

FOOD INSECURITY AND TRADE BARRIERS IN WEST AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOWAS REGIONAL INTEGRATION.

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Abstract

Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, was set up in 1975 by fifteen West African member states following the signing of Lagos Treaty by the fifteen member states. The regional body had the aim of integrating West African region through cooperation, which will improve on the lives of its citizens. To discuss and understand better what integration is all about, this paper adopted regional integration theoretical framework of Ernst Haas's Regional Cooperation of Neo-Functionalism, which focused on spillover and gradual shifting of national loyalty to the supra-national. It also highlighted the concept of food insecurity as well as causes of food insecurity in West Africa. Such causes included: impact of climate change, high cost of food prices, challenges of farmers having little or no access to government agricultural inputs, poverty, conflicts, corruption, and lack of modern infrastructure. Besides, challenges to trade and the threat to regional integration were examined such as, lack of documentation and data on the volume of intra-regional informal trade, harassment and intimidation on trade corridors by security agents, existence of national trade barriers and restrictions, insecurity, smuggling, lack of citizens participation and lack of ECOWAS single currency. More so, Conclusion and recommendations were made in the course of this research work.

Keywords: Food Insecurity, Trade Barriers, ECOWAS-member-states, Sub-regional trade, & West Africa.

Introduction

West Africa as a region comprised sixteen countries namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire,, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia. Others are: Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal Sierra-Leone and Togo. On May 28, 1975, a Treaty establishing Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS was signed

in Lagos, Nigeria, by fifteen West African countries, namely, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania,, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal Sierra Leone and Togo, Cape Verde joined ECOWAS in 1976. ((Ebiefie, 1983; Afolabi, 1998; Oddih & Okor, 2020; Yusuf, 2011; Mangachi,2011; Montford, 2024). Currently, all other countries are members of Economic Community of West African States, except Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Mauritania left the regional body in 2000, while Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger exited in 2024 (Afolabi, 1998; Mangachi, 2011; ETK, 2024; Resnick, 2025). The aim of ECOWAS included promoting cooperation and integration. ECOWAS objectives were to establish an economic union in West Africa in order to raise living standards of its people, and to maintain economic stability, foster relationship among member states and contribute to progress and development of the African continent (Afolabi, 1998; Mangut & Wuam.2012; Ishola, 2017).

The people of West Africa engage in agricultural activities, including growing of crops, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting and fruit gathering. The people also engage in trade and craftwork (Zoundi, 2003; Mensah et al, 2016). West Africa comprises several agro-ecological zones such as, arid to semi-arid, sub-humid and humid climates (Mensal, E., et al, 2016). Suitable crops grown and consumed in West Africa are determined by climate and vegetation. Patterns of consumption in West Africa differ from country to country or from community to community in each of the countries according to different climatic conditions. There are major important food crops grown and consumed in West Africa, which include, (i) Cereals such as, sorghum, millet, maize, and rice (ii) Roots and tubers such as, cassava, sweet potatoes, and yams and legumes comprising cowpeas, and groundnuts, and other food crops such as banana and plantains. (Elbehri et al, 2013; Mensal et al, 2016). West African countries that grow and consume majorly cereals are: Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali and Niger depend mostly on sorghum and millet, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone mostly depend on rice and wheat with Mauritania preferring wheat to rice. Countries that depend on roots and tubers as their staple food are: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo. Exception of Cote d'Ivoire, all other countries in this group consume cassava more than yam. More so, in such countries as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Guinea there is significant consumption of banana, plantain, rice and maize. Rice and maize consumption in these countries constitute at least 85kg/person/year (Elbehri et al, 2013; Mensal et al, 2016).

According to Mensah et al 2016, report of an assessment carried out by Research Service/ USDA on performances of member states of ECOWAS in 2014 in regard to grain and root productions showed that Sierra Leone recorded the largest annual growth in production of grain (8.2%) ahead of Liberia (6.8%). Annual grain productions of other countries were between 2.0% and 6.0% with the least value of 5.3% from Cape Verde.

Besides, Mali had recorded the highest annual root crop production growth of 13.95 from 1990 to 2012 ahead of Senegal with 10%, while the annual growth of other countries recorded between 1.2% and to 5.7% with Gambia having the least growth of 1.2% (Elbehri et al, 2013; Mensal et al, 2016).

Impact of climate change has negatively affected agriculture in the region. According to Mensah, et al (2016) experts had predicted that in the region, dry areas would continue to be drier, while the wet areas would be wetter, a situation which has resulted to increasing number of pests and diseases against staple crops, and has caused large movement of herders from the arid and semi-arid areas to the rain forest and coastal south leading to more serious herders and farmers clashes; worsening food insecurity already plaguing the region (IPCC,2007;FAO,2008;IISD,2008; Mensah et al,2016; Muhammad& Babatunde, 2024). Similarly, despite the abundance of land and water in the region, accessibility to water has been a challenge to agriculture and has remained mostly dependent of rain water. Agriculture in the region has become vulnerable to weather changes, degradation of soil fertility, pest attacks and several crop diseases. Such serious conditions on agriculture are experienced during extreme weather changes (Camila & Gaeye, 2003; FAO, 2009; Feed the Future, 2015, Mensah, 2016; Muhammad& Babatunde, 2024).

Besides, trade barriers pose as challenges to creation of a common market (Touray, 2023; Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). According to Brock et al (2010 a) the major obstacle to promotion of trade liberalization in Benin Republic was lack of enforcement of national and regional laws at the borders, which clearly showed on imposition of non-tariff barriers at the borders that hinder free trade agenda.

Besides, conflicts, terrorism, and insecurity serve as major obstacles to regional integration of West Africa. These challenges affect political will of governments to open up borders for free movement of persons and goods, owing to the threat of spillover effects of insurgency and terrorism plaguing the region of West Africa (Eze, 2013; Touray, 2023). This has been observed as a basic fear discouraging ECOWAS countries from transferring their national authorities to supranational ECOWAS authority ((Eze, 2013; Touray, 2023).

The aim of this paper is to raise research questions that can lead to examining factors encouraging food insecurity and trade barriers in West Africa, their effects on integration of West Africa as well as making recommendations. The research questions are, (i) what are the causes of food insecurity in West Africa? (ii) What are the causes of trade barriers in West Africa? (iii) What are the implications of food insecurity and trade barriers to regional integration of West Africa? (v) How would food security and free

flow of intra-regional trade in West Africa encourage integration of West African region? The relevance of this paper will be on its contribution to academic knowledge and generation of discussions on integration of West African region through food security and free flow of intra-regional trade.

Methodology

The methodology used in this paper is through data collection and utilization of analysis of data from different secondary sources such as, online journals magazines and newspapers and published sources. Besides, the method of data analysis was qualitative, using content analysis.

The data was analyzed by means of content analysis. This method which is often linked with documented texts, involves analysis of the contents of written documents to make inferences. By using content analysis, contents and themes were examined, which involved identifying keywords and themes, understanding the context and the meaning of the content, analyzing the relationships between content elements, and drawing conclusions about the underlying opinions and views expressed.

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Regional Cooperation: Neo-functionalism.

Neo-functionalism was prominent among classical theories of integration that dominated the debate on European integration from the early 1950s to early 1990s (Monnet & Schuman, 2008). It was considered much relevant to this work by the researcher.

According to Haas (1958), Neo-functionalism involved the process whereby political actors in different national settings would be persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities to a new center whose institutions have or would demand jurisdiction over the already existing nation-states. Haas predicted that the process that started with European Coal and Steel Community would continue in the European Economic Community. His perception of the European Economic Community was that of “spill over” from the European Coal and Steel Community. He stated that liberalization of trade within the customs union would result to harmonization of general economic policies and expectedly spill over into areas of politics which would lead to the establishment of some form of political community (Haas, 1958).

This theory places major emphasis the role on non-state actors, mainly the secretariat of the given regional organization, those interest associations and social

movements that are set up at the regional level that provide the dynamic for integration. Member states are always the key actors in the process. These member states stipulate the terms of the earlier agreement, however, only they do not determine the direction or the level of the subsequent change.

However, regional bureaucrats in connection with a shifting set of self-organized and passions would seek to utilize the assuredly spill overs and aftermaths that arise as a result of agreement of states trying to assign some form of supra-national responsibilities in order to achieve some tasks and then knowing that those responsibilities would have external effects on other independent activities. Lindberg (1963) explained that spill over in neo functionalism referred to a situation in which a given action related to a specific goal would create a situation in which original goal would be assured only by taking further actions, which lead to creation of a further condition and a need for more action and other similar ones. Spill over occur when citizens start shifting more and more of their expectations to the region and fulfilling them will encourage and hasten up the tendency that economic-social integration will spill over into political integration (Haas,1975; Christiansen, 2001; Schmitter, 2002).

However, Schmitter (2004) explained that neo-functionalism developed a model to explain the growing level of European integration and the role of supranational bodies in the progress of integration. Firstly, it noted that where countries agreed to cooperate in a particular sector that would create incentives to cooperate in other related sectors.

Secondly, Neo-functionalism meant that economic integration would always lead to an increase in interaction among actors in the integration process of the region. In this regard, sub-state actors would start to cooperate in politics across borders in order to lobby other political leaders. It stated that this would lead to interest groups at domestic levels that would begin to lobby one another for reasons to integrate.

Thirdly, it explained that neo-functionalism espoused that supranational body would be established to supervise the integration by promoting the goals of benefits of integration to all the interest groups and the entire region (Schmitter, 2002). Neo-functionalism was chosen for two major reasons. Firstly, it is a yardstick to understanding the basic stage of European integration and secondly, it elucidates the understanding of regional integration not only to Europe, but worldwide and expresses a criterion that brings out the successes and failures of these processes. With these factors, neo-functionalism is most suitable to ECOWAS as a regional body aiming for a regional integration in West Africa.

The concept of Food Insecurity

Food security campaign has become one of the dominant issues of global interest, culminating in holding the 1974 first World Food Conference (Anjani et al, 2012; Mensah et al, 2016), and World Food Summit in 1996, among others (Mensah et al, 2016; Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). According to USDA (2006) food insecurity can be referred to limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways. In addition, food insecurity can be described as when and where people do not have sure access to adequate amounts of safe and nutritious food needed for normal growth and development and healthy living, which could be caused by lack of food, low income earnings, unfair distribution or inadequate consumption of food at the household level(FAO, IFAD and WEP, 2014; ; Mensah et al, 2016), Food and Agriculture Organization (2002) stated that food insecurity could be understood from inability to afford four indicators of food security namely, food availability food accessibility, food utilization and food system ability. Food availability is predicated on food production, while food accessibility describes the people's ability to afford food, maybe through production or purchase or transfer. Food utilization focuses on the food's nutritional value, its interaction with physiological condition as well as food safety. Food systems stability is about stability of supply and access and ability to respond to food emergencies (FAO, 2002; Mensah et al, 2016).

Food Insecurity in West Africa and the Threats to Ecowas Sub-Regional Integration.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been reported and reputed to have remained the region having most food insecurity in the world with an estimated 29% of its population in 2014 to be food insecure and projected to rise to 30.7% in 2024, if urgent steps were not taken to arrest the deteriorating situation (Economic Research Service /USDA, 2014; Fuglie et al., 2014; Mensah et al, 2016; Ibitoye, Ogunnyemi, Ojo & Ibitoye, 2018). Agricultural risks in the region have resulted to multiple shocks such as food scarcity, high cost of food and malnutrition. In 2021, about 27 million people in West Africa were in need of immediate food aid owing to drought, poverty, high cost of cereals and environmental degradation, displacement, poor trade integration and conflict (World Bank, 2021).

In West Africa there is rising surge of prices of domestic food, which has posed as a serious threat to the regional food security. In addition, in the region, domestic food price is volatile, creating price fluctuations and an environment of uncertainty; at times resulting to the producers or the traders deciding to hoard the produce, while the consumers will engage in panic buying all resulting to artificial scarcity and hike in price of the commodities (Mensah et al, 2016). However, according to Engel & Jouanjean (2015) farmers were still confronted with some difficulties to collective action, which

included poor distribution arrangements, poverty, ignorance, inaccessibility to government and not being carried along by policy makers.

Farmers play crucial role in the economy of the region, however, they are confronted with difficulties in having access to agricultural inputs like improved seeds, tractors, fertilizers and agro-chemicals and uncertainties of price fluctuations (FAO and World Bank, 2001). World Bank publication (2012) revealed the obstacles farmers faced in accessing inputs, and long delays subjected to before having access to new seed varieties, higher costs of fertilizers owing to higher trade costs and inadequate institutions to reduce the trade costs. For instance, farmers in Nigeria and Senegal paid three times as much as those in Kenya for nitrogen –based fertilizers (Engel & Jouanjean, 2015). During the 2007-2009 rises in prices, Guinea placed a ban on export of all food to neighbouring countries, while Senegal ordered an export ban on rice (ibid).

In spite of favourable natural resources, there is still high rate of poverty among rural dwellers in West Africa who are mostly farmers. For instance, there is relatively food insecurity in the Northern regions of coastal and the landlocked Alliance for Sahel States because of the low levels of overall agricultural growth prospects and poverty reduction measures, which are evident in very small sizes of farms, inadequacy of modern technologies, poor infrastructure and markets and insignificant number of opportunities for all off-farm activities (FAO, 2014; Mensah, 2016).

Besides, Movement of agricultural produce among ECOWAS member states has been disrupted by regional conflicts, political instability, corruption, poor and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges pose as serious threats to food security to ECOWAS (Gustafon, 2024). According to Gustafon, 2024, research showed that agriculture sector in ECOWAS was on average less protected than that of other regional bodies in Africa. Besides, it said that within ECOWAS sectors that received major protection by non-tariff measures were mostly those not so important. According to Brock et al (2011) agricultural policy in West Africa is always like poorly written rules with an uneven implementation and inconsistent enforcement, resulting to an unfriendly business environment that hinders potentials for economic growth, which is derived from agriculture and greatly affects competitive access to food. More so, absence of data has made Policy makers not to generate a clear picture of balance of agricultural and food security. This absence of data has impacted negatively on food security. Corruption has been identified as one of major obstacles to food security and trade in ECOWAS. Bribery and smuggling are common and have great negative implications on trade flows and food security (Gustafon, 2024).

ECOWAS vision of regional integration, which anchored on encouraging food security through collective efforts, has faced some challenges resulting to food insecurity

in the region. In a bid to solve these problems posed by food insecurity there came up different agricultural practices from different member states of ECOWAS (Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). Muhammad & Babatunde (2024) noted that West Africa had different agricultural practices and integrating these different methods would bring a setback in attempts to finding a common and acceptable solution to food insecurity in the region. Among the member states of ECOWAS there are differences in their national regulations, subsidies and strategies, for instance Ghana's policy outcomes on its Planting for Food and Jobs Programme is different from Anchors Borrowers Programme of Nigeria. This poses as a major obstacle to ECOWAS, as a body, to tackle food insecurity holistically. This disparity in national approaches or methods to tackle food insecurity can be attributed to inadequate data sharing among member states of ECOWAS. Lack of comprehensive exchange of information on agricultural practices, market trends and availability of resource will tend to make member states to struggle in implementation of coordinated strategies (Iyioha,2000). Without this collaboration there will be inefficient allocation of resource, duplication of functions and there will be hindrance to prompt response to food challenges. Besides, Muhammad & Bababtunde (2024) stated that the regional tools such as, West African Economic and Monetary Union(WAEMU). ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) were becoming ineffectual because of divergent approaches among member states of ECOWAS, which resulted to inefficiencies , uneven growth and difficulties in providing lasting solutions to shared agricultural related resources like land use, water resources management and other inappropriate regional agricultural production.

Challenges to Trade in West Africa and the Threats to ECOWAS Sub-Regional Integration

Informal trade flows constitute a major part of intraregional trade within ECOWAS. Informal trade in ECOWAS, if properly organized, will promote ECOWAS regional integration. However, the informal trade flows do not have proper documentation and the absence of formal data regarding the quality of trade in the region has been a major constraint in respect of estimating the balance of trade of each country and establishes correct regional policies (Gustafon, 2024).). According to Muhammad & Babatunde (2024) countries must be willing to share data among themselves for regional integration to solve several political, social, economic, and environmental challenges. Data sharing will play a major role in encouraging regional integration through collaboration and informed decision-making, as well as facilitating the exchange of information such as economic indicators, trade patterns, and the development of infrastructure that can help in understanding the region's dynamics (Holmes, 2005).

Besides, different rigorous documentation of people across borders within ECOWAS has been a serious challenge to informal trade within the region (Eze, 2013; Touray, 2023). According to Touray, 2023, vehicles plying West African roads, most times would need to offload their goods for security checks and document verification of commuters. This results to man hour loss, especially cross border petty traders who deal in non-durable goods (Touray, 2024). It has been observed that complex paperwork, soliciting of bribes, and absence of good road networks for effective market connections lead to loss of non-durable goods and valuable investment capital (Deen-Sarray, 2014; Engel & Jouanjan, 2015; Nebeife, Chinwuba, Onwuanuibe, 2022; Touray, 2023). Several restrictions for instance, on The Gambia and Senegal borders, affect trade volume and encourage goods smuggling resulting to confiscation of valuable goods, loss of valuable capital and making business unprofitable. There have been complaints of slowing down free movement of vehicles by other countries transport unions, notwithstanding having ECOWAS brown card, without intervention of their national governments against such (Touray, 2023). Such other setbacks to cross border trade in ECOWAS include, security harassment mostly on women engaged in petty trade and demand for sex in exchange for confiscated goods, verbal abuse, sexual assaults and physical harassments (Eze, 2013; Touray, 2023). Touray, 2023 stated that local and regional investors were frustrated by the several bureaucratic bottlenecks and demand for gratification before setting up businesses for export. The cost of doing business is a challenge that cannot be handled successfully without government ECOWAS member states, unlike the Asian Tigers, have done insignificantly in terms of Export-led development approach through diplomatic delivering of market connections with foreign governments and entering into trade agreements. Achieving these will provide enabling environment to investors for large economies of scale and stimulate domestic production and export outside West Africa (Eze, 2013; Touray, 2023).

There are reports of non-tariff barriers in ECOWAS such as, arbitrary charging of duty to value-added goods, the introduction of seasonal restrictions, arbitrary bans and introduction of quotas. Many ECOWAS member states have high unbound tariffs, contrary to ECOWAS policy on free trade (Engel & Jouanjan, 2015, Touray, 2023; Muhammad & Babatunde, 2024). Most ECOWAS countries have not yet removed trade barriers, including tariffs, quotas and non-tariff barriers hindering regional integration.

West Africa, especially ECOWAS will be better placed with regional integration in the face of globalization because they will be at advantage bargaining in the larger world economic order (Isibor & Isaac, 2023). However, in spite of this major advantage, ECOWAS policy on regional integration is faced with challenges of illicit trade. In West Africa drug trafficking accounts for a significant portion of trans-border crimes. Countries of West Africa have been known as major points of origin, transits and

destinations to other African countries (Eze, 2013; Isidor & Isaac,2023). Coastal states of West Africa have become transit routes for drugs trafficked from Latin America. These coastal states include, Guinea Bissau; Guinea; Cape Verde; Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia and Senegal. More importantly, Cape Verde has been identified as a major entry for drug traffickers into West African region (Isidor & Isaac,2023).

In addition, the borders of West Africa are porous, not adequately policed. According to Isidor & Isaac (2023) UNDDC reported that between 2000 and 2004 showed that about 1.4 tons of cocaine was seized on the way to West Africa or from West Africa to Europe, notwithstanding a usually huge seizure of 2.29-7.4 tons. Ethiopia, Kenya and Egypt have been identified as points of origin of heroin being trafficked to West Africa with Cote d'Ivoire as a major point of destination. More so, the rising insurgencies and terrorism in West Africa has been connected with drug trafficking. It is reported that terrorists operating in West Africa and the Sahel area had formed close ties with drug traffickers for the proceeds from the illicit trade. There is allegation that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb are behind the illicit drug trade in the Sahel area by actively engaging on the trade as well as collecting duties from the drugs trafficked across their occupied territories (Isidor & Isaac, 2023).

Another challenge to trade in West Africa is Trans-Border Armed Robbery. Border residents and cross border traders have become regular victims of armed robbery attacks without protection from security agents. Many national borders in West Africa are porous and either under policed or not manned at all by security operatives, which makes it easier for smuggling and other trans-border crimes (Eze, 2013; Isidor & Olawale, 2023). This has been a setback to ECOWAS drive for regional integration since there seems no guarantee for security of human lives, free movement and trade

More so, West Africa lags behind in the world in terms of infrastructure needed to stimulate economic activities and development such as ports, roads, border crossings, energy and information communication technology (Harris et al ,2012; Engel&Jouanjean, 2015) Costs of transportation in West Africa have continued to be high, notwithstanding huge investment and significant efforts made so far. For instance, economic integration and free movement of people among West African countries of Senegal, The Gambia, Mali and Guinea Conakry, according to research, have been slowed down due to poor infrastructure (Touray, 2023). Trading across borders indicator, according to ECOWAS Doing Business Regional Profile (World Bank,2014), revealed that ECOWAS regional average trailed behind SADC average at 132 out of 189 countries, which showed Niger at (179); Burkina Faso (174); Mali (163); Nigeria (159); and Cote d'Ivoire (159) among the forty countries that ranked worst in performance (; Engel&Jouanjean, 2015). According to Engel&Jouanjean (2015) an assessment carried out by ECOWAS Commission and submitted as part of the Aid-for-Trade Global Review 2013 identified the main

challenges to intra-regional trade in West Africa such as, the regulatory environment for doing business, shortage of transport links, cost of transportation services and restricted access to finance. Road networks in West Africa are still not efficient and are not properly linked. The major cross border corridors in West African region have several roadblocks resulting to all forms of harassments and requests for gratification by security operatives (Deen- Sarray, 2014; Engel &Jouanjean, 2015; Nebeife, Chinwuba, Onwuanuibe, 2022; Touray, 2023). Besides, rail connection in West African region for years has not remained significantly poorly developed (Engel &Jouanjean, 2015).

In addition, private sectors as well as most citizens have little or no knowledge of ECOWAS trade agreements and protocols. ECOWAS has created comprehensive trade policy frameworks, which aimed at improving coordination and increase trade integration among its member states (Eze, 2013; Engel &Jouanjean, 2015). ECOWAS leaders have been signing these intra-regional agreements and protocols, however, there implementation by countries involved has been so poor. For instance, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), which major framework was to make ECOWAS a free trade area, has no adequate citizens participation resulting to poor implementation . Private sector knowledge of these agreements and protocols remains inadequate (Brock et al, 2010; Engel &Jouanjean, 2015).

Another challenge to trade in West Africa is the absence of a single currency among the entire West Africa. This is another hindrance to true trade liberalization and growth. Only eight countries of former French colonies in West Africa use CFA franc as a single currency, while the rest seven countries use different national currencies. A single currency for ECOWAS would remove exchange rate volatility and strengthen trade integration (Gustafon, 2024).

Conclusions

The aim of ECOWAS to establish regional integration among its members in West African region through agriculture has faced a serious setback arising from food insecurity across West Africa. Despite several measures and approaches adopted by the regional body, such as ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), member states still resorted to their different national approaches to mitigate the menace rather than a collective approach that will lead to cooperation, collaboration, and integration. Besides, trade, which ought to have been a catalyst for ECOWAS regional integration, has suffered some forms of restrictions from most of the West African countries, notwithstanding the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme. ECOWAS is yet to create a free trade area within itself. Despite all these challenges, with the gradual implementation of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods and policy on free trade, ECOWAS is closer to achieving a free trade area and regional integration. In line with

this, the article suggests the following practical and actionable recommendations to relevant actors towards addressing this challenge:

- There should be strong political will by member states of ECOWAS to implement treaties, agreements, protocols and policies of the regional body.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that the proposed ECOWAS customs union is fully achieved without further delay.
- ECOWAS member states are expected to share vital information, especially on agriculture and trade among themselves and other non ECOWAS countries of West Africa.
- ECOWAS leadership and the member states of the regional body should ensure citizens participation. Citizens and private sector should be well informed and carried along on ECOWAS treaties, agreements, protocols and policies. There should be citizens participation.
- Deliberate efforts should be made to improve on infrastructure in ECOWAS, especially intra-regional road networks and rail lines.
- Creation of a single currency, Eco, for ECOWAS will facilitate regional agricultural and commercial activities and will lead to regional integration OF ECOWAS member states.

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