Discussion

ECOWAS and Regional Integration Development in West Africa

Muhammed Adekunle Yusuf

Research Associate, Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa, No. 4 Dep Street Off Danube Street, Maitama, Abuja FCT, Nigeria. ¹
E-mail: mayus20052000@yahoo.com; myusuf@cseaafrica.org

Abstract: The new global development agenda, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), accord critical roles to regional integration as part of the major springboards that can enhance rapid development outcomes, especially in the developing world. Given the ambitious nature of the new world development order, collaborations that leverage on local knowledge and skills transfer for efficient resource utilization among countries in the same regional bloc remain germane to the realization of SDG targets. In this regard, this study provides a concise critical appraisal on the extent to which ECOWAS has been able to foster effective and deeper integration in West Africa. Based on careful review of appropriate literature, the study assesses the degree to which the organization has been able to achieve its agenda, focusing on the successes and challenges recorded, as well as political commitments to the regional body. Of particular importance is the extent to which ECOWAS takes cognizance of the need to re-shape its agenda towards fostering inclusive development in the areas of education and health in the region. The report is expected to provide background that could motivate discussion on the future prospects of economic integration in the sub-region.

Keywords: regional integration; economic development; ECOWAS; inclusive development

1. Introduction

Wide recognition is accorded regional integration as an effective tool for the promotion of sustainable and inclusive development especially in developing countries. This is in view of its potential beneficial effects to trade, investment in both physical and human capital development, peace and security, economic growth and development. It can help foster competition among firms producing identical goods in the trade zone which would enhance economic efficiencies, drive down the prices, and leads to welfare gains. Due to existence of large market and enhanced efficiency among firms, regional trade agreements may attract foreign direct investments both from within and outside the Regional Integration Arrangement (RIA). It can also facilitate knowledge and skills transfer among members of the regional bloc thereby promoting human capital development. In addition, it can help in countering cross-border terrorism through regional task force mobilization; and minimize neighbour-to-neighbour hostilities among countries. In another

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perspective, regional trade agreements creates avenue for interdependency and positive interactions among members; this is likely to build trust, raise the opportunity cost of war, and hence reduce the risk of conflicts between countries (Polachek, 1992 [1]).

The recent global shift towards inclusive development presents both opportunities as well as challenges to the developing economies especially West African countries. On a positive side, it extends development to the excluded and marginalized section by mainstreaming these groups into the development agenda, initiative, and performance. By implication, development standards now inculcate the extent to which these groups are captured in development outcomes. The new development assessment no doubt, presents both structural and methodological challenges. On one hand, it introduces critical changes into approaches and procedures of development programmes with which governments at all levels need to key into. On the other hand, it presents new measurements of development outcomes as the conventional development parameters are inadequate to capture the new development orientation. Be that as it may, responses to that effect are ongoing as policymakers and development actors across regional bloc seek to build all-inclusive development indicators that reflects the realities of their region.

The new global development agenda, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), accord critical roles to regional integration as part of the major springboards that can enhance rapid development outcomes, especially in the developing world. Given the ambitious nature of the new world development order, collaborations that leverage on local knowledge and skills transfer for efficient resource utilization among countries in the same regional bloc remain germane to the realization of SDG targets. In this regard, this study provides concise outlook on the extent to which ECOWAS has been able to foster deeper and effective integration in West Africa. Of particular importance is the extent to which the regional body facilitates inclusive development in West African sub-region. The report is expected to provide background which would motivate discussion on the future prospects of economic integration in the sub-region.

Section 2 highlights the need for regional integration. Section 3 briefly discusses ECOWAS agenda for regional integration with focus on the successes and challenges recorded. Section 4 assesses political commitments towards regional integration in the sub-region. Section 5 critically examines the extent to which ECOWAS agenda help foster inclusive development in West Africa. And finally, section 6 presents a summary guide on the way forward towards effective regional integration for inclusive development.

2. The Case for Regional Integration

The features of West African economy (as in other developing economies) provide grounds for regional integration. The region is densely populated with high level of cultural, linguistic, and ecological diversity. The region’s population accounts for about 40% and 5% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa and the world respectively in 2014. Structurally, the region comprises clusters of small economies with small (underdeveloped) markets, weaker productive base, low investments (its abundant resources notwithstanding), poor infrastructure development, low human capital development, weak political and economic institutions, and high sense of national insecurity. These economies have low competitive advantage in the global markets and are highly vulnerable to both internal and external shocks. Thus, in the absence of a viable RIA, they are less likely to be relevant in the political and economic decisions in the world.

The need for economic and social integration led to the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. The Treaty establishing ECOWAS streamlined various bilateral agreements among the countries in the sub-region into a single document that meets the needs and aspirations of the Community. Inherent in the integration process, among others, entails the promotion of trade liberalization, stimulation of investment activities, creation of large market access, and enhancement of peace and security in the region. The slow progress recorded in the
achievement of deeper integration that can promote collective ideals led to the adoption of common currency and customs union by some member states² of ECOWAS in line with Article 3 of the treaty establishing the Community. Hence, in 1994 eight Francophone member states of the Community established the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU).

Since its creation, WAEMU³ has successfully implemented macro-economic convergence criteria and an effective surveillance mechanism. It has adopted a customs union and common external tariff and has combined indirect taxation regulations, in addition to initiating regional structural and sectoral policies. In 2000, a similar version to WAEMU, West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), was formed in Anglophone countries in the region. However, unlike WAEMU, little progress has been made by WAMZ towards effective monetary integration in the member states.

ECOWAS, no doubt, has become one of the models of regional integration in the world giving its continuous progress in West Africa. But the extent to which its goals and programmes are aligned towards effective integration remains empirical issue. Since effective integration in inclusive development sense entails designing regional integration strategies that involve all stakeholders (including the marginalized and excluded groups), we therefore, seek to examine the integration process in relation to development performance in the region.

3. ECOWAS agenda for regional integration: the successes and failures

The Economic Community of West African States⁴ (ECOWAS) was created on the 28th May, 1975 with the objectives to promote economic cooperation and regional integration among member nations. The Community seeks borderless integration in economic activities among members in the areas of industry, agriculture, health, telecommunication, transport, commerce, energy, natural resources, monetary and financial issues, social and cultural matters to mention a few. Parts of its aims focus on: improving the standard of living of the peoples of the West African States; establishing a common market by means of trade liberalization, common external tariffs, and removal of obstacles to free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital across member states; fostering inter-dependence among member states to promote trade, enhance security and stability, etc. towards collective self-reliance. These are broadly stated in the Article 3 of the Treaty establishing the Community.

Overtime, the extent to which the organization has been able to achieve some of its goals remains an issue of open policy debate and empirical investigation among researchers and development practitioners. This has been approached from different perspective. Some of the studies examining the achievement of ECOWAS’ aims and objectives focus on: the degree to which ECOWAS has facilitated trade creation in the region (e.g. Jacob, 2013 [2]; Deme, 1995 [3]); the ability of the organization to promote peace and stability in the region (e.g. Camilla & Justin, 2010 [4]; Gilles, 2010 [5]); among others. In regards to several of these studies on ECOWAS as documented in the literature, we therefore, highlight some of the achievements and setbacks of the organization and subsequently present a summary guide on the way forward.

3.1 Key Achievements

Since its creation in 1975, ECOWAS has recorded landmark achievements in the promotion of outward-oriented integration strategies with beneficial effects across the West African region. These are not limited to peace-keeping activities, promotion of democracy, and free cross-border movement of people across the region. In addition, the organization has adopted several initiatives designed to adequately meet the objectives of its original charter and then further revised to address the needs of its revised charter of 1993. Parts of these initiatives placed a redefined focus on health, infrastructure, human resource development, rules of law and enforcement, and political

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² Especially Francophone and Anglophone countries
³ Also known as UEMOA from its name in French, *Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine*
⁴ The regional bloc consists of 15 member countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote D’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cabo Verde, Niger and Guinea
mediation to mention a few. In fact, organizations were created to that effect to coordinate the activities of these initiatives.

**The Community maintains strong commitment to peace-keeping and peace-building across the region.** ECOWAS has achieved significant success in resolving longstanding conflicts, and are still taking initiative(s) in peace keeping and controlling tension from escalating into destabilizing crises. The organization institutes both military and non-military framework in its peace-keeping activities. In terms of non-military track record, conflict prevention has been given more attention through enhanced early warning and mediation efforts. And where conflicts degenerate to crises, the Community intervenes to restore peace through its military task force – ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Interventions were carried out in four countries in the 1990s and in the early 2000s: ECOMOG was present in Liberia from 1990 to 1998 and then again as ECOMIL in 2003; in Sierra Leone as ECOMOG II in 1997-2000; in Guinea-Bissau 1998-1999; and in Côte d’Ivoire 2003-2004 as ECOMICI (Camilla and Justin, 2010). The institution of ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) in 2008 is geared towards improving the organization conflict and mediation strategies for inclusive regional development.

**ECOWAS promotes democracy and its sustainability in member states.** The organization maintains zero tolerance to unconstitutional changes of government. A clear position on this was given in 2001 with the enactment of the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The protocol provides, in its Article 1, that every accession to power must be made through free, fair, and transparent elections; zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means; and popular participation in decision-making; strict adherence to democratic principles. The protocol also specifies instruments of implementation and sanctions in case of violation. ECOWAS has played key roles in civilian-to-civilian power transition in the region. With regards to election monitoring, the organization plays active role by sending electoral observers to oversee election conducts in member states, and produces comprehensive reports on the outcome. The Community also collaborates with the African Union (AU) to sanction member states involved in coup d’état and other unconstitutional accession to power. For example, Guinea, Niger, and Cote D’Ivoire were suspended in 2008, 2009, and 2010 respectively following coup d’ états in the former two and failure to abide by electoral results by incumbent president of the latter.

**Free mobility of nationals of member states across the region promotes knowledge and skills transfer.** The success of attaining the aims and objectives of ECOWAS is hinged on free movement of persons, goods and capital within the sub-region (Oladimeji et al, 2012 [6]). In this recognition, the organization has been taking proactive steps and initiatives to see to the achievement of the goal. Between 1980 and 1990 the Community has adopted four protocols on free movement which, among other things, direct member States to: provide valid documents to their citizens, grant Community citizens the right of residence for the purpose of seeking and carrying-out income-earning employment, ensure appropriate treatment for person being expelled, not to expel Community citizens en-masse, limit grounds for individual expulsion to issue of national security, public order or morality.

In this light, ECOWAS introduced travel certificates and Brown Card which brought an end to the visa and cross-border entry requirements in the region. ECOWAS Brown Card is a compulsory insurance cover for third party liability. It is to ensure rapid and equitable compensation in case of accidents to vehicles from one ECOWAS state occurring in a different member States. Also in 2002, it was agreed that the travel certificate with the Community States would become an ECOWAS passport. These initiatives had facilitated easier intra-regional movements of nationals of ECOWAS members.

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5 See table 1 in the appendix for shortlists of ECOWAS initiatives
The Community facilitates growing investment activities in the region. The region’s huge market access creates opportunities for investment activities. ECOWAS commitment to peace and security in addition to open market access initiative (through unrestricted mobility of people, capital, and goods) positions the region as the investment destination in Africa. The organization has instituted collaborations with development actors in private and public arena such as NEPAD Business Group, Africa Business Round-Table (ABR), USAID, AFDB aims at improving the business and investment climate in the region. Over the years, the region has boasted of rising influx of Foreign Direct Investment. The several initiatives of the Community notwithstanding, investment environment is generally not conducive enough for business to thrive and cost of doing business is relatively high in the region. This is due to weak infrastructure, policy uncertainty, poor access to capital, and ineffective regulation system. The region still ranks low in global competitiveness index and investment-friendly destination.

The organization also contributed to the development of infrastructure in the areas of power and energy in the region. Recognizing that inclusive and sustainable development can be fostered through adequate provision and access to sustainable and affordable energy supply, ECOWAS has taken initiative along this line through implementation of priority generation and interconnection projects through the West African Power Pool (WAPP). This is aimed towards meeting the energy needs of ECOWAS Member States by providing reliable and sustainable electricity supply for economic development. The infrastructure programme represents the implementation of approximately 5,500 kilometres of high voltage transmission lines interconnecting all the national power utilities of ECOWAS Member States coupled with an injection of about 10,000 Megawatts of new capacity that is still under way.

3.2 Challenges

In spite of numerous achievements of ECOWAS in promoting successful integration for development across the region, however, the organization is confronted with myriad challenges in attaining some of its objectives.

One of the challenges facing ECOWAS as a body bothers on how to foster deep intra-regional trade. In spite of ECOWAS trade liberalization and other initiatives which aims at eliminating barriers to trade among members, intra-regional trade in West Africa is, however, low. This represents about 10 percent of total ECOWAS merchandise trade in 2014 (See figure 1). The low intra-ECOWAS trade in goods may not be unconnected with the fact that member states are not natural trade partners as they are largely producers of primary (and in most cases single) commodities. This is buttressed by the low trade complementarity index among the countries in the sub-region. Figure 2 shows that exports from Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, and Sierra Leone weakly complement imports of Nigeria with the former having mean complementarity index of 0.1, 0.2, 0.1, 0.3, and 0.2 respectively between 1995 and 2013. This evidence is not distorted in a trade complementarity cross-pair that has each of the countries as importer with others as exporters. The specialization in primary commodities by most economies in the sub-region provides grounds for higher trade with advanced countries (especially colonial masters) which have requisite technology to produce varieties of goods. Also hindering effective integration through trade in West Africa are weak infrastructural facilities, the problem of import and excise duties, and foreign exchange controls which in combination militate against effective trade liberalization in the sub-region.

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6 New Partnership for Africa’s Development  
7 United States Agency for International Development  
8 African Development Bank
The Commission’s response to security challenges in the region is slow. While acknowledging the feats recorded by the organization in resolving crises in the region, it is also important to admit that the Community has little or no sophisticated arrangement to quickly respond to acts of insurgency and terrorism of present-day reality. The intelligence gathering on security challenges in the region
is rather poor and hampers early detection of criminal activities for proper action. In the Sahel Region, proliferation of sophisticated arms in forms of missiles and explosives in the hands of terrorists and insurgents calls to question effectiveness of border scrutiny by the security operatives in the region. In the Gulf of Guinea, incidence of piracy is alarming. Compounded to this is the increasing rate of oil bunkering as well as drug and human trafficking. In 2014 INTAKE Global Intelligence report⁹, some members of the Community were rated high in insecurity, crime, civil unrest, terrorism, and internal conflict.

**ECOWAS’ approach to health system strengthening in the region is inadequate.** Despite the organization commitment to strong, virile, and sustainable collective health system, it has failed to deliver the promise in the region. The West African Health Organization (WAHO), (the health arms of the commission) has very little capacity (in terms of facilities and manpower) to tackle outbreak of epidemic diseases in the region. The recent Ebola disease outbreak that ravages the West Africa creates exposure as to the state of the health system in the region.

Other agenda not yet fully realized by the commission are in the areas of monetary integration, harmonization and coordination of national policies, and the adoption of common external tariffs and common trade policy vis-à-vis third countries.

### 4. Political Commitments to Regional Integration in West Africa

Political commitment is required to empower the policy making authorities to enforce the legislative and administrative changes which is essential for a successful integration (Zhang, 2012 [7]). Strong political commitment in the region has surfaced in areas of enforcing appropriate policies to encourage conflict resolution (ECOMOG initiative) and efforts to prevent tensions that might transform into crises (AfDB, 2011 [8]). ECOWAS member states supply troops to enhance peace-keeping missions of the organization. Also, genuine interest is placed on democracy and its sustainability in the region. ECOWAS has been actively involved in election monitoring and observation across the region. The commission sends election observers headed by past leader(s) in the region to monitor and give accounts on the outcome of election in member states. This has facilitated peaceful civilian-to-civilian power transition and enhanced political stability in the region.

However, weak political commitment among leaders of member states militates against the efforts of the organization to realize some of its targeted aims and objectives. This has been seen to be pervasive in the areas of financial contributions, data provision, implementation of directives, enforcing independent monetary and fiscal policies, enforcing stringent controls on imports, attendance and participation at meetings, and transparent political system.

Default in financial contribution to regional fund by some member states has led to increased burden on some of the committed member states. This has posed serious constraints to the commission in funding its budget. For instance, the high default in financial commitment led to an imposition of levy by the Community which is assessed at 0.5 % of the value of imports into member states from third countries.

Also, non-ratification, non-implementation and low commitment to decisions reached among member states pose a threat to fostering integration. For instance, ECOWAS agenda which introduced the ECOWAS Travel Certificate (ETC) to ease mobility of people and goods in the region (as enshrined in Article 3 of ECOWAS Treaty) has faced challenges in implementation due to non-compliance by some other member states.

Furthermore, divided loyalty among ECOWAS member contributed in undermining effective integration in the region. Some of the member states still strongly attached to other inter-governmental organization (especially in respect of their colonial masters) to the detriment and neglect of ECOWAS. Also, the desire to acquire aids and grants has made member nations uphold

certain unilateral/ bilateral ties with donors thereby adhering to the conditions attached which might work against the interest of the region (Geda and Kibret, 2007 [9]).

5. ECOWAS and Inclusive Development in West Africa

From the literature, inclusive development is entrenched on equal opportunities, equal representation, and full participation of all stakeholders in the development processes. The framework seeks developmental approaches that recognize the inputs and contributions of all sections of the society including the marginalized and excluded groups. The need to ensure shared prosperity across divides and entities motivates the call for inclusive growth and development. Evidences over decades that increased economic prosperity have not translated to a reduction in poverty, unemployment, and inequality especially in developing countries arouse global attention and create massive orientation towards inclusive growth and development.

In assessing inclusive development, metrics such as inclusive education, inclusive health, social inclusion and poverty dynamics have surfaced in the literature. However, this section intends to evaluate the Community’s efforts on human capital development in the region focusing on inclusive education and health.

5.1 ECOWAS and Human Capital Development

Recognition of the critical role of education and health in development is at the heart of ECOWAS agenda. Article 60-63 of the Treaty establishing ECOWAS as revised in 1993 make provisions for collaboration in human resource development, as well as in the areas of social, cultural, and women development. To this end, the Community seeks cooperation in the fields of education, training and employment; encourages and strengthens co-operation in health matters; promotes learning and dissemination of a West African language as a factor in Community integration; and stimulates dialogue among themselves on the kinds of projects and programmes aimed at integrating women into the development process.

In order to facilitate the achievement of the above, ECOWAS created Directorates of Education, Culture, Science and Technology; and Gender Development, Youth/Sports, Civil Society, Employment, and Drug control (out of the former Human Development Department) with mandate to provide policy direction for the promotion of human development as an instrument of poverty reduction. ECOWAS Directorate on Education seeks to provide citizens of member states greater access to quality education and training opportunities available in the region. To fast-track the realization of this objective, the Commission adopted an action plan (as approved by the Conference of Ministers) on HIV/AIDS preventive education, Girls education, Teacher training through distance learning, promotion of science and technology, and Technical and vocational education and training. Since its inception in 2007, major activities of the Commission have been focused on feasibility studies on the equivalence of education certificates among member states and promotion of Girls education in the region10.

5.1.1 ECOWAS Agenda and Inclusive Education

From the understanding of ECOWAS agenda on education and key activities of the Community since 2007, it is not cleared whether the vision and action plan of the Commission can foster all-inclusive education in the region. While acknowledging the efforts of ECOWAS in promoting girls education towards bridging the gender gaps in West Africa, however, significant pockets of exclusion still remain in the region. Access to education is still stratified by wealth, ethnicity, religion, and location in the region. Despite records of a decade improvement in basic education enrolment11 in West Africa, out-of-school-children (OOSC) rate is still high in the sub-region. OOSC accounts for 35% of school-age children12 - well above the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) average of

10 http://www.ecowas.us/EducationDirectorate.html
11 See figure 3
21.5\%^{13}, and the highest among other African regional blocs\(^{14}.\) OOSC is more pervasive among poor households and orphan hood family as well as in rural areas (See figure 4 & 5).

Figure 4 displays percentage concentration of OOSC of primary school age in rural and urban areas of selected ECOWAS members. As can be observed, OOSC is much more concentrated in the rural areas than the urban counterparts in all the sample countries. Although OOSC in both rural and urban area is higher in Liberia, the gap is much more narrowed in Sierra Leone with rural-urban differential of 17\% compared to Liberia (21\%), Nigeria (31\%), and Mali (36\%). Also, Figure 5 demonstrates that OOSC is more concentrated among the poor than the rich. This is true as the poor are likely to spend higher proportion of their resources on basic needs such as foods, shelter, and clothing with little resources to expend on education. However, the high prevalence of OOSC among the richest quintile in Liberia necessitates an investigation to unearth other motivations that could undermine child’s enrolment other than household income in the country.

Figure 3: Gross Enrolment ratio, primary education, both sexes

Source: Compiled by the Author from UIS database 2016


\(^{14}\) South African Development Community (SADC) and East African Community (EAC) recorded 2.8 million and 2 million OOSC in 2011 respectively.
Part of the reasons adduced to high OOSC in West Africa is the prevalence of child labour. About 21 million children aged 5-14 representing 25% of all children in this age group, are in one form of employment or the other in West Africa (ILO15, 2014 [10]). Findings from the demographic survey of 14 ECOWAS members by ILO in 2014 indicate that children in employment are more common in rural areas than in urban areas and these gaps are highest in Liberia (where 27% of rural children work in employment against seven percent of urban children), Burkina Faso (47% versus 20%), and Gambia (53% versus 23%). The study also found that children’s involvement in employment is consistently higher among children from poor households and orphan hood family.

Focusing on education gaps between women in urban and rural areas, a study in 2014 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on conflict and education inequality in 30 SSA countries found greater disparity in education attainment among women in rural and urban areas. From the report, women in urban location have average years of schooling of 3 years and 5.1 years in Mali and Liberia respectively, compared to 0.6 and 1.7 years of schooling of rural residents women in both countries. Also, years of schooling of urban women in Nigeria was reported to be twice as the rural counterparts.

Source: Compiled by the Author from UIS database 2016

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15 International Labour Organization
In spite of various education agreements among governments in West Africa and the intensity of efforts by multilateral agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF on the need to provide free education access for all at basic levels, however, low achievement has been recorded in West Africa so far, especially in rural areas. As can be observed in Figure 6, while countries such as Benin, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, and Sierra Leone have mildly achieved a reduction in the rate of OOSC in rural areas\(^\text{16}\) over time, reverse is the case in Nigeria and Ghana both of which recorded an increase in the rate of OOSC in the observed period. Higher reduction in OOSC observed in Benin and Sierra Leone point to greater commitments on the part of the governments of these economies. However, it is important to note that achieving improved education outcomes\(^\text{17}\) does not only require increased education funding but also a well-aligned policy frameworks that ensure effectiveness in the budget utilization for performance. Table 7 presents data on percentage of primary education spending on GDP vis-à-vis rate of OOSC of primary school age in selected West African countries. While Niger appears to have higher primary education spending-to-GDP ratio relative to Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, Niger, and Togo, she however records the worst OOSC rate among the countries observed. In fact, higher spending-to-GDP ratio is associated with high OOSC and vice-versa among the countries observed. This evidence requires an assessment of the policy frameworks and organization structures of basic education in most West African countries with a focus on evaluating effectiveness of spending in the region.

Figure 6: Rate of out-of-school-children of primary school age, rural, both sexes

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\(^{16}\) Note that this is not at the detriment of urban areas. OOSC in urban areas also fall in the observed countries

\(^{17}\) Reduction in OOSC and withdrawal rate
Figure 7: Rate of OOSC of primary school age and Government expenditure on primary education as % of GDP (2014)

Source: Compiled by the Author from UIS database 2016
Cross-country evidence on education inequality based on ethnicity and religion can be found in the work of USAID (2014) [11] on conflict and education inequality in 30 SSA countries. The study reported large disparity in education attainment between the two largest ethnic groups (in Nigeria, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Ghana) to the extent that the most privileged group has twice as many years in school as the least privileged. It was also found that women belonging to the most privileged among the two largest religious groups have twice as many years of education as the least privileged group.

The evidences above provide policy direction to policymakers in ECOWAS region. Despite existence of free universal primary education, participation is still low among poor households as well as in rural areas in most countries in the sub-region. This calls for wide-scale cross-country study into the challenges of education access in order to foster appropriate interventions. Given that the poor, the nomadic, those from minorities, the disabled, and girls are those likely to suffer exclusion from school, a streamlined effort should be directed to capture and mainstream the marginalized and the vulnerable in inclusive education programmes of the region. In this regard, ECOWAS as a regional body needs to create platforms of strong policy advocacy and programmes towards increasing education access to other disadvantaged groups. Ongoing basic education policy stance of the Community which focuses on bridging gender gaps and ensuring quality assurance at various school levels is however applauded. However, strong commitment need be exercised towards elimination of education inequality of all kinds. Focus should not only be in terms of inequality in education access but also on disparity in learning achievement. Promotion of effective education for all remains key to poverty reduction and central to the achievement of sustainable development goals in West Africa.

5.1.2 ECOWAS Agenda and Inclusive Health

Inclusive health anchors on health services that are efficacious, equitable, and affordable, as well as in right quantities to the healthcare consumers. Efficacious connotes that health services perform as required – they produce gains in peoples’ health and wellbeing and seek to prevent diseases and other social conditions that inhibit health. Equitable means that services are provided on need-oriented basis- that those most in need have greater access to health services than those least in need. Affordability ensures that health services are produced and delivered to the community and household in the most cost-effective manner (MacLachlan et al, 2012 [12]). Inclusive health focuses on both provider and consumer of healthcare.

ECOWAS articulates and implements its regional health agenda through West African Health Organization (WAHO), an organization created in 1987 with the objective to protect peoples’ health in the sub-region through the harmonization of the policies of Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic combat against the health problems of the sub-region18. Since its inception, the organization’s major activities have been geared towards promoting innovations in Reproductive, Maternal, and Child Health and HIV prevention in the sub-region. Notably, WAHO organizes annual forums which aim at sharing knowledge and best practices in Health. This cut across institutional reforms, human resources for health, health technologies, knowledge transfer and use of evidence in policies and programmes.

While these programmes are crucial to the realization of inclusive health in the sub-region, however, effective harmonization and implementation of regional health policies among Member States still remain a challenge. Most countries in the sub-region lack critical institutional structure that can foster stronger health systems. This is a result of complex structure of health institutions in the region. In many countries, multiplicity of public health agencies is evident; and this in most cases leads to problem of coordination and efficiency. Central to this is a problem of inadequate human resources for health. The sub-region has one of the lowest health personnel globally. Couple with this is low level of Research and Development (R&D) in West Africa which militates against

health technology and innovation advancement. Less than 200 out of 1 million inhabitants in West Africa involve in R&D\(^\text{19}\). This is far below what obtains in Southern Africa sub-region where more than 200 per 1 million people engage in R&D activities.\(^\text{20}\) Low R&D personnel in West Africa are indicative of very low per-capita R&D spending in the sub-region. Without adequate technology and trained personnel that can deliver quality healthcare, improvement in health outcomes is far from being achievable.

In West Africa, healthcare delivery is largely streamlined to preventive care and programmes while curative, restorative, and rehabilitative activities still remain at the periphery. Emphasis is more on the Primary Healthcare (PHC) which is generally aimed at bridging health outcome gaps in communities especially in rural areas. PHC seeks an improvement in infant and maternal care as well as malaria, fertility and HIV control etc. towards enhancement in wellness and well-being. It addresses inequality in health access in rural communities as care is provided free-of-charge or at subsidized rates to the poor and the vulnerable. Also, it helps to put a check on the spread of infectious diseases in rural communities. However, the visible records of poor health outcomes in the sub-region points to the ineffectiveness of PHC. In spite of a decline in mortality rates over the years in the sub-region, they are still higher relative to other regions in the world. In fact, West Africa has one of the highest cases of infant deaths globally with worst cases recorded in Sierra Leone (270 deaths per 1000 live births), Niger (253), and Liberia (235)\(^\text{21}\). Failure to meet health targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in most countries in the sub-region is ostensibly associated with weak PHC. Many PHC centers are not properly located for easier outreach, poorly staffed with qualified personnel, and ill-equipped with essential drugs\(^\text{22}\). About 12% and 23% of infants in West Africa have not been captured in routine immunization against tuberculosis and polio respectively in 2014. This is in contrast to 10% and 16% recorded in Southern Africa over the same period\(^\text{23}\).

Despite that PHC is designed to close health outcome gaps in rural communities, inequality in access and utilization of health services still exists. A study by Mutangadura et al (2009) \(^\text{13}\) on health inequities in selected African countries assessed inequities in access to vaccination, delivery assistance, prenatal care, and contraceptive usage. From the result of concentration index of the above health indicators as constructed by the Authors, it was found that contraceptive use and delivery assistance has the greatest inequity value due to wealth differences in Ghana and Senegal – ECOWAS members in the study. The researchers however found close to equity score for immunization and prenatal care services in both countries. Also the study recorded rural-urban disparity in the health indicators with Senegal being the country with greater inequities in modern contraceptive use, immunization and delivery assistance in the observed countries.

At secondary and tertiary level of care, inequality in healthcare access is more pronounced. The cost of healthcare is high especially to the disadvantaged groups and this culminates into low healthcare access among the group. A study by Olaleye et al. (2013) \(^\text{14}\) on inequalities in access to healthcare services among people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria reveals that poor people and rural dwellers are more affected by the endemic disease. Facilities that can help manage the disease are located in urban areas and this places a huge costs on the rural dwellers and the poor living with HIV/AIDS as they have to in many occasions travel far distances to obtain Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) treatment.

The foregoing discussions point evidence of serious health equity issue in West Africa. The urban-rural divide cuts across all health indicators with the rural population severely under-served. Also,

\(^{19}\) See UIS database, 2016. Countries of observation are: Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. Computed based on recent data for each country as reported in the UIS database, 2016

\(^{20}\) See UIS database, 2016. Countries of observation are: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. Computed based on recent data for each country as reported in the UIS database, 2016


\(^{22}\) For studies on Nigeria (See MN Sambo et al, 2005, 2008)

\(^{23}\) See UNICEF Global Databases, 2016
the presence of inequities due to wealth differences implies the need for policies that can address the rich-poor source of inequities, particularly in the aspects of delivery assistance and contraceptive use. ECOWAS as a regional body need to create platforms that integrate the marginalized and the vulnerable towards health inclusiveness. In doing this, the Community should learn best practices and share success stories of high performing countries in health outcomes in the sub-region and promote the adoption of effective health system framework in the sub-region.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This paper examines regional integration in West African sub-region with focus on the successes and challenges facing ECOWAS as well as political commitments to the sub-regional body. Through careful review of literature on the subject matter, it was gathered that regional integration has helped fostering positive development outcomes in the region. Specifically, the Community records mild achievement in infrastructural development; intensifies effort towards stimulating investment climate; fosters peace and security; and continually seeks to an improvement in cross-border interactions among member states.

However, the sub-region still lags behind in the achievement of all-inclusive development. Inequality in education and health is still evident. In spite of a decade records of progress in education access in West Africa, mild achievement is recorded in mainstreaming the marginalized and the vulnerable to school system. OOSC is still high and evidence of wide disparity in education attainment across wealth, gender, ethnic, religion, and location among the observed countries in West Africa is prominent. In most cases, the inequality in education mostly affects the poor, the women, the children, and the disabled.

Evidences on health performance in West Africa also point to weak inclusiveness in healthcare access and utilization in the sub-region. Inequity in access to contraceptive and delivery assistance by wealth and location is large. Utilization of birth control measures is most prevalent among the rich and urban women as against the poor and rural-based women; ditto for child-birth delivery assistance. This signifies the likelihood that higher birth rate, infant, under-5, and maternal mortality rate prevalence are among the poor and rural women. The idea of PHC service is to address health inequities of this nature in rural areas. However, PHC has recorded low achievement in these regards due to a number of factors ranging from poor health institutions and organization, to low quality health service delivery.

However, ECOWAS has been proactive in its approach to foster inclusive development in the sub-region. From the past and recent programmes of ECOWAS, the efforts of the Community were largely focused on bridging gender gaps in education and ensuring quality assurance at school levels in the sub-region. The rise into prominence of other education inequities and inequalities, no doubt, presents great challenges to the regional body. Notwithstanding that agenda of the Treaty establishing the Community are not originally designed to address different kind of inequalities that form the crux of development performance assessment in the recent time, ECOWAS holds responsibility to shape its agenda in line with global initiative. New approaches and methodologies in seeking solution to obstacles towards inclusive development require cooperation among governments at all levels in member states. In pursuant of this, experience of high-performing member states need be shared for other members to learn, imitate, and adapt from.

A general assessment of the Community’s agenda points to weak unified focus towards achieving inclusive development in the sub-region. Goals, operational procedures and strategies instituted by the Community are too regional in scope as well as too narrowed to meet the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized groups. There seems to be challenge of policy coordination in the sub-region. This militates against effective development design that carries along all and sundry in the integration process. There is a need to break down development goals to household level so as to have concrete information on which to base assessment and set priority. Overall, more result-oriented and effective integration requires strong political commitments among member states in
the region. More importantly, there is need to streamline ECOWAS agenda towards ensuring effective integration for inclusive development among member States.

References

## Appendix

Table 1: Short list of ECOWAS initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Organization/Program/Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>West African Health Organization (WAHO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
<td>ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Water Resources Coordination Unit (WRCU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECOWAS Priority Road Transport Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Law Enforcement</td>
<td>The Political, Judicial and Legal Affairs, Regional Security and Immigration Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Mediation</td>
<td>Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace and Security</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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