

Regional Integration: Significance for the Political Stability of the West African Sub-Region

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Abstract

No man is an island and no nation can go it alone. In the comity of nations, there is every evidence to suggest that the measure of good relations among countries enhances cooperation amongst such countries and also facilitates the degree of progress, growth and development of such nations. This study examined the extent to which relations among the countries of the West African sub-region can enhance the political stability of nations in the sub-region. Data was obtained from secondary sources which include – books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, the internet, etc. Such data was analyzed by content analysis while the theory of Peace Galtung (1967) was adopted as the theoretical framework. Results showed that even as a group, the Economic Community of West African States has not enjoyed the level of regional cooperation that can give an optimal boost to the development of its member states. The study suggested that relations must be improved to enhance the development of the sub-region.

Keywords: *Sub-region, ECOWAS, International relations, Regional development, Regional integration*

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Background to the Study

Regional aspirations as shared by West African statesmen, intellectuals and citizens alike, affect a general desire to break the confines of the nation-state, and a denial of all that divide 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. Oliver and Atmore (1981 a, b) believed that “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”. These regional aspirations also constitute a response to the manifest capacity of the state to generate development.

The concept of regional integration is often confused with that of economic integration. There is therefore a need to undertake some conceptual clarifications. Regional integration may be viewed as covering the full range of public sector activity, including not just the coordination of economic policies, but also regional security, human rights, education, health, research, technology, and natural resource management. It is therefore a broader concept than economic integration. Interest in regional integration and cooperation is global in scope and has been inspired by the success of the European experience. Mytelka (1981) observes that, “it also reflects a growing appreciation of the benefits to be derived from regional unity and cooperation in meeting with the challenges posed by the increasing competing world markets. This is why this paper seeks to examine the significance of such regional cooperation (regional integration) the peace, unity and political stability of the countries in the sub-region. Thus, this study seeks to ascertain the extent to which regional integration can enhance the political stability of West Africa.

Conceptual Clarification

Economic Integration: This is an agreement among countries in a geographic region to reduce and ultimately remove tariffs and non-tariff barriers to the free flow of goods and services and factors of production among each other, i.e. any type of arrangement in which countries agree to coordinate their trade, fiscal, and/or monetary policies are referred to as economic integration. Such integration consists of different stages.

The three degrees of economic integration can be categorized into five stages:

- a) Free trade area
- b) Customs union
- c) Single market
- d) Economic and monetary union
- e) Complete integration (political union).

Tinbergen (1965) posits that, “all process of economic integration include two aspects- negative integration: the elimination of obstacles; and positive integration: harmonization, coordination of existing instruments”. In this vein, Tinbergen (1965), defines international economic integration as, “the creation of most desirable structures of international economy, removing artificial hindrances to the optimum operation and introducing deliberately all desirable elements of coordination or unification”. However, Balassa (1969), views economic integration both as “a process and as a state of affairs.

Regional Integration: This concept may be defined along three dimensions:

- a) Geographic scope which illustrates the number of countries involved in an arrangement (variable geometry).
- b) The substantive coverage or width, that is the sector or activity coverage (trade, labour mobility, macro-policies, sector policies, etc.), and
- c) The depth of integration to measure the degree of sovereignty a country is ready to surrender, that is from simple coordination or cooperation to deep integration.

The above therefore suggests that regional integration is a “multidimensional process which may take the form of coordination, cooperation, convergence and deep integration initiatives and whose scope extends not only to economic and trade issues but to political, social, cultural and environmental ones as well” (Barcena, 2013).

Political Stability: This may be viewed as the propensity of government collapse either because of conflicts or rampant competition between various political parties. Also, the occurrence of a government change increases the likelihood of subsequent change. Encyclopedia Britannica believes that, “political stability is the durability and intelligence of the present government regime”. A stable society is one that is satisfied with the ruling party and system of operations and is not interested in revolutionary or despotic ideas. The international consulting firm Eurasia Group cited in Sottilota (2013), defines political stability as the “capacity of a country's political system to withstand internal and external shocks”. This is to suggest that any broad operational definition of political stability should incorporate certain indicators and concepts which include human development (as measured by the UN Human Development Index); the quality (Gini index); political legitimacy (i.e. the more or less widespread support for the government, whether democratic or non-democratic); constrain on regime responsiveness (i.e. the economic constraints which government encounter in meeting the request of their citizens as expressed, for example, by the total stock of a country's public debt); and regional/international integration (meaning, for instance, membership in international and regional organizations or the ratio of total foreign trade over GDP).

Sub-Region: A region could be a territory, province, prefecture, district or administrative area. For smaller areas in geography, the term 'micro-region' may be applicable. Regions may be conditionally divided into:

1. Physiognomic regions- (a homogenous region which has its distinctive appearance and physiognomy, thanks to the homogeneity of the environment and social processes)
2. Functional regions- (an important feature given to the elements of spatial organization-i.e. the consequences of men working);
3. Nodal regions- (based on territorial entity with its own center around which gravitates to its environment; Latin “nodus” - node.

In the determination of the region, it is necessary to establish its borders because of determination and for more precise determination of geographic content. Delimitation is

best when boundaries are natural. Some borders are unnatural and non-ethnic. It is worthy of note that the Serbian geographical terminology has been internationally accepted and generally adopted for regions-which include-micro-regions, sub-regions, meso-regions and macro-regions. Ink (2005: 87), observes that, "the region is an integrated region and area, i.e. the complex heterogeneous space with comprehensive geographic content".

Unity: Unity connotes a sense of one-ness, a sense of we-ness. It stands for the bonds which hold members of a society together. This is to say that unity means integration. There is always the need to distinguish unity from uniformity. While uniformity presupposes similarity, unity does not. Unity may or may not be based on uniformity. Unity may be born out of uniformity. Unity in diversity is a concept of unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation that shifts focus from unity based on a mere tolerance of physical, cultural, linguistic, social, religious, political, ideological and/or physiological differences towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that difference enriches human interactions. "Unity in diversity" is used as a popular slogan or not by a variety of religious and political groups as an expression of harmony and unity between dissimilar individuals or groups.

Empirical Literature

Past and current works on the subject matter are hereby reviewed in a tabular form as follows:

Table 1: Empirical Literature on Regional Integration

Surname of researcher, year and title of study	Scope of study	Methodology, findings/recommendations
Ogbuabor, Anthony Orji, and Ogbonna (2019). Regional Integration and growth: New empirical evidence from WAEMU	WAEMU: Regional Integration and growth 2000-2015	The study used robust instrument variables system GMM regression in the framework of cross-country growth model and panel data. Contrary to the widely held view that regional economic integration fosters economic growth, this study did not find any empirical support for a positive growth impact of WAEMU integration in west Africa. However, results indicate that FDI, institutional quality, capital, labour and the initial real per capita GDP are important drivers of growth in the sub-region.
Okorie, (2017) Assessment of regional Economic Integration and the Nigerian Economy: A case study of ECOWAS	ECOWAS and the Nigerian Economy. Regional Economic Integration and development.	Secondary data were employed using the random effect estimation methods on the longitudinal series from inception of economic integration till 2014. It was discovered that a number of states benefit from the economic community. However, these benefits are not as a result of the level of openness of each member state.
Eme and Adegoke (2015). An empirical analysis of Integration and Intra-regional trade in ECOWAS	ECOWAS: Integration and intra-regional trade	This study utilized a gravity model that was modified to reflect economic features of ECOWAS. Specifically, findings of the research show that economic size and common, language are the major drivers of intra-regional trade in ECOWAS. It recommended deepening economic and cultural integration to maximize the enormous gains accruable from increased intra-regional trade.
Ametoglo, Guo, and Wonyra (2018). Regional Integration and income inequality in ECOWAS zone.	15 ECOWAS states over the period 2004-2013	Data was sourced from the World Bank Development Indicators (WDI) from 2004-2013 at the world Bank. Results suggest that political integration reduces income inequality, while economic integration increases the income gap in the ECOWAS zones.

Theoretical Framework

The Eclectic Paradigm (Dunning, 1977)

This study leverages on the hypothesis of Growth-led FDI as its theoretical framework. Thus, Dunning (1977) in his Eclectic Paradigm, argues that “MNCs with certain ownership advantages will invest in another country with locational advantages, and both advantages can be captured effectively by “internalizing” production, through FDI. The hypothesis of growth-led FDI, therefore focuses on locational factors, such as market size (proxied by GDP or GNP), as the most significant factor in attracting FDI. As the market size (GDP) of the host country increases with a high rate of economic growth, ceteris paribus, FDI will increase, resulting from the expected higher level of profitability. High rates of economic growth will cause levels of aggregate demand for investments (both domestic and foreign) to rise (Corden, 1999, Zhang 2001). In addition, better economic performance suggests better infrastructural facilities and greater opportunities for making profits. As a result, the greater the market size, the greater the inflows of FDI into the recipient countries (Choong, Yusop and Soo, 2004).

Methodology

This study examined the extent to which regional integration can enhance the peace, unity and political stability of the West African sub-region. Data from secondary

materials were analyzed in a qualitative approach to yield some findings. The theoretical framework was chosen from an economic background for the simple reason that regional integration incorporates economic integration, political stability, peace, etc. Also economic progress is vital for peace, unity, security and political stability. This justifies the adoption of the eclectic paradigm by Dunning (1977) as the theoretical framework.

Research Questions: To what extent would regional integration enhance the political stability of the West African sub-region?

There are empirical views to support that poverty; unemployment, inequality etc. have facilitated the spate of violence and insecurity in developing countries like Nigeria. For instance, Awojobi (2014) in his study of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria democratic desperation, revealed that, “in spite of over fifteen years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria, there is a high level of poverty, unemployment and insecurity and Katsina (2010), asserts that, “the economy continues to dwindle, poverty is spreading while political instability continues to be the order of the day”. El-Rufai (2011), observes that “since democratic rule in 1999, the country has witnessed unprecedented level of social vices like political violence, ethno-religious strife, kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy and recent activities of the dreaded Islamic group called Boko Haram. “There is high tendency that frustration can lead to groups taking up arms against the state” (Ajaegbu, 2012), The paper opines that the rising level of poverty has been blamed for security challenges confronting Nigeria.

Another study by Ajodo-Adebanjoko which studied “poverty and the challenges of insecurity to development using secondary data found that “insecurity contributes to poverty with implications for development and the need to shun violence was recommended. Thus, with sufficient proof of the relationship between poverty, violence, insecurity and political instability, the need for an instrument of reversal from poverty to prosperity can be enhanced through regional integration which incorporates regional economic cooperation as attested through empirical evidences.

Empirical studies abound to support the fact that a regional economic cooperation has the capacity to enhance the growth and development of member states. Adeniji (2014), in his study titled, “Regional integration and socio-political and economic development in East Africa; Focus on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), found that “all the members of IGAD belong to more than one regional group and that there is infrastructural deficit, many potentials are not well-utilized, inadequate capacity and resources among countries”. The paper recommended a closer relationship which will benefit all member states and usher in an era of growth. Such era of growth certainly will reduce poverty, lead to less violence and conflicts, and ensure political stability. Thus, regional integration if seriously packaged has the potentials to enhance security among member states in the West African sub-region.

Findings

In this current study, the following findings have been recorded:

1. The relationship between poverty, violence, conflict and insecurity has been established in clear terms as positive.
2. Most conflicts in Nigeria and most member states of ECOWAS are caused by poverty.
3. One fast way out of poverty and unemployment is through regional integration which would enhance growth in the sub-region. This can come through regional cooperation.
4. Many member states belong to a couple of regional bodies which does not allow for maximum cooperation.
5. There are many resources that remain underutilized due to lack of close relationship.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between poverty, conflict, violence and political stability among African countries especially those in the West African sub-region. Using the technique of content analysis. The study established the fact that most problems of insecurity are as a result of the level of economic, social and political development. People are unemployed, poor and the incidence of inequality in countries of the sub-region is high. Hence, they resort to all forms of vices. The paper therefore suggests that the only fast way to ensure political stability is to enhance growth and development through regional cooperation among member states.

Suggestions

The paper suggests as follows in view of the findings:

1. Member states of the West African sub-region should avoid belonging to many regional bodies. This makes them weak members. Hence, their rewards are not fully tapped.
2. Political stability could only come when violence, conflicts and insecurity are addressed to the roots. Having identified poverty as the root of most challenges of insecurity in the region, it only makes sense to advice governments to strive and enhance economic growth and development through effective policies acceptable across the region.
3. Regional policies that would enhance the full utilization of untapped resources across the sub-region must be undertaken by national governments in the region.
4. The challenges of youth unemployment should be tackled at the regional level by member states.

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