

## ECOWAS: Trajectory from Economic to Regional Security Organisation

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the evolution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) from an economic bloc to a regional security organisation (RSO). Relying on 'New Regionalism' to explain the shift in emphasis from economic integration to a holistic political union, the paper argues that non-traditional security threats faced by ECOWAS member-states facilitated the evolution. These threats include pandemic diseases, violent territorial disputes, regional economic and political crises, terrorism, poverty, human migratory pressures, illicit transfers of small arms and light weapons and food security. Others are environmental degradation, transnational organised crimes, fake drugs and narcotics, insurgency, sectarian religious crises, conflicts over scarce resources, and foreign military presence in West Africa (US, France and others). These threats were exacerbated by superpower disengagement from the security architecture of the sub-region, thus the emergence of a security community and regional security complex with its attendant shared commitment to mutual security.

### Introduction

The visibility of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been traced to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), which agreed with the Organisation for African Unity's *Lagos Plan of Action* (LPA) in 1980 to strengthen the ECOWAS, barely five years after its formation, and to establish new Preferential Trade Areas (PTAs). The PTAs were established for East and Southern Africa in 1981, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in 1983 and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) for North Africa (El-Affendi, 2009: 3). These PTAs served as building blocks for an ambitious African Economic Community (AEC). Thus, the ECOWAS is part of the grand economic integration project designed to unite Africa.

Although the ECOWAS is basically anchored on economic aims, it is one of the milestones for the culmination of Pan Africanism, which emerged as a political and cultural Movement in the early nineteenth century. The 'new Pan-Africanism', which emerged later, regards Africa's sub-regional bodies as invaluable instruments for the actualisation of the new African agenda

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(Landsberg and McKay, 2005). Pan-Africanism is committed to African unity and solidarity, development, peace and security, democratic governance, co-operation, and economic integration.

The successive AU, like the OAU, identified five regional economic communities (RECs), as constituent components within the African continent: Southern, Western, Eastern, Northern and Central region, which collectively forms the basis for the selection of members of the AU Commission. These are Southern Africa Development Commission (SADC), ECOWAS, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), which includes states from Southern, Eastern and Central Africa sub-regions. However, only SADC, ECOWAS and IGAD are active in the security sector and security policy formulation (Laakso, 2005: 494).

The African Union was envisaged to concretize the new Pan-Africanism in line with the contemporary challenges faced in the quest for political and economic integration. Some analysts argue that rather than promote unity as envisaged by the early post-Independence African leaders, Pan-Africanism has inadvertently “generated conflict and tension with neighbours and rivals on the continent” (El-Affendi, 2009: 14). This position is stated more bluntly by Adogamhe (2008) who asserts that although Pan-Africanism is useful as a possible framework for unity and development as well as human security, thereby inspiring generations of Africans, the potentials are yet to be tapped. He posits that “the average African state has variously been referred to as rogue state, prebendal state, predatory state failed state, and more,” due to insecurity and other developmental deficits (2008: 11).

Fifteen Heads of State (HOS) ratified the ECOWAS Lagos Treaty on May 28, 1975. The treaty entered into force in June of the same year. ECOWAS comprises Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Cape Verde joined in 1977 while the Arab Republic of Mauritania withdrew in December 1999 citing its preference for Arab identity although other accounts argue that Mauritania withdrew from the ECOWAS under President Quld Taya in 2000 to protest against plans by the regional body to introduce a common currency for member states in 2004 (UNODC, 2010: 98).

Geographically, the ECOWAS covers the West African states, which lie in the sub-Saharan region of Africa on the North-South axis close to 10<sup>0</sup> East longitudes. The Community is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea in the west and south. The Sahara Desert forms the northern border with Niger, which is the farthest part of the region northwards. The Benue trough, Mount Cameroon and Lake Chad complete the triad of natural boundaries in the eastern part of the region. French, English and Portuguese are the official languages of the ECOWAS, reflecting the Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone colonial pasts of the member-states.

The ECOWAS sub-region covers 6,139,070 square kilometres with a total population of about 367 million people (<https://countryeconomy.com>). The ECOWAS reckons that 29 percent of the entire African population resides in West Africa although “about 60 percent of the populations are illiterate and over 70 percent lack access to safe drinking water and medical facilities,” which are indicators of underdevelopment and poverty (Jaye, 2008: 8). The ECOWAS sub-region comprises about 500 ethnic groups that profess Islamic, Christian and other religions, with age-long historical foundations characterised by a visible pattern of regionalisation (Soderbaum, 2001: 63; Jaye, 2008: 155; Panke, 2017).

The paper examines the trajectory of ECOWAS from economic to regional security organisation. The paper is divided into four sections. After the introduction, the next section is focused on literature review and theoretical framework. The third section examines the evolution of ECOWAS from economic to a regional security actor. The final section is the conclusion.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The literature on regional security is burgeoning but relatively few focus on West Africa. Buzan (1991), Buzan and Waeber (2003), Tavares (2008), Ayoob (1997) and other scholars attempted an analytical framework for understanding regional peace and security. Buzan (1991) identifies five security complexes in the Third World: Latin (South) America, Middle East (including North Africa), Southern Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Interestingly, the West African states of Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad, and Sudan were designated by Buzan as ‘buffer states’ between the Middle East and Southern Africa Security Complexes (Buzan, 1991: 210). Buzan insists that the rest of West Africa consisting of Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D’Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso, do not belong to any security complex.

Buzan (1991: 206) contends that for “the band of over twenty states sandwiched between the Southern side of the Middle Eastern complex and the northern side of the Southern African one, no firm patterns of local security interdependence have yet emerged.” He postulates that a security complex is characterized by a high level of threat and or fear “which is felt mutually among two or more major states” (Buzan, 1991: 193-194).

However, contemporary events such as regional political and economic integration, the pervasiveness of proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), “the global war on terror (GWT)”, and environmental threats have since overtaken Buzan’s thesis. West Africa has evolved into a regional security complex taking on security issues as common agenda (Lacher, 2013; Odobo, Andekin & Udegbonam, 2017). Tavares (2008) introduces the concept of ‘regional peace and security cluster’ (RPSC) which he argues is a broader

approach than the regional security complex (RSC). The RPSC framework seeks to account for the agents of peace and security, the instruments of peace and security, the security pattern, the conflict pattern, the positive peace pattern, and the level of regional integration. It also examines how these different components relate to each other.

The literature is replete with divergent views on what constitutes a sub-region or region. Sub-regions are smaller parts of macro regions (Hettne, 2005). They are usually referred to as ‘intermediate’ and ‘peripheral regions’. These epicentres of cooperation are regionalist projects championed by weaker states in comparison with the ‘triad’ or the ‘core’ (Glenn Hook and Ian Kearns, 1999: 1). Hettne asserts that there could be many operational regions on a continent, especially Africa. Thus, the ECOWAS and the Southern Africa Development Cooperation (SADC) “are regions and not sub-regions, but depending on the strength of the AU they may become sub-regions in the future” (Hettne, 2005: 566).

There are four epochs or historical analogies of regionalism. Mansfield and Milner (1999: 589-627) situate the “first wave of regionalism” in the “second half of the nineteenth century”, which they argue “was largely a European phenomenon.” The period was characterized by a rise in intra-European trade which invariably constituted a large portion of global commerce as well as economic integration and single market economy.

Söderbaum (2001) linked the first wave of regionalism to “protectionism of the 1930s” although some analysts spotted it in the post-war period to the late 1960s and early 1970s. This boom was disrupted by World War I, but a “second wave of regionalism” soon began after World War II in 1945, although it had more discriminatory features than the first wave or in economic terms, it was preferential.

The period of the second wave had ideological foundations as the determinants of regionalism as opposed to geographical proximity. The evolutionary pace-gathering and momentous reappearance of regionalism spurred literature on what is euphemistically called the “new regionalism” (Fawcett and Hurrell, 1995; Mansfield and Milner, 1999; Hettne, Inotai and Sunkel, 1999; Farrell, Hettne and Van Langenbove, 2005 and Buzan and Weaver, 2003).

Tarling (2006) also traces the development of ‘regionalism’ to the depression period of the 1930s, and the emergence of nation-states due to rapid de-colonization in the post-World War II, as manifested in the European Economic Community (EEC), up to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the recent wave of globalization. He, however, stressed that in both milieus emphasis was on the economic aspect of analysis and definition.

### ***ECOWAS 'New Regionalism': Between Theory and Praxis***

Social constructivists insist that regions are usually constructed. They aver that countries which share a communal identity are a region, regardless of their geographical distance. Katzenstein (1997: 7) asserts that “regional geographic designations are not ‘real’, ‘natural’, or ‘essential.’ They are socially constructed and politically contested and thus open to change” in membership (Cited in Mansfield and Milner, 1999; Otmazgin, 2005). To emphasise his constructivist argument, Katzenstein postulates that countries join and leave regional grouping as in a confederation. This position is tenable in West Africa, where Mauritania was formerly part of the ECOWAS and later left whereas Cape Verde was not a founding member.

Schulz, Söderbaum and Ojendal (2001: 234-76) also admit that regionalism and its correlatives such as region are characteristically socially constructed. They assert there are no “natural” regions, but these are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed—intentionally or non-intentionally—in the process of global transformation, through collective human action and shared identity formation. Since regions are social constructions, “there are no given regions” and there are no peculiar regional interests, but these interests and identities are built, modified and reformed in the process of sustained interaction and ‘inter-subjective understanding.’

‘New regionalism’ or what Söderbaum refers to as ‘waves’ or ‘generations’ has been traced to writers involved in a United Nations University/World Institute for Development Economic Research (WIDER) project in the late 1990s (Tarling, 2006: 11). The new wave of regionalism arguably began in Western Europe in the mid-1980s (Evans, 1996: 11). Prior to the WIDER project, Björn Hettne (2005) considered the European Coal and Steel Community created in the 1950s to fall within the group of old regionalism (Tarling, 2006: 12). However, the ECOWAS which was formed in 1975 and has survived throughout the 1970s and 1980s, spanned the period of the ‘second waves’ or new regionalism even though it continually undertakes internally- and externally-instigated reforms to meet the challenges of globalization and the post-Cold War era.

The emergence of ‘new regionalism’ in West Africa can be attributed to many factors such as the move from bi-polarity towards a multi-polar or perhaps tri-polar structure after the Cold War; the relative decline of American hegemony and the encouraging attitude of the United States (US) towards regionalism; and the restructuring of the nation-state system and the increased interdependence, transnationalisation and globalization of trade and economies. Besides, the persistent fear of instability in multilateral trades; and the positive attitude to neo-liberal economic paradigms and political systems in many developing countries as well as in the post-Communist Eastern European

countries contrived to promote the new regionalism (Schulz, Soderbaum and Ojendal, 2001: 3).

This post-Cold War epoch of regionalism has been characterized by deep economic integration nuanced with political elements as the driving force in West Africa and other peripheral regions of the world. Other factors are the growing multilateral governance among states that incorporate many aspects hitherto viewed and treated as the exclusive preserves of states, such as environmental issues, development and human rights; devolution of powers and responsibilities within states which transcends to the regional level; and strong international legal framework with potent sanctions for violations and negligence coupled with cooperation over many dimensions unthinkable during the Cold War era (Thakur and Van Lagenhove, 2008: 30).

In essence, the emergence of fluid interactions based on a supranational edifice as opposed to the traditional emphasis on national sovereignty catapulted nascent regionalism into wider prominence. Thakur and Van Lagenhove (2008: 30) demonstrate that the new regionalism “aims to promote certain ‘world values’ such as security, development, ecological sustainability”, rather than globalism. The shift by ECOWAS towards this new regionalism and its functional roles has been demonstrated more clearly in the security sphere. This transformation by the ECOWAS into security regionalism is the subject of discussion in the next section.

### ***Trajectory of ECOWAS from Economic to Regional Security Actor***

The ECOWAS was focused exclusively on economic integration during its first decade. However, the gradual shift and widening of its mandates were necessitated by extant human security challenges that became manifest at the end of the Cold War. Thus, the ECOWAS has been more visible in the political and security dimensions, compared to the economic underpinnings upon which it was established (Panke, 2017).

The creation of its multinational force popularly called the ECOMOG (ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group) ensured that the ECOWAS was militarily involved in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau (1999) and Ivory Coast (2002) (Karns and Mingst, 2004: 204-205) to arrest the relapse of its member states into anarchy and total collapse even with unprecedented human casualties. The aftermath of the military exercise has led pundits to view ECOWAS as “one of the most advanced sub-regional groups in the developing world dealing with security issues” (Kirchner, 2007: 10) though this foray is more restricted to traditional security tasks of peacekeeping, conflict management and prevention.

The threats posed by globalization and its negative impacts have also been advanced as catalysts for regional states to unite for peace and security governance. Matlosa (2008: 412) enumerated the insidious developments exacerbated by non-traditional security threats to include reduced state security power and capacity to govern and provide security; reduced sovereignty and

legitimacy of the states; and the privatization and commercialization of security. This results in profit-generating activities competing with peacekeeping efforts. Other developments are the rise in international cross-border flow of weapons of war and mass destruction through multiple agents which lead to human security crises and state vulnerability; and the increased incidence of difficulty to manage resource-based intra-state conflicts and attendant political instability for nation-states with wide implications for regional security (Matlosa, 2008: 412).

One of the five dimensions of a region, according to Hettne (1996) is 'sociological' level, which involves a social system characterized by trans-local relations among groups in a security complex (cited in Ndayi, 2006). The other levels are geographic, institutionalization, regionalization and supranational entity. Hettne asserts that these constituents of the region are interdependent for their security. In this vein, Tarling (2006: 14) postulates that states within a region or regional organizations usually have "a more complex interrelationship than that of states/hegemon or states/state and that may also condition their attitude to those states that might be seen or want to act as hegemon from outside the region."

These multi-pronged interrelationships are shaped and structured along with two key motives: utility and security. The utility motive entails wealth creation or, more succinctly stated, economic security and galvanizing of efforts to tackle common supra-national or regional issues such as desertification and pollution reduction and pandemic disease control (Hveem, 2003). The ECOWAS began on this note. On the other hand, the security motive is based on a 'comprehensive security concept' with a broader scope, when compared with the traditional military notion of security centred on the state. It encompasses the military, political, economic, societal and environmental aspects of security (Buzan, 2003: 141). This phenomenal approach also applies to ECOWAS which has evolved to take on security and economic motives simultaneously.

Hveem (2003) identifies a third motive for security regionalism which is engendering defence of collective identity. It can be argued that ECOWAS is also concerned about collective security as succinctly stated in its treaty. Hveem (2003: 89) argues that regionalism and cooperation may spring out of "a manifest need to establish, or defend what is perceived as the fundamental cultural basis, socio-cultural distinctness of the particular institutions characteristic of a region".

Mansfield and Milner (1999: 608) argue that "interstate power and security relation" usually play key roles in shaping regionalism, as the latter would affect the "patterns of conflict and cooperation" among member-states. Hurrell (2007: 141) postulates that in line with the idea of delegation, policing and mutual reinforcement in international affairs, regional states are increasingly being tasked with security risk management. He insists that "regional

organizations and regional coalitions can contribute to burden-sharing in security matters.”

Earlier work by Mansfield and Milner (1995) contends that unlike the previous waves of regionalism devoted exclusively to economics and used as instruments of power politics, the current wave depicts regional organizations as being used to promote democracy and trade liberalization. The authors suggest a detailed research into the “political underpinning of regionalism in order to unravel the political economy of national security and the factors that shape the design and strength of international organizations” (1995: 621).

The regional security philosophy is congruent with and integral to the aims and objectives of the United Nations (Thakur and Langenhove, 2008: 33; Malangwa, 2017). This position has been elucidated upon by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan (2005: 213), who posits that “the United Nations and regional organisations should play complementary roles in facing the challenges to international peace and security.” Indeed, Article 52 (1) of the UN Charter recognises the co-existence of the UN with regional security arrangements. It states:

Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.

It should, however, be noted that the UN framework envisages regional approaches to traditional security threats and not the post-Cold War non-traditional threats that the ECOWAS has had to grapple with in the past decades.

At a later date, the UN High Level Panel report on Threats, Challenges and Change (2004) indeed postulates a broad view of security policy to cover terrorism, nuclear proliferation and state collapse, but its emphasis was on the conventional security threats. In effect, a broad range of political conditions have contributed to the current wave of regionalism distinguished by emphasis on and pre-occupation with ‘benign characters’ (Robert and Zaum, 2007: 18).

In the 1992 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General titled: *An Agenda for Peace* and in the follow-up report (Supplement to an Agenda for Peace) in 1995, the UN accorded regional organisations due recognition in its international peacekeeping and peacemaking roles. In fact, as El-Affendi (2009: 2-3) emphasizes, the Secretary-General views the regional organizations “both as a form of functional decentralization” to relieve the UN of too many responsibilities and to effectively democratize the entire UN system.

Former ECOWAS Secretary-General, Ibn Chambas (2005: 16) justifies why ECOWAS metamorphosed into a security regionalism saying “after

decades of limited success in promoting economic integration” and confronted with the outbreak of intra-state conflicts, “ECOWAS has had to factor in the peace and security sector which was previously downplayed” (Cited in Ogwu, 2008: 792). As Ayoob (1995: 196) notes, conflicts in the third world often lead to internal and external refugee flows not only into neighbouring states but also into the developed countries. The refugee flows exacerbate racial tensions due to forced migration to the industrialized democracies and imposes stress on critical infrastructure in the neighbouring states.

From the foregoing, the initial impetus for the formation of the ECOWAS, as the name suggests, was basically economic integration and the formation of a common union to enhance trade liberalization and unhindered exchange of goods and services across the region. In fact, “the regional mission of ECOWAS was to evolve into a customs union” (Adejumobi and Olukoshi, 2008: 135) but the civil wars in its member states forced the regional body to bring political, peace and security issues into its mandates. Those aims were later modified or expanded to accommodate pressing political and security needs after the Cold War.

It should be reiterated that the shift by the ECOWAS was reinforced by external realities in the international community with its increased emphasis on regional solutions to intra-regional problems. El-Affendi (2009: 1) is, however, pessimistic, saying that since “threats to security in the post-Cold War era derived mainly from domestic or regional dynamics, the leading industrial powers wanted to subcontract the burden of safeguarding neighbourhood security to designated regional bodies.” The main point is that superpowers are no longer prepared to be physically involved in regional conflicts but they prefer to assist regional blocs to contain them.

Regional arrangements are expected to advance “cooperative security arrangements based on mutual reassurance, rather than deterrence, and also promote economic and political cooperation” (El-Affendi, 2009: 1-2). El-Affendi argues that the United Nations and other major powers felt that the regional bodies could help mitigate ethnic and communal conflict by severing the “historic link between sovereignty and self-determination” through the creation of broader regional identities. This would, in turn, de-emphasize state sovereignty and offer disadvantaged minorities a broader framework within which they could meet dominant national majorities on the basis of equality.

At its creation on May 28, 1975, the ECOWAS cut across both colonial and linguistic divisions: it unified former British, French and Portuguese colonies and Liberia. Since then, the Community has survived for over 35 years, notwithstanding its weaknesses and challenges. The ECOWAS is a reflection of the sense of West African awareness and community among the leaders and the people (Jaye, 2008: 156). ECOWAS’s constitutive norms, as outlined by former Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida, at a summit of the

ECOWAS, “were anchored on solidarity, unity, mutual trust and good neighbourliness” (Akabogu, 1992: 79 as cited by Jaye, 2008: 152).

In reality, however, this narrow perception of regionalism has been challenged by more nuanced security issues. As noted by Nwachukwu (1999: 115), a surfeit of contemporary political and security developments in the region has continued to expose the “weaknesses of the narrow militaristic notion of security as the integration of West Africa was hindered by other dimensions of non-traditional security. These ideas emerged out of the realization of the need to face the challenges of post-independence, characterised by military and non-military dimensions of security issues” (Quoted in Jaye, 2008: 152).

The ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security adopted on December 10, 1999 was its first-ever comprehensive instrument dealing with security and securitization. The Protocol provides the normative framework within which the ECOWAS could respond to transnational security challenges within the sub-region. Under Article 2 of the Protocol, the ECOWAS member states re-affirm their commitment to the following principles:

- that the economic and social development and the security of peoples and states are intrinsically linked;
- equality of sovereign states;
- territorial integrity and political independence of member states;
- protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms and the rules of international humanitarian laws;
- promotion and consolidation of a democratic government as well as democratic institutions in each member state; and
- promotion and reinforcement of the free movement of persons within the region, the right of residence and establishment which contribute to the reinforcement of good neighbourliness (ECOWAS Protocol, 1999).

The protocol specifically warns that the proliferation of conflicts threatens peace and security and undermines regional efforts to improve the standard of living of the population of West Africa (ECOWAS Protocol, 1999).

Thomas Jaye (2008: 153) notes that while the principle of sovereignty is jealously guarded by the member states as it relates to security, they acknowledge that there can be no meaningful integration and emergence “into a viable regional Community” without a concomitant “partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the Community within the context of a collective political will” in line with the ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993: 2).

In the Declaration of Political Principle of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS Declaration, 1991), the member states resolved to “resist any attempt by forces outside our sub-region to undermine the expression of our collective will and determination”. However, the West African society of states is still exposed to external interference by big powers

such as the United States, Britain, France, and Portugal thus threatening the regional solidarity and cohesion.

In a related move, as enshrined in its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the ECOWAS member states pledged their commitment to a “zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means”. The Protocol explicitly outlaws coups d’état, which had become trendy in West Africa, and demands that “the armed forces must be apolitical and must be under the command of a legally constituted political authority”.

The protocol specifically prohibits any serving member of the armed forces from seeking elective political office even under a democratic setting (ECOWAS Protocol, 2001). However, the ECOWAS, in its attempts to safeguard state constitutions and regimes had been drawn into peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone as well as in Guinea where humanitarian reasons were advanced for military interventions.

Pundits have asserted that since its formation the ECOWAS has successfully sustained the idea of a West African community although this has been bedevilled by difficulties, setbacks, and failures. In the interim, the effort has been trailed by important landmarks and success stories (Ezenwe, 1991: 126) such as the reinstatement of democratic regimes in Liberia and Sierra Leone in spite of initial scepticism, especially from the UN and other world powers. As stated earlier, the evolving political and security architecture is a child of necessity as the ECOWAS did not originally set out to become a political union. As usual, newly independent states tend to harbour a very strong sense of state sovereignty that renders unimaginable any form of political union (Jaye, 2008).

Jaye, relying on Ezenwe (1991) has shown that the founding fathers of ECOWAS emulated the Europeans, who were convinced that “effective economic integration would generate the conditions for closer political and socio-cultural ties which would, in turn, reinforce the integration scheme itself” (2008: 165). The overwhelming opinion, therefore, is that a gradual integration along the economic line would usher in the political conditions for integration.

In line with this transformative view, Jaye (2008: 165) asserts that the “ECOWAS has gradually transformed itself into a supranational body with a parliament, a community court of justice, a monetary union and other relevant organs” which are no mean achievements attained in recent years. Jaye argues that this transformation, although externally induced, was significant, when one considers that “unlike in the past when the sub-region clung to the principles of inviolability of the independence and sovereignty of its member states, the revised ECOWAS Treaty and decisions by the heads of state and government have undermined that notion” (2008: 165).

Having recognised the need to tackle the new security mandates, the challenge resonates in the functions and institutions as well as the diplomatic instruments of the regional body. At its 27th Summit in Accra, Ghana in

December 2003, the ECOWAS set up a Peace Fund designed to mobilize funds from members and development partners for peace and security mandates. Similarly, at its 11th Extraordinary Meeting of the Mediation and Security Council, the ECOWAS foreign ministers urged the ratification of its extant peace and security instruments such as the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (Adejumobi and Olukoshi, 2008: 136; Hartmann, 2017).

Four decades after its emergence on the international scene, ECOWAS represents a durable, resilient and enduring regional security organization that continues to respond to security challenges in West Africa. Despite the initial reluctance by the superpowers, led by the United States, to endorse its first peacekeeping and peace enforcement in Liberia and later Sierra Leone in early 1990, the regional body has recorded sterling achievements in reinstating peace in the region, its shortcomings occasioned by a dearth of logistics and materials, notwithstanding.

The ECOWAS has consistently demonstrated that a germane political climate and human security are key prerequisites for economic and social development. This realization has been the driving force in the regional body's quest to respond to security challenges in its domain although the challenges are still extant in varying dimensions such as child trafficking, small arms proliferation, terrorism, trafficking in drugs, transnational crimes and environmental challenges (De Wet, 2014). The institutional capacity to respond to these challenges will continue to be modified by the ECOWAS while efforts are made to consolidate a truly West African Union where trade and commerce, peace and security are unhindered.

## **Conclusion**

The ECOWAS emerged as part of the global Pan-Africanist movement, which began in Europe and the Americas in the late nineteenth century and culminated in the formation of the OAU (now the African Union). Expectedly, its initial mandates were anchored on the vision of a regional economic bloc designed to accelerate economic integration as a prelude to an ambitious political unification of the entire continent.

The ECOWAS was formed in 1975, five years before the Lagos Plan of Action promoted by the OAU to galvanize regional blocs for the economic integration of the continent. Since its formation, the ECOWAS aims/objectives, principles, and institutions have continually responded to the challenges of the post-Cold War super-power disengagement from proxy regional rivalries. This reform became imperative in the context of debates on new regionalism with its emphasis on a regional approach to deal with multiple issues such as peace and security, political and economic integration, cultural and scientific development. The ECOWAS leaders also seek the creation of a

supranational regional governance organization to cater for issues of mutual benefit to the member states.

Thus, regionalism in West Africa has been shaped by unique historical, economic and political forces that have contrived to engender formal regionalism alongside the centuries old non-formal regionalization in the sub-region. The ECOWAS has consistently evolved as a regional security actor taking up non-traditional threats faced by its member states.

As the discussions in this article reveal, the ECOWAS leaders are convinced that without enduring security, peace and stability, economic and political integration would be a mirage. This conviction has steadily drawn the ECOWAS into peacekeeping and peace-enforcement roles to stabilize its members-states often plagued by civil wars and political instability. In this vein, Nigeria has shouldered massive security responsibilities as a regional hegemon in West Africa (Haastrup & Lucia, 2014).

The ECOWAS has recorded a mixed bag of achievements and challenges in its role as a regional security actor, most especially by restoring democratic governments in many member states. Intervention by foreign powers, language challenges, polarization along colonial legacies, multiplicity of parallel organizations with similar mandates and economic challenges often cripple ECOWAS activities. It is noteworthy that the ECOWAS is no longer pre-occupied with economic integration: it has taken up challenges of political and economic development germane to human security.

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