

# **ECOWAS: The Dilemma of Integration in a Fragmented Sub-Region**

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## **Abstract**

*The Economic Community of West Africa is an experiment in regional cooperation. With the case study of ECOWAS, this essay evaluates both the theory and practice of regionalism as a functional approach in inter-state cooperation and regional integration. In analyzing the failures and successes of this organization, can it be argued that the signing of the ECOWAS Treaty in 1975 was merely a "copy-cat" enterprise?*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The signing of the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS) Treaty in 1975 can aptly be described as a "copy-cat" enterprise. By that treaty, the sixteen member countries of the West African sub-region embarked upon the construction of a regional common market, modeled after the European Economic Community, EEC, which metamorphosed into what is now known as the European Union, (EU).

Surprisingly, during the past thirty-three years, the ECOWAS has made significant progress in many areas. In addition to its magnificent headquarters, which is one of the most astonishing structures beautifying the skyline of Nigeria's new inland capital Abuja, ECOWAS has impressively established many issue-specific regimes. The Ecobank, located in Lome, Togo is equally a spectacular edifice. In very significant ways, and really against several odds, the countries of the region and sympathetic extra regional organizations have invested several hundreds of millions of dollars in this idealistic venture. One is indeed tempted to take the region seriously in its goals of economic and perhaps political integration.

Official governments' policies unequivocally indicate efforts towards encouraging webs of interdependence, and building both an amalgamated as well as a pluralistic security community in accordance with the functionalist tradition of David Mitrany (1943) and Karl Deutsch (1957). But paradoxically, the physical picture of the region shows one of the most fractious or fragmented regions of the globe. One cannot help wondering how ECOWAS could possibly succeed. The peoples of the sub-region do not have any significant traditions of interdependence. So what is driving the ECOWAS? Without the necessary civil relationships, and

synergy, can it succeed?

My hypothesis is that ECOWAS might be an exercise in futility. It seems very much ahead of its time. The majority of the elites in the region cannot effectively communicate across national boundaries. This is even much worse among the masses, due to highly debilitating linguistic barriers. The fear of Nigeria's domination looms very large and is resented throughout the region. Nigeria itself is far from being stable. So upon what solid foundation(s) can such a supranational organization stand and endure? Its fragility is almost alarming. Still ECOWAS trudges on towards an European-style integration model. Why?

The purpose of this work is to delineate the legal or treaty arrangement establishing the organization, and how much progress it has made since its inception. It is however very difficult to resist the temptation of passing a negative judgment, given the overwhelming evidence regarding the poor feasibility of a West African Union in the foreseeable future, lofty intergovernmental institutions and pronouncements notwithstanding.

This paper will be divided into three parts. The first part, which is the introduction, exposes the genesis and evolution of the ECOWAS. The second part makes an assessment of the organization's progress, based upon its stated goals as enunciated in the charter. The last section sums up the future of the community in the light of all the positive and negative nuances appertaining thereto. An analysis will be made regarding the dilemmas of ECOWAS as an intergovernmental organization operating in the context of international law that has not quite transcended states' sovereignties

## **PART ONE**

### **THE GENESIS OF THE ORGANIZATION**

In May 1975, the original fifteen countries of the West African sub-region (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote D'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo), gathered in Lagos, Nigeria, and by a treaty named after that venue, they established the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The outstanding protocols bringing some of the main features of the Treaty into effect were ratified in November 1976. Cape Verde joined in 1977 to become the sixteenth member, but Mauritania withdrew in 2002 bringing the membership back to fifteen. In 1991-92, a revised ECOWAS treaty aimed at accelerating economic integration and increased political cooperation was drafted. Not all have adopted this new edition of the Treaty.

In deed the ECOWAS came during one of the most optimistic periods, if not

the most optimistic period in the political and economic development of the region. First, Nigeria, the predominant state of the region, some say the hegemon, was realizing some of its economic potentials in the aftermath of Arab-led oil embargo of the 1970s. Second, a newly strengthened Nigerian state was being grateful for the support and solidarity shown by most of its neighbors during the Biafra War. So Nigeria was enthusiastically seeking cooperation and integration with the countries of the region to consolidate their post-war foreign policy of good-neighborliness, understandably to ensure a more secured future. There was also a need to try to neutralize the ever perplexing French influence in West Africa-- a region Nigeria considers its sphere of influence. Finally, the European Community, under an on-going arrangement with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries within the Lome Convention, encouraged European style regional groupings in the developing countries. This was to ensure better distribution and coordination of EC's economic development aid to the countries and regions in question. The ACP group of countries would also benefit from European Community's (EC's) trade and economic preferences. So even within the ACP, the ECOWAS would have a much greater voice as a bloc. These were some the incentives for establishing the ECOWAS.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

As of June 1993, ECOWAS' organizational structure reflected the core values of its framers:

#### **1. Conference of Heads of States and Governments.**

This meets once a year, and the Chairman is selected from the member states in turn.

#### **2. Council of Ministers.**

The Council comprises two representatives from each country, and a chairman is selected from each country in turn. The Council meets twice a year, and has the primary responsibility of running the Community.

#### **3. The Tribunal.**

A Community Tribunal was established by the treaty. The authority and competence of the Tribunal are prescribed by the Heads of State and Government. The Tribunal interprets the provisions of the treaty. It also adjudicates in disputes among member states as referred to it.

#### **4. The Executive Secretariat**

The Executive Secretary of the Community selected for a four year term which is renewable only once.

#### **5. Specialized Commissions**

The organization has six special commissions namely:

- (i) Trade, Customs, Immigration, monetary Payments;

- (ii) Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources;
- (iii) Transport, Communications and Energy;
- (iv) Social and Cultural Affairs;
- (v) Administration and Finance;
- (vi) Information.

#### **6. ECOWAS Fund for Co-operation, Compensation and Development**

This is a fund administered by a board of Directors, whose chief executive holds office for a four-year renewable term. The Fund headquarters is located in Lome, the Togolese capital. The initial authorized capital was US\$90m. and raised to \$360m by 1986. The Fund has reached agreements with several regional banks such as the African Development Bank, The Islamic Development Bank on co-financing of project and staff development. An agreement is also reached to provide access to non-regional participants.

#### **PROBLEMS AND PERFORMANCES OF ECOWAS**

The establishment of ECOWAS treaty is without doubt the single most significant regional achievement in post-colonial West Africa. It was motivated by the realities of the international political economy, as well as the security concerns of countries of the region. The Biafra conflict compelled Nigeria, the true champion of the ECOWAS treaty, to seek regional integration to ensure predictable solidarity with its neighbors in case of future domestic conflicts. However, the kind of urgency Nigeria felt, due to its civil war experience, was not unanimous by 1975. So the Nigerian leadership had to persuade others as well as provide them with significant economic assistance. Perhaps, the current Liberian crisis and the subsequent regional intervention, might have underscored the potential benefits for all member states of the organization. Only the future will authenticate this claim.

Without doubt, the most compelling force for regional integration was the need to forge a larger and more viable economic unit. Integration or at least economic cooperation is something that all the states in the region can relate. The incentives for such closer link seemed very attractive. Nigeria's oil boom economy was quite attractive to her neighbors, all of whom welcomed the opportunity to share in the bounty. Secondly, the strong European Community was nudging the sub-region and the rest of African Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) to unite.

In the midst of highly debilitating obstacles, the organization seems to have made relatively significant achievement towards regional integration. The ideals of the organization have remained undiminished despite difficult practical problems.

The first major problem of ECOWAS is the question of divided loyalty among its members, especially those of the francophone group. It is pertinent to note that, all but six members of the sixteen member organization are French speaking. In the usual hands-on French colonial style, French West Africa remains very much under the direction and control of Paris. France has continued to promote a Francophone zone in Africa. So its former colonies have been torn between French-induced exclusive regional groupings and region-wide forums that include non-French speaking states. French financial assistance and political patronage remain serious obstacles to the goals of ECOWAS. This problem is exacerbated by the divergent and conflicting political goals of France and Anglophone Nigeria in Africa. France needs the unity of its former empire for its global status; whereas Nigeria, unflinchingly convinced of its hegemonic status in the sub-region, detests French meddling.

The second major problem of ECOWAS, and perhaps one more significant, is the lack of steady commitment from Nigerian leadership and the prevailing attitude within Nigeria. Some in Nigeria really feel that the regional organization is more of a burden than a blessing. Nigeria has almost two-thirds of the total population of the region and contributes one-third of ECOWAS finances. Critics feel that ECOWAS is an extra burden on the Nigerian economy. They argue that the Nigerian economy, though quite significant in relative terms, is hardly strong enough to carry the development burdens of what is arguably the least developed region of the world. I consider this negative attitude a more fundamental problem because, without the Nigerian enthusiasm and sacrifice, the little willingness of its francophone neighbors would virtually evaporate. This would further strengthen the latter's links with Paris, and, of course, undermine the ECOWAS.

Thirdly, it is very difficult to link economies that are naturally in competition with one another due to the similarity of their outputs, and the absence of any significant economic diversification. All West African states are exporters of primary products. They are all vying for favorable trade deals from their First World customers. Besides, their intra-regional trade remains very marginal when compared with their trade with the industrialized markets of Western Europe, North America, Japan and now China.

Be that as it may, in 1992, a committee of eminent citizens of the region drew up a revised/new ECOWAS Treaty. The revised treaty even strengthened the resolve for economic and political cooperation among members. For instance, under this latest version, a West African Parliament would be established in conjunction with a West African Court that would replace the Tribunal. The Community remains unequivocal about its goal of a common market with a single currency. In the

following section, we will attempt an evaluation of the progress made in each of the six issue areas for which special commissions were established under the agreement.

First, let us consider the state of ECOWAS finances. At its inception, when the Nigerian economy was at its peak, Lagos easily provided some of its oil wealth for the establishment and operation of the organization. Nigeria volunteered to build the ECOWAS Secretariat in Lagos and later in Abuja. Today, due to general economic malaise, funds are not as abundant in Nigeria as it was during the formative years of the ECOWAS in the 1970s. The treaty prescribes that ECOWAS be financed through contributions from its member countries. But like all intergovernmental organizations, including the most famous of them all-- the UN, ECOWAS is hampered by irregular or non-payment of dues by its members. Recognizing this problem, the new ECOWAS treaty recommends that 1% of all custom duties collected in the region, be made available to the organization. This is yet to be approved by Council of Heads of State, the supreme body of ECOWAS. In March 1993, the approved ECOWAS budget was 4,135,068m. Francs CFA, that is approximately US\$14.9m.

The ECOWAS is primarily interested in raising the living standard of the citizens of its member countries. This would in turn contribute towards a continent-wide progress. The strategy is to promote development and cooperation within the community especially in those areas that it has established special commissions.

Now let us try to explore what progress each commission has made, beginning with the Commission on Trade, Customs, Immigration and Monetary Payments. A fifteen year transition period was targeted for the elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade among member states. Furthermore, the Conference of Heads of State and Government agreed that effective from May 28, 1979, it would be illegal for any member state to increase its customs tariff on goods from any member state. This was seen as an initial step towards removing all custom duties within the Community. In 1980, the Conference of Heads of State and Government opted for a free trade area for unprocessed agricultural products and handicrafts beginning May 1981. Industrial products manufactured by specified industrial enterprises will be duty-free from that date. Although the difficulty of defining the relevant enterprises delayed the implementation of the clause, the tariff was lifted on twenty five listed ECOWAS made items in January 1990. By mid-1991, the number of listed items had increased to ninety. The same 1980 Conference classifying member countries into most developed, less developed and least developed members, prescribed that the first group of members which includes: Cote d' Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal should eliminate tariff on priority products

within four years, and on non-priority ones within six years. The second group, comprising Benin, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo would eliminate tariff on priority products within six years and non-priority ones in eight years. The last group consisting of Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, would remove tariff on priority products within eight years and on non-priority products within ten years. Free trade is so important to the leaders of the Community that under the general economic policy approved by the Conference of Heads of State and Government, the ECOWAS Council of Ministers decided in 1992, to institutionalize an ECOWAS Trade Fair. Accordingly, the Community intended to spend the sum of US\$12.6m (most of its annual budget), to promote free trade in 1993. The council of ministers working under the guideline given by the Conference of Heads of State and Government, decided to institutionalize an ECOWAS trade fair. The first ECOWAS trade fair was scheduled for 1995 in Dakar, Senegal.

With regard to monetary policies, the 1990 Conference of Heads of State and Government agreed to establish a single monetary zone by 1994. Earlier they had set up a study group to look into the feasibility of a single currency for the Community. They have since replaced the existing West African Clearing House with the West African Monetary Agency (WAMA) which is to oversee the ECOWAS Exchange Rate System (EERS).

In addition to free movement of goods, the ECOWAS is determined to ease immigration restrictions among member states. During their 1979 conference, the Heads of State signed a protocol allowing free movement and rights of residence for ECOWAS citizens. The same protocol also provided for the right of ECOWAS citizens to establish commercial enterprises anywhere within the Community.

Next is the commission on Transport, Communication and Energy. In the 1980 conference, a plan to construct an ECOWAS integrated road network was adopted. Under the program, two major highways were planned: the Trans-Sahelian Highway, linking Dakar, Senegal, with N'djamena, Chad (4,633 km), and the Trans-Coastal Highway from Lagos, Nigeria to Nouackchott, Mauritania (4,767 km). As of 1993, 78% of the Trans-Sahelian trunk, and 88% of the Trans-Coastal link had been completed. The plan also includes the construction of access roads to the coast for land-locked countries. The Community is currently planning to establish an ECOWAS Airline, to enable the region compete in global commercial aviation.

ECOWAS has adopted a plan to promote and expand the domestic and interstate telecommunications systems. The first two phases of the program, completed in October 1988, provide microwave telephone, television and telex links between Burkina Faso and Ghana, Burkina Faso and Benin, Nigeria and Niger, Mali

and Cote d'Ivoire. With regard to energy cooperation, Nigeria, the most important, if not the sole oil producing state of the region, maintained a concessionary energy pricing policy for the countries of Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

Under the Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources Commission, ECOWAS has equally made notable progress. Its economic and industrial development strategy saw the establishment of Ecobank Transnational Incorporation., based in Lome, Togo. This project which was first conceived in 1984 became operational four years later with 10% ECOWAS equity shareholding. Ecobank affiliates were already operational in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Nigeria by mid-1990. The ECOWAS has established an annual West African Industrial Forum, with the aim of promoting regional industrial development. The ECOWAS Secretariat is currently working on a West African Industrial Master Plan.

In 1982, the Community adopted an agricultural development strategy to make the region self sufficient, especially in food production by the year 2000. The organization resolved to promote research in, and selection of, improved seeds and cattle species. To this effect, the Community designated seven seed selection and multiplication centers in 1984. In 1988, the Organization decided to develop an 18,000 hectares area for a cattle-ranch in southern Mali. It also undertook a tse-tse fly control program. The Community attracted a US\$9.6m. European Union grant in 1993 for a five-year fishery development within the sub-region.

In rural, social and cultural development, the ECOWAS has made significant strides too. Under its program for the development of village and pastoral water resources, the Community plans to provide 3,200 water points throughout the region, that is, 200 in each member state. The first phase would concentrate on the most desperate states of the Community. These are Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo, all of which are in dangers of drought and increased desertification. After preparatory missions to all the affected member states had been completed, international donors were expected to donate generously to this vital project. The first phase was projected to cost about US\$40,7m.

In order to promote regional informal or functional integration, the ECOWAS has encouraged the organization of West African Universities' Association; Organization Trade Unions of West Africa (1984); West African Youth Association; and the West African Women's Association(1987). In 1989, the ECOWAS established a West African Health Organization. Needless to say that: Regional Sports competitions are organized annually.

Finally, under the Commission on Information and Media, ECOWAS council



of ministers agreed on an information policy for the region in 1990. The Community members are required to disseminate information about the Organization and appraise the peoples' respective attitudes towards ECOWAS. Some of the most concrete policies in this regard include: the creation of an ECOWAS press card, judicial guarantees to protect journalists, joint training programs for regional journalists and the establishment of a regional information center.

In addition to these six Commissions, the ECOWAS established a common defense policy. This was, without doubt, the most politically significant policy of the nearly one score years old Community. The members had signed a non-aggression protocol at its third Conference of Heads of State and Government. But a mutual defense assistance was formalized in 1981, when thirteen member signed the defense protocol. This warranted the establishment of a Standing Mediation Committee to arbitrate in disputes between members. Under the aegis of this defense commitment, the ECOWAS ministers tried to mediate in the Liberian civil war. Expectedly, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia received the greatest international attention of all ECOWAS regional initiatives.

The world was pleasantly surprised by this African initiative, which remains one of the few examples of regional peacekeeping ventures. Had ECOMOG succeeded, it would have provided an international model for dealing with the rampant civil conflicts apparently inundating the United Nations itself. Perhaps ECOMOG was the response of ECOWAS to the burden-sharing strategy recommended for the United Nations (Tessitore and Woolfson, 1993:4). This is very much similar to what the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is being called upon to do in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Even in the current crisis in Rwanda, serious suggestions are being made about an African peacekeeping force there. This is, at least, partly due to the ECOMOG venture. But ECOMOG did not quite succeed, because it inadvertently turned into a collective security action in a civil war situation. ECOMOG did not do too well even as a peacekeeper. As usual it was very ineffectual against local guerrilla forces without whose cooperation a peacekeeping force would be nearly useless.

The ECOMOG truly represents an ideal response to the ever problematic goal of regional security, with its concomitant need for intervention even in domestic conflicts. The failure of ECOMOG in Liberia is an indication that civil wars are not amenable to collective security actions. Ironically, cynics have been wondering about the current United Nations' impotence in the Bosnian crisis. First of all, the UN is still grappling with the appropriate definition of that conflict. It is true that civil war atrocities are morally repugnant; but external military interventions have not proved to be the proper solution to this problem, not even in very small countries.

Clearly Nigeria dominated ECOMOG; but the willingness of other members to contribute to the multinational force is indicative of a fundamental commitment towards a common political destiny. At this juncture, let us appraise the context or operational milieu of ECOWAS. This is to enable us appreciate the progress it has made so far, and to convince ourselves about where it is really going. Before contemplating any kind of political integration, a culture of cooperation must exist among the prospective candidates. Unfortunately, 19th.C Euro-politics, that is, the centuries' old Anglo-Franco struggle, found a very fertile land in two West Africans one British the other French. Unlike Britain that granted independence to her African colonies and 'left' or moved to neocolonial control tactics, France remains a very central political force throughout French Africa. This has always dismayed leading pan-Africanists, most of whom are Anglophone. For instance, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah battled this French intrusion and dominance of his neighbors until his death. Similarly, the very first foreign policy offensive pursued by independent Nigeria was to bring France to the United Nations in an attempt to stop French nuclear tests in the Sahara Desert, in the early 1960s. France has defense pacts with all her former African colonies. By implication, the only true enemies would be their Anglophone neighbors. The francophone states remain very well armed by Paris, thereby compelling internationalization of every little conflict. For example, in the recent border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, French paratroopers arrived in the conflict area even before the two countries had time to consider the possibilities for bilateral diplomacy. Invariably, in the diplomatic row that resulted, the government in Abuja went after the French, paying little or no attention to the authorities in Yaounde, Cameroon. Cameroon is not part of West Africa hence it is not a member of the ECOWAS.

Furthermore, the West African sub-region and indeed all of French Africa, is ramified with several regional organization mainly aimed at uniting francophone countries to the exclusion of the rest of Africa. This divisive environment, maintained through significant economic and military patronage from Paris, provides a serious road-block to home-based, that is, regionally focused economic cooperation and integration. The spirit and goals of ECOWAS find a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in this kind of environment. After all, integration is in some sense attitudinal, and has to do with degrees of people's feeling of "we-ness"(Deutsch, 1967).

Secondly, functionalism also suggests that integration progresses better in a fairly homogeneous region, meaning an area of relatively similar levels of development. Other incentives for integration include the existence of diversified and fairly developed economies within the region in question. This would lead to mutual

dependence among the participants. Perhaps, the West African sub-region qualifies on the first count, given their general underdevelopment status, but that is as far as that incentive can go. Apparently, the countries of the region are not mutually dependent in any significant way. Rather they are in constant competition with one another for the ever shrinking global market for primary products and raw materials that they all so heavily depend upon. So on this count, ECOWAS is truly an unrealistic, if not an illogical enterprise.

Thirdly, one must ask about the impact of national politics on the aspiration for and development of the ECOWAS. One must consider the prevailing political culture of the countries within the region. The Nigeria military government under Gen. Yakubu Gowon spearheaded the establishment of the ECOWAS treaty in 1975. The Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadema also played a crucial role, being Nigeria's francophone friend. The rest of the countries were equally very enthusiastic in bringing about the regional organization. All subsequent leaders of the member states have consistently shown significant degrees of commitment to the Community. At least, the Community has lost only one of its original sixteen members in thirty one years. But more importantly, they are all actively participation in regional programs. Interestingly, other countries outside the region have indicated their interests in joining some ECOWAS joint ventures such as Ecobank Incorporated.

Once again the political will that seems to be driving the ECOWAS contradicts the basic tenets of political integration. Integrationists posit that political integration occurs within and among fairly developed polities. Through the development of webs of interdependence in economic matters, political links are strengthened. The political elite must be mature enough to submerge their parochial ambitions. They must think and act regionally. However, the West African sub-region reflects the very opposite of this. Instead, the majority of them are either military regimes or converted one-party states. Given that these societies do not respect or honor peaceful transition of political power, in their various countries, one can only wonder how they can willingly give up power to a supranational body relatively far away from their national capitals. To shift sovereignty upward from state to regional or global structures is what international integration is all about (Goldstein, 1994:392). This requires a certain level of political maturity from the governing elite in West Africa, something they have very rarely demonstrated.

## **CONCLUSION**

In spite of these three major obstacles, the West African Economic Community has managed to survive so far. It has also managed to record very significant achievements in the various issue areas of cooperation. This simply suggests that, perhaps, the above hurdles do not constitute the necessary and

sufficient conditions for regional cooperation and integration.

Although the countries of West Africa really need one another in order to build a viable political economy, their current levels of development and the nature of their economic outputs, do not encourage the European Union type integration that they seem to be aspiring for under the ECOWAS. Their political and economic situations clearly defy conventional wisdom. In the light of the great achievements the organization has made so far, one ought to be very reluctant to regard ECOWAS as simply an aspirational symbol. But what is its true future?

Somehow, the ECOWAS seems to be far ahead of its time. No doubt, it seems to be reflecting the progress being made in Brussels. The European Union has remained the most important patron of the ECOWAS. One can argue that the strongest incentive and perhaps, the most concrete push towards cooperation and even integration in West Africa, is a recognized need for what I might call a "collective aid basket"--some kind of group "panhandling". Donor countries seem to prefer and recommend regional groupings to simplify the process of giving aid to the more than one hundred and fifty developing countries, most of which are in sub-Saharan Africa. But the internal political, cultural and even economic conditions of the Community do not agree with some of the basic requirements for integration.

One of the most intriguing things about ECOWAS and regional development is the fact that it has managed to bring development to areas that have remained grossly underdeveloped since independence. Such ECOWAS sponsored projects include international or intra-regional highways, regionally financed telephone networks, agriculture and water resource developments, and other kinds of industrial development projects. These can only be great sources of hope for an otherwise hopeless situation.

Politically speaking, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), represents the most significant initiative. It demonstrates a willingness for, and actual integration of, West African foreign policy. To the leaders of the region, ECOMOG did not signal a total failure. What they see is a regional effort that ameliorated a very difficult and tragic situation until the international community was ready to join. The ECOMOG experience indicates a much more fundamental need for solidarity, rather than simply coming together to share foreign/external aid. It therefore reinforces a sense of optimism that there is a more compelling need for regional integration. The ECOMOG venture also shows that cooperation in non-soft political issues would hardly pose a problem for the countries of the ECOWAS.

So far, the ECOWAS has not proven to be a futile enterprise. After all, it has so far helped significantly in the economic development of the sub-region. Again in spite of long colonial disruption, the peoples of West Africa still have some sense of

a common destiny. This ought to account for why the ECOWAS has managed to trudge along in the face of very debilitation circumstances. Furthermore, it is important to note that Nigeria has managed to maintain a respectable level of commitment to the goals of ECOWAS, in spite of domestic detractors. The popular opinion, and especially the "giant of Africa quandary", compels Nigeria to remain intimately involved in all of Africa, and especially in West Africa. The ECOWAS has been described as the cornerstone of Nigeria's Africa-centered foreign policy. Nigeria's regional policy reflects intentions to influence rather than to dominate; and this seems to be the right approach. The ECOWAS annual conferences remain very well attended; and the Community's Secretariat at Abuja in Nigeria, remains quite a busy center of regional planning.

Economic realities will eventually compel greater political and diplomatic relations. As the EU gets more and more integrated, France would have less and less to give to its ex-colonies. Invariably, all initial, though unique, impetuses that led to the formation of the ECOWAS are still alive and well. It seems likely that the Community will endure for quite some time in the future. It might even get stronger.

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