

## **The Political and Security Challenges Facing 'ECOWAS' in the Twenty-first Century: Testing the Limits of an Organization's Reputation**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines whether ECOWAS will be able to address the challenges of governmental instability and national security breakdowns that its member states have been facing since the dawn of the twenty-first century. ECOWAS, formed nearly forty years ago to represent some of the most autocratic governments and poorest states in Africa, has not quite lived up to its original ideal of fostering greater economic cooperation among its members. Achieving the related goals of political stability and preventing the integrity of its member nations from being breached has even been more challenging. The incidence of military coups d'état has dwindled but ECOWAS member states have borne the brunt of the military whimsically removing governments. ECOWAS' member states have also endured an unprecedented number of rebellions whereby dissident groups have challenged the authority of the state by launching insurgencies. States have also felt their integrity breached by people unimpededly moving across national borders seeking places with better economic opportunities. Even though ECOWAS has not had a stellar track-record of addressing the problems which have entrapped its members, any blame for the organization must be directed, however, to the governments it represents because of they have persistently misgoverned.*

**Keywords:** ECOWAS, ECOMOG, coup-d'état, Boko Haram, secession, multipartyism, migrants, herdsmen

### **Introduction**

In May 1975 fifteen West African countries (later joined by Cape Verde) signed in Lagos, Nigeria, a treaty creating the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria played the key role in the intensive three-year diplomatic activities culminating in ECOWAS (Ojo, 1980). Since its creation, ECOWAS has faced multiple political, economic and security challenges arising from member states' inability to address those problems themselves. This is not surprising since the fifteen countries that comprise ECOWAS are ranked among the poorest in the world and have weak state capacities. ECOWAS was set up mainly to achieve the economic goals of "harmonization and coordination of national policies"; however, the signatories to the treaty also affirmed to adhere to principles which include "solidarity and collective self-reliance, nonaggression between Member States, maintenance of regional peace, and stability and security." ECOWAS also entreats its members to seek the "recognition, promotion, and protection of human and people's rights in accordance with provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights." ECOWAS including security and human rights have impelled it to seek goals the sub-region historically has struggled to achieve.

Promoting and protecting human rights— prerequisites to good governance— were in chronic short supply at the signing of the original ECOWAS treaty. Governments that signed the treaty epitomized autocratic rule. Sekou Toure of Guinea, Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, Dawda Jawara of the Gambia, William Tolbert of Liberia, Houphouet-Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire, and Leopold Senghor of Senegal headed single-party or dominant party political systems and had effectively emasculated opposition groups from competing. The other governments that signed the treaty such as Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and Niger embodied military autocracies. Keeping ECOWAS member nations safe from domestic insurrections was going to be a difficult proposition as ethnic politics had already bedeviled countries such as Senegal and Mali but which in the case of Nigeria had culminated in a full-blown civil war.

By the mid-1970s the countries that comprised ECOWAS were experiencing the dysfunctions that building new nations usually entailed. This paper assesses whether ECOWAS since its formation nearly forty years ago and more than one decade into the new millennium has achieved the twin goals of ensuring political stability and the security and integrity of its member countries 'states assist charter sought.

Countries in the West Africa subregion have been beset by some of the deepest developmental crises countries anywhere in the world face today. Evaluating ECOWAS' performance on political stability and national security therefore must recognize the many developmental challenges which are endemic to the region and, undoubtedly, have impeded the organization's effectiveness. These problems include high levels of illiteracy and nonperforming bureaucracies, political corruption and inept political leadership. By the depth of problems which a regional organization may be tasked to resolve, those ECOWAS faced surpass all. Each decade which ECOWAS has trod has come with its unique problems that have challenged the organization's viability and image as exemplar and worthy to be reckoned among the best in the world. Assessing how successful ECOWAS has been since its forming by addressing the sub-region's problems concerning politics and security in the new millennium, is an enquiry worth making.

### **1.1. The forces of union and disunion in West Africa**

A country may reap economic and political benefits from joining an association that involves other countries that share identical characteristics rather than relying solely on its own resources. Such benefits include expanded markets and access to food and raw materials that a country may not or cannot produce itself. The governments of West Africa coming together as they did representing their countries to sign ECOWAS' original protocol hoped to lift the underperforming economies from which countries in the region suffered. ECOWAS' original article of incorporation was clear about offering these economic advantages to its members. The preamble of the original treaty states "the overriding need to encourage, foster, and accelerate the economic and social development of West African states in order to improve the living standards of the people living in the region." Several decades before ECOWAS forming, the people and groups in West Africa had traded with one another and settled in lands far beyond their places of birth without following formal residency protocols.

The ECOWAS treaty streamlined immigration and residency requirements for the citizens of member countries by removing formal barriers which countries had erected such as seeking visas for entry. Signing the treaty symbolically bridged the chasm which had existed between Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone countries— an invisible but palpable rift caused by the differing ideological and cultural perspectives the English, the French, and the Portuguese brought administering their colonies. These different administration perspectives have been the primary basis for trade and cultural exchanges among the countries of West Africa, as well as between West African countries and their former metropolitan masters. Great Britain, Portugal and France to varying degrees have kept trade, diplomatic and cultural ties with their former colonies which have restricted those countries from committing themselves fully to ECOWAS. Britain was the most standoffish of the three major colonial powers as it only kept weaker trade ties with its former colonies. The Commonwealth of Nations has ameliorated this by promoting stronger cultural ties. Apart from the biennial heads of state meeting and sports competition, the former British colonies in Africa have cherished associating with the Commonwealth which they consider a special bond. In no case did the former British colonies consider associating with Britain a minor incident in their history; it everywhere left a lasting mark on institutions and thought (Brady, 1962). France, unlike Great Britain, has kept strong economic and diplomatic ties with its former colonies.

France saw its trusty allies in the heartland of the defunct French West African and French Equatorial African Federation. Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal stood out as the two countries whose leaders had political careers that were intimately influenced by French colonial policy. Staniland (1987) quotes a French scholar observing that ministers of French-speaking African states made some 2,000 visits to Paris in an average year. Between 1960 and 1978, French and African presidents held 280 meetings, and Presidents de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard d'Estaing made 32 state visits to Africa. Cote d'Ivoire had over 50,000 French citizens and Senegal over 20,000. France kept military bases and had defense arrangements providing for French intervention in case of internal and external threat. Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde joining ECOWAS in 1976 soon after independence signified the spirit which made West African countries to form the organization. Portugal had left its former colonies in disarray following several years of war that left those colonies lacking in qualified manpower and infrastructure.

These peculiarities which each ECOWAS member brought into the union: the different cultural perspectives among Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone countries; the different climatic endowments of countries, the unbridled movement of people across national boundaries, and the misgovernance which has characterized the political leadership in West Africa have affected ECOWAS capability to achieve its goal of political, economic, and security sufficiency.

## **2.1. Political instability**

Countries of West Africa have been among the most politically unstable in Africa. From 1960 until the early 1990s those governments had not been interested in keeping systems which allowed multiple political parties to coexist and compete for their share of electorate in elections. The competition that parties bring into politics as they try to persuade the electorate to elect them into power opens up otherwise closed political systems to scrutiny as it forces the parties to lay out clearer manifestoes. The abuses like imprisonments, disappearances, house detentions, forced exiles and even deaths which became rampant under single-party systems might have been ameliorated as opposition parties equally driven by a strong zeal for power would have exposed those abuses. In every newly-independent African country, civilians had the first opportunity to rule but corruption, mismanagement, and leaders and their parties aggrandizing power caught the attention of the military to step in, ostensibly to stop the wayward direction the new nations were heading.

After independence was achieved, the people of Africa's new nations had high expectations about government modernizing their nations and improve living standards by providing small conveniences such as schools, hospitals, clean water, health-care, education and prevent communicable diseases from spreading. These expectations were never realized as governments lacking money to undertake developmental projects and being unable to attract economic aid from donors created a huge deficit in the trust people had for government and its ability to handle the challenges of the future. Wanting to keep power but also apprehensive that people's deflated expectations would cost them elections, leaders found ways to eliminate political competition by nullifying the section of constitutions that allowed multiparty governance. Ghana and Guinea, two of sub-Saharan Africa countries to get independence early, also became the first to outlaw multiparty governance by adopting single-party systems. Ghana's ruling Convention People's Party (CPP) passed the Preventive Detention Act in 1958 and the Republican Constitution of 1960 restricted political parties other than the CPP from operating. Guinea passed its own Preventive Detention Act in 1959, followed by a ban on the activities of political parties other than the Parti démocratique de Guinée (PGI). Other countries in the subregion such as Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal and Liberia followed suit by passing single-party laws or making the ruling party so strong it emasculated minor parties from competing. Carter (1962:2) claims one-party control was associated not only with dictatorial but also with quasi or full totalitarian rule.

Leaders presented single-party rule as the only choice that would have a stabilizing influence on Africa's new nations whose ethnic groups could tear the state apart because of partisan politics. Opposition parties believed, on the other hand, that leaders' proscribing other parties was nothing more than a ploy to tighten the ruling party's grip on power. Leaders moving to ban opposition groups invariably attracted the military to step into politics. Esterhuysen's (1992), table of military coups in Africa shows no less than thirty-three military coups occurring in West Africa from 1960 to 1991. The military that brazenly and self-righteously overthrew civilian governments, ironically, also became entangled in the same dysfunctions which they had accused the former governments for creating. Coup makers entrenching themselves in power attracted other military personnel to intervene by removing the first group of military rulers. Military coups soon became a contagion (David and Lutz, 1974), as military governments fell victim to intrigue that came within their own ranks. Only a handful of military leaders including Moumar Gaddafi of Libya, Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia, Siad Barre of Somalia and Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo enjoyed longevity in their rule because they successfully suppressed opposition groups by using extreme brutal methods. From the mid-1960s, instability came to symbolize African politics as civilians and military personnel jostled to get an edge on ruling.

### **2.1.1. Security challenges**

Countries of ECOWAS have faced some of the most daunting security challenges any region in Africa has had especially from civil wars. Like the rest of Africa the countries in West Africa seldom go to war with their neighbors despite Africa having some infamous irredentist wars.

The war between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Ogaden in 1977, between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998, Libya and Chad over the Aouzou Strip, and Libya's border incursions into Egypt in 1977 were among the infamous. West African countries have avoided going to war because they have realized that the benefits accruing from going to war is inconsequential compared to the financial and human cost of waging that war. It was not surprising, therefore, that during Nigeria's and Cameroon's bitter disputation over Bakassi which is sandwiched between southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon they avoided mobilizing troops for war. The two countries relied on the International Court of Justice's mediation to settle the dispute (Anyu, 2007). Chad has also had a large chunk of its territory, about 25,000 square miles, in disputation with Libya and has also had disputes along the Chad-Niger and Niger-Nigeria border. The number of disputed boundaries between countries in West Africa has been remarkably small, despite the several thousand miles of land between national borders. Zartman (1965) explained the absence of war was due to the African state being still in a state of becoming; therefore, effective government control of their borders had not yet become coterminous with the limits of the state. He predicted, however, that disputes would become more frequent in the future as the frontier zones became demarcated. There have been instances; however, when neighboring countries had provided a safe haven for émigrés that engage in acts of sabotage against their home government across the border. During Eyadema's long reign over Togo, he periodically accused Ghanaian governments of providing shelter and support for renegade groups planning his government's overthrow. The Senegalese government has periodically launched raids against Casamance separatists and pushed both rebels and civilians to seek refuge in neighboring Guinea Bissau. Evans' (2009) study shows that villagers and rebels returning to exploit their former habitable and agricultural spaces when security improved never found life easy because they felt insecure from not knowing when the Senegalese government would launch reprisal raids.

**2.1.2.** The major security problem that continues to threaten West African countries has been internal squabbles breaking out among ethnic groups or between regions or ethnic groups with the central government over policy. A region or a group's disagreement with government often has been about feeling cheated by the manner in which government divides budget revenues, whereby a resource-rich region suspects the government diverting revenues away to poorly endowed regions. The shortage of money for governments to allot to regions as well as governments' prebendalism which Joseph (1987) describes as the sense of entitlement that many public officials and private citizens felt they had to the revenues of the Nigerian government has been a cause. Militias specializing in kidnapping oil workers and vandalizing oil infrastructure has been a common form of protest against marginalization by the state and transnational oil corporations in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has become an umbrella group spearheading these kidnappings. A study by Haggerty and Temitope (2011) assert that insurgents seek to portray the situation in the Niger Delta as a form of war, and oil workers as enemy combatants, and use this metaphor of war to frame their violent actions as a form of justifiable repertoire of protest. Lewis (1996) describes the military governments of Babangida and Abacha in Nigeria from 1985 to 1994 as prebendal toward predation that "reflected a new tendency which allowed a single ruler and the military elite to arbitrarily control power by employing a mixture of coercion and material inducement." Conflict also has occurred among groups about their disenchantment with residents from other regions and itinerant traders who move into their community. Itinerant farmers also have run into resistance from local farmers who may complain about the nonnative farmers encroaching on their land.

**2.1.3.** Religion has been a constant source of discontent between locals who find the religious doctrine and norms immigrants bring to their community detestable. The followers of the two dominant religions of West Africa, Christianity and Islam, have often clashed inside their communities over doctrine and lifestyle. The coastal regions of some West African countries are chiefly Christian and have richer arable land, schools, and industry. These southern regions historically have attracted itinerant families, usually daily laborers and cattle herders from the north who are chiefly Muslim, looking for work. Clashes have occurred in several countries in West Africa and have few encouraging signs of subsiding. Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria have borne the brunt of such religious conflicts. Cote d'Ivoire's civil war of 2002 was sparked by southern Ivorian leaders who were Christian trying to disqualify a northern candidate from contesting in the presidential elections coming up. The resulting war split the country into halves between a Muslim north and a Christian south. Nordås' (2008) study of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire reveals that even though Cote d'Ivoire's neighbor Ghana is situated on the same 'civilizational fault line' between a Muslim northern part and a Christian south, no violent north-south mobilization has occurred.

The two cases clearly show that the existence of a religious divide, in and of itself, does not predetermine bloodshed, but political strategies, religious concentration and reinforcing cleavages can act as intervening variables that help explain the difference in result. In Nigeria the hostility between Muslims and Christians has intensified since the early 1980s. From 1982, a violent confrontation between a Muslim sect under Alhaji Muhammadu Maroua, popularly known as the Maitatsine, and the police in Maiduguri began. The Maitatsine were part of a movement to create an Islamic state in the region. This Islamic revival attracted the attention of students, peasants, and the urban poor. The government responded to this political threat by provoking a confrontation in which the police killed hundreds of the Maitatsine (Hickey, 1984). The newest radical organization, Boko Haram, whose philosophy, organizational planning, and modus operandi is Taliban, however, has carried out the most ferocious and devastating attacks on Nigerians than any other group (Ali et al, 2012). Beginning from 2009, Nigeria has been destabilized by large scale and unimaginable bomb attacks by the Boko Haram movement. Although Boko Haram can be compared by philosophy and by objectives to the Maitatsine sectarian group, its organizational planning, armed resistance, and modus operandi is Taliban and attacks carried out by the groups so far the most ferocious and devastating. Boko Haram attacks which at first was confined to North-Eastern Nigeria, has spread to the North-Central and spreading even to Southern Nigeria.

**2.1.4.** Civil wars such as those which occurred in Cote d'Ivoire in 2010, Liberia in 1989, and Sierra Leone in 1991, and Nigeria in 1967, by far, have exacted much violence. These wars had several causes ranging from the cultural and economic to the political, and wrought incalculable harm on the people who were directly or indirectly affected by those wars. As Nafziger (1972) recalls, the Nigerian civil war was caused by a series of interconnected events which began soon after independence in 1960 that threatened to dissolve the republic. They include disputing the enumeration of the population by region for federal parliamentary representation as well as the military intervention of 1966 spearheaded by young Ibo officers in which several prominent politicians were killed. Civil wars in West Africa have lasted varying lengths with the latest, the Ivorian civil war of 2010, lasting only a few months. The Nigerian civil war lasted from 1967 to 1970, the Sierra Leonean from 1991 to 1997, and the Liberian from 1989 to 2003. ECOWAS acknowledges that its peacekeeping activities in the 1990s were dominated by efforts to end the civil war in Liberia through involving ECOMOG (ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group). The Ivorian civil war which began in late 2010 followed that country's earlier war of 2002 and its inconclusive peace. The first Cote d'Ivoire conflict was largely driven by political and social grievances over citizenship (Bah, 2010), and the second disputation over who won the presidential elections of that year. ECOWAS mobilized soldiers from Ghana, Togo, Benin, Niger and Senegal for \$1.8 million a month to help 4,000 French troops to keep the peace in the first civil war. ECOWAS had planned using 3,200 troops, but settled for 1,400 when donor countries failed to give all the funding they had promised ("Cote d'Ivoire," 2003).

### **3.I. ECOWAS' superstructure**

ECOWAS, undoubtedly, has followed the European Union's model which methodically moved from an economic to a political union as it tagged on supplemental treaties to the Union's original protocol. The 1960 Rome Treaty provided for establishing a common market, a customs union and common policies. ECOWAS' original treaty set up eight 'technical committees' of which Trade, Customs, Taxation, Statistics, Money and Payments was one. This committee seemed well-suited for its primary task of promoting trade among ECOWAS member countries. Another technical committee, the Political, Judicial and Legal Affairs, Regional Security and Immigration, was also deemed essential in making sure the organization lived up to the political and legal changes and the immigration challenges which the region was facing. Like the European Union using the 1992 Maastricht Treaty to prepare the organization for the new challenges it would face such as a monetary union and citizenship, ECOWAS adopted a new treaty in 1993 extending economic and political cooperation among member states and stated achieving a common market and a single currency as major economic objectives.

**3.1.1.** Thrust in a politically unstable region, ECOWAS has sought to mediate member countries' internal conflicts and disputes between countries. The first move the organization made in that regard was by adopting a Protocol Relating to Non-Aggression (PNA) in 1978 in Lagos, Nigeria, which forbade member states from threatening and using force of aggression against one another. A later Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defense (PMAD) was signed in Freetown, Sierra Leone on May 1981 and became effective five years later. The ECOWAS Summit of December 1999 signed a Protocol for the Establishment of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace and Security.

The Mechanism set up a Council of Elders, as well as a Security and Mediation Council. In October 1999, ECOWAS decided to set up a Court of Justice following a two-day meeting of Justice Ministers in Abuja. The court addresses complaints from member states and institutions of the organization. In May 2002, the ECOWAS parliament convened the first time with 115 members and its membership weighted according to population. In 1990, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was set up by ECOWAS member states as a non-standing military force consisting of land, sea and air units (Khobe, 2000). ECOMOG's operations started in Liberia to prevent Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) overthrowing the unpopular government of President Samuel Doe. Doe called on the Community for help.

The unendingly dire financial circumstance ECOWAS members face has affected the capacity of those member states to support the organization to carry out its security and peacekeeping functions that need heavy expenditures. ECOWAS, therefore, has relied on the United Nations, the European Union, the AU and sovereign states such as the United States and France and other European countries for relief. Besides, the United Nations has cooperated with ECOWAS in peacekeeping operations under the so-called 're-hatting' program in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Re-hatting has allowed regional or multinational forces to operate and then to be followed by a UN peacekeeping force. Under these agreements, the United Nations reimbursed the West African countries contributing to ECOWAS peacekeeping for the personnel, equipment and services they provided ("Re-hatting", 2005). In 1990, when it found its strategic interest in Liberia threatened, the United States navy set off to the coast of Liberia to evacuate American citizens. The United States navy repeated a similar gesture in 2003 following the fall of Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia. This time, the United States deployed three warships off the coast and provided \$10 million to fund peacekeeping operations ("Liberia," 2003).

#### **4. Assessment**

##### **4.1. Good governance**

Although ECOWAS was set up mainly as an economic union to promote trade among member countries and reap the other benefits associated with cooperating such as a freer movement of people and exchange of expertise across the region, the region's poorly performing economies have had debilitating effects on political stability and national security. Despite multifarious trade and security alliances which member countries have with former metropolitan powers, ECOWAS has been resilient. Member states such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso have experienced devastating economic hardship since the late 1970s but have remained loyal members. Mauritania withdrawing its membership in 1999 has been the only aberration to countries sticking by the organization. ECOWAS' membership remaining almost sacrosanct, however, belies the internal political upheavals most of its members have faced including crippling civil wars that have wrought havoc to some member countries. Even though the coups that were regular distractions to political institutional building in ECOWAS member states have subsided, the military's predisposition to take power from civilian governments remains an existential threat. Two military coups have taken place in 2012, with Mali's taking place in March and Guinea Bissau's in April. An earlier coup had occurred in December 2008 in Guinea, shortly after President Lansana Conté died, leading to the National Council for Democracy and Development (*Conseil National de la Démocratie et du Développement*, CNDD) setting up. Despite these recent coups occurring, the number of coups in West Africa since 2000 has reduced.

The number of countries which have experienced coups since 2000 is still sizable according to ECOWAS' zero tolerance for coups and includes Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Niger and Mali. West African countries' post-independence history of instability seems far from being tamed. The extent to which ECOWAS has helped to promote democratic governance in West Africa since 1990 is debatable because the impetus for reform began outside the region. Many countries in Africa embraced multipartyism and political toleration— the ingredients needed for political reform— following three decades of military juntas and single-party autocracies reigning supreme. The Cold War ending compelled African leaders to reexamine their proclivity for single-partyism and stifling multi-party competition (Bratton, 1997; Joseph, 1997; O'Loughlin et al., 1998). The Organization of African Unity (OAU, now the African Union, AU) aware of the changes affecting the world's political order embraced reform and passed several protocols to support its members developing their democratic institutions. Sensing change was inevitable, ECOWAS pressed its members to embrace political reform even though Benin, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire had been among the first to do so.

**4.1.1.** Major Koroma's Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) became notorious shortly after overthrowing the civilian government for allowing soldiers to seize the legislature, burning the national treasury, releasing violent prisoners and inviting the dreaded Revolutionary United Front to join the junta. Tejan Kabbah, Sierra Leone's deposed president, appealed to General Sani Abacha, the Chairman of ECOWAS, to deploy the Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops stationed in neighboring war-torn Liberia to reverse the coup (Dumbuya, 2008). ECOWAS deciding to use ECOMOG was backed by the OAU, which strongly condemned the Sierra Leone's military coup. The Security Council also supported ECOWAS's action as well as the embargo, naval blockade, and Nigerian troops occupying the country's major airport. Under traditional legal analysis, however, such interventions might have lacked legal justification (Karsten and Schbacker, 1998).

By intervening in Sierra Leone, ECOWAS showed it could legitimately and efficaciously mediate and arbitrate in matters outside traditional economic integration (Doktori, 2008). Not intervening would have dented ECOWAS' credibility in the world. Writing in the *New York Times*, French (1997) saw Mobutu Sese Seko's fall and ECOWAS intervention in Sierra Leone as a surprising new determination by many African countries to take command of their own regional affairs without first carefully consulting powerful foreign patrons. In 1999, African Heads of States at the *Algerian Declaration* embraced an anti-coup ideal that reaffirmed ECOWAS' uncompromising stance against coups. In 2000, the OAU adopted the Lome Declaration in 2000 to affirm the organization's commitment for governments to promote democracy and respect human rights (OAU, 2000). Cowell (2011), on the other hand, saw the Lome Declaration no more than a self-interested, coup prevention mechanism that has failed to enforce wider constitutional norms of good governance and democracy, even though it has provided the impetus for reducing the military's influence on politics as shown by the marked decrease of coup attempts in West Africa. A full-scale intervention such as ECOMOG had in Sierra Leone, however, has never been repeated and the organization has stopped confronting military juntas directly to end their rule. Direct intervention will only be feasible when a nation's armed force is small and poses little threat to fight a protracted war. A military intervention that seems straightforward can go awry resulting in a heavy casualty of lives.

**4.1.2.** ECOWAS, nevertheless, has continued to underscore its goal to remove coups or reduce their instances in the subregion when all fifteen members signed the *Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* in December 2001. The Protocol reiterated the organization accepting the principle of separation of powers among the executive, legislative and judiciary and accession to power through free, fair and transparent elections. The Protocol has a zero tolerance for power gained or kept by unconstitutional means. Besides, armed forces were required to be apolitical and under the command of a legally set up political authority. To ostracize coup makers, ECOWAS has backed condemning coups by suspending membership from the countries in which a military junta takes place. When the Togolese army installed Faure Gnassingbe as president in 2005 following the death of his father, the quickly-arranged hereditary succession infringed Togo's constitution. ECOWAS joined other international organizations like the UN, AU, the EU, and donor countries like the US and France to condemn the succession. President Obasanjo of Nigeria, in his role as president of the AU, called on other African leaders to accept nothing other than a democratic transition and threatened that the AU would impose sanctions and barred Togo from future AU meetings ("Army Installs President, 2005). ECOWAS similarly greeted Guinea's coup of December 2008 following the death of President Lansana Conte with contempt. It announced that it was suspending Guinea from its ranks in early 2009, and would forbid that country participating in its meetings until constitutionality was restored. In February 2009, the AU declared that Guinea's ruling junta would have to commit to holding democratic presidential elections before the end of 2009 and would not hesitate to impose the Lome Accord, which calls for suspending AU states that allow changes of government through a military junta (Guinea Country Review, 2011).

The African Union similarly condemned Guinea Bissau's coup of 2012, reiterating it would not accept any unconstitutional change of government and attempt at undermining the democratic process in Guinea Bissau. ECOWAS also condemned the coup attempt, which it called "irresponsible". ECOWAS sent a delegation to meet with the military to negotiate a timetable for a return to civilian rule ("AU Condemns Guinea Bissau," 2012). Six months on, Guinea-Bissau is still headed by a National Transitional Council comprised of military and political figures, and the AU, ECOWAS and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLC) have been negotiating a timetable for a return to civilian rule.

The latest coup to occur in West Africa, the March 2012 coup in Mali, has epitomized the dual problem of political dysfunctionality and a nation's integrity crumbling. President Amodou Toure was overthrown by army renegades who accused the government for failing in its leadership by not giving them enough arms to tackle a rebellion by ethnic Tuareg. A statement signed by ECOWAS' president warned the organization would not tolerate any recourse to violence as a means of seeking redress and "strongly condemned the misguided actions of the mutineers" ("ECOWAS Condemns," 2012). Other international actors such as the UN Security Council and the AU which described the coup as a "significant setback for Mali," also condemned it. In January 2012 Tuareg nationalists launched a rebellion against Mali's new government when the fighters returned to Mali after fighting as mercenaries in Libya. The Tuareg nationalists, the National Movement for Liberation of the Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad – MNLA) declared northern Mali independent from the south and seized the major northern cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.

#### **4.2.1. The security challenges**

Security threats to the governments of ECOWAS' member states have centered mainly on internal rebellions that disenfranchised groups have started against ruling governments. One such rebellion which occurred in the late 1960s was Nigeria's Eastern Region pulling out in 1967 to form Biafra, eight years before ECOWAS formed. The horrific aftermath of the secession including the resultant war, undoubtedly, moved Nigeria to redouble its effort to spearhead ECOWAS' formation. There have been sporadic border tensions between neighboring states, however, such as Nigeria and Cameroon, a non-ECOWAS member, over Bakassi, and Guinea seizing Sierra Leonean land along their common border. Repeated attacks by armed rebels from Sierra Leone on the Guinean villages of Massadou, Pamalap and Macenta made Guinean forces to occupy Sierra Leonean territory in 2000 to prevent rebel forces infiltrating Guinea. Guinea has refused to leave that piece of territory (Cham, 2012). Internal political disputes periodically have spilled into neighboring states when governments, wittingly or unwittingly, had provided shelter to rebels. Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor, launched frequent forays into Sierra Leone to chase the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels fighting his army. Côte d'Ivoire's civil war of 2010 spilled into Liberia as the rebels supporting Laurent Gbagbo crossed the border to seek shelter and launch counterattacks from across the border against Ouattara's government.

**4.2.2.** The uncontrollable movement of people across national borders has raised security concerns for governments. ECOWAS' original treaty sought to achieve a freer movement of the citizens of its member countries by abolishing visa requirements. The Protocol on the "Right of Residence" stipulates that citizens who are nationals of one member state living in a member state other than his own may be issued a residence card or permit that may or may not allow him to hold employment. The Protocol enjoins governments to ensure that migrant workers and members of their families whose status comply with the residence requirements may only be expelled from the host member state for reasons of national security, public order, or morality (Supplementary Protocol, 1997). Migrants and visitors not needing visas to enter member states has resulted in several thousand people moving from low performing economies to high performing economies. This has brought in large numbers of itinerant workers seeking jobs, and often without fixed homes. Governments whose economies attract large waves of immigrants have expressed concern about economic predation and threats to their security. Nigeria was the first to suffer from the influx of immigrants from across West Africa when several thousand Ghanaians, Togolese, Beninois, and Nigeriens settled there from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. In 1985, the Nigerian government under General Buhari believing his primary duty lay in protecting its citizens asked these immigrants who numbered several thousand to leave—a measure which brought so much agony for the immigrants. Expelling immigrants undermined Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS treaty on the free movement of people (Okoro, 2005). By 2012, almost three decades after Nigeria expelled migrant workers Ghana's economy had improved and attracted several thousand Nigerians looking for work. The Ghana government threatened to expel non-Ghanaian residents engaged in petty businesses, sparking unease among those immigrants especially Nigerians. Not surprisingly, the Nigerian government asked ECOWAS to intervene to avert the planned mass expulsion (Agande, 2012).

**4.2.3.** For several decades Fulani herdsmen have been moving southward from Niger, Mali and Chad into southern Nigeria, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire seeking greener pastures for their herd and markets that command higher prices for meat. As the number of herdsmen and the frequency of their southward forays increased, so also did their breaching countries security increase as the migrating herdsmen have clashed with local residents. Most clashes have involved local farmers whose farms have been pillaged by wandering herds.

Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire have borne the brunt of the ravages from these herds. Ekiti farmers in southwestern Nigeria have had their farmlands routinely destroyed by Fulani herdsmen but were shocked by the apathy of the state government addressing the problem ("Ekiti Farmers," 2012). Since then, it has become a routine journey for the cattle from the North to graze at the dams in Ekiti during dry seasons and in the process destroy the farmlands with reckless abandon. The harsh living conditions and the hostility they face from natives have made the Fulani herdsmen to defend themselves by returning violence with violence. Such clashes between the herdsmen and natives have been reported in several states in Nigeria (Shuaib, 2012). Fulani herdsmen, working along the borders of Ghana and Burkina Faso have attacked and vandalized the farms and properties of Ghanaian farmers along the border. There have also been reports of attacks by Fulani herdsmen on many Ghanaian rural dwellers deep in the heart of the country (Adabre, 2012).

Even though ECOWAS' 1979 Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons abolished visa entry permits, the protocol nevertheless required citizens who wished to enter the territory of any other member state to possess a valid travel document and an international health certificate (Protocol A/P.1/5/79, 1979). The unregulated movement of Fulani herdsmen as well as other people seeking economic opportunity moving to areas other than their native countries has been violating the spirit of the 1979 Protocol. The true status of undocumented immigrants was partially clarified when in 1985 a supplemental protocol allowed countries to expel immigrants who violate residency requirement, even though the host state was to enforce the expulsion humanely by respecting the fundamental human rights of expelled immigrants (Supplemental Protocol, 1985).

The flow of illegal immigrants, which ECOWAS defines as citizens of the Community who do not fulfill the conditions stipulated in the different Protocols on the free movement of people, epitomizes one of the fundamental problems member countries face, especially those with high-performing economies. Because most ECOWAS member countries are poor and ranked at the lowest bottom of the Human Development Index, higher performing economies have been at the receiving end of the influx of illegal immigrants. The low economic capacity of governments also has hampered their capacity to support ECOWAS' programs such as the *West African Health Organization* (WAHO), *West African Monetary Agency* (WAMA), and the *West African Monetary Institute* (WAMI) with funding to bring changes that would improve alleviate poverty. One policy area whose effect has been reduced because of inadequate financial backing from members is peacekeeping. Under the best of circumstances, ECOWAS' Department of Defense and Security should be fully staffed or combat-ready to respond promptly to political circumstances in the region that turn volatile. Not surprisingly, peacekeeping has been ECOWAS' single most expensive undertaking.

The United Nations estimated its UNAMISL's operations in Sierra Leone from July 2003 to June 2004 costing \$196.86 million for 11,278 troops, 241 military observers, and 130 civilian police personnel (Africa Peacekeeping, 2004). ECOWAS' slow response to the insurgency in northern Mali has been due in part to the organization not being able to fund any military undertaking. ECOWAS' ability to intervene to stop rogue militaries from seizing power also is sending a message, even if subliminally; to those militaries that they may suffer reproach no greater than economic sanctions and condemnatory statements. The precarious economic standing of ECOWAS member states has made the organization dependent on foreign aid without which the handful of peacekeeping operations it has undertaken might not have happened. ECOWAS muddling through these problems of economics, social and political development without breaking up is testament to member countries willingness to stay together to tackle the multifarious developmental problems that have become emblematic of the subregion. It is possible the member states of ECOWAS do not see many alternatives to solving those problems other than governments pooling their resources together.

It may be safe to assume that the spirit which bound some of the most autocratic governments to commit themselves to form ECOWAS is still alive today. When an economic community overcomes its early hurdles, it may progress to form a political community. Such has the EU, the world's most recognizable economic union, done by moving beyond an economic union to a political union by adding several noneconomic policy areas such as citizenship, the European Court of Justice, and a common currency to its original charter. An economic union could be antithetical to state sovereignty when states lose their unique right to control their own destiny and allow other countries to exercise influence on their affairs (Howe (1990). As the European Union has had problems with some of its member states not giving accent to its treaties, ECOWAS also has had the problem of member states giving inconsistent support because of irregular political transitions.

**4.2.4.** The biggest threat to the solidarity of ECOWAS members has been internal and comes from the cultural divide between its Francophone and Anglophone members. Francophone and Anglophone Africans have had their suspicions about each other about lifestyles and administrative competencies, with the Francophones believing they are more attuned to the sophisticated lifestyles of the French. Breene's (1967) account of the divergent French and British colonial policy explains this divergence. The French willingly integrated indigenous African soldiers during World War I, and most French politicians referred to their colonies in West Africa as *un reservoir d'hommes*. The British, on the other hand, had a policy that was purely commercial, restrictive, and conservative. France, more than Great Britain, continues to keep a complicated set of arrangements with its colonies which include social, political, economic and military linkages (Le Vine, 2004). One philosophical disagreement that emerged between Francophone and Anglophone ECOWAS members was deciding to intervene in the Liberian civil war. Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Nigeria and Guinea which never had a close relationship with France after independence, supported the military action. Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, however, opposed it as their leaders described the crisis as a strictly domestic matter. To ECOWAS' credit, it has compensated for the lack of full financial support from members by being open to getting help from external sources. Nigeria has been using its huge national wealth to support ECOWAS' activities and bears a disproportionate share of ECOWAS' budget. Nigeria shared a disproportionate load supporting ECOMOG and UNAMISL and continues to support ECOWAS' bureaucracy in Abuja, its capital.

ECOWAS' role in ensuring economic growth and political and national security in the West African subregion has fallen short of expectations. ECOWAS' members have faced political, economic and security problems that have been persistent throughout the four decades since the organization's founding. Two veteran political leaders of the organization, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso and Yahyah Jammeh of Gambia are former coup leaders even though they have given legitimacy to their rule by holding multiparty elections. True to their autocratic background, these two leaders have ensconced themselves in power and have showed no inclination of leaving anytime soon. Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, a signatory to ECOWAS' original treaty ruled his country for thirty-eight years and perfected the art of leadership longevity by suppressing dissent. Political uncertainty continues to ensnarl the member states of ECOWAS including Nigeria and Senegal, two of its iconic members. In 2012, Senegal had an uncertain transition of its presidency when Abdoulaye Wade, after serving twelve years, sought a third term. He lost the resulting elections to Macky Sall and graciously bowed out. From 1983 to 1999, politics in Nigeria, ECOWAS' most prominent member, floundered as the country could not disentangle itself from the rule of military autocrats until Olusegun Obasanjo was elected in 1999 in its first multiparty elections. One decade into multiparty politics, the ultra-extremist Islamic group, *Boko Haram*, has plunged the country into fear and insecurity through an indiscriminate bombing campaign (Abimbola, 2012).

For Cote d'Ivoire, it has been two civil wars which occurred within one decade that have set the country back as it tried to resuscitate its economy and promote a more unified political community. The twenty-first century is still in its prime, but most member countries of ECOWAS have been sinking deep in poverty with those in the Sahelian region, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso being in the middle of unprecedented economic downturn because of drought. The frustratingly slow and sometimes reversible pace at which ECOWAS' member countries have been growing as nation-states was epitomized by Mali splintering into halves in 2012. Mali had been enjoying a decade of economic growth spurred on by keeping multiparty governance alive since it adopted a new constitution in 1992. The Tuaregs have had a history of rebellion against the government in Bamako but the Tuareg rebels declaring the northern half of the country independent took most observers by surprise. The rebels have been committing unspeakable crimes through human rights abuses and have invited *ihadists* from Sudan and the Western Sahara to bolster their defenses as they brace themselves for a possible military intervention from ECOWAS and the African Union (Jemal and Idoumou, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

The long list of issues plaguing ECOWAS countries raises the question whether that organization has been successful bringing peace and prosperity to one of the most troubled regions of the world, and whether the organization forming has been worth the time and effort of its members. The answer to both questions is yes, because despite the imagery of poverty and political instability ECOWAS' member countries send to the world, the organization has made modest accomplishments bridging the cultural divide that has existed between its Francophone and Anglophone members through increased travel and cultural exchanges. ECOWAS commissioners have shown evenness sharing positions between Francophone and Anglophone members.

When, Kadre Desire Ouedraogo, the current President of the Commission assumed office in 2012 it split the position 4-3 in favor of the Francophone members holding that position. Similarly, the Chairmanship which is reserved for heads of states has revolved among all member countries except Cape Verde. The ECOWAS Parliament which started sitting in 2002 has 115 members, with each member state given five seats at least and the rest divided among the members in proportion to their population. ECOWAS keeping its basic structure intact, adding new agencies, and keeping its parliament continually in session has been showing leadership by example, letting the citizens of its member states recognize the invaluable benefits of making public policy through civilized debate. A bigger onus for helping ECOWAS earn credibility rests with the heads of states themselves whose ancestors four decades ago, believed the region's deep economic and political woes would be ameliorated only through greater cooperation among countries in the subregion. Lofty-sounding protocols and memoranda of understanding aside, it should be clear to the leaders of each member country that only an exemplary political leadership would create goodwill from citizens to commit to act responsibly and convince external actors to give aid and invest in the region.

ECOWAS, like any regional organization representing countries that have political institutions and economic capacities at different stages of development, is the collective face of the West African countries it represents. The political and economic challenges ECOWAS has faced since its founding were not of the organization's making, rather, they were the result of the multifarious developmental problems leaders and the people of its member states created. For a region that remains politically volatile, economically fragile and violence prone, the only hope for redemption is a supranational organization close by. Insufficient financial support from members, however, has deprived ECOWAS of the capability to develop to its fullest competence in providing economic and security assistance for its members. The organization, unfortunately, will continue to respond reactively to problems long after they have occurred. Any blame for ECOWAS' lapses, however, must first be laid at the doorstep of the governments of its constituent states many of whom have never ceased to perform disappointingly ever since they achieved independence.

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