



THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL POLICIES ON REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND IMPEDIMENTS

Fauziyyah Bashir Esq.¹, Aminu Mustapha² & Nura Bashir Shehu³

¹Department of Law, State College of Legal and Islamic Studies Wamakko, Sokoto

²Department of Education, Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic, Birnin-Kebbi

³Department of History and International Studies, Sokoto State University, Sokoto



Corresponding Author's Email: fauziyyah914@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the impact of national policies as impediments to regional economic integration in West Africa. Regional economic integration is a process in which two or more countries agree to eliminate economic barriers within their region, with the end goal of enhancing productivity and achieving greater economic interdependence. It can take different forms, from the simplest preferential trade area to the most advanced monetary or fiscal union. However, despite the growing efforts of countries to achieve this regional economic integration in West Africa, some national policies of the member states often conflict with regional objectives due to different economic priorities, political interests, and protectionist tendencies among member states which appears to pose a serious threat and limiting the progress of realizing and achieving the apex economic integration in West African sub-region. In this regard, the study derived its data from both primary and secondary sources and carried out content analysis method to explore wide varieties of literature on the subject matter. Findings of this research will provide insights for governments, policymakers and regional bodies aiming to foster sustainable economic integration in West Africa.

Keywords: National Policies, Regional, Economic Integration, West Africa and Impediments.

Introduction

National Policy according to Better Care Network Organization is a statement containing principles and a broad course of action adopted by the national government in pursuit of a specific objective. They are used to guide decision making towards the achievement of a stated outcome (Network, n.d.). National policies shaped by each country's unique economic, political, and social conditions can sometimes hinder the collaborative efforts required for regional integration in West Africa. These policies may include Protectionist Trade Policies and Agreement, Visa Restrictions and other Immigration policies, Currency Misalignment, and Infrastructure gap among others.

Economic integration is the process by which different countries agree to remove trade barriers between them. Trade barriers can be tariffs (taxes imposed on imports to a country), quotas (a limit to the amount of a product that can be imported) and border restrictions. For example, Canada, Mexico and the United States have formed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which reduces trade barriers between the three countries (McCormick, 1999).

Regional economic integration is a process in which two or more countries from a particular geographical region agree to eliminate economic barriers with their region, with the end goal of enhancing productivity and achieving greater economic interdependence. It can take different forms,

from the simplest preferential trade area to the most advanced monetary or fiscal union (Aladdin, 2016).

This study examines the impact of National Policies as impediments to regional Economic Integration in West Africa. The study analyzes specific policy areas such trade regulations, fiscal policies, and political frameworks that present challenges to integration effort. Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to provide insights into how West African countries might overcome these impediments through harmonization of policies among member countries, enhancing infrastructure connectivity in West Africa, and the promotion of currency stability between member states that will advance the region's economic integration agenda.

Conceptual Clarification

National Policies

National policies are guidelines and principles set by a government to address various issues and shape the direction of the country in areas such as economics, education, healthcare, foreign relations, and more. These policies are typically designed to promote the well-being of the nation and its citizens, establish standards and regulations, and achieve specific goals. According Enahoro, National policy is a broad course of action or statement of guidance adopted by a government at the national level in pursuit of national objectives (Enahoro, 2019).

Regional

The word "region" comes from the Latin word *regio*, which means "direction, district, area, territory" (International, n.d.). The concept of regional means something is larger than local but smaller than national. It can refer to a geographic or cultural area within a larger country, or to something that is characteristic of a region. For example, you might describe a weather forecast as regional if it covers multiple counties or even several states (Vocabulary.com, n.d.).

Economic Integration

Economic integration is an arrangement among nations that typically includes the reduction or elimination of trade barriers and the coordination of monetary and fiscal policies. Economic integration aims to reduce costs for both consumers and producers and to increase trade between the countries involved in the agreement. Economic integration is sometimes referred to as regional integration as it often occurs among neighboring nations (Kenton, 2023).

West-Africa

West Africa or Western Africa is the westernmost region of Africa. The United Nations, defines Western Africa as the 16 countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The population of West Africa is estimated at 419 million people as of 2021. The region is demographically and economically one of the fastest growing regions on the African continent (Nations, 2011).

Impediments

Impediment comes from a Latin verb that meant "to interfere with" or "to get in the way of progress", as if by tripping up the feet of someone walking. In English, *impediment* still suggests an



obstruction or obstacle along a path; for example, a lack of adequate roads and bridges would be called an impediment to economic development. So, we may speak of an impediment as something that slows the progress (Webster, n.d).

Literature Review

There are many existing literatures on National Policies and the Regional Economic Integration in Africa. According to U.K Planning Inspectorate (2012), National Policy statements are produced by government. They give reasons for the policy set out in the statement, and must include an explanation of how the policy takes account of government policy relating to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. They comprise the government's objectives for the development of nationally significant infrastructure in a particular sector and state (U.K, 2012).

According to Ajayi, Regional alliances are common in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and there are substantial initiatives to promote integration as a means of stimulating economic development. The recently restructured African Union (AU) and the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) exemplify this growing commitment towards African cooperation and unity. On a smaller geographic level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of the most advanced partnerships on the continent (Ajayi, 2005).

According to Jones, Economic co-operation at the regional and sub-regional level has been an important feature of the economic development policies of developing countries. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with a view, inter alia, to promote economic co-operation and integration in West Africa (Jones, 2002).

Furthermore, posits that since the end of the colonial era, African States have been struggling to develop patterns of continental and regional co-operation that will serve to break down debilitating dependencies on the old metro poles without shattering the nation-state structures based on the old colonial boundaries (Yansane, 1977).

Methodology

The study adapted the secondary method of data collection, by extracting relevant contents from available publications. The study used content analysis as appropriate method of data collection to undertake this research study. The use of a qualitative method seems to be suitable. The secondary data used for discussion in this study, were majorly derived from text books from the library, journals, articles, research reports and internet sources and educational websites; it is thus considered more secure and safe to make use of such written records, which are secondary sources as many have been published and printed.

Results and Discussions

The Concept of Regional Economic Integration in West-Africa

According to Igue (2011), the concerns of regional integration in West Africa have been around for centuries. From the middle Ages up to the contemporary period, there are four levels of regional integration which can be identified in respective socio-political contexts: The first level encompasses the creation of the West African medieval empires like empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. The second level is that of the breakdown of these empires which were replaced by the trans-regional caravan trade based on the circulation of cowry shells. The third level includes the colonial period with the foundation of the French West African Federation and lastly, the fourth level corresponds to



the current experiences of regional integration, namely the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Mano River Union (MRU) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) (Igue, 2011).

The regional integration today is more linked to the current evolution of the world characterized by a better refocusing of economic interests on a regional or global level. Indeed, if one analyzes the mechanisms of the current global economy, one notes that regional groupings, by forming blocks, have become essential factors for the negotiation of favorable commercial agreements. The interdependence of economies increased through free trade agreements makes regulatory modalities for the partners in an economic exchange necessary. Hence, one could say that the concerns of regional integration as currently expressed are a response to globalization. The principal interest of integration is to create interdependence amongst members in order to establish new auto-centric regional poles. Regional integration would also enable Africa to function on the basis of comparative advantages. We can therefore say that regional integration is essential to increase clarity for investors that want to conduct business in Africa (Igue, 2011).

The Impediments and Challenges of National Policies to Regional Economic Integration in West Africa

According to Vinaye Ancharaz (2011), the low degree of Economic Integration in West-African trade is due to a lack of product diversification and poor trade complementarities among the West African countries. These structural constraints are compounded by inadequate, inefficient and ineffective National Policies on infrastructure, such as Roads, Ports for transportation and energy, the ICT, customs systems and etc. Vinaye went further to buttress the following constraints as impediments to Regional Economic Integration in West Africa:

Protectionist Trade Policies and Agreement: Challenges due to weak physical infrastructure are often compounded by bad policies and a poor regulatory environment. Constraints include poorly developed financial markets; the absence of cross-border financial instruments; complex and lengthy procedures regulating private business activity and high trade tariffs. Some states may implement protectionist trade policies, such as high tariffs or non-tariff barriers, to protect domestic industries. These policies hinder intra-regional trade by increasing the cost of importing goods from neighboring countries, thus undermining efforts to promote economic integration (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011).

Visa Restrictions and Immigration and other officials Policies: Stringent visa requirements and restrictive immigration policies can impede the free movement of people within the region. Limited mobility can hinder cross-border trade, investment, and cultural exchange, inhibiting the development of regional integration initiatives. Crossing a transit territory adds another percentage to trade costs irrespective of the distance covered. Multiple roadblocks on major roads cause further delays. As an extreme example, the highway between Lagos-Nigeria and Abidjan-Ivory Coast has about 69 official checkpoints, specifically 7 checkpoints per 100 km (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011).

Infrastructure Gaps: Cross-border infrastructures are essential to move goods, services, people, and information between countries. Such linkages expand market access; reduce economic distance; and facilitate trade, investment and labor mobility. However, West Africa's poor transport and infrastructure and unreliable power raise trade costs and undermine competitiveness and the region's ability to integrate. The Disparities in infrastructure development among West African states can create barriers to regional integration. Inadequate transportation networks, such as poorly maintained roads or limited access to ports, can hinder the movement of goods and services across borders,



stifling economic cooperation and integration (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011). A good example is the West African landlocked countries like Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger that does not have direct access to the sea and therefore do not have their own Ports as the marine transport is the most dominant means of transporting goods across the globe (Rosenberg, 2020).

Currency Misalignment: Divergent monetary policies and currency fluctuations within regional monetary unions, such as the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), can create challenges for trade and investment. Misaligned exchange rates and monetary instability can undermine the effectiveness of regional integration efforts (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011). A good example is the current official exchange rate between the Nigerean CFA and the Nigerian NGN which trading at = CFA 100 is exchange trading to NGN 250 as at 20th February, 2024.

Political Instability, Conflict and Insecurity: Persistent political instability, governance challenges, conflict and insecurity in some West African states can disrupt regional cooperation and integration initiatives. Insecurity and instability undermine trust and confidence among member states, hampering efforts to promote peace, security, and economic development in the region (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011).

Lack of Political Will and Cooperation: Inconsistent or insufficient commitment from member states to regional integration goals can hinder progress. Political rivalries, competing national interests, and a lack of coordination among policymakers may result in delays or setbacks in implementing integration policies and initiatives (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011). The most recent example of this is the move by the three Military Juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to break away from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on January 28th, 2024 (Allegrozzi, 2024).

Non-Compliance with Regional Agreements: Failure to comply with regional agreements and protocols, such as those related to trade liberalization, customs cooperation, and free movement of people, goods, and services, can impede integration efforts. Non-compliance undermines the effectiveness of regional institutions and erodes trust among member states (Vinaye Ancharaz, 2011). A good example is Nigeria's Government taking a very critical decision to close its land borders on August 19, 2019 on the reasons bothering on the economy and National security (Onwuachu, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that, National policies in West Africa countries can have a significant impact on regional integration. The paper identified and explained the various areas where these National policies can negatively influence the integration process of West Africa, such as Protectionist Trade Policies and agreements, Visa Restrictions and Immigration Policies on the movement of people, infrastructure development, Currency Misalignment, Political Instability, Conflicts and security cooperation, Lack of Political Will and Cooperation, and Non-Compliance with Regional Agreements. For example, trade policies can either facilitate or hinder the free flow of goods and services within the region, while immigration policies can either promote or impede the movement of people across borders. Additionally, policies related to infrastructure development, such as transportation networks can as well play a crucial role in regional integration efforts. Overall, the alignment of states' policies towards common goals and objectives is essential for the successful integration of West Africa. The study recommendations are as follows:



1. **Policy Harmonization:** Establish a mechanism for harmonizing national policies with ECOWAS and other regional integration goals, particularly in trade, customs, and investment regulations. West African Countries could adopt common frameworks to minimize policy conflicts and promote seamless cooperation.
2. **Enhancing Infrastructure Connectivity:** The West African Countries should invest in regional infrastructure projects to improve transportation and communication networks across member states. As this will facilitate trade and mobility, thereby addressing logistical impediments to integration.
3. **Promoting Currency Stability:** The West African Countries should adopt policies that promote currency stability across the region and pertinent to introduce a single common currency among the member states. This could increase currency interoperability to reduce transaction costs and facilitate smoother intra-regional trade.
4. **Conflict Resolution and Political Stability:** The West Africa member countries should resort to addressing their political instability and security issues that undermine regional integration efforts by themselves. Thereby establishing more effective conflict resolution mechanism and fostering stability which is essential for a sustained economic cooperation between the member countries.
5. **Fostering Public Awareness and Support:** The West African member countries should increase public awareness in their respective domains for the benefit of the entire region. They should initiate programs that educate citizens on the economic and social benefits that can build grassroots support, reducing political resistance to regional initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, the West African region might overcome the challenges and impediments posed by some National Policies on regional economic integration efforts. These steps would create a more conducive environment for economic integration, enabling West African Nations to harness the collective economic potential of the region.



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