94. It stated the need for parliamentary forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus on any decision or declaration adopted by the Authority of Heads of States and Governments on political principles. The community parliament started its operation with fifteen national parliaments of ECOWAS member states by what the delegates are sent to serve the advisory and consultative roles” [6].

2. Compositions:

The ECOWAS community parliament has its permanent seat in Abuja, Nigeria, it agreed that the parliament will have one hundred and twenty (120) seats, but as a result of withdrawal of Mauritania from the ECOWAS, the membership reduced, as well as the seats. Each member state has a minimum of five (5) seats based on equality of states. The remaining forty (40) seats will be shared among the members based on their population given.

Representation of each member state shall be as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>s/n</th>
<th>Member States</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>Six (6) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>Seven (7) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Eight (8) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Six (6) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>Six (6) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>Six (6) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Thirty-five (35) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Six (6) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>Five (5) seats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The treaty provides that, whenever necessary, the distribution of seats will be reviewed by the authority on the recommendation of the community parliament.

3. Competence and Powers of the Community Parliament:

According to article (6) 1 of the protocol of ECOWAS parliament states that: “The Community Parliament shall be concerned with the issues of community which are relevant to fundamental human right, freedom of speech and recommend to the institutions and organs of the community” (Article 6). The parliament is entitled to advice on the issues concerning the ECOWAS community whenever consulted and specifically shall be on these areas:

1. The parliament takes into consideration of any matter concerning the community, in particular issues relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms and recommend to institutions and organs of the community.
2. The parliament may be consulted for its opinion of the issues relating to the community in the following areas:
   (a). Interconnection of telecommunication system to form an excellent community network with maximum number of extension and more accessible to rural areas.
   (b). Interconnection of communication links between member states for free movement of the person, goods, services and capitals.
   (c). To form an interconnection of energy networks among member states.
   (d). To increase cooperation and efficiency in the area of radio, television, satellite, media links and communication system among the member states and to the rest of the world.
   (e). Public health policies for the community to be formulated rationally and implemented effectively for the benefit of the community.
(f). Adjustment of education within the community to international standard and diversifying educational sector within the member countries.
(g). Youth and sports to be considered as part of ECOWAS cooperation; youth is the backbone of any society and sport improves and unites the community.
(h). Scientific and technological research.
(i). Community policy on the environment.
(l). Social integration. (m). Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in all their plenitude.

4. Roles of ECOWAS Community Parliament:

4.1 The Role of ECOWAS Community Parliament in Regional Integration:
The institution was established with the intention to enhance and strengthen the ECOWAS institutional activities by the establishing other institutions that will give a chance to the people of the sub-region to participate through dialogue, consultation and consensus. For this reason, the community parliament is crucial to regional integration representing the best hopes and yearnings of the West African people.

According to Strategic Plan of ECOWAS Parliament, one of the overall goals of the community parliament is to: "promote West African citizens through democratic representation, cooperation and integration for the achievement of economic union, raising standard of living, economic stability, fostering relationship among the member states and contributing towards the success of development in the sub-region"[7].

Magbagbeola stated that, "ECOWAS Parliament provides a forum for the people of the sub-region to participate in regional integration. It intermediates and liaises between the ECOWAS community and community’s decision-making authorities, it encourages the participation of ECOWAS citizens through collaboration with the civil society, Nongovernmental Organizations, Community-Based Organizations for democratic integration"[8].

According to Onwuka cited in Ali, economic integration is a complex system which brings integration and improves international trade, organizations and law, where the member countries share well-regularised rules in free trade, custom, common market, economic policies and political union" [9].

4.2 The Role of ECOWAS Community Parliament in Peace and Security:
In any angle of the world or region, the success of regional integration largely depends on the ability and performance of the authorities to provide peace and security as well as good governance which are the backbone of any regional integration and cooperation in any community, the ECOWAS parliament aims to prevent, manage and resolve Intra and inter-state conflict, strengthen cooperation in the areas of conflict, early warning where conflict may arise, peace-keeping operations, control of cross-border crime, international terrorism, proliferation of small arms, maintain and encourage peace and security within the community, establish institutions and formulate policies that will organize and coordinate humanitarian relief before and after war, promote preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping among the member states, constitute and deploy civilian and military force to maintain peace and restore order within the sub-region whenever necessary.

According to Bah, "ECOWAS witnesses that, its mission of peacekeeping task in 1990s was mainly in efforts to bring the end of civil war in Liberia through the use of ECOMOG (ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group) and currently the Cote d’Ivoire civil war that began in 2010, caused by political and social grievances over the citizenship." [10].

4.3 The Role of ECOWAS Community Parliament in Strengthening Democracy and Good Governance:
ECOWAS community parliament has concluded that, the majority of conflicts that arise in the region among the member states are all caused by lack of free and fair election which brings poor governance and unjust leaders. The parliament has always laid emphasis on obtaining a clear insight into the ongoing democratization process in the sub-region, since its inception. It has participated in observing and monitoring elections in many member states within the region. For instance, it participated in observing elections held in the Gambia in 2001, Burkina Faso in 2002, Guinea in May 2002, Sierra Leone in May 2002, and Guinea Bissau in July 2003, it participated in legislative, presidential and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria 12th to 19th April 2003. The Parliament was represented by team members of ECOWAS parliament assisted by the staff of its secretariat.

As stated by Robertson that, "to achieve good governance and democracy, there must be a creation of active collaboration to ensure political, social and economic priorities are settled and the voices of the poor and most vulnerable are heard in the decision-making process" [11].

4.4 The Role of ECOWAS Community Parliament in Sustainable Human Development:
The human development program was designed to contribute to the capacity welfare of ECOWAS citizens through education, creativity, women and youth empowerment, poverty reduction, economic growth and
development, and implement regional action plan for controlling, consumption and trafficking of drugs, addressing money laundering, involvement of civil society, controlling for health problems, child trafficking and abuse, child soldiers etc., by collaboration with the West African Health Organization. Parliament has shown great concern about the issue of children in the sub-region.

According to Salman, “the parliament tries to contribute towards the attainment of the MDGs, because the MDGs are essential for sustainable human development, and it was also the means of achieving meaningful life and economic growth, it reduces hunger, ensures gender equality, improves health and education, accesses potable water and sanitation which all these really improve the quality of life of people as well as standard of living in the sub-region”[12].

Conclusion:
Parliament is a law making body in any society the same with ECOWAS parliament that plays vital roles in the region right from the time it was created under the ECOWAS article that indicated the provision of the institutions. It succeeded in bringing peace and security in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire, and other West African countries, and participated in regional integration of agricultural sector, environment, water resources, human development, and infrastructural facilities etc., it succeeded in observing election in so many West African countries e.g. the Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau etc., and solved some problems of money laundering, child trafficking and abuse, child soldiers, poverty eradication, control of health issues, control of consumption and trafficking of drugs etc.

REFERENCES