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ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS (ECOWAS)

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Abstract

The study investigated economic integration in international economic relations with an emphasis on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The establishment of ECOWAS was a milestone in the history of economic integration of member states. The myriads of socio-economic and political problems that confront member states; low intra-trading, insecurity, political instability and general underdevelopment necessitated the establishment of ECOWAS. ECOWAS has recorded some tremendous gains; economically and politically. Despite, these economic and political gains, the organization has not lived up to the expectations of the people in the subregion as general underdevelopment; insecurity and political instability still ravage the subregion. The functionalist theory of integration propounded by David Mitrany was adopted as the theoretical framework. The secondary source of data was deployed for the study; it involves the collection of data from textbooks, magazines, articles etc. The paper finds out that ECOWAS member states have recorded some economic progress and gain since the establishment of the organization as it had the fourth largest economy among Africa's RECs with a GDP of US$633.1 billion, representing about 25.5% of the continent's total economy. The study recommends that ECOWAS member states should show more commitment to the process of integration in the sub-region. They should be prepared to give up their national sovereignty and promote sub-regional interests for socio-economic and political integration to succeed in the sub-region. They should strive to domesticate and implement ECOWAS treaties, agreements, policies and programmes at the national levels.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Trade, Economic, Integration, GDP

Introduction

Integration is the coming together of states and pooling of resources for the benefit of the entire people in a particular region. It has to do with cooperation in trade and other socio-cultural, economic and political realms. Economic integration is an arrangement among states that typically includes the reduction or elimination of trade barriers and the coordination of monetary and fiscal policies. El-Agraa (1998) defines the term economic integration as the discriminatory removal of all trade impediments between at least two participating countries and the establishment of certain elements of coordination and cooperation between them. Economic integration aims to reduce costs for both consumers and producers and to increase trade between the countries involved in the agreement.

The last decades have seen a dramatic increase in the number of preferential trade agreements (PTA), due in part to the frustration arising from the delayed completion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), at least 100 regional arrangements had been formed by the end of 2004, nearly a third of them in the previous five years. As a result of the proliferation of PTAs, the share of preferential trade has increased considerably in the 2000s, reaching 42 per cent of world trade between 2003-2007 (Grether & Olarreaga, 2008). It was estimated by Grether and Olarreaga that Western Europe has the largest preferential trade share, with a 70 per cent average between 1998 and 2007. It was followed by the Western Hemisphere and Africa, with a 25-26 per cent average. Asia and Oceania, however, recorded very low values, which were around 4 per cent (Grether and Olarreaga, 2008).

Flores (2007), identified seven stages of economic integration; a preferential trading area, a free trade area, a customs union, a common market, an economic union, an economic and monetary union, and a complete economic integration. The final stage represents a total harmonization of fiscal policy and a complete monetary union. Economic integration is sometimes referred to as regional integration, as it often occurs among neighbouring states. Ethier (2006), identified some of the advantages of economic integration. According to him, they fall into three categories which are; trade creation, employment opportunities and consensus and cooperation. He further noted that economic integration typically leads to a reduction in the cost of trade, improved availability of goods and services and gains in efficiency that lead to greater purchasing power (Ethier, 2006). A good example of an economic integration arrangement is the European Union (EU). The European Union represents an economic integration among 27 countries. Others are the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) etc.

This paper discusses the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as an economic integration. The signing of the treaty of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) goes down in history as the first major successful effort in the sub-region's quest for collective self-reliance. On 28 May 1975, the heads of state and governments of fifteen West African States signed the ECOWAS treaty in Lagos, Nigeria. These countries were Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Gambia, Republic of Benin, Niger, Sierra Leon, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali (Akinyemi & Aluko, 1983). The organization presently has fifteen members following the withdrawal of Mauritania in 2000.

Statement of the Problem

According to Ogwu and Adebayo (2011, p.1), "ECOWAS is a manifestation of the desire for cooperation among the people of West Africa. It is the structural embodiment of the people's belief in a collective attack against the enduring problems of underdevelopment in tropical Africa". Across the sub-region, the yearnings of the people are the same; they want to be helped out of the valley of poverty in which they are enmeshed. The language may be different, and the cultures may be diverse, but beyond all, the longing for economic emancipation through cooperation transcends all barriers. ECOWAS member states are mired with myriads of security and socio-economic issues that threaten to shake the region's relative stability and economic progress. The challenges range from terrorism and violent extremism to piracy, political instability, elections-related violence, drug trafficking or deadly viruses and general underdevelopment. These, as well as other security and violence-related issues, are hardly limited to one country alone but tend to lead to the spillover of instability across the sub-region.

ECOWAS member states are also constrained by their small economies that are highly susceptible to external economic and political influences and this situation affects their socio-economic and political development. The Gross Domestic Product of the Republic of Benin in 2021 was 17.14 billion USD, that of Nigeria was 440.8 billion USD in 2021, Mali was 19.14 billion USD in 2021 and The Gambia was 2.038 billion USD in 2021 (World Bank, 2021).

Nwaorgu (2006) noted that the idea to embark on regional integration by ECOWAS member states as a means of development has been predicated on certain thoughts; that since political independence, the countries in the ECOWAS sub-region have been faced with myriad of socio-economic and political problems. Here we hasten to say that much of the problem lies within the domain of the economy; that these problems are so acute and demanding that national solutions are inadequate if not totally impossible. There are problems of low per capita income, slim resources etc.

It is the face of the debilitating economic challenges that bedevilled the people of the sub-region that necessitated the need for the establishment of ECOWAS.

Objectives of the Study

The work is guided by the following objectives:

i. Examine the objectives and organs/structures of ECOWAS

ii. Analyze the economic content of ECOWAS

iii. Identify the challenges of ECOWAS

Methodology

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The historical research design was adopted for the study; it involves studying past events to understand present events in other to predict future events. The secondary source of data was utilized for this study. The secondary source of data refers to the set of data collated or authored by another person, archives, in the form of documents collected for a purpose other than the present one in which it is being used (Asika, 2006). Selltiz et al (2008), have declared that the usefulness of secondary sources of data lies in the fact that information of this sort is collected periodically. Also, gathering of information from such sources does not require the cooperation or assistance of the individual about whom information is being sought. The sources of data for this study include; magazines, articles, textbooks, journals and seminar papers among others. The content analysis was adopted as our method of data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the functionalist theory of integration as its theoretical framework. The major exponent of this school of thought is David Mitrany. Mitrany came up with this theory in 1975. The assumption of the theory is hinged on how cooperation in specific areas can lead to a broader integration among states. These areas are; technical, economic, social, cultural etc. The functional theory was developed in order to achieve social peace and prosperity. Mitrany proposed a new international order, based on trans-national cooperation (1975). Writing in a period in which Europe was confronting a profound crisis, Mitrany managed to offer the functionalist theory arguments for global but also regional integration (1975). His main preoccupation was connected to the efficient administration of limited resources as an essential premise for durable cooperation and for the creation of what he defined as a working peace system.

Mitrany believes in the spillover logic which guarantees the growth of planning in the economy. While the immediate impulse of growing planning would have been the will for economic stability as well as a consequence of crisis in one or more industries, Mitrany stated that the experience of planning during the First World War (WW1) proved that a control upon an industry could lead to a control upon all industries. This change in goals – specific to planning in democratic societies – could be helpful in compensation for inheriting the anti-democratic tendencies of the functional government. Mitrany considers that the need for peace and social progress can be accomplished, threw another way of association of nations threw a common action of organizing the government, following the specific needs and in conformity with the time conditions (1975). The alternative to this action could be the traditional organizing, based upon constitutive documents concerning the jurisdiction, rights and competencies. Continuing on this logic of organic development of the international public body, the growth of specific administrative agencies and laws is the fundament of modern government (1975).

Accordingly, the functionalists believe in the gradual approach towards regional and global peace. The basic assumption of functionalism is that years of wars which have scourged the human race are principally the product of a crudely organized international system, riddled and inebriated with much suspicion and anarchy (Nseable, 2014). Functionalism advocates that national and international life should be organized along functional lines. For these theorists, the satisfaction of

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the welfare needs of the people in a region is the responsibility of international or regional institutions.

Functionalism proposes a gradual and incremental approach to integration. For functionalists, integration begins with people coming together to solve a common problem or challenge. Functionalism preaches that rather than states focusing on individual self-interest, they should seek common interests and needs of member states in the region. The theory encourages states to integrate functional areas such as economy, science, technology, society and culture. These areas are referred to as functional areas because they are vital sectors that are capable of stimulating economic growth and development. When these functional areas are allowed to develop and encouraged to spread, there will be a meaningful increase in activities that promote unity, peace, cooperation and development in the region.

The relevance of this theory to the study is that through cooperation ECOWAS member states will be able to surmount her developmental challenges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Objectives of ECOWAS

The aim of the ECOWAS is to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa to raise the living standards of its peoples, maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent. To this end, the objectives include;

1. The harmonization and coordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities, particularly in food, agriculture and natural resources, industry, transport and communications, energy, trade, money and finance, taxation, economic reform policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science, technology, services, health, tourism, legal matters.

2. The harmonization and coordination of policies for the protection of the environment.

3. The promotion of the establishment of joint production enterprises.

4. The establishment of a common market through.

5. The liberalization of trade by the abolition, among member states, of customs duties levied on imports and exports, and the abolition, among member states, of non-tariff barriers in order to establish a Free Trade Area at the Community level.

6. The adoption of a common external tariff and a common trade policy vis-a-vis third countries;

7. The removal, between member states obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and the right of residence and establishment.

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8. The establishment of an economic union through the adoption of common policies in the economic, financial, social and cultural sectors, and the creation of a monetary union.

9. The promotion of joint ventures by private sector enterprises and other economic operators, in particular through the adoption of a regional agreement on cross-border investments.

10. The adoption of measures for the integration of the private sectors, particularly the creation of an enabling environment to promote small and medium-scale enterprises.

11. The establishment of an enabling legal environment.

12. The harmonization of national investment codes leading to the adoption of a single Community investment code.

13. The harmonization of standards and measures.

14. The promotion of balanced development of the region, paying attention to the special problems of each member state particularly those of landlocked and small island member states.

15. The encouragement and strengthening of relations and the promotion of the flow of information particularly among rural populations, women and youth organizations and socio-professional organizations such as associations of the media, businessmen and women, workers, and trade unions.

16. The adoption of a Community population policy which takes into account the need for a balance between demographic factors and socio-economic development.

17. The establishment of a fund for cooperation, compensation and development; and

18. Any other activity that member states may decide to undertake jointly with a view to attaining Community objectives.

Organs/Structures of ECOWAS

The organizational structure of ECOWAS consists of the following institutions and specialized agencies as gleaned from the ECOWAS Common Investment Monograph (2010):

Institutions:

1. The Authority of Heads of State and Government: It is the highest policy-making organ of the community organization. It is made up of heads of state and government of member states. It meets annually to discuss issues affecting the organization. It approves the appointment of the executive secretary of the organization. It approves all the treaties and agreements of the

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community. It reviews the recommendations of the council of ministers on the policy objectives of the community. It approves proposals for the amendment of the charter of the community.

2. The Council of Ministers: The Council of Ministers consists of two representatives from each member state (30 members). It meets twice a year and it is chairmanship is held in annual rotation among member states in the community. It maintains the objectives of the Council of Ministers. It prepares the agenda for the meeting of heads of state and governments. It makes recommendations to the authority of heads of state and government for recommendation or consideration e.g. on the appointment of the executive secretary. It prepares the budget of the community and forwards it to the authority of heads of state and governments. It implements the decisions and resolutions adopted by the authority of heads of state and governments.

3. The Executive Secretariat: The executive secretariat is the administrative headquarters of ECOWAS and is located in Abuja, Nigeria. He appoints and directs all members of staff of the secretariat. He prepares and presents the annual report of the community with the authority of the head of state and government. He speaks for the organization. It carries out the day-to-day administration of the community and it is headed by an executive secretary who holds office for four years and may be re-elected.

4. The Economic and Social Council: The Economic and Social Council play a crucial role in advising the ECOWAS Commission and member states on economic and social policies. It also serves as a platform for dialogue between governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to address key issues facing West Africa, such as poverty reduction, sustainable development, and regional cooperation. The council's work includes research, policy analysis, and the development of recommendations to advance the economic and social objectives of ECOWAS. It also oversees the implementation of regional programmes and projects aimed at promoting economic growth, social progress, and poverty alleviation in West Africa.

5. The Community Court of Justice: The ECOWAS Community Court of Justice is the judicial organ of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was established to ensure adherence to the rule of law, protection of human rights, and interpretation and application of the provisions of the ECOWAS Treaty and other related legal instruments. The court has jurisdiction to hear cases brought by individuals and corporate bodies against member States for violations of human rights, as well as cases involving the interpretation and application of community texts. It also has the authority to interpret decisions and regulations adopted by ECOWAS institutions. The ECOWAS Court of Justice plays a critical role in promoting human rights and the rule of law in West Africa. Its decisions are binding on member states, and it has contributed significantly to the development of regional human rights jurisprudence.

6. The Community Parliament: The ECOWAS Community Parliament is one of the institutions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was established to provide representation for the people of West Africa and to promote integration and development within the region. The Parliament consists of representatives from each member state, including elected members and representatives of civil society organizations. Its functions include:

1. Providing a platform for dialogue and cooperation among member States on issues of regional importance.

2. Promoting democracy, good governance, and the rule of law in West Africa.

3. Monitoring the implementation of ECOWAS policies and programmes.

4. Making recommendations to the ECOWAS Commission and other institutions on matters of regional concern.

5. While the Parliament does not have legislative powers, its role is advisory, and its recommendations carry significant weight in the decision-making processes of ECOWAS. The Parliament meets regularly to discuss key issues facing the region and to make recommendations for action by ECOWAS member States and institutions.

ECOWAS is also made up of specialized agencies which include:

1. West African Monetary Agency (WAMA),

2. Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF)

3. ECOWAS Regional Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERERA)

4. ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE)

5. The West African Power Pool (WAPP)

6. ECOWAS BROWN CARD

7. ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC)

8. ECOWAS Youth & Sports Development Centre (EYSDC)

9. West African Monetary Institute (WAMI)

10. ECOWAS infrastructure Projects Preparation and Development Unit (PPDU) etc.

Economic Content of ECOWAS

One of the objectives of ECOWAS is to promote economic cooperation and development of member states, positive gains to some extent have been recorded in that direction. For instance, as reported by Africa Economic Outlook (2020) in 2019, ECOWAS had the fourth largest economy among Africa's RECs with a GDP of US$633.1 billion, representing about 25.5% of the continent's total economy. This constituted an increase of 233.2% from 1990 when GDP was at US$190.0 billion. This is dominated by Nigeria (GDP of US$391.4 billion in 2019 constituting 61.8% of the total) and the smallest economies are Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Cabo Verde, each representing less than 0.5% of the Community total. The report further noted that the

ECOWAS economy grew at 3.6% in 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the region, hampering growth. It was projected to grow at 4% in 2020, yet contracted by almost 1%. The pandemic caused contractions in six of its member states (Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Cabo Verde) in 2020 (Africa Economic Outlook, 2020). According to an Oxfam report (2020), the West African region lost about US$48.7 billion in GDP and working hours, which is equivalent to 7 million jobs, in 2020.

The region has an optimistic outlook with economic growth to rebound to 4.2% in 2024. This is partly due to most countries signing onto an IMF support programme. Currently, nine countries (Senegal, Benin, Niger, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cabo Verde) are on IMF-supported programmes (IMF, 2023). Also, long-term growth prospects are positive reflecting economic potential. The GDP of ECOWAS as projected by the World Bank will have more than tripled by 2043, reaching about US$2.0 trillion, equivalent to an increase of 214.5% over that period. This will increase the share of ECOWAS in Africa's economy to about 29.2% by 2043 (World Bank, 2021). The GDP increase will largely be driven by the expected growth in Nigeria.

Despite these economic gains and prospects by member states, member states have also recorded some economic setbacks. For instance, the region suffers from high public debt. The average public debt-to-GDP ratio increased from 37.1% in 2019 to 49.3% in 2022. This increase is driven by the widening fiscal deficit, weak domestic currencies and low economic growth. The ratio is particularly high in non-oil exporting countries with the debt-to-GDP ratio reaching 73% in 2022. For instance, in Cape Verde, it reached 137.1% in 2022. On the other hand, it was low (37% in 2022) for the oil-exporting countries due to the surge in oil prices thereby increasing revenues (World Bank, 2022).

There is also the problem of external debt; a large part of external debt stems from the growing appetite for Eurobond in ECOWAS. For instance, Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and the Republic of Benin have all issued Eurobonds over the past decade. As a result, all countries in the region are at risk of debt distress. In 2022, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau were classified as high risk, with the remaining countries at moderate risk. In fact, Ghana defaulted on its debt in December 2022 and embarked on debt restructuring (World Bank, 2022). There is also the problem of high inflation rate; the inflation rate grew from 9.7% to 17% (average from 2014-2020), mainly because of higher inflation rates in non-WAEMU countries (Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria) which was primarily caused by increases in food and energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This was accentuated by the restrictive monetary policies implemented in advanced economies resulting in tight global financial market conditions. All these challenges are hampering economic recovery and growth in the sub-region

These economic poor performances of member states are due largely to the fact that most countries in ECOWAS rely on primary commodity exports with little or no added value. For instance, Nigeria's economy largely depends on exporting its oil, while Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire rely significantly on cocoa, gold and other mineral exports. As a result, their economies are susceptible to international commodity price fluctuations and shocks.

Challenges of ECOWAS

The following are some of the challenges of ECOWAS as gleaned from ECOWAS Commission (2009);

1. Overlapping Membership/Multiplicity of Association

This is one challenge that has hampered the deepening of economic integration in West Africa. Most member states of ECOWAS belong to other regional and international economic organizations. Some of these regional and international organizations have overlapping functions and interests which introduces duplication of efforts and policies. This has worked against the overall objectives of ECOWAS.

2. Lack of Political Will to Ratify/Implement ECOWAS Protocol, Treaties, Policies and Agreements

Most ECOWAS member states and their government are unwilling or reluctant to implement ECOWAS treaties and agreements. They find it difficult to incorporate it into their national policies and programmes. Nevin as cited in Olubomehin and Kawonishe (2004), observed that the real challenge facing the ECOWAS is how to get all member states of the organization reading from the same page. Buttressing Nevin, Ndulo noted that the traditional explanation of the failure of integration schemes in West Africa is that there is a lack of political will in the member countries that is necessary to see integration succeed, expressed in the chronic non-observance of commitments undertaken within the respective agreements and in the insufficient use of the instruments set up by these agreements (cited in Olubomehin &Kawonishe, 2004). This suggests that West African leaders lack the political will to make integration work. Worst still is the fact that some member states are reluctant and unwilling to cede or hand over part of their national sovereignty to ECOWAS. This has made the organization less effective in the implementation of policies, programmes and initiatives.

3. Nationalist Rivalry

ECOWAS member states rather than promote collective policies and agreement of the Union have always preferred promoting national interest. Oftentimes, member states have pursued policies and programmes that promote their national interest even though this is at the expense of other member states of the organization. This no doubt contradicts the spirit of unity and cooperation for which the organization was established. It hampers the harmonization of policies and programmes.

4. **Mono-Cultural Agro-based Economies**

Most of the national economies of the member states are largely monolithic. They specialise in the production of raw materials or primary products. Their economies are always poorly integrated and fragmented. Because member states lack the capacity to transform their primary products into finished products, they sell them to the West at cheaper prices, and when value has been added to

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these products, they are sold back to West Africa at exorbitant prices. This hampers intra-regional trade in the sub-region.

5. **Unwillingness of member states to give up their sovereignty:** sovereignty is the ultimate power within a state. This study found that ECOWAS member states are generally unwilling to give up or share their sovereignty as seen in European integration. Part of the reason why the EU succeeded in implementing a Custom Union (CU) is because member states were willing to share their sovereignty, something which ECOWAS member states are not willing to do.

6. **Over-Dependence on Donor Funds:** ECOWAS member states have two main sources of finance; member states contributions and funding from International Cooperating Partners (ICPs). This study found that ECOWAS member states highly depend on donor funds. Data released by the World Trade Organization in 2021 has revealed that more than 50% of the funding within ECOWAS member states is from ICPs with the EU being the major donor of ECOWAS member states. There is also a risk of donors advancing their own agendas in ECOWAS member states through conditionality attached to aid. As stipulated by the dependency theory, breaking free from dependence on donors is difficult as donors may instil punishments for attempts to break away. Donors may thus, manipulate certain positions within ECOWAS member states in order to advance their own agendas because of the influence they hold as major funders.

7. **Lack of industrial capacity in ECOWAS member states;** the non-diversity of exports within ECOWAS member states is considered a major factor affecting intra-ECOWAS trade. ECOWAS member states lack industrial capacity for diversified manufactured goods. As a result, the exports within ECOWAS countries often comprise of goods which are of little value to other member states.

Findings

Based on the study, the following observations are made:

1. The study observed that ECOWAS was established to help address the myriads of socio-economic challenges that bedevilled the people of the sub-region
2. The paper finds out that ECOWAS member states have recorded some economic progress and gain since the establishment of the organization as it had the fourth largest economy among Africa's RECs with a GDP of US$633.1 billion, representing about 25.5% of the continent's total economy.
3. The work observed that the dominant challenges that confront ECOWAS member states in actualizing their objectives of economic integration are; lack of political will multiplicity of regional organizations, unhealthy rivalry among member states etc.

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Conclusion

The Economic Community of West African States stands as a significant regional bloc in Africa, fostering economic integration, political stability, and social development among its member states. Since its establishment in 1975, ECOWAS has played a vital role in promoting peace, security, and economic growth in West Africa. Through its various institutions, such as the ECOWAS Commission, Community Parliament, and Community Court of Justice, ECOWAS has worked to deepen regional economic cooperation, harmonize policies, and resolve conflicts within the region. It has also been instrumental in facilitating trade and investment, promoting regional infrastructure development, and advancing social and cultural exchange among member states. Despite facing challenges such as political instability, security threats, and economic disparities among member states, ECOWAS remains committed to its founding principles of promoting economic cooperation and integration in West Africa. As the region continues to evolve, ECOWAS stands as a beacon of regional unity and cooperation, working towards a more prosperous and peaceful West Africa.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. ECOWAS member states should show more commitment to the process of economic integration in the sub-region. They should be prepared to give up their national sovereignty and promote sub-regional interests for socio-economic and political integration to succeed in the sub-region. They should strive to domesticate and implement ECOWAS treaties, agreements, policies and programmes at the national levels.

2. ECOWAS leaders should provide purposeful leadership that will drive the socio-economic and political development of the sub-region.

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