

THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT ON THE INTEGRATION AND CO-OPERATION OF WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

SAMAILA SIMON SHEHU*

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role and impact of the ECOWAS parliament on the integration and co-operation of West African sub-region. The aim of this paper is to examine the establishment and objectives of the ECOWAS as a body, and its organs especially the parliament, explain the strategy and plans for the ECOWAS parliament on integration and co-operation of West African sub-region, discuss the activities of the first, and second, legislature, analyse the impact of the parliament on the integration of West African sub-region, and why the parliament did not have full legislative powers. The findings revealed that ECOWAS parliament is one of the community institutions established by the ECOWAS revised treaty. ECOWAS parliament also aimed at accelerating and depending the integration and development process among the people of the sub-region. again, it also revealed that the parliament was conceived as a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus among representatives of the people, the beauty of democracy is predicated on the independence of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, it revealed that the Parliaments at the federal and state levels in functional democracies enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed powers to make law for the good governance of their people. The study will contribute to ECOWAS and African nations on how to harness the resources that will improve their living conditions and to improve on political and diplomatic relations, as well as other sectors of the economy. It will also help Nigeria and other African leaders on policy making.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on 28 May, 1975, via a treaty signed in Lagos. Countries that constitute ECOWAS as a body are the 15 West African States. These states came together to promote co-operation in economic, social and cultural activities, and to promote living standards of their peoples. The Sub regional organization evolved

the need for the member nations to pool their resources together to maximize their economic, social and political development. In the 20th and 21st centuries, such organizations have become accepted, because of the unfolding interdependence among nations, as well as the need to exploit the benefits of globalization.

* Lecturer with the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Maiduguri, Borno Nigeria.

Correspondence E-mail Id: editor@eurekajournals.com

Nations therefore, have to collaborate to trade, which is the fundamental reason for sub-regional integration, and then gradually expand the economic relationship to a political union in the interest of all. The European Economic Community (EEC) which is now the European Union (EU) has often been used as a yardstick to measure the successes of regional and sub-regional organizations.

The beauty of democracy is predicated on the independence of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Parliaments at the federal and state levels in functional democracies enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed powers to make law for the good governance of their people. The three principal functions of the parliament include law-making oversight and representation. Dynamics of modern democracy have extended the scope and functions of parliaments to regional bodies seeking to improve inter/intra-border trade among member states. The 15-member Economic Community of West African states established the ECOWAS parliament in 2000. It has a total of 115 seats occupied by members of parliament elected from national assemblies of member states. At inception, it was mandated to serve only as a consultative and advisory body. Twelve years later; despite a desire expressed by the authority of Heads of States and governments in 2006, to have an ECOWAS parliament with directly elected members and exercising full legislative powers, the original mandate has remained unchanged. This is unlike what obtains in similar bodies across the world.

ECOWAS parliament is one of the community institutions established by the ECOWAS revised treaty. It aims at accelerating and depending the integration and development process among the people of the sub-region. Consequently, the parliament was conceived as a forum for dialogue, consultation and consensus among representatives of the people. This work will examine the role and impact of the ECOWAS

parliament in the integration and co-operation of West African sub-region.

THE FORMATION OF ECOWAS

Efforts at regional and sub-regional integration in Africa date back to the immediate post colonial period before the establishment of ECOWAS. It was seen as an extension of the liberation movement and an effort to construct geographical entity that was economically viable and politically united. It reflected the prevailing European experience with its emphasis on free trade with a common external tariff zone. Regional or sub-regional integration in Africa has met with limited success on account of several factors.

According to A.E Essien, in his book *Exploring the gains to economic integration in the West Africa*, the chief among them are the parallel and often competing groupings that divert the needed political will to succeed, the conflict with the developmental objectives and expectations of their development partners, usually the former colonial masters or their associated groupings, conflict between national structures and policies and group objectives and agenda, personality conflicts infra-structures constraints, institutional constraints and national holes in the form other enlargement of local markets. The realization of economies of scale and the strengthening of bargaining positions in global negotiations is a sufficient allure to make the countries of Africa try time and again to forge these regional trade agreements.

ECOWAS came into existence through the intervention of states formerly colonized by Britain, America, France, and Portugal. The evolution of ECOWAS could be traced to the late 1950s and early 1960s. Dr Kwame Nkurumah of Ghana proposed the idea of establishing a continental union Government, or else a political union of West African states. This concept was aborted principally because of Nigeria's lack of

cooperation after having won the confederation of African states to back its position. Nigeria also stood firm for economic cooperation she believed could usher in political union. According to this proposal, economic union must be launched at the sub-regional level and advance in phases. To starting with the pragmatic cooperation and harmony heading towards an African common market, there was yet another strong reason why Nigeria initially opposed the establishment of a continental union. Nigeria had desired to realize with ECOWAS States a regional program that would be enforced at a pace that does not outdo its potentials to design the productive role required to make it a centre of industrial progress.

General Yakubu Gowon, the then Nigerian Head of State, formally launched ECOWAS in April 1972. Gowon and his Togolese counterpart, President Ganassingbe Eyadema of Togo, issued a communiqué expressing their desire to create an economic community between the two states Nigeria and Togo. They formed a commission of experts charged with the task of working on broad areas of trade and industry as well as free movement of people and goods between Nigeria and Togo. The recommendation of the commission was as follows; the removal of transit tax which formed an obstacle to the development of trade. They asked Gowon to convene a summit of all West African leaders to discuss the proposed community. General Gowon was mandated to convene a summit of West African leaders to discuss the proposed Community. It's was first considered by ministers of West African States at a meeting in Lome in December 1973 where basic principles for the creation of ECOWAS were adopted. Following subsequent meetings in Accra in February 1974 and Monrovia in January 1975, the treaty establishing ECOWAS was adopted by a ministerial meeting. It was signed by the original fifteen ECOWAS member's states at Lagos on May 28 1975. The first five protocols annexed to the treaty were signed at

Lome on November 5 1976 with these ECOWAS was born.

According to U Ezenwe, in his book, *ECOWAS and the Economic Integration of West Africa*, the aspiration of the then sixteen countries was to promote cooperation and growth in all sphere of economic affairs, especially in the realms of industry, transport, communications, energy, agriculture, natural sciences, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural issues with the aim of improving the welfare of its peoples of boosting and sustaining economic steadiness, nurturing closer ties among its members and of contributing to the progress and development of the African continent. The creation of ECOWAS took place on May 28 1975 with the treaty of Lagos, Nigeria. It was through the persuasion of Nigeria its then former President General Yakubu Gowon and Togo's former President Gnassingbe Eyadema that ECOWAS was officially launched. The sixteen member countries are as follows; Benin, Burkinafaso, Cape verde, Coted'ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierraleone and Togo. In 2002, Mauritania bowed out of the community leaving the number at fifteen. When put together these countries embrace a geographical area larger than Western Europe. Within ECOWAS States you can find some countries that possess immense mineral resources and they are the most populous countries in Africa.

THE AIMS OF INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION.

The revival of interest in regional integration and cooperation is a worldwide phenomenon, inspired by the success of the European experience. It also reflects growing appreciation of the benefits to be derived from regional unity. In Africa, regional unity is seen as a possible solution to the continents deep and prolonged economic and social crisis, at a time when private energies are being released, thanks to the

strengthening of civil society and the deregulation and privatization of national economies, while the continuing decline of state imposed barriers to inter-country flows is paving the way for increased regional trade.

Regional aspirations as shared by West African State intellectuals, and citizens alike, reflect a general desire to break the confines of the nation state and a denial of all that divides the region, including the multiple barriers to the free movement of goods and services, people, and capital among countries and differences in legal, governmental and educational structures West Africans are aware that the kingdoms and cultures of West Africa were relatively well integrated in pre-colonial times, as accounts of the region amply attest, and the quest for regional unity is in many respects a search for ones roots.

These regional aspirations also constitute a response to the manifest incapacity of the state to generate development. They thus include a search for solutions extending beyond what existing nation states appear capable of providing, including better regional infrastructure better management of the regions resources and even a broader range of freedoms.

This search for new solutions also has its centripetal side not only in Africa, but worldwide, in the growing demands of communities and private citizens for greater control over their own affairs. The manifestation of this is clear in calls for greater decentralization of government and public services; greater community participation in decision making and withdrawal of the state in West Africa is thus being assailed from both directions. It is called upon to share power with lower levels of government and other social entities and with regional bodies. These pressures are not contradictory and do not amount to a negation of the state, but clearly, the day has passed when the nation state is expected to be all things to all people, from policeman to

ultimate provider. The objective is for each level of government to provide such services and functions as it can supply most efficiently and effectively, and it is for the better application of such a principle that the peoples of West Africa seem to be striving.

Because of its holistic and multidimensional coverage of the issues, the Dakar conference provided a useful gauge of evolving views on regional integration and cooperation, while confirming the attachment of African intellectuals to the regional ideal.

The former executive secretary of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Abass Bundu, presented a vision of all that ECOWAS could be and called for renewed leadership and commitment from the member states. He assessed the impediment to regional integration in West Africa but pointed to some of the factors increasing the odds of success in the present 1993 conjunction, in particular the more liberal economic policies recently being adopted in most countries, the advance of democracy in the region and the approval of the revised ECOWAS Treaty by the Authority of Heads of state and government in.

They came together with the agreement to bring an end to or drastic reduction of kidnapping of women and child trafficking, cultism, Robbery among the West Africa States. Article 3 of the ECOWAS treaty encapsulates the aims and objective of the treaty "to promote co-operation and integration leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the standards of living of its people and maintain and enhance economic stability foster relationship among development of African continent."

The achievement of this laudable objective will only be realised with the harmonization and co-ordination of national policies of ECOWAS member countries.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

The ECOWAS Parliament is the representative body of millions of West African citizens who are struggling to build a home through integration. The community Parliament is a sub-regional effort to ensure that the citizens of West Africa learn to live peacefully work together learn from each other's culture and customs and to understand their differences which if properly harnessed would be an asset.

ECOWAS Parliament (also known as Community Parliament) was established under Articles six (6) and thirteen (13) of the 1993 treaty and its protocol (protocol A/PS/8/94) which did not come into effect until 14 March 2002. Since its establishment, the Parliament has made concerted efforts to promote democratic regionalism in West Africa through informed representation of people's views on the Community. The Community has made wide consultations from other experienced bodies such as the European Union to enable her chart a good course in its operations in the West African sub-region. For example, the European Parliament represents 370 million citizens of Europe comprising all fifteen (15) member states. The European Parliament helps to ensure democratic control over the running of the European Union.

The structure of ECOWAS Parliament affirms that the Parliament is the assembly of the people, the Community members of the Parliament who are also known as representatives of all the people of the Community. At a session held in Dakar, (Senegal) on 21st December 2001 the Authority of Heads of States and Government decided that Abuja should be the seat of the Parliament. The Parliament is composed of 115 seats, each of the (15) member States has a guaranteed minimum of five seats, the remaining 40 seats are shared on the basis of population. Consequently, Nigeria has thirty-five (35) seats, Ghana eight(8) seats,

Coted'ivoire seven (7) seats, while Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal have six(6) seats each. The others Benin, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo have five (5) seats each. Whenever necessary the number and distribution of seats shall be reviewed by the authority either by its initiative or on the recommendation of the parliament.

According to a respondent, Hon Hassan Sale, the ECOWAS parliament was established to improve the standard of the member States in the aspect of socio-economic development. He gave example with the European Parliament (EP) and South African Parliament (SAP) where good integration was made possible and have one unity. According to him the member states were to have free movement of goods and services, the use of one currency and also in the aspect of security issues the States are there to support each other. The Parliament holds the government to account on behalf of the people, ensuring that government policies and actions are both efficient and commensurate with the needs the public.

According, to another respondent Hon. Patrick Asadua, the ECOWAS parliament was established to bring unity among the West African State and also to bring about good development in the areas of unemployment, educational sectors, roads network, agriculture and health. He said the parliament helps to have good governance and good representative of the people. By these the beauty of democracy is shown in the West African States.

According to another respondent Hon. Nicolas Mutu, the ECOWAS parliament was established because the West African States have similar culture and tradition, and also have similar political problems. These West African States came together putting aside their differences to make their nations move forward in all developmental aspects that will benefit their people. He said that the member states are there

for each other by bring in a ideas that will benefit their people even though they are an advisory body that cannot make laws, but are doing what they can as an advisory body.

THE AIMS OF ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

The aims of establishing community are basically the promotion of co-operation and integration among Member Countries. This has led to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa with the aim of raising the living standards of West Africans. It is also to maintain and enhance economic stability. This effort would further foster relations among member States and contribute positively to the progress and development of Africans in general to realize this objective; and in accordance with the relevant provisions of ECOWAS Treaty, the Community shall endeavour to ensure that regional cooperation and integration are actualized in addition, it is necessary to harmonized and coordinate national policies and promote integration programmes, projects and activities particularly in food, agriculture, natural recourses, industry, transport, and communication, energy, trade, money and finance.

Also in areas of taxation, economic reform policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science, technology, services, health, tourism and legal matters. There are key factors responsible for achieving the harmonization and co-ordination of policies for the projection of the environment, the promotion of the establishment of joint production enterprises and the establishment of common market. It is stated that:

- i. The liberalisation of trade by the abolition among member States of customs duties levied on imports and exports, and the abolition among member States of non-tariff barriers in order to establish a free trade and community level.

- ii. The adoption of a common external tariff and a common trade policy vis-à-vis third countries.
- iii. The removal among member States, of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods service and capital to the right of residence and establishment.
- iv. The establishment of an economic union through the adoption of common policies in the economic, financial, social and cultural sectors and the creation of a monetary union.
- v. The promotion of joint ventures by private sector enterprises and other economic operators in particular through the adoption of a regional agreement on cross border investments.

Basically the Parliament may consider any matter concerning the community, in particular issues relating to Human Rights and fundamental freedoms and make recommendations to the institutions and organs of the community. The Parliament is responsible for the interconnection of the communication links between member States so as to make free movement of persons and goods effective. And also the interconnection of telecommunication system to form an effective community network with the maximum possible number of extension to the rural areas to make them more accessible. The Parliament takes the lead in the interconnection of energy networks; increased cooperation in areas of radio, television and other media links within the community and between Community and the rest of the World; and Development of National communication system to form an integrated effected community system with its own programmes.

STRATEGY AND PLAN OF THE ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

The objective of Parliament during the third legislature is to improve on its pervious performance so that by 2020 it will become a

Parliamentary institution that has contributed effectively to the establishment of a viable and integrated regional community.

The ECOWAS Parliament has designed the strategic plan for the legislature as a means of achieving this objective. The main objective of the strategy and plan is not only to reinforce the legitimacy and enhance the powers of the Parliament, but it is also to consolidate its position as a specialised institution among the community institutions. Therefore, the strategy and plan is a new policy framework of the programmes and activities of Parliament for the current legislature, while taking into account the achievement of past legislatures. The strategy and plan also takes into consideration the main political, economic, social, environment changes taking place in the sub-region.

ECOWAS Parliament is evolving within a community framework; the strategy plan was drafted taking into account the vision, objectives and fundamental values of ECOWAS; as well as the plans of the other institutions. The strategy and plan of the ECOWAS parliament is spread across all organs of the community Parliament which include:

- i. **PLENARY:** the plenary is the highest deliberative body of the Parliament, it comprises all the elected members of Parliament. It meets in session twice a year in May and September. However, an extraordinary session may be convened at the initiative of the Chairman of the Authority of Heads of States and Governments, on the request of the Speaker of the Parliament or in response to a written request by two- third majority of the members sent to the Speaker. Extraordinary sessions are usually held to address specific issues.
- ii. **BUREAU OR PARLIAMENT:** it comprises the Speaker and four Deputy Speakers. It is the body that oversees the activities of

Parliament; its functions are listed in the protocol relating to the Community Parliament. These include the approval of the activities of the standing committees held outside the headquarters of Parliaments, approval of the draft agenda and work programmes of the sessions of Parliament as well as giving general guidelines on the annual budget prior to its referral to the relevant committee; approval of the recruitment of the other staff members; and it oversees the administrative and financial management of Parliament.

- iii. **CONFERENCE OF BUREAUX:** it comprises the Speaker of Parliament, the Chairman, vice Chairmen and Reporters of standing committees. It is mainly responsible for the approval of the annual programmes of Parliament to ensure that they are in harmony with the general community pro
- iv. **PROGRAMMES:** In conjunction with the Bureau of Parliament, the conference of Bureaux also approves the draft agenda and work programmes of the sessions of Parliament.
- v. **STANDING COMMITTEES:** there are thirteen (13) standing committees. Their main function is to write reports on all matters within their areas of jurisdiction or relating to the community for transmission to the plenary. The Bureaus of each standing committees is composed of a Chairperson, a vice Chairperson and two Reporters. The responsibilities of the standing committees, as stipulated in the ECOWAS Revised treaty reflect the mandates of the technical committees/departments of the ECOWAS commission in order to ensure synergy between the activities of the two community institutions. However, Parliament may establish additional standing committees in an attempt to fulfil its mandate.
- vi. **GENERAL SECRETARIAT:** the General secretariat is the administrative and technical wing of Parliament. The General Secretarial,

headed by the Secretary General provides administrative and technical support to the members of Parliament.

According to a respondent Hon Hassan Sale, some of the method and strategy the Parliament used was the delocalized meeting in each member States which occurs as arranged by the Speaker and committee members, conferences, seminars held in all States? Interested groups and organization attend to help in integration among member States. In a year 3-4 conferences and seminars will hold, the various committees were to implement integration through their activities and it was very successful.

THE PARLIAMENT AS VEHICLE FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION

After the establishment of ECOWAS Parliament by the authority of Heads of States and Government on the 16th November 2000, the Community Parliament has taken positive measures aimed at ensuring peace and security in the sub-region. It is noted that the Parliament is still a Parliament in transition which lacks legislative powers, but it has played an important role in the settlement of various disputes in West African since its establishment in 2000.⁴³

Another measure taken by the Parliament is in the area of oversight of security sector which happens to be one of its main prerogatives. However, the Community Parliament has not done much in this area as a result of its present advisory role. Furthermore, the Parliament is working in collaboration with the armed force in order to guarantee the peace and security of West Africans.

ECOWAS Heads of States and Government and the people of the sub-region have also been encouraged in and rendering necessary support to all actions of the Parliament geared towards promoting the sub-regional integration process by helping to educate the people on the various

activities that would be beneficial to the sub-region. The Parliament since its establishment has been able to set up many component organs as it was stated in the strategy and plans. The growth of the Parliament is attributed to good work of the secretariat. For example, consultations on peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Community Parliament played a key role in enhancing the negotiations brokered by ECOWAS between the warring parties in the Liberian crisis that eventually resulted in the installation of an interim government and the relative peace that country enjoyed.

As an advisory body, ECOWAS Parliament represents the sub-region within the integration process. It gives the people voices by advising the community decision makers on issues and policies that are in the best interest of the people. The

Principal duty of the Parliament remains the provision of advisory opinion on key integration issues as provided for in article 4 of the supplementary protocol relating to the Parliament. In addition to that there are several other roles that the Parliament can play in promoting the ideals of ECOWAS. These include the following: -

- i. Sensitisation of the populace on community programmes; Community citizens are the ultimate beneficiaries of the integration programmes, they however hardly know the content of most programmes and therefore, hardly can take advantage of them. Members of Parliament, as the legitimate representatives of the people are better positioned to sensitise them on the programmes. It is common knowledge that a lot of people do not fully understand the advantages derivable from the ECOWAS programme on the free movement of person, service and capital as well as the right of establishing. Consequently, a lot of obstacles are experienced relating to the

- implementation of this protocol, especially at land border across the sub-region.
- ii. Prevention and resolution of conflicts, Conflict prevention and resolution have taken the front seat in the quest for cooperation and integration within the community. This is so because of the belief that peace and security, is most unlikely if and meaningful programme can be achievable. Members of Parliament have the grassroots linkage with the people from where such conflicts emerge. Furthermore, in the event of armed conflict or violence, the people are usually the actors, since they are mostly recruited to execute such violent acts. Here again, the role of members of Parliament in mitigating, if not eradicating such conflict situations comes handy. Parliamentary diplomacy has remained the main avenue for intervention in this respect. Previous efforts have yielded desired results especially during the first and second legislatures.
 - iii. Observance of Democracy and Good Governance: Despite the fact that it does not make laws, the Parliament has been playing a leading role in the promotion of democracy and good governance throughout. The Community Parliament is leading in the infamous case of the tenure elongation by the administration of former President Momodou Tandja of Niger Republic, as well as the Coup d'état in Guinea in 2009 were clear demonstration of its role towards the observance of democracy and good governance.
 - iv. Ratification and domestication of ECOWAS Protocols and conventions. As earlier stated, members of the ECOWAS Parliament have dual membership; they are members of the National Assemblies of their respective member States before getting elected into the ECOWAS Parliament. This duality of membership may be viewed as disadvantageous, but in the area of

ratification and domestication of ECOWAS Protocols and conventions, it is highly advantageous. Several protocols and conventions of the community remained unimplemented because the needed numbers of member's states are yet to ratify them. Ratification is an act of Parliament consequently the ECOWAS Parliament serves the function of ensuring that each National Parliament is encouraged to ratify pending ECOWAS Protocols and conventions.

- v. Observance of ECOWAS Protocols. The Parliament has often been used as a watch dog in ensuring the observance of ECOWAS Protocols and conventions. Where a violation is observed Parliament embarks on advocacy to the Government of the member States concerned, to ensure full observance of such protocol. The most recent example being Parliaments efforts in the case of the petition from some Nigerian trader's resident in Ghana. Parliament intervention was well received by Government of Ghana, leading to an amicable settlement of the issues.

WHY THE PARLIAMENT WAS UNABLE TO BE AN ELECTED BODY WITH FULL LEGISLATIVE POWERS.

For some time now, the ECOWAS Parliament has been playing the role of an advisory and consultative body thereby restricting its powers to effectively compliment the activities of other Community institutions in fulfilling the aspirations of member countries. The need for transformational drive had come at a time that it was badly needed as part of the move to fast track transition to an ECOWAS of the people.

It should move from the advisory body which is the present status of the ECOWAS Parliament to a law making body in line with region Parliament like the EU and the East African Parliament. The move by the economic boles Parliament is in line with a decision the regional leaders took in 2002

authorizing the revision of the legal text setting up the institution towards enhancing its powers. That decision provides for direct election into the community Parliament by 2010, oversight of sectoral policies and conformation of statutory appointees, establishment of office of Parliamentary Ombudsman and the integration of the Parliament into the regional conflict resolution and management architecture.

But six years down the line that dream has not been realized, due to lack of logistical support. For instance, the community Parliament needed to have created constituencies at the grass roots of member States for the election of members but due to technical challenge had to suspend that. Currently, the Community Parliament is considering using member Parliament as Electoral College where members would be elected. For many reason, the Parliamentarians want to dedicate 100% of their time to the ECOWAS Parliament. As it is today, their attention is divided because all the Parliamentarians are also Parliamentarians in their respective Countries.

CHALLENGES FACING ECOWAS PARLIAMENT

Most of the treaties forming African Regional Economic countries are sophisticated instruments similar to those guiding economic integration in other regions. For example, most of these regional bodies have well-functioning secretariats, and they conduct frequent meetings at the summit, ministerial and technical levels. Taking ECOWAS Parliament for instance, one can say that these are problems associated with their activities which pose a challenge for Regional Integration.

The ECOWAS Parliament like most regional Economic Communities adopted several protocols. However, there are weaknesses in them making it difficult to function properly. This therefore, means that there is lack of

complementarities in the activities of the ECOWAS Parliament. The Parliament has standing committees which if their recommendations are properly implemented would have gone a long way in adopting an integrative mechanism. But these protocols differ. Their priorities vary from one community to another and consequently, the protocols place emphasis on different issues. These compound the difficulties for countries belonging to more than one regional organization: they must implement programmes that vary in intensity, schedule effect on national policies and other features.

Another problem that calls for attention is the lengthy negotiation process which the committees of the ECOWAS Parliament embarked on. For example, all the committees under ECOWAS Parliament take a long time to conclude. This was especially so with the vital and sensitive committees which are significant to regional cooperation and integration. The resulting delays have made it difficult to adhere to the provisions of the treaties establishing ECOWAS Parliament which failed to specify the period of their activities for example, negotiations on economy, finance and trade committee may take so long that the speaker of the parliament and Bureau may not sign the working document by the target date thus, this may lead to the rescheduling of the scheme.

THE IMPACT OF ECOWAS AND THE PARLIAMENT ON INTEGRATION AMONG THE WEST AFRICAN STATES

The evaluation of the ECOWAS as a body and the Parliament, one of its organs should be made in the light of objectives set out in the original treaty of 2000. The overall goal define in the 2000 treaty (Article 3) for ECOWAS reads “to promote cooperation and integration leading to the establishment of an economic union in West African on order to raise the living standards of its people and to maintain and enhance economic

stability foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent”.

To help achieve this goal, Member States are to make specific commitments in the various areas at the field today. It has rich architecture of programmes covering almost all sectors of economic, social, cultural, and political activities. The action implemented for each of these roles help to improve the strategies and policies of member States, by obliging them to align with the best practices existing at the regional and global levels. They also promote the implementation of reforms as the Parliament is instruments can henceforth be applied directly in the member States which should incorporate same into their legislation, thus facilitating their acceptance by national stakeholders.

Moreover, ECOWAS sectoral programmes created new framework for cooperation between countries of the region and offer them in the medium and long term opportunities which are greater than those they could have obtained if they acted single- handily. This is especially true with regard to infrastructure or energy projects, although ECOWAS Parliament lack of means to constitute a major contract on the speedy implementation of programmes and their ability to generate a strong impact in the short term. Free movement of persons among ECOWAS members led to creation of special post by member States at each official entry point for entry formalities by their nationals and ECOWAS citizens. Freedom of movement and of residence, existence of an ECOWAS passport, adoption of biometric identity card as a travel document instead of ECOWAS travel certificates, suppression of the residence card (free establishment for ECOWAS citizens) free access to employment in the member States setting up of a platform for the harmonization of immigration procedures and planned introduction of ECOVISA it could have gone along way.

There is also free movement of goods the objective at which was trade liberation by elimination of customs duties on imports and export of goods between member States and the abolition between member States of non- tariff barriers, with a view to creating free trade area at the community level. The ECOWAS Parliament was able to achieve by reduction of non-traffic barriers through control post on some corridors, free movement of local goods and handicrafts between member States exclusive of all duties and taxes. Also in area of trade promotion through actions such as the use of raw materials, goods and factors of production as well as finished products from the community and periodically participate in sectoral trade fairs, region trade fair and other similar activities. The ECOWAS Parliament was able to propose the adoption of the ECOVISA as a step forward in the promotion of intercommunity tourism. In the area of Road infrastructure, which aimed at developing within the community a vast network of all seasons roads while giving priority to interstates highways it developed plans to improve and ensure the integration of network and it led to major road infrastructure projects realized (or being realized). These include Lagos Abidjan High way project, Senegal Gambia Bridge, Rossobrilge between Senegal and Muratains, Trans West African highway coastal road with the construction of bridges in Sierra Leone and the Liberian border, construction of the Zinder-Nigeria border road and the trans-sahel, establishing a transportation facilitation and transit programme, implementation of the West Africa trade.

Under railway infrastructure the Parliament was able to adopt and implement the railway master plan within the community level. Air transport was also in progress with the implementation of an air transport liberalized market with ECOWAS creation of the sub-region organization of supervision of aviation safety (BAGOSOO) 2010. In area of maritime transport, which was aimed

at develop in a programmes for improving the sabotage service and interstate waterways as well as the harmonization of polices on transport and maritime service which is key in the integration and cooperation of West African sub-region. In order to achieve this, aim it led to the creation of a sub-regional shipping company called ECOMARINE international which will be able to work toward the standardization of equipment used in transport and communication and the creation of common infrastructures for production maintainers and repair member States came into agreement to develop a common policy on communications as well as related laws and regulations. To develop, modernize, coordinate and standardize national telecommunication network was introduced in order to provide reliable interconnection among member States. The impact of such among the West African States was the launched of INTELCOMM II programme, establishment of the fund for the development and financing of transport and energy sector (FODETE ECOWAS), interstate terrestrial fibre optic connections Burkinafaso- Niger, Burkinafaso submarine cables for land locked countries (Burkinafaso, Mali and Niger). Establishment of a Project Preparation and Development Unit (PPDU) and financing of the transport and energy sectors (FODETE-ECOWS).

The impacts of ECOWAS Parliament in integration and cooperation among West African States was visible in the areas of industries which brought about the important regional initiatives programme implementation of the West African common industrial policy (WACIP) of ECOWAS; Development of the Quality policy implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Authority (ERA) to boost competition. Development of an ECOWAS investment policy (ECOWIP) and the West African Investment Code (ECOWIC) standards Harmonization programme (ECOSHAM). The private sectors were not left behind in having visible impact on West African

sub region the existence of ECOWAS investment policy (ECOWIP), ongoing preparation of an ECOWAS Investment Code (ECOWIC), an information system on the market ECOBIZWORLD (ECOINVEST PROJECT) and of a support platform (E-COMMERCE) to ECOBIZ- other initiatives include the establishment of a young entrepreneurs programme an ECOWAS Diaspora programme and a regional public private partnership (PPP) policy. In the area of regional development funding it gave active support for the creation of ECOBANK which was establish in 1999 as a bank for investment and development (EBID) replacing the ECOWAS FUND. ECOBIZ was able to establish the West African capital markets integration council (WACMIC).

In health related issues the impact was the establishment of the West African Health Organization (WAHO), conduct of studies on the application of health care quality assurance norms and standards in ECOWAS campaign against HIV/AIDS, establishment of the West African Health Organization in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and also regional integration and operation plan for response to the EBOLA VIRUS. Gender issues which was aimed at improving the social and economic and cultural conditions of women in West African Sub-region. The ECOWAS Parliament was able to establish centre for gender ongoing development of on ECOWAS plan of Action for Gender and trade commercials. Member States were able to have ECOWAS emergency response team (ERT) in the areas of Humanitarian Affairs this team supported gender inclusion in the sub-region. ECOWAS Parliament supported education programming in the sub-region. On the 13th of January 2003 marked the of adoption of a protocol on education and training promotion of student and teacher's exchanges within ECOWAS and natural recognition of diplomas foster the creation of common institutions of higher education and vocational training by ECOWAS encourage the coordination

of curricula and training. By 2006 under science and technology the West African States implementation of priority components of the ECOWAS programme, or the development of culture through the NEPAD Action plan for culture in 2003, which promote culture and improve the structures and mechanisms for the production dissemination and exploitation of cultural practise. ECOWAS youth and sport development centre implementation of the ECOWAS volunteers programme to promote youth and sport activities.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, Political and economic integrations are necessary tools in West Africa because of the global new realignment. The sub-region is following economic integration through formal and informal circumstances in line with the new trend members States are binging to surrender certain degrees of their sovereignty and to act as an economic community unit. This effort is geared towards moving from economic isolation through economic mercantile policy that would eventually lead to economic cooperation and integration.

This study affirms that the community needs linkages and genuine coalition formation for its meaningful integration process. It is also argued that such coalition and linkages could have both positive and negative impacts on the community. Furthermore, this study affirms that the ECOWAS Parliament remains committed to its stated mission in order to meet the set objective of its founding father and to strive hard to fulfil the aims of the community citizens. Even though the Parliament is a young institution, it is also argued that it should not be seen as handicapped for its operations.

Parliament is a law making body in any society. It is the same with ECOWAS Parliament though it lacks the mandate of making laws but rather serves as advisory body. It has played vital roles

in the region rights 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'ivore 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 some West African Countries e.g. The Gambia, Burkinafaso, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau etc. The Parliament 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. The Parliament began as a consultative and non-legislative Assembly and has remained so, but determined efforts have been made in the past decade to turn it into a legislative and co-decision –making body. These efforts have yielded significant results with the adoption on December 15, 2014, of the supplementary Act on the Enhancement of the powers of Parliament at the forty-sixth Ordinary Session of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of States and Government held in Abuja.

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