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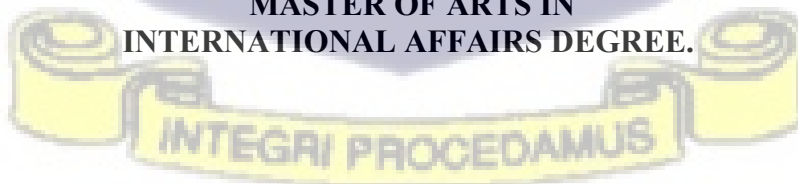
**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**



**ECOWAS REGIONALISM AND INTEGRATION EFFORTS IN  
THE WAKE OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE  
AREA**

**BY  
AKPE ABRA ACKAH  
(10875030)**

**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY  
OF GHANA, LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DEGREE.**



**JUNE, 2025**

## DECLARATION

Except for the quoted references and acknowledged sources, I hereby declare that this dissertation is a result of original research conducted by me under the supervision of Dr Daniel Kipo-Sunyehezi and that no part has been submitted anywhere else for any purpose.



.....  
**AKPE ABRA ACKAH**  
**(STUDENT)**

.....  
**DR. DANIEL DRAMANI KIPO-SUNYEHZI**  
**(SUPERVISOR)**

**DATE: 6<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2024**

**DATE: 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2024**



## DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to my girls Sedem, Senam and Selassie. I wouldn't have come this far without your support.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge everyone who made this study possible. A special thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Dramani Kipo-Sunyehzi of The Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana for availing his expertise, comments and constructive criticisms in the completion of this Thesis.

To the participants of the interview from African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and University of Ghana (UG), I would like to say that I am very grateful for your contribution to the success of this Thesis.

A special thanks to Desmond Tenkorang Gyamfi for supporting me and providing the relevant information for this work.

I also would like to say a big thank you to my year group The Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana Part Time 2020/2021-year group for the support throughout the entire program. You are appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone at The Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy, University of Ghana who assisted me and encouraged me throughout this program.

This has been a great learning journey. I would not have actualized this without the help, guidance and motivation of all the people I have mentioned.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	-	African Economic Community
AMU	-	Arab Maghreb Union
ASEAN	-	Association of South East Asian Nations
AU	-	African Union
CENSAD	-	Community of Sahel Sahara States
COMESA	-	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
CU	-	Customs Union
AEC	-	African Economic Community
EAC	-	East African Community
EACLA	-	East African Central Legislative Assembly
EACSO	-	East Africa Common Services Organisation
EADB	-	East African Development Bank
EAHC	-	East Africa High Commission
EALA	-	East African Legislative Assembly
ECCAS	-	Economic Community for Central African States
ECOWAS	-	Economic Community of West African States
EEC	-	European Economic Community
EU	-	European Union
IGAD	-	Inter-governmental Authority on Development
LDCs	-	Least Developed Countries
LPA	-	Lagos Plan of Action



NAM	-	Non-aligned Movement
OAS	-	Organisation of American States
OAU	-	Organisation of African Unity
PEEACCM	-	Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Community Common Market
RECs	-	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community),
UNECA	-	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
US	-	United States



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## ABSTRACT

The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area represents a significant milestone towards achieving regional economic integration in Africa. The AfCFTA Agreement acknowledges the significance of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as fundamental components for the effective execution of its objectives, aligning with the principles outlined in the Abuja Treaty. Furthermore, the agreement anticipates that RECs have already made substantial progress in fostering a more comprehensive level of integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is intended to expand upon the existing Tripartite Free Trade Agreement and the ECOWAS Regional Trade Agreement. This study focused on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a case study to explore the opportunities and obstacles associated with achieving the objectives of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It is important to note that a significant portion of trade within Africa occurs inside the RECs. Situated within the theory of supranationalism, this study sheds light on the factors that influence the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. The study applied a qualitative research approach, gathering and analysing both primary and secondary information. Three key persons from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration in Ghana, the AfCFTA Secretariat and the University of Ghana participated in semi-structured interviews to collect primary data. The results prove that ECOWAS keeps serving as a helpful Regional Economic Community, especially with the promotion of regional trade and integration. The study further reveals that the AfCFTA can be implemented effectively in ECOWAS because of its organisational structure. In addition, ECOWAS has achieved key results in fostering tranquilly, economic advancement and regional trade among its countries and the wider African union. The study indicated that trade liberalization poses a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. The study highlights the challenges in achieving ECOWAS' economic integration principles due to a lack of capability, colonial hangover, and external factors. It also highlights the lack of full utilization of trade integration and the constraints preventing regionalism and economic integration in West Africa. The study proposes measures like harmonization of legislation, improved tariffs, robust institutions, and increased transportation and communication infrastructure.

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of Study

Regional integration is a well-established occurrence observed in both industrialized and developing nations. The post-World War II trading landscape has consistently exhibited this characteristic (Erickson, 2022). Regional integration arrangements allow member governments to expedite the process of economic transformation and promote competition in the realm of global trade. Additionally, these arrangements facilitate the acquisition of technology, investment, and the interchange of ideas. The justification for integration is not always confined solely to economic factors. The factors embodied within this framework may encompass political, cultural, social, and security dimensions (Offe & Offe, 2019). The majority of nations across the globe are currently affiliated with a regional integration organization.

The European Coal and Steel Company (ECSC), which was created in 1951, holds a prominent position as one of the most renowned regional trade agreements in history (Hadjilambrinos, 2019; Purnhagen, 2019). The primary objective of the initiative was to establish a connection between the coal and steel industries throughout Europe, with the additional aim of mitigating the potential for future conflicts (Igwe et al., 2021). In light of the European Union's achievements, other nations, particularly those in Africa, have sought regional integration agreements as a means to expedite economic progress (Byiers et al., 2021, Gumede, 2019). The process of regional integration in Africa commenced in 1963 in Addis Ababa, because of the decolonization efforts spearheaded by independent nations, liberation movements, and student organizations. The Addis

Declaration outlined a strategic plan that motivated Africa to achieve the liberation of the remaining states still under colonial rule. The declaration aimed to promote a comprehensive agenda encompassing political, economic, and social advancements, with the goal of integrating all governments into a regional framework. The transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) was undertaken with the aim of strategically positioning the continental body to effectively address the significant difficulties encountered by the continent and adapt to the regional and global advancements of the 21st century (Moyo, 2020; Vhumbunu, & Rudigi, 2020). Since its rebirth in 2001, economic integration has emerged as a pivotal indicator of the African Union's (AU) efforts. In 2013, the African Union (AU) initiated a significant project known as 'Agenda 2063' to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the OAU (Addaney, 2018; Ekwealor, 2020). This initiative represents the AU's comprehensive strategy aimed at effecting a substantial transformation of the African continent, aligning it with the socio-economic standards observed in industrialized nations around the globe. This initiative birthed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) idea.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which went into effect in May of 2019, is the most ambitious attempt yet to unify Africa's segmented markets. It is based on several core objectives. Defined by the African Union Commission (2020) and reiterated in recent studies (Erasmus, 2022; UNECA, 2023), the AfCFTA has the purpose to: (i) establish a single continental market for services and goods, (ii) facilitate the free movement of capital and persons, (iii) increase the competitiveness of African industries, (iv) promote industrial development through diversification, and (v) solve the paradox of overlapping memberships among Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The Agreement also contemplates the eventual establishment of a customs

union on the continent, thus further integrating the continent. Notably, the AfCFTA recognizes that achievement would be made subject to the active cooperation of the RECs, which are the functioning building blocks of continental integration. Here, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), already engaged in market integration through its Trade Liberalisation Scheme, Common External Tariff, and free movement of goods and persons' protocols, is a strategic stakeholder where AfCFTA can be rolled out in West Africa. As Afreximbank (2023) and Ismail (2024) observe, the resilience of ECOWAS institutions, policy harmonization capacity, and trade infrastructure position it as a key driver of AfCFTA's broader economic vision.

The resolution to establish a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) was ratified during the 18th Ordinary Session Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in January 2012 (African Union, 2020). The year 2017 was designated as the official starting point for the implementation of the Free Trade Area (FTA). During the aforementioned meeting, the participants also gave their endorsement to an Action Plan on Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT). Following the 10th Extraordinary Summit of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which took place on 21 March 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda, a significant development known as the Kigali Declaration emerged. This declaration paved the way for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), with an initial participation of forty-four countries (African Union, 2018).

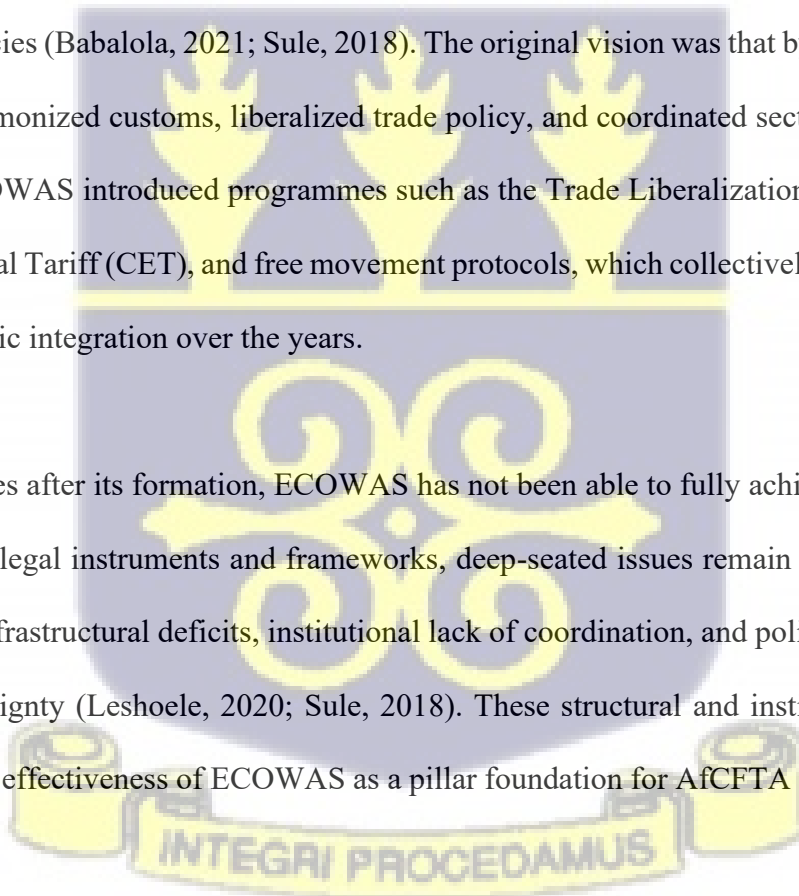
## 1.2 Statement of Problem

Regional Economic Communities are sub-regional bodies that are an integral part of Africa's regional integration (Alexander & Garba, 2021; Mohammed & Magai, 2020). They have been

mandated by the African Union to speed up integration at the sub-regional level. The Abuja Treaty of 1991 provides the legal foundation for this directive as it sought to consolidate continental unity by integrating the existing RECs progressively into one African Economic Community (AEC) by 2034 (Ani, 2018; Byiers & Dièye, 2022; Odeyemi, 2020).

Among these RECs, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) stands out as having been formed early and having economic strategic objectives. The ECOWAS Treaty of 1975, which was signed by 15 West African countries, aimed at the elimination of internal trade barriers, free movement of people and capital, and harmonization of economic, monetary, and agricultural policies (Babalola, 2021; Sule, 2018). The original vision was that by 1990 a Common Market with harmonized customs, liberalized trade policy, and coordinated sectoral policy would be in place. ECOWAS introduced programmes such as the Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), Common External Tariff (CET), and free movement protocols, which collectively aimed to deepen regional economic integration over the years.

However, decades after its formation, ECOWAS has not been able to fully achieve its integration agenda. Despite legal instruments and frameworks, deep-seated issues remain — including non-tariff barriers, infrastructural deficits, institutional lack of coordination, and political reluctance to surrender sovereignty (Leshoele, 2020; Sule, 2018). These structural and institutional gaps risk undermining the effectiveness of ECOWAS as a pillar foundation for AfCFTA implementation in West Africa.



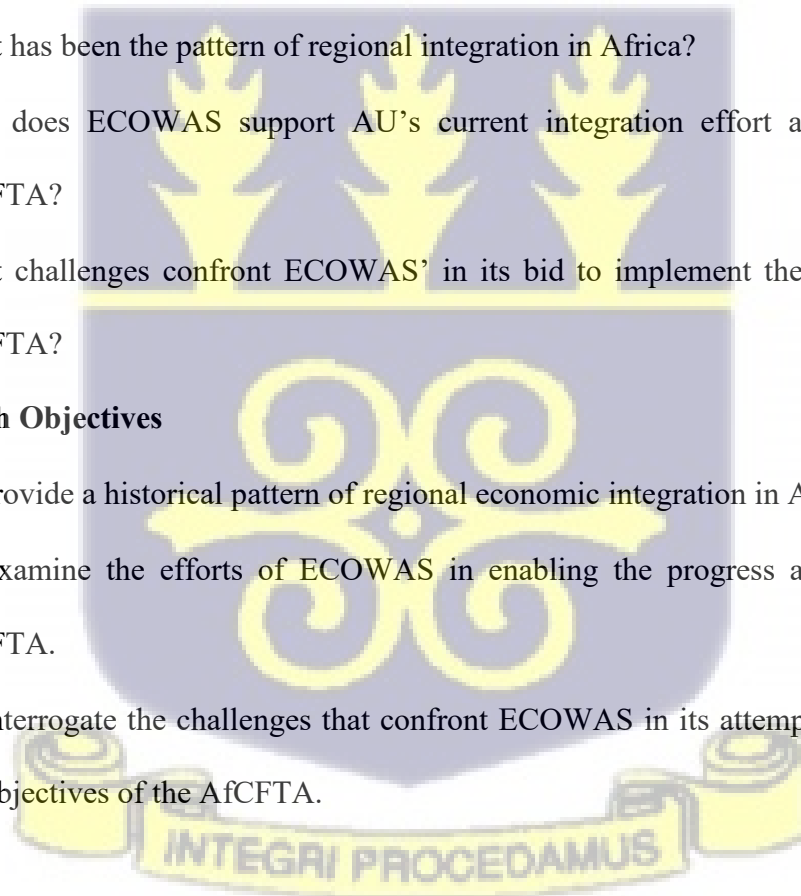
Given that AfCFTA aims to create a single continental market, ECOWAS's preparedness and capacity to harmonise and facilitate its objectives becomes the central concern. Since AfCFTA is built on existing REC arrangements including ECOWAS and COMESA's, SADC's, and EAC's Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) the need to examine how ECOWAS's existing programs complement or conflict with AfCFTA becomes imperative (Oloruntoba, 2020). The basic question, therefore, is: To what extent can ECOWAS actually operate as a regional driver for the AfCFTA, and what institutional, political, or policy reforms must occur to ensure that it contributes optimally to the continental integration effort?

### 1.3 Research Questions

- What has been the pattern of regional integration in Africa?
- How does ECOWAS support AU's current integration effort at establishing the AfCFTA?
- What challenges confront ECOWAS' in its bid to implement the objectives of the AfCFTA?

### 1.4 Research Objectives

- To provide a historical pattern of regional economic integration in Africa.
- To examine the efforts of ECOWAS in enabling the progress and growth of the AfCFTA.
- To interrogate the challenges that confront ECOWAS in its attempt at implementing the objectives of the AfCFTA.



### **1.5 Scope of Study**

This study takes into consideration ECOWAS's role towards the realization of AfCFTA's chosen objectives, including trade liberalization, intra-African trade facilitation, free movement of people and goods, and policy harmonization. These are in line with current ECOWAS instruments like the ETLS and CET. The study excludes AfCFTA objectives relating to investment, intellectual property, e-commerce, and settlement of disputes since they do not fit into ECOWAS's immediate mandate. The temporal scope is 1975 to 2023, from the founding of ECOWAS through regional integration in the 1980s–1990s to the implementation of the AfCFTA. The geography is focused to West Africa, with the ECOWAS region being the target REC. Continental systems are but briefly referred to in as much as they deal with engagement with ECOWAS.

### **1.6 Significance of Study**

This contribution is significant in the overall context of African continental integration, particularly as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) starts operation phase. By calling attention to the role of ECOWAS, it contributes to more effective analysis of how sub-regional institutions can support or hinder the achievement of AfCFTA's objectives. The study provides evidence-based observations on ECOWAS's trade policy, institutional actions, and regulative actions in promoting regional integration. Moreover, the analysis is advantageous to policymakers by establishing areas of strength and areas of concern of ECOWAS's integration agenda. The study contributes to academic work through the filling of the nexus between regionalism and continental trade structures. The study is intended to inform future policy reforms for enhancing continental and regional economic objectives' coherence, thereby allowing RECs like ECOWAS to fulfill their role in completing Africa's vision of a single market.

## 1.7 Conceptual Framework

- **Supra – Nationalism**

The study employed the concept of supra-nationalism, which is rooted in the theoretical framework of neo-functionalism. Prominent advocates of this theoretical framework include scholars such as Keohane, Nye, Haas, and Lindberg. Neo-functionalism, as defined by Haas (1958), refers to the phenomenon in which political actors in multiple distinct national contexts are influenced to redirect their allegiances, expectations, and political engagements towards a novel centre, whose institutions possess or require authority over the existing nation-states. Supranationalism denotes the strategic approach employed by member states to optimize their national interests over an extended period of time. This is achieved through the establishment of supranational organizations and the development of regional policies (Agostinis, 2019; Healy & Bristow, 2020).

Supra-nationalism places significant emphasis on the intentional creation of regional institutions, which are perceived as the most efficacious mechanisms for addressing shared challenges. These institutions and supranational bodies were initially intended to be established by the states. However, over time, regional bureaucrats, interest groups, and self-organized interests have emerged as significant actors in the process. The regional institutions played a crucial role in facilitating the development of functional, political, and cultural spill-over, resulting in a reconfiguration of group identity that extended beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and centred on the regional entity (Bache et al., 2020; St John, 2018).

Based on the aforementioned assumptions, it may be contended that several governments within a given territory endeavour to address problems through peaceful and non-coercive means, either by proactively anticipating and addressing them or by reactively responding to them. In essence, the formation of an agreement, alliance, or treaty by States results in the establishment of a collective entity that holds a higher degree of power and influence compared to its constituent states. This is primarily due to its ability to transcend the limitations imposed by individual state boundaries and override national legal frameworks (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2022; Lokulo-Sodipe & Osuntogun, 2013). By forming a supranational entity, member states of the organization commit to adhering to the provisions of the agreement, even if these provisions may not align with the specific national interests of a particular nation-state. Alliances are established with the intention of pursuing many objectives, including but not limited to economic, cultural, and military interests. The European Union (EU) serves as a prominent illustration of a supranational entity that was formed with the primary objectives of fostering cultural integration, promoting economic cooperation, and ensuring collective security.

According to Oloruntoba et al. (2023), supra-nationalism is beyond mere collaboration in inter-state relations and entails a degree of integration that entails a relinquishment of national sovereignty. According to Alcázar, (2019), the characterization of ECOWAS as supranational in the strict sense of being “over and above individual states” is an overly broad and outdated understanding of the system. Based on this line of reasoning, it can be inferred that the existing structure and processes of ECOWAS incorporate elements reminiscent of national administrations. The primary objective of the 1993 Revised ECOWAS Treaty was to transition ECOWAS from its previous progressive regionalism approach to the new regionalism paradigm of the present day, as stated by Kufuor (2006). After the ECOWAS summit in December 2006, the sub-regional

organization underwent a significant transformation into a supranational institution. This included the conversion of the ECOWAS Secretariat into a Commission, as well as the reorganization of the ECOWAS Parliament and the Community Court of Justice (ECOWAS, 2006). The formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a supranational institution was undertaken with reference to the European Union (EU) as a benchmark.

According to Kostyrya et al. (2023), the process of integration is typically associated with the delegation of a portion of national sovereignty to supranational entities. Following the establishment of the AfCFTA, the ECOWAS possesses the authority and capacity as a supranational organization to comprehensively incorporate the region, therefore achieving the noble aspirations set forth by the AfCFTA.

Scholars who critique supra-nationalism, such as Brack et al. (2019), present the national interest argument. Conversely, proponents of globalization, such as Giddens (2013) and Stiglitz (2002), advocate for the inclusion of the national interest as a determining factor in cooperation and integration. The latter suggests a more expansive strategy for promoting the establishment of regional and sub-regional alliances in the context of globalization and the liberalization of trade. Despite these objections, the notion of supra-nationalism is more aptly positioned to elucidate ECOWAS' efforts in realizing the objectives of the AfCFTA. Acknowledging the fact that the member nations within ECOWAS are the main participants in the AfCFTA, ECOWAS relies on the legal jurisdiction provided by the Abuja Treaty. This treaty designates the RECs as partners in the pursuit of integration initiatives in Africa. ECOWAS would employ its legal resources,

political structures, and collective backing to compel its member nations to effectively execute the objectives of the AfCFTA.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

### **1.8.1 Political Opportunities and Barriers to Integration**

Political processes remain central to African regional integration under such institutional frameworks as ECOWAS and the broader AfCFTA. The theoretical foundation of this study, neo-functionalism, contends that political cooperation between independent states can gradually lead to more integration as functional imperatives spill over into broader areas of governance (Ismail, 2017). The establishment of AfCFTA reflects this rationale, being a collective political will for African nations to achieve greater continental unity, economic independence, and greater negotiating power within the world order.

Notwithstanding this, there are several political constraints to effective integration. Some of them, according to Soutar (2021), include weak political will, institutional fragility, and state-centred interests, all of which undermine the enforcement of regional trade agreements. One of the most persistent hindrances is the reluctance of national governments to relinquish power to supranational institutions, eroding the legal and functional powers of RECs like ECOWAS. Similarly, Wapmuk and Ali (2022) note that political instability and regular leadership changes compromise policy consistency, engendering mistrust between member states and dissuading long-term integration agendas.

Garba and Wancelous (2023) contribute by investigating how domestic political constraints, such as inadequate legislative alignment and weak budgetary provisions, undermine the capacity of member states to translate AfCFTA commitments into feasible national policies. These are compounded by overlapping regional agreements and weak enforcement mechanisms that account for a landscape of policy fragmentation and duplication.

Despite these, political opportunities are embedded in regional institutions. ECOWAS, for instance, offers platforms such as the ECOWAS Parliament, Early Warning Systems, and Mediation Bodies that can be utilized to foster political convergence. However, to take full advantage of these opportunities is predicated on developing institutional capacity and a stronger commitment by political elites to supranational governance. For AfCFTA to succeed, there is a need for a higher convergence of political interests and a shared regional vision among ECOWAS member states.

### **1.8.2 Socio-Economic Opportunities and Barriers**

The socio-economic facets of integration under AfCFTA and ECOWAS offer vast promise and colossal challenges. On the positive side, MBalla (2022) argues that AfCFTA is capable of ushering economic change through ease of access to a wider regional market, reduction in trade costs, and intra-African investment promotion. This can enable regional value chains, increase industrial output, and diversify the economy, particularly for small and landlocked economies in ECOWAS.

However, the practical application of these benefits is hindered by enduring structural issues. Olayiwola (2020) argues that economic inequalities among ECOWAS members, particularly

Nigeria's dominance, evoke fears of skewed benefits, eliciting resistance from small states with the risk of market exclusion. Additionally, lack of infrastructure, low industrial capacity, and the dominance of informal patterns of border trade undermine economic integration at sub-regional and continental levels.

Udombana (2020) acknowledges the problem of uneven regulation and fragmented trade regimes across Africa's RECs, like ECOWAS, that complicate harmonisation towards ensuring the successful rollout of AfCFTA. This policy duplication is equivalent to economic inefficacy and compliance risk for governments and businesses.

To this complexity, Wapmuk and Ali (2022) add that pervasive poverty, a poor social protection cover, and underdevelopment in infrastructure greatly limit economic performance and integration. These have also increased intra-regional disparities, making it more challenging to construct inclusive economic structures.

Despite these socio-economic barriers, there are transformative effects that are likely to be high. Through targeted investment in infrastructure, synchronized regulatory reforms, and intervention in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), ECOWAS has the potential to be a sub-regional propellant for the AfCFTA. The realization of this potential depends on institutional coordination and resource allocation at regional and national levels.

### **1.8.3 Cultural Opportunities and Barriers to Integration**

Cultural dynamics are now being more widely acknowledged as drivers as well as hindrances of regional integration in the likeness of ECOWAS and the AfCFTA. Whereas economic and political

motives have dominated integration discourse, cultural factors like language, ethnic identity, religion, and common heritage play a pivotal role in regional cooperation.

Bolarinwa and Odumosu (2022) argue that cultural affinities between West African states, including cross-border ethnic identities and complementary colonial paths, are a sound social basis for integration. The cultural similarities show up in the guise of informal trade, transnational kinship, and religious interactions that cross artificial boundaries. Hence, cultural fluidity is a latent asset for regional confidence building and harmonizing policy.

However, Ojo and Akinola (2023) contend that cultural diversity is likely to lead to distrust and identity conflicts, especially if national governments place greater emphasis on safeguarding local cultures at the cost of regional inclusivity. This may manifest through negative migration policies, xenophobia, and resistance to cross-border mobility of labour, even in ostensibly open regional environments.

An annual affair is the dominance of colonial languages English, French, and Portuguese that continue to be cultural silos in ECOWAS. Teye and Asante (2021) suggest that language cleavages hamper communication and disrupt legal and policy coordination, especially in cooperative institutional initiatives. Furthermore, differences in colonial traditions provide incompatible bureaucratic practices that complicate harmonisation of integration mechanisms.

To the good, there is a growing passion for cultural diplomacy and regional soft power. For example, Ajibade and Ezeani (2020) discuss how regional festivals, language exchanges, and

common academic forums can help build a Pan-African identity. In the context of AfCFTA, cultural activities are crucial towards promoting social integration, especially considering cross-border mobility and trade increases under liberalised regimes.

Additionally, while cultural diversity is real a challenge to regional integration, it also holds potential waiting to be accessed if framed as unifying asset rather than a divisive entity. ECOWAS and AfCFTA must invest in economic policy and cultural structures that build mutual understanding, inclusive identity construction, and citizen engagement with integration purposes.

#### **1.8.4 National Laws vs. Supranational Agreements and Protocols**

The most significant legal challenge to African regional integration is arguably the tension between national legal systems and supranational agreements, particularly within the ECOWAS and broader AfCFTA space. Integrations normally require harmonisation of the law, mutual recognition of standards, and enforcing common rules—objectives most often in tension with core national sovereignty.

As Olawoyin and Okoye (2022) state, most African nations, including ECOWAS member countries, are not willing to amend domestic law that is inconsistent with regional obligations. This fragmentation of the law constrains the enforceability of supranational accords and undermines compliance. While ECOWAS protocols and AfCFTA provisions are legally binding, the lack of provisions for overriding national legislation or sanctions against non-compliance significantly undermines the drive towards integration.

Akinboade and Balogun (2023) also mention that most African RECs, such as ECOWAS, are beset with non-alignment of national constitutions and regional treaties, leading to a “dual legal regime.” For instance, while a country may ratify AfCFTA protocols at the executive branch, domestic implementation is slow due to legislative apathy or judicial incongruities.

From a comparative law standpoint, Mensah and Osei-Tutu (2021) emphasize the need for an efficient mechanism of dispute resolution that is accessible, enforceable, and well-regarded by national courts. They are of the view that current mechanisms under AfCFTA remain underdeveloped and in practice isolated from national legal procedures, generating uncertainty among traders, investors, and regulators alike.

On the other hand, Njinkeu and Ugoh (2022) note that the existence of multiple legal regimes—common law, civil law, and mixed legal systems—makes harmonisation difficult in the absence of a strong supranational legal body, which in ECOWAS and AfCFTA is lacking at present. They recommend that there be a continental protocol for legal harmonisation to deal with inconsistency between regional and national obligations and create legal certainty for the private sector players.

Despite these deficiencies, there has been some improvement. ECOWAS has developed protocols of free movement, trade liberalisation, and the ECOWAS Court of Justice that are intended to provide integration with a supranational legal framework. Compliance remains voluntary in practice, with selective application by most member states on a pay-as-you-go basis for reasons of national interest.

To thrive, AfCFTA must overcome the legal dualism phenomenon common in most African countries and establish effective enforcement mechanisms. Interface of law between domestic courts and supranational institutions of dispute should be strengthened through strengthening of legal education and treaty domestication strategies for ensuring integration deepened on the legally coherent basis.

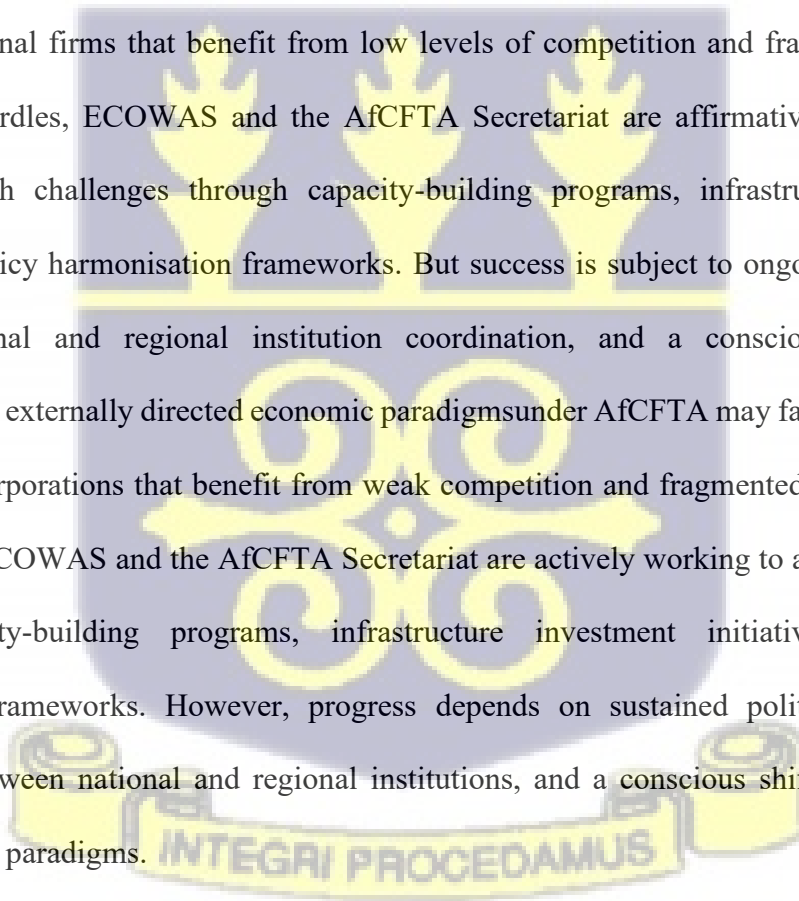
### **1.8.5 Internal and External Barriers to Integration**

Africa's integration trajectory at the sub-regional level via ECOWAS and at the continental level via AfCFTA is faced with an intimidating array of internal and external challenges. The challenges are economic, legal, and profoundly structural, geopolitical, and institutional. Olaniyan and Adesanya (2022) state that internal challenges like poor infrastructure, political instability, administrative lethargy, and low industrial capacity as persistent challenges are undermining integration in West Africa. Many ECOWAS countries face challenges in enforcing trade rules, harmonization of tariffs, and macroeconomic stability. These weaknesses are compounded by inadequate fiscal space and over-reliance on extractive exports, which weaken structural diversification incentives for enhancing regional competitiveness.

Additionally, Adeleke and Owolabi (2021) also attribute the impact of institutional fragmentation among Africa's regional blocs. The duplicate mandates of many RECs, whose member states largely overlap with each other, lead to confusion, policy redundancy, and inefficient resource utilization. The institutional duplication dissuades harmonized reactions to trade facilitation, customs harmonization, as well as non-tariff measures, hampering AfCFTA's development. On the external front, Ekeocha and Mensah (2023) argue that Africa's overdependence on extra-regional trade with Europe, China, and America diverts attention and investment from intra-

African trade development. Trade patterns shaped by colonial links and donor conditionality also limit the willingness of national governments to attempt continental integration fully. In addition, economic constraints internationally in the form of rising inflation, supply chain collapse, and dollar-denominated debt impose limits on trade and fiscal policies, which render it harder for countries to place priority on regional targets.

Asare and Kwame (2021) caution that even external players, including foreign firms and development partners, may also resist integration policies that threaten to upset their monopoly over markets. For example, increased protection for local industries under AfCFTA can raise the ire of multinational firms that benefit from low levels of competition and fragmented markets. Despite such hurdles, ECOWAS and the AfCFTA Secretariat are affirmatively committed to breaking through challenges through capacity-building programs, infrastructure investment policies, and policy harmonisation frameworks. But success is subject to ongoing political will, enhanced national and regional institution coordination, and a conscious change from paradigmatically externally directed economic paradigms under AfCFTA may face resistance from multinational corporations that benefit from weak competition and fragmented markets. Despite these barriers, ECOWAS and the AfCFTA Secretariat are actively working to address challenges through capacity-building programs, infrastructure investment initiatives, and policy harmonisation frameworks. However, progress depends on sustained political will, deeper coordination between national and regional institutions, and a conscious shift from externally driven economic paradigms.



## 1.9 Methodology

### 1.9.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative study design, best placed to analyse rich and contextualised phenomena that can't be adequately explained using numerical information. Study designs are generally categorised under qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The choice made by this study to utilise a qualitative design was stimulated by its power to disclose the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences entailed in social and policy phenomena (Khoa et al., 2023), particularly under institutional and political arrangements such as ECOWAS and AfCFTA.

Qualitative research is interpretive and inductive in nature, as Creswell et al. (2007) posited, which allows one to be flexible and conduct rich contextual analysis. The intention of this research is to explore the function played by ECOWAS towards advancing the goals of the AfCFTA, necessitating a research approach capable of enabling one to examine institutional arrangements, perceptions of stakeholders, and organisational dynamics. Moreover, a qualitative approach allowed one to probe these aspects in detail in their natural settings.

A descriptive case study design also guided the study further. According to Yin (2003), in instances where a researcher is interested in looking at complicated social phenomena in their natural environment, particularly where the demarcation between the phenomenon and its setting is not sharply defined, case studies are appropriate. ECOWAS was selected as the principal case for this research, with nested units being the AfCFTA Secretariat, the Ghanaian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, and universities. This facilitated data triangulation and enabled it to gain deep insight into regional integration dynamics and institutional interaction.

### **1.9.2 Sampling Technique and Size**

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique wherein subjects are deliberately selected on the basis of their relevance to the research problem (Pace, 2021). The method is most appropriately used in gathering rich qualitative information from respondents possessing specific knowledge or experience. The purposive sampling is devoted to the deliberate selection of participants who are in a position to offer meaningful inputs to the study. Accordingly, participants were selected on the basis of identified requirements like active involvement in ECOWAS or AfCFTA policy-making processes, institutional membership in regional integration institutions, or demonstrated academic or policy expertise in African economic integration. On the basis of these requirements, a list of fifteen participants was initially drawn. However, due to time constraints and the data saturation principle, whereby it was questionable whether additional data would add new knowledge, the ultimate sample of studies was reduced to three very important individuals. These were one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, one who works at the AfCFTA Secretariat, and one academic at the University of Ghana. The cleaned sample ensured that the data collected were rich, focused, and analytically productive.

### **1.9.3 Source of Data**

The study utilized primary and secondary sources of data to achieve its objectives. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the three selected participants. The interviews provided firsthand information on the institutional, operational, and strategic dimensions of ECOWAS-AfCFTA integration. Secondary data comprised peer-reviewed journal papers, official policy documents, ECOWAS guidelines, AfCFTA structures, and associated government documents. Blending both sources of data facilitated a robust triangulation process and contextual depth in analysis.

#### **1.9.4 Data Collection Instrument**

The semi-structured interview guide was the principal data-gathering instrument used in this study. This tool was chosen because it is adaptable, allowing the exploration of pre-determined topics while simultaneously permitting spontaneous follow-up on queries driven by the responses of respondents. Semi-structured interviews are convenient in qualitative research as they find a balance between structure and open-endedness, offering a platform for the participants to offer explanations of their experiences, perceptions, and contextual knowledge (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

The interview guide was designed with precision to facilitate the research objectives and queries, regional policy implementation, institutional coordination, and integration barriers in ECOWAS in the AfCFTA regime. This helped in collecting dense, narrative information that would be inaccessible in systematic questionnaires or observational studies. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and remotely when necessary, using computer recording devices to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were prepared and cross-checked to maintain data integrity before analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews, therefore, provided a consistent yet adaptable means of gathering nuanced information across institutional and professional environments.

#### **1.9.5 Data Analysis**

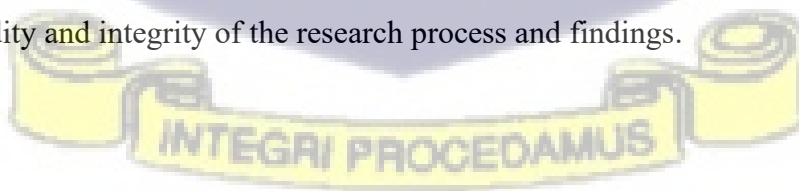
Data analysis in this study was conducted through thematic content analysis, a methodological process long accepted to be systematically identifying, examining, and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data. The method was selected since it allows the researcher to interpret various features of the research topic with rigour and with openness. The procedure began with complete

familiarisation of the data, during which the transcripts were read many times to gain an intimate familiarity with the responses. This was followed by developing initial codes from repeated ideas, terminologies, and participant observations. These were then developed into broader themes according to the study's purpose.

These themes were revisited and expanded to ensure that they had correctly captured the content and context of the data. Each theme was constructed and named, and data extracts were assigned to their respective thematic category. The final step involved interpreting the themes in light of the broader research questions and existing literature, and making findings internally valid and contextually grounded. Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying primary interview data with secondary sources such as official reports and academic writing, lending credibility and trustworthiness to the analysis.

#### **1.9.6 Ethical Considerations**

The study was carried out strictly in accordance with research ethical guidelines. Ethical clearance was requested, and participants were provided with detailed information about the nature and purpose of the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from study at any point without repercussions. All participants signed informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and information was stored safely in line with ethical requirements (Wallace and Sheldon, 2015). Adherence to such procedures by the researcher ensured the validity and integrity of the research process and findings.



### **1.10 Limitations**

The sample size for this study was on the small side, which was a drawback of the study. Because the qualitative research approach allows for a smaller sample size, the study's findings may be vulnerable to different interpretations.

### **1.11 Organisation of Study**

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Pattern of Regional Economic integration in Africa

Chapter 3 – ECOWAS and the AfCFTA

Chapter 4 – Summary of Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations



## CHAPTER TWO

### AFRICA'S INTEGRATION – THE JOURNEY SO FAR

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides the story of integration in Africa and towards the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

#### 2.1 Historical Pattern of Regional Economic Integration in Africa

##### 2.1.1 *The 5<sup>th</sup> Pan African Conference*

The establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) can be attributed to a confluence of various factors, making it the first integration initiative on a continental scale. The origins of this organization can be attributed to the initial Pan-African Conference convened in 1900, spearheaded by Henry Sylvester Williams, a prominent Trinidadian advocate and scholar (Reddock, 2020; Thiam et al., 2020). The significance of the fifth Pan-African Congress, which took place in Manchester in 1945, extended beyond the attainment of self-governance. It played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the establishment of the OAU. According to Hodder (2021), this particular Pan-African Congress is widely recognized as the most renowned in history. The attendees of the aforementioned congress, a majority of whom were from British colonies, subsequently advocated for the attainment of independence for their respective nations. The concept of unity was a prominent focus in the resolutions that were approved at the conference

(Thiam et al., 2020). The 5th Pan African Congress, led by W.E.B Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and George Padmore of the West Indies, proposed the creation of a West African Economic Union as a means to address the exploitation of economic resources in West African nations and promote the involvement of indigenous populations in the region's industrial development (Malisa & Nhengeze, 2018; Thiam et al., 2020).

### ***2.1.2 The All-Africa Peoples Conferences (AAPC)***

Before May 25th, 1963, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah delivered campaigns advocating for the independence of African states under a unified African Union government throughout various conferences. The Kumasi conference that took place on April 14, 1953, is highlighted in the literature as a precursor to the Pan-African conference held in 1954, with the primary objective of deliberating on matters concerning the entirety of Africa (Thiam et al., 2020). Following the attainment of independence and assuming a strong grip over the newly established state, Nkrumah proceeded to convene two additional conferences. The inaugural event was the Conference of Independent African States, which took place in April 1958. It was attended by a number of African nations including Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, and Ethiopia. The conference marked the very first attempt at fostering collaboration among African states, as indicated by Reddock (2020). After the April summit, John Kale of Uganda proposed the notion of organizing a more comprehensive conference that would encompass a wider range of groups, beyond independent African governments alone (Reddock, 2020).

Therefore, the All-Africa Peoples Conference (AAPC) was conceptualized in Accra during the month of December 1958. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was a convergence of

various social groups, encompassing ethnic communities, anti-colonial political parties, and African organizations, such as labour unions and other notable associations. This phenomenon occurred not only in Africa but also in the Diaspora, specifically in Europe, North America, and South America (Grilli et al., 2018). Two additional consecutive All-African People's Conferences (AAPCs) took place in Tunisia in 1960 and Cairo in 1961, with the central administration based in Accra. According to Grilli et al. (2018), the AAPC was identified as the authentic successor to the Pan-African Congresses. The Accra conference held in 1958 made several resolutions, one of which was the establishment of an Economic and Research Committee within each country. This committee would be supported by a Joint Economic and Research Committee, consisting of delegates from all independent countries. The aforementioned action was undertaken with the objective of achieving coherence between the economic and industrial policies of the member nations, while also facilitating the coordination of economic planning and fostering trade (Malisa & Nhengeze, 2018). In subsequent years, the autonomous African nations of the era expressed the need for the establishment of several institutions, including the African Council of Economic Cooperation, an African Development Bank, and an African Commercial Bank. According to Aniche (2020), the conference held in Tunisia also proposed the establishment of a preferred tariff system among sovereign African nations.

The multitude of unification attempts witnessed throughout Africa constituted a highly consequential advancement over the relatively short period following independence on the continent. Seife (2021) stated that the advent of independence had engendered heightened acknowledgement in various African states, with a particular emphasis on the interconnectedness of African nations and the imperative of adopting cohesive strategies to address shared challenges.

The newly established nations, along with a few pre-existing independent African governments, have all been actively engaged in various efforts towards achieving a certain level of integration. Paradoxically, the matter of attaining unity has emerged as a contentious topic inside African states, an issue that persists to this day (Seife, 2021).

### ***2.1.3 The Organisation of African Unity (OAU)***

The creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 resulted from a historical compromise between three main ideological blocs that manifested in post-colonial Africa: the Casablanca Group, the Monrovia Group, and the Brazzaville Group (Aboussou, 2019; Makaka, 2018). These blocs had different visions regarding the pace and shape of African unity.

The Casablanca Group, formed in 1961, advocated for direct political federation and pan-Africanism. The group was made up of more radical and revolutionary countries like Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria. These countries, led by the likes of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, wanted to have a united Africa under a centralized political authority.

Conversely, the Monrovia Group advocated for a more measured integration process that prioritized national sovereignty, economic cooperation, and institution building ahead of instant political union. It had as members Nigeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and the majority of Francophone African states. They advocated for enhancing state autonomy prior to seeking enhanced continental unity.

The Brazzaville Group was a sub-category of the Monrovia bloc and included, in essence, the French-speaking African ex-colonies of France. These states had strong ties to France and were more conservative in their approach to African unity and international alignment. The

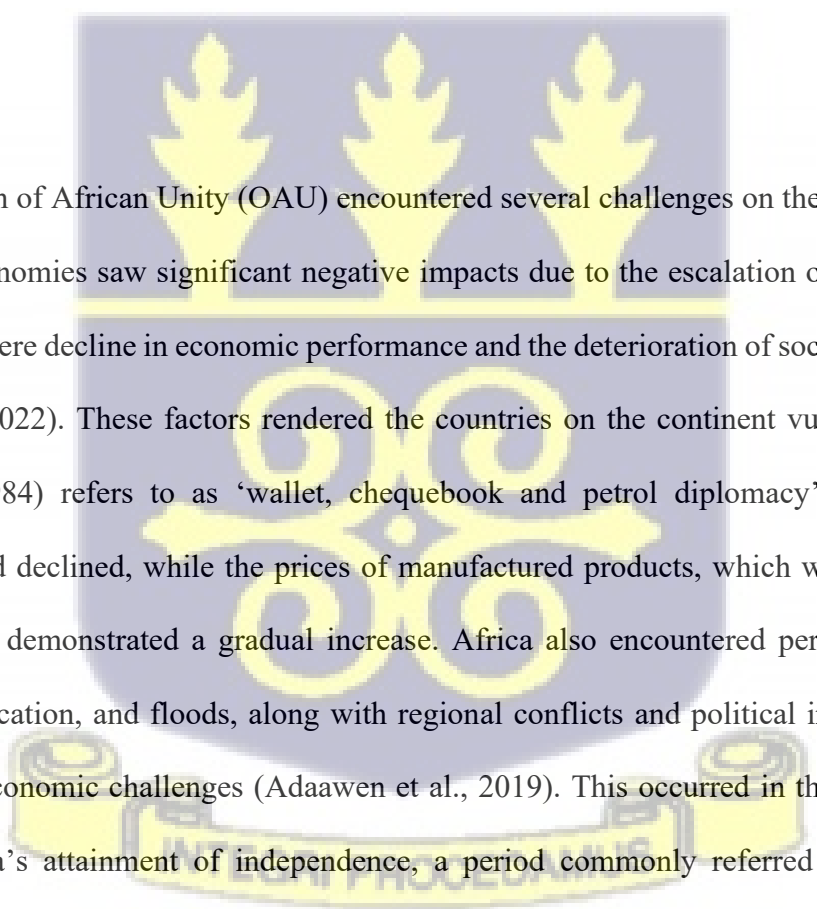
reconciliation of these diverse stands ultimately led to the formation of the OAU, which was a compromise organization centered on sovereignty of states, non-interference in internal affairs, and cooperative as opposed to federalist unity. While it was less than the supranational control that the Casablanca Group had envisioned, it did provide the fundamental framework of continental cooperation that would one day become the African Union (AU).

The emergence of these organizations can be attributed to variations in the orientation, strategic approach, and operational plans of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). A significant division existed between individuals who advocated for Africa's redemption through a political union and those who advocated for a consultative body of African states. The latter approach aimed to foster consensus while ensuring the preservation of unequivocal individual independence (Aniche, 2020). The OAU successfully consolidated these various sources of division into a unified continental institution (Medoye, 2018). The compromise, as delineated in Article 3L of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Charter, entailed the creation of a continental supra-national entity, namely the OAU, which was supported by Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The adoption of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, was influenced by the prevailing currents that led to its acceptance. The Pan African Conferences and the APPC exerted significant impacts on this nascent organization, steering it towards the eradication of colonialism and the promotion of Pan-Africanism principles.

The founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was a significant event in African history, as it reflected the complex and contradictory dynamics prevalent on the continent (Dogah, 2022). During its early beginnings, the OAU exhibited three distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other regional organizations: firstly, it boasted the largest membership, with nearly fifty states within a comprehensive continental framework. (i) The organisation was the most recent

addition, but also the least economically developed. (ii) During its establishment, there was no significant dominance by any major powers within the OAU, allowing it to garner considerable worldwide influence (Dogah, 2022).

In addition to the objective of eliminating colonialism, fostering unity, and safeguarding the sovereignty and independence of African nations, the Organisation aimed to organise and enhance collaborative endeavours to attain improved living conditions for the African populace. The Charter encouraged member nations to achieve policy harmonization in various domains, including health, communication, transportation, economy, defense, and security (Adeyinka & Onechie, 2020).



The Organization of African Unity (OAU) encountered several challenges on the economic front. The African economies saw significant negative impacts due to the escalation of the debt crisis, resulting in a severe decline in economic performance and the deterioration of social infrastructure (Olaoye et al., 2022). These factors rendered the countries on the continent vulnerable to what Mangwende (1984) refers to as ‘wallet, chequebook and petrol diplomacy’. The prices of commodities had declined, while the prices of manufactured products, which were imported by African nations, demonstrated a gradual increase. Africa also encountered periods of drought, hunger, desertification, and floods, along with regional conflicts and political instability, which aggravated its economic challenges (Adaawen et al., 2019). This occurred in the second decade following Africa’s attainment of independence, a period commonly referred to as ‘the Lost Decade’ in a sentimental manner. It is important to acknowledge that the underperformance of Africa may mostly be attributed to global challenges. The significant increase in oil prices between

the years 1973 and 1974, resulting from the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly the Yom Kippur War, as well as a subsequent similar occurrence in 1979, had a detrimental impact on the economies of African nations (Cohen, 2021). The period of integration was characterized by significant challenges and difficulties according to Antwi-Danso (2016).

Thus, beginning in 1979 in what many described as the *Liberia Declaration*, African leaders converged in Monrovia to discuss solutions to the problem of Africa's underdevelopment. The Monrovia Declaration basically resolved to, among others,

- a. to promote the social and economic development and integration of our economies with a view to achieving an increasing measure of self-reliance and self-sustainment;
- b. to promote the economic integration of the African region in order to facilitate and reinforce social and economic intercourse;
- c. to establish national, sub-regional and regional institutions which will facilitate the attainment of objectives of self-reliance and self-sustainment (OAU, 1979).

The declaration presented a call to action for Africans to enhance the process of economic integration inside their respective nations. The Monrovia Declaration served as the catalyst for the formulation of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) in 1980, which represented the inaugural comprehensive framework for economic advancement in Africa by OAU (Udombana, 2020). The LPA, followed by the subsequent Final Act of Lagos (FAL), placed significant emphasis on

achieving economic self-reliance and projected the establishment of an African Common Market by the year 2000 (Olayiwola, 2020).

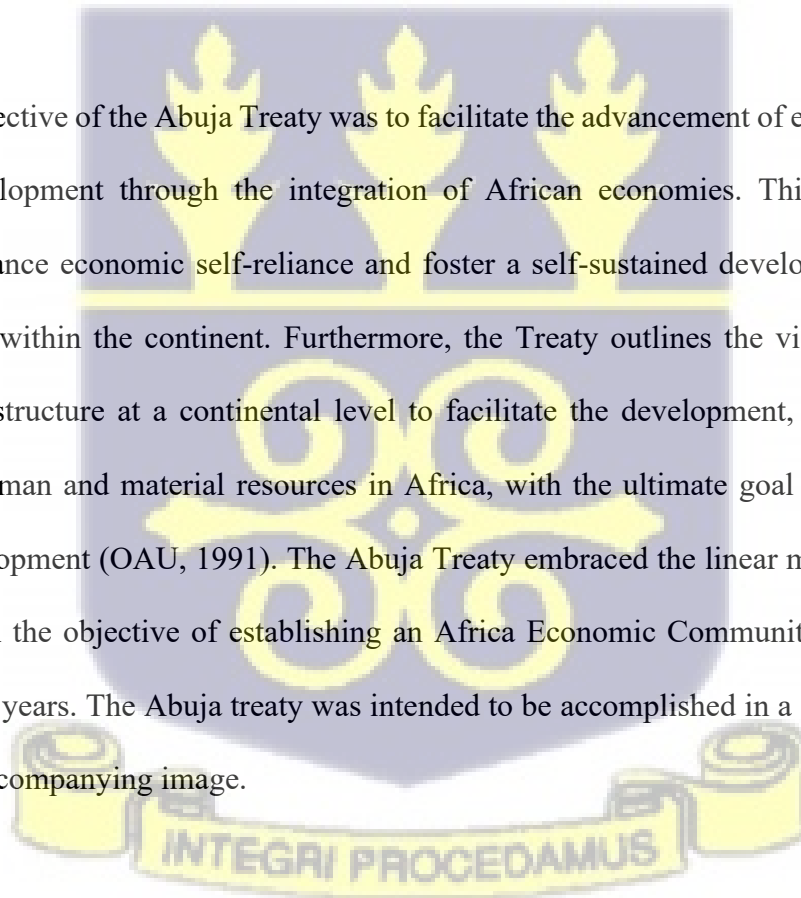
Regrettably, as stated by Antwi-Danso (2016), the LPA was deemed non-viable from its inception due to the severe economic downturn experienced by African nations in the early years of independence. This dire situation compelled Africa to adopt the IMF/World Bank-endorsed Structural Adjustment program as the sole solution for liberating African economies from the state of stagnation, decline, and deterioration. Therefore, the report of the Berg Commission appeared, recommending the implementation of Structural Adjustment as a direct contradiction to the objectives outlined in the LPA (Mncube, 2020). The paper suggests that the adoption of state minimalism could serve as a potential solution for revitalizing stagnating African economies. The prioritization of integration in Africa was relatively low until 1991 when the initiation of the African Economic Community initiative brought it to the forefront of governmental considerations.

#### ***2.1.4 The African Economic Community (AEC) – The Abuja Treaty***

In advancing the objective of integration, the OAU organized a subsequent summit in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1991, with the aim of solidifying previous initiatives that were initiated in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1979. The Abuja Treaty was ratified and came into force in May 1994 (Nagu' 2019). The Treaty of Abuja established new RECs while also acknowledging pre-existing ones. According to Olayiwola (2020), the treaty proposed that the objectives of the African Economic Community (AEC) would be effectively synchronized and integrated with the established RECs. The treaty served as a means for the AEC to officially acknowledge the existence of five Regional

Economic Communities (RECs): the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the East African Community (EAC). Following this, in an effort to address the issue of numerous memberships, the African Union (AU) adopted a resolution at the Banjul Summit in 2006 to augment the count of officially acknowledged Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to eight (African Union, 2006). Vickers (2017), writes that the three supplementary Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Community of Sahel Sahara States (CENSAD).

The primary objective of the Abuja Treaty was to facilitate the advancement of economic, cultural, and social development through the integration of African economies. This integration was intended to enhance economic self-reliance and foster a self-sustained development model that originates from within the continent. Furthermore, the Treaty outlines the vision of creating a comprehensive structure at a continental level to facilitate the development, mobilization, and utilization of human and material resources in Africa, with the ultimate goal of achieving self-sustaining development (OAU, 1991). The Abuja Treaty embraced the linear model of economic integration, with the objective of establishing an Africa Economic Community (AEC) within a timeframe of 34 years. The Abuja treaty was intended to be accomplished in a series of six steps, as seen in the accompanying image.





The AEC has encountered significant challenges in achieving success, as exemplified by the lack of success of the central organization, the OAU. The presence of various and competing RECs has been identified as a significant factor contributing to the failure of the Abuja Treaty. The phenomenon known as the spaghetti bowl syndrome, characterized by the prevalence of numerous regional groups, and overlapping preferential trade agreements, has emerged as a significant obstacle to the process of integration in Africa. This complex situation poses a considerable challenge for the African Union (AU), which has been grappling with this issue since its establishment in 2002. In the West African sub-region, there exist notable instances of overlapping regional associations, namely ECOWAS and UEMOA, which exhibit distinct strategies aimed at mitigating trade barriers. A further illustration can be found in the Southern African Development

Community (SADC), whereby several of its constituent nations are also affiliated with the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and/or the East African Community (EAC). The presence of overlapping memberships has resulted in a sluggish implementation of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) and the elimination of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

In general, it may be argued that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) achieved its primary goal of decolonization and promoting African Unity, as evidenced by the fact that by the year 2000, all African governments had attained self-governance. However, the conclusion of the Cold War resulted in significant economic changes that necessitated the establishment of a more adaptable institution capable of addressing the ongoing transitions in the 21st century.

### ***2.1.5 The African Union***

The African Union (AU) was established in 2001 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This transition occurred through the passage of the Constitutive Act in Lusaka, Zambia in 2001, followed by the official inauguration of the AU in Durban, South Africa, in 2002. The AU's transformative agenda was initiated during the renowned Sirte Conference in Libya, where former president Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, during an Extraordinary Summit, instigated deliberations aimed at implementing significant modifications to the OAU. These changes were intended to establish an organization capable of effectively addressing the complex social, political, and economic challenges faced by the African continent (Nagu, 2019).

The conclusion of the Cold War in 1990 led to a reconfiguration of regional integration agreements. The phenomenon of regionalism's second wave was observed in different regions across the globe. The concept of regionalism has evolved over time. Initially, old regionalism focused on economic cooperation and integration, driven by Cold War politics. It primarily aimed to ensure the economic and political security of states within the regional body. However, this approach is being replaced by new regionalism, which takes a broader perspective. New regionalism seeks to achieve goals beyond ideology and security, encompassing a comprehensive definition of development. This includes considerations such as environmental protection, human security, and regional self-sufficiency, among other factors. (Akhigbe, 2021; Philip & Uwa, 2022).

The African Union (AU), as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has embraced a more realistic approach in addressing economic challenges. The Constitutive Act provided the African Union (AU) with additional determination to expedite the progress towards the establishment of the African Economic Community (AEC), with the objective of advancing Africa's socio-economic development and effectively addressing the problems presented by globalization (Adeyinka & Onechie, 2020).

Despite the stated purpose of the African Union (AU), as outlined in the Constitutive Act, to expedite the integration of the African continent and empower Africa to fulfil its global economic responsibilities, as well as to tackle complex social, economic, and political challenges exacerbated by unfavourable aspects of globalization, integration efforts in Africa have remained primarily inter-governmental in nature. According to Chimaobi et al. (2023), there are several causes that contribute to this situation, including low levels of intra-African trade, inadequate infrastructure, fragile economies, political instability in many regions, and the presence of numerous memberships within the RECs.

The RECs were intended to serve as fundamental components of the African Economic Community (AEC). However, due to their overlapping membership and subsequent failures, the AEC encountered persistent challenges and disruptions. The AfCFTA is a prominent initiative under the African Union's Agenda 2063. This agenda represents the economic ambitions of the continent, tracing its roots back to the early years of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Therefore, African nations are dedicated to striving for the fulfilment of this initiative.

## 2.2 Problems of Economic Integration in Africa

As previously mentioned, it has become evident that in addition to the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), there are other RECs that exist, posing a significant difficulty for the African Union (AU) known as the 'spaghetti bowl syndrome'. In the West African region, there exist additional sub-groupings such as the Mano River Union and UEMOA, which challenge the dominant position of ECOWAS. The phenomenon known as the "spaghetti bowl" is observed when states engage in many trade agreements simultaneously, at various levels, as explained by Bhagwati (1995). The implementation of several tariff rates and multiple Rules of Origin results in a complicated web-like structure, characterized by a crisscrossing effect. According to Bhagwati and Panagariya, (1999), the SBP results in more transaction costs for firms and causes issues in trade and investment, making trade less efficient.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the spaghetti bowl phenomenon gives rise to a mutually reinforcing circumstance in which African governments find themselves. Specifically, it is seen that a single REC is insufficient to adequately address their politico-economic requirements. The presence of commitment concerns and financial restrictions in Africa contributes to a

gradual and protracted process of integration. The inadequate functioning of the RECs has been a significant concern for numerous African nations, as they recognize the need to enhance their economic and political circumstances. Due to this rationale, some nations seek solace in affiliating with other RECs whereby their additional requirements might be fulfilled. It is worth noting that the participation of African States in multiple memberships is not without significance and serves several reasons beyond just economic integration. With a total of 63 transboundary river basins encompassing approximately 64% of Africa's land area (Hasan et al, 2019), the occurrence of regional spillovers resulting from conflicts and forest reserves that extend beyond national boundaries necessitates the imperative for cooperation and interaction. According to Byers et al (2019), it is clearly stated that cross-border issues and possibilities extend beyond the borders of a regional economic community (REC) and encompass various regional groupings.

Therefore, a nation such as South Sudan, which is a member of the East Africa Community (EAC), can rely on the EAC to address its economic requirements, while seeking assistance from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for matters pertaining to security due to the distinct advantages offered by each regional economic community (REC). The CFA Franc represents a notable example of monetary unification within francophone African countries, characterized by a significant colonial influence. The appeal of the CFA Franc is evident in its utilization within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) in the regions of West and Central Africa, as noted by Byers et al. (2019). The member states of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), for instance, have demonstrated considerable strength and cohesion during talks within the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS), significantly shaping the policies and initiatives of the regional economic community. The sub-group advocates for a liberal economic integration agenda that includes a macroeconomic monitoring mechanism and convergence standards, supported by the implementation of a shared currency.

One potential drawback of the spaghetti bowl phenomenon is that it gives rise to commitment challenges for the participating governments. Tanzania, a founding member of the East Africa Community (EAC) and also a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), has demonstrated a greater level of commitment to the SADC in terms of financial obligations compared to its commitment to the EAC. Moreover, the presence of various memberships contributes to the intensification of rivalry and competitiveness, a phenomenon that defines the nature of the relationship between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

There are various obstacles that impede the process of regional integration in Africa. It encompasses a range of political cooperation and extends to the development of infrastructure. A significant fraction of African nations are characterized by their landlocked status, accommodating a substantial share, approximately 40%, of the overall population within the continent. The presence of geographic disadvantages leads to increased transportation expenses, which negatively impact both intra- and inter-regional trade (Agnosteva et al., 2019; Fan, 2019). Infrastructure projects are characterized by their significant capital requirements, often exceeding the AU's annual budgetary allocations. As a result, the AU's financial resources are typically strained, necessitating careful prioritization and allocation to a limited number of

projects. The establishment of strategic alliances with several wealthy nations, particularly China, has effectively addressed certain deficiencies in infrastructure (Chaisse, 2018). The alliances formed by African states do not consistently yield favourable outcomes, as they undermine the fundamental objective of a unified Africa that aspires to independently undertake its own initiatives. The Algiers-Lagos, Tripoli-Windhoek-Capetown, and Cairo-Gaborone-Pretoria highways collectively span a distance of 27,000 kilometres and have been established by the African Union (AU) with the aim of promoting economic activities, which is a key component of the AU's development program (Mitrovic, 2018; Pascha, 2020). Additional sectors that merit consideration for discussion include telecommunications and energy, both of which require the active involvement of the African Union. The significance of the relationship between infrastructure and economic development cannot be overstated, given the abundance of scholarly works that emphasize this connection.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, there has been significant progress in terms of accountability governance and the establishment of the rule of law, marking a notable departure from the era of authoritarian political regimes that prevailed during the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. During that particular period, it can be observed that ineffective governance resulted in the impoverishment of a significant number of individuals, leading to adverse consequences such as unemployment, malnutrition, untreated illnesses, and insufficient access to education (Bishara, 2018). The impact of aid conditioning and the role of donor credibility in strengthening democratic accountability have generated divergent perspectives within scholarly discourse. Some argue that the allocation of resources by superpowers to promote the rule of

law in Africa was perceived as dubious, as it primarily served the interests of the West rather than benefiting Africans (Hodzi, 2020).

### **2.3 Structure of Africa's Economy**

The drive to establish a single market in Africa can be attributed, in part, to the existing economic and social conditions prevalent in the region. These conditions are characterized by market fragmentation, increasing poverty rates, and inadequate social conditions. A significant number of individuals in Africa reside below the poverty threshold, facing challenges such as limited population density and a lack of qualified human resources. The trade volume on the continent is less than 20%, and the continent's global production and trade contribution has experienced a downward trend since the 1970s (Byiers & Tidiane Dieye, 2022). Additionally, there exists a deficiency in production diversity and an excessive reliance on primary exports, resulting in limited prospects for substantial economic expansion (Kozul-Wright & Fortunato, 2019).

Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for a mere 1.7% of global output and 1.9% of international exports in 2022. Although the shares of exports at the end of the 1990s were lower than the current figures of 1.1% and 1.3%, the rise in export levels can be attributed to the global increase in primary commodity prices (Apiko et al., 2020). According to the AfDB, OECD, and UNDP (2014), African merchandise exports were 3.5% of global exports, with a significant focus on fuel and mining products, which comprised 69.5% of the whole export volume (Shingal et al., 2019). The trading pattern, which is influenced by the characteristics of the exchanged goods, also suggests that there has been limited change from earlier periods.


Throughout the same time frame, there was a persistently low level of trade within the region. In spite of the extensive historical background of regional integration efforts within the African continent, the extent of intra-Africa trade continues to be relatively modest when compared to intraregional trade in other areas, encompassing both established and developing economies (UNCTAD, 2016). The proportion of intra-Africa commerce is estimated to be approximately 12.8%, indicating a very low level of trade inside the African continent. Conversely, trade with regions outside of Africa, such as Europe, Asia, and North America, has a significantly higher magnitude (Shingal et al., 2019). According to trade experts, it is argued that even when accounting for unrecorded informal cross-border trade, the overall volume of intra-Africa trade is projected to remain around 20%, a figure that is still comparatively low (UNECA & AUC, 2013).

The economic landscape of the continent has a significant degree of fragmentation, characterized by the presence of numerous small-scale and poor nations. The sub-Saharan Africa region is home to a population of 1.2 billion individuals, although exhibits a relatively limited degree of economic activity. This economic activity is further divided across 47 countries, the majority of which fall under the classification of Least Developed Countries (McCarthy, 2010). In the year 2008, it was observed that within the sub-Saharan African (SSA) region, a total of 12 states had populations that were below 4 million individuals each. Additionally, 20 states had a gross domestic product (GDP) that was less than US\$5 billion. Among these, a minimum of seven states had a GDP that was less than US\$1 billion, indicating the presence of notably small economies (McCarthy, 2010). In light of the aforementioned discussion, which underscores the distinctive nature of African economies, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers a compelling remedy for the integration of these smaller African economies. This integration would involve the dispersion

of skills, the mobilization of capital, and the facilitation of other factors of production across these nations, ultimately creating a substantial collective resource. The intended outcome of this integration is to stimulate production, manufacturing, and the provision of services.

The realization of the Abuja Treaty, with the aim of attaining an African Economic Community (AEC) by 2034, has encountered various obstacles due to the incomplete execution of the six-stage procedure. The completion of the stages subsequent to the foundation of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) has not been entirely achieved due to differing levels of advancement exhibited by regional blocs and their constituent countries.

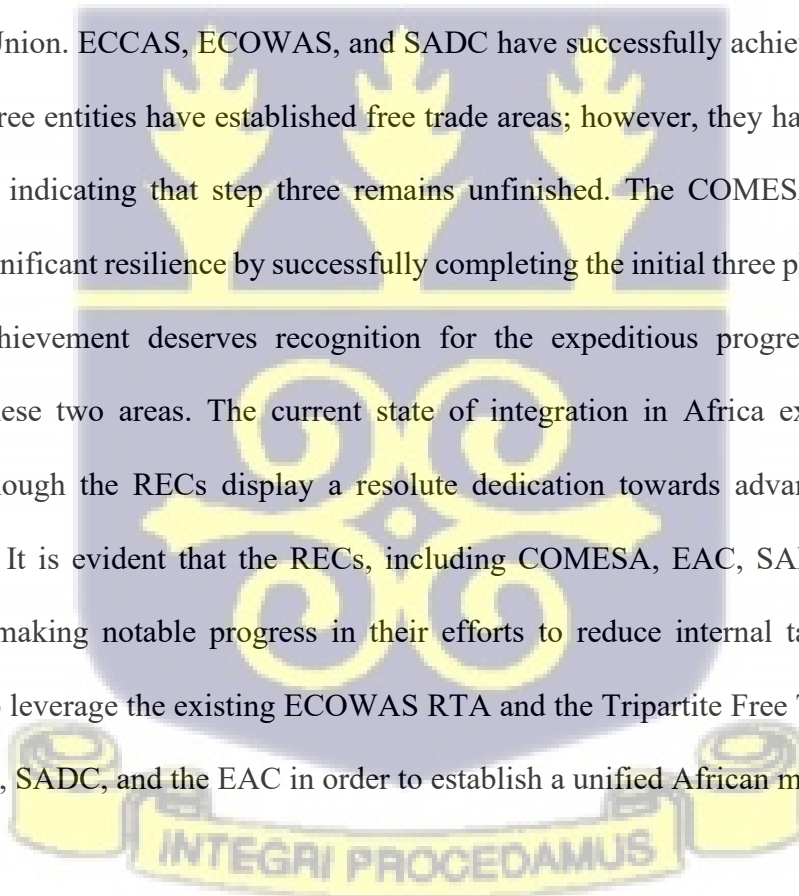
**Figure 2. 1: Abuja Treaty and stages of implementation by RECs**



Stages of the Abuja Treaty	Stage one: 1994-1999	Stage two: 2000-2007	Stage three: 2008-2017	Stage four: 2018-2019	Stage five: 2020-2023	Stage six: 2024-2028 latest 2034		
RECs	Strengthening existing RECs and creation of new RECs where they do not exist	Coordination and harmonization of activities	Gradual elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers	Free Trade Area	Customs Union	Continental Customs Union	Establishment of an African Common Market	Monetary and Economic Union
UMA	✓	✓	In progress	Not yet	Not yet	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved Customs Union and harmonized their respective Common External tariff (CET), with a view of creating one single continental CET.	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved continental customs union as well as free movement of labour and capital.	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved African Common Market at which time there will be a common currency, issued by the African Central Bank.
IGAD	✓	✓	In progress	Not yet	Not yet			
SADC	✓	✓	✓	✓	2013			
CENSAD	✓	✓	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet			
ECOWAS	✓	✓	✓	✓	2015			
COMESA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
ECCAS	✓	✓	✓	✓	No date fixed			
EAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

Source: AUC/UNECA

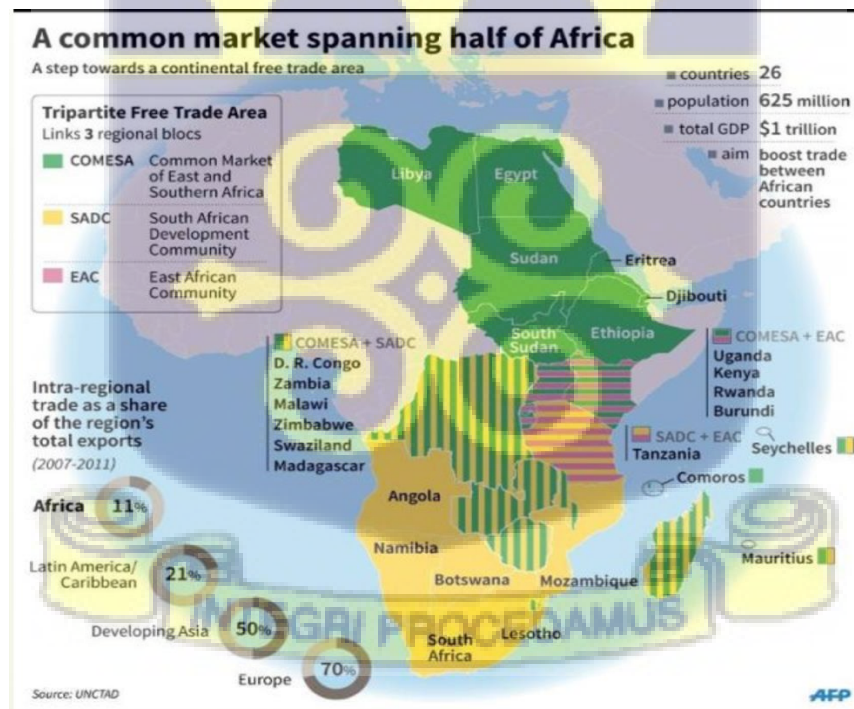
Based on the data presented in the chart, it can be seen that a majority of the RECs, specifically five out of the total eight, have effectively achieved the initial two phases outlined in the Abuja Treaty. These stages involve the formation of a REC and the subsequent efforts towards harmonization and coordination within the REC. Nevertheless, it should be noted that three of the RECs have not yet achieved complete achievement. This is mostly due to the ongoing process of gradually eliminating both tariff and non-tariff barriers within their various sub-regions. While UMA and IGAD have made significant advancements, CENSAD has not yet made any endeavours. These three entities have exhibited a delay in the establishment of a Free Trade Area and a Customs Union. ECCAS, ECOWAS, and SADC have successfully achieved the initial two phases. These three entities have established free trade areas; however, they have not yet formed customs unions, indicating that step three remains unfinished. The COMESA and EAC have demonstrated significant resilience by successfully completing the initial three phases of the Abuja Treaty. This achievement deserves recognition for the expeditious progress made towards integration in these two areas. The current state of integration in Africa exhibits an uneven distribution, although the RECs display a resolute dedication towards advancing the African economic drive. It is evident that the RECs, including COMESA, EAC, SADC, ECCAS, and ECOWAS, are making notable progress in their efforts to reduce internal tariff barriers. The AfCFTA aims to leverage the existing ECOWAS RTA and the Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) of the COMESA, SADC, and the EAC in order to establish a unified African market.



## 2.4 Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA)

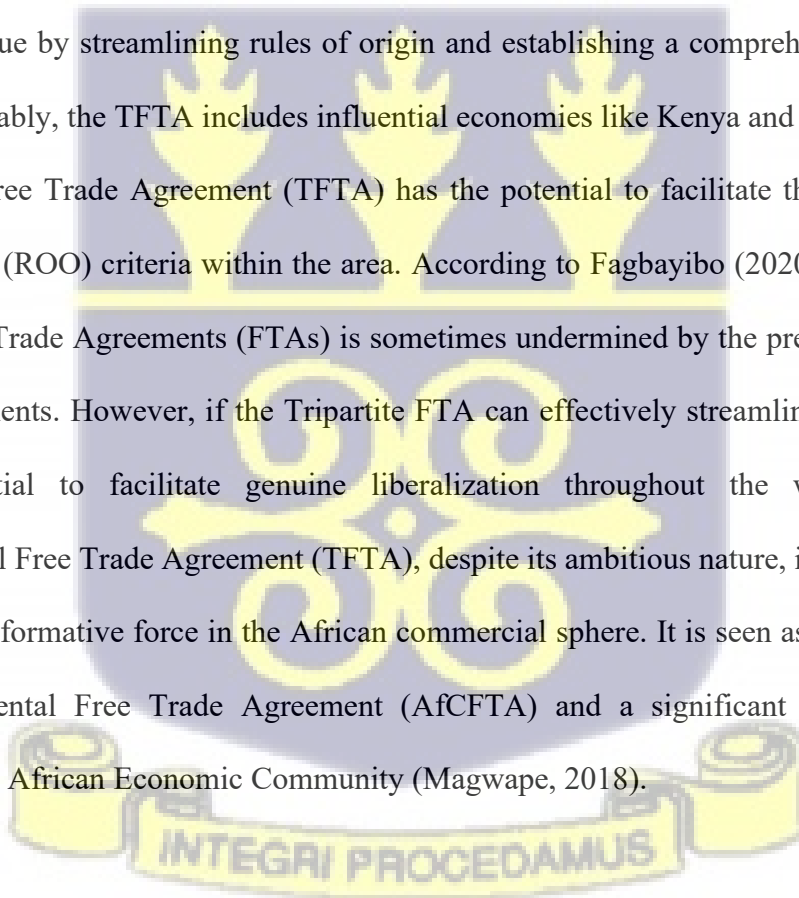
The Tripartite Free Commercial Agreement (FTA) constitutes a significantly enlarged commercial alliance encompassing approximately fifty percent of the member states within the African Union (AU) (Chimaobi et al., 2023). Upon its initiation, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) encompassed a populace over 600 million individuals, boasting a per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$ 1.3 trillion (Magwape, 2018). This figure accounted for 57% of Africa’s total population and 58% of the continent’s GDP, as reported by COMESA, EAC, and SADC in 2015. The Agreement initially encompassed a total of 26 member states within the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Nevertheless, the Trade Law Centre (2016) reports that the number of participating member states has increased to 27 as a result of South Sudan’s accession to the East African Community (EAC).

**Figure 2. 2: The Tripartite Free Trade Area**



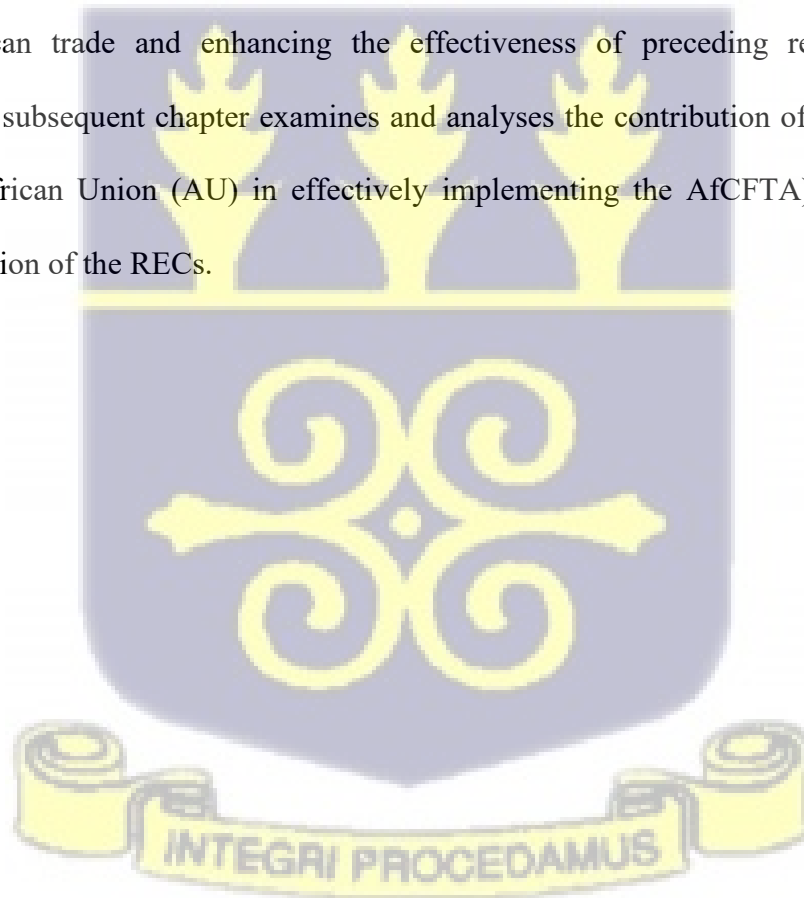
Source: UNCTAD

The Trans-Frontier Trade Agreement (TFTA) aims to harmonize both tariff and non-tariff barriers across the three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to promote economic growth and attract investments. According to Fagbayibo (2020), the agreement proposes the harmonization of trade policies, elimination of trade obstacles, and promotion of trade facilitation, with the aim of generating significant advantages for the economies and inhabitants of the areas. The primary objective of the TFTA is to address a persistent challenge in African regional integration, commonly referred to as the “spaghetti bowl syndrome.” This syndrome arises from the complex and overlapping network of trade agreements in the region (Ajibo, 2019). The TFTA aims to mitigate this issue by streamlining rules of origin and establishing a comprehensive integration framework. Notably, the TFTA includes influential economies like Kenya and South Africa. The Trans-Pacific Free Trade Agreement (TPFTA) has the potential to facilitate the streamlining of Rules of Origin (ROO) criteria within the area. According to Fagbayibo (2020), the liberalizing impact of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) is sometimes undermined by the presence of Rules of Origin requirements. However, if the Tripartite FTA can effectively streamline these criteria, it has the potential to facilitate genuine liberalization throughout the whole area. The Transcontinental Free Trade Agreement (TCFTA), despite its ambitious nature, is widely seen as a potentially transformative force in the African commercial sphere. It is seen as a catalyst for the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and a significant step towards the realization of an African Economic Community (Magwape, 2018).



## 2.5 Conclusion

The chapter undertook a comprehensive historical examination of the endeavours made by African leaders to achieve economic integration across the continent, starting from the inception of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its subsequent transformation into the African Union (AU). The desire for increased integration in Africa is motivated by the economic challenges faced by the continent, as well as the structural characteristics of many African economies, such as a low population, reliance on the extractive industry, and a predominance of low-skilled workers. The primary objective of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is to harmonize previous efforts within a political economy framework, with the aim of tackling the obstacles associated with intra-African trade and enhancing the effectiveness of preceding regional economic initiatives. The subsequent chapter examines and analyses the contribution of the ECOWAS in assisting the African Union (AU) in effectively implementing the AfCFTA), considering the integrative function of the RECs.



## CHAPTER THREE

### EFFORTS OF ECOWAS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AfCFTA

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of semi-structured interviews with selected key stakeholders, including the Ghana Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration, the AfCFTA Secretariat, and academia. It aims at discussing how ECOWAS, as a Regional Economic Community (REC), is engaged in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The presentation revolves around the three main aims of the study: to assess ECOWAS's integration mechanisms, explore alignment with AfCFTA goals, and identify opportunities and challenges. Results are thematically presented to capture integration patterns, facilitating and constraining factors, and institutional relevance.

#### 3.1.1 Patterns of Integration in Africa

The landscape of African integration has mostly evolved through the formation and strengthening of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as ECOWAS, COMESA, SADC, and EAC (Alexander & Garba, 2021). These organisations have served as the pillars of continental integration, in collaboration with the African Union vision through Agenda 2063. All respondents from the AfCFTA Secretariat and academia echoed that these RECs have set up the institutions facilitating intra-African trade, common customs, and policy harmonisation.

One respondent explained,

*“The RECs have moved from isolated policy arrangements to a much more coherent trade integration model. ECOWAS, in particular, has invested in trade liberalisation and the removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers as early as the 1980s.”*

Another respondent noted that overlapping memberships have created what has popularly been described as a ‘spaghetti bowl’ of trade agreements, that is, multiple, intersecting regional as well as bilateral agreements with diverse rules of origin. This renders the transactions more expensive and compliance for businesses more challenging, thus making the need for harmonised regimes under AfCFTA more compelling (Ayalew, D. T. (2022). Thus, the integration trend is institutional and policy-driven, in which ECOWAS’s experiences in economic and political integration in the past serve as a learning blueprint for broader continental endeavors. (Oloruntoba et al., 2023). The record shows that integration has moved step by step, with member states more ready to move on the economic than the political level, for fear of sovereignty and independence in national policymaking.

### **3.1.2 Opportunities and Facilitators of Integration**

The study’s participants highlighted several opportunities and facilitators that enhance the capacity of ECOWAS to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Both institutional processes and broader socio-political and economic circumstances are favourable to continental integration objectives and contain these opportunities. One of the most salient facilitators mentioned by all the respondents is the existence of previous trade liberalisation frameworks in ECOWAS. The ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS), established in 1979, is a precursor to AfCFTA since it increases the free movement of goods and services within the region (Ajibo, 2024). Such schemes were mentioned by the respondents to provide a working platform on which AfCFTA can be built.

One participant remarked,

*“The advantage we have in West Africa is that ECOWAS has been doing this for a while. The structures may not be perfect, but they give us a head start under the AfCFTA.”*

The presence of institutions such as the ECOWAS Commission and the ECOWAS Parliament was also found to be extremely crucial. These institutions build consensus among member states and harmonize integration initiatives. Moreover, the Accra-based AfCFTA Secretariat was mentioned as symbolically as well as practically important in advancing national and regional agendas. In addition, the respondents pointed out that Agenda 2063 and increased interest from donors in regional integration contributed to facilitating development. Projects such as the Lagos-Abidjan highway are an example of how creating physical links helps countries trade (Onyemakonor et al., 2023). Also, the existence of a highly educated and youthful population, coupled with the upsurge in a digital economy, was seen as social capital for integration (Sheriff, 2024). These factors, if managed effectively, can lead to a continental market that is competitive globally, inclusive, and innovative.

### **3.1.3 Barriers and Obstacles to Integration**

Despite the progress captured, there are several hurdles and impediments that still limit effective integration processes within ECOWAS and on the African continent (Ogbonna, 2024). These were echoed by all three panellists, with emphasis being placed that even as the political will at the continental level exists, domestic realities and systemic constraints pose significant threats to AfCFTA implementation. One of the persistent lines of argument in the responses was that tariff and non-tariff barriers still dominate. The interviewees observed that while ECOWAS policy allows duty-free trade, varied practice, duplicating procedures of customs, and varying rules of origin create colossal friction for businesses attempting to trade across borders.

A respondent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated,

*“The biggest issue is not the policy but the practice. At the borders, each country still has its own procedures, and there is little harmonisation.”*

Political instability and security concerns in the region were also brought up as major impediments.

Such zones of conflict and insurgency or terrorist-influenced territories, such as areas in Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso, inhibit mobility, disrupt trade routes, and lower investment confidence. These hostilities not only challenge regional cooperation but also drain significant state resources that otherwise would benefit economic integration. Ogbonna (2024) pointed out that differences in economy and available infrastructure among member states serve as a structural barrier for ECOWAS. The larger nations like Nigeria and Ghana are expected to benefit the most, whereas the smaller or locked-in nations may fall behind (Funlayo et al., 2022). Such inequalities cause people to feel they are not receiving the same benefits which may inspire them to resist further integration. Another theme that appeared was the lack of proper institutions.

Respondents described that ECOWAS does not have effective rules for monitoring compliance. Although such agreements are negotiated by regional states, their implementation at home tends to move slowly since institutions struggle with delays, lack enough resources or get involved in politics. The lack of legal enforcement further underscores the weakness of commitments given by member states. In addition, such challenges, ranging from political instability to institutional inefficiency, render accomplishment of AfCFTA objectives difficult. Addressing them requires coordinated strategies, stronger institutions, and inclusive policy frameworks that consider the diversity of economic and political contexts across the region.

### **3.1.4 Institutional Role of ECOWAS in the Implementation of AfCFTA**

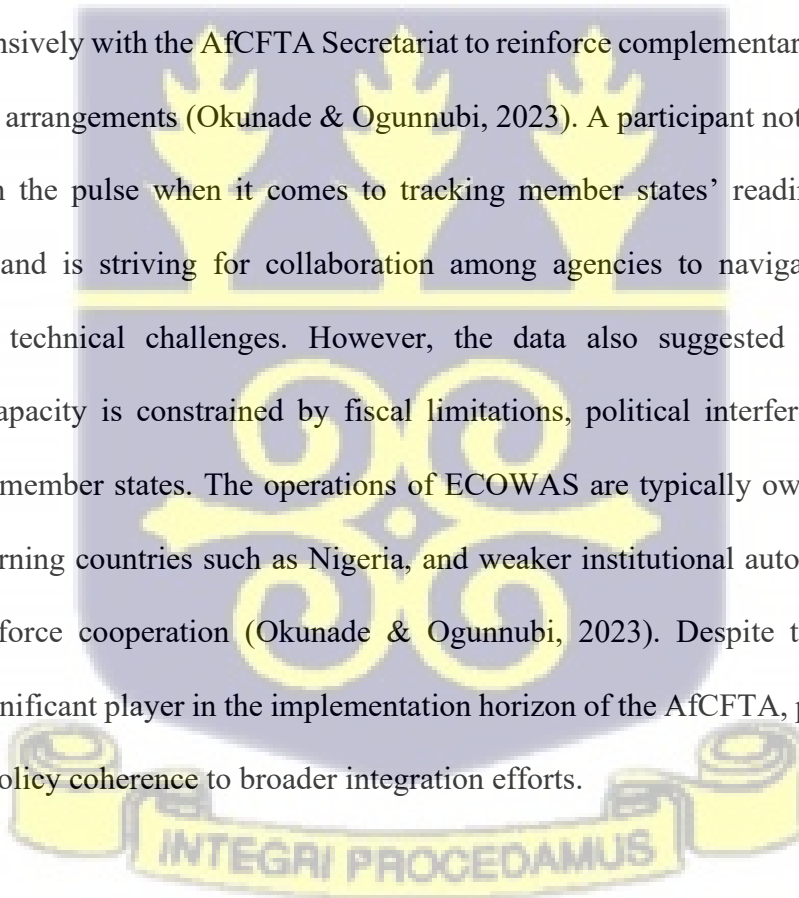
The role of ECOWAS in regional organization to execute the agenda of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was reasserted strongly by participants. ECOWAS, as a noted Regional Economic Community (REC), is an important building block in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, which is tasked with spearheading regional integration as a stepping stone towards continental unity (Akokpari & Ampomah, 2024). The respondents acknowledged the strategic functions of ECOWAS institutions, including the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS

Parliament, and the Community Court of Justice. They were referred to as ones responsible for coordinating policies, the legal regulation, and the encouragement of dialogue between the member states.

According to one respondent,

*“ECOWAS’s value lies in its role as a mediator and coordinator. The Commission provides technical guidance to member states, and its protocols often inform national legislation.”*

In addition, ECOWAS has been instrumental in aligning its protocols with AfCFTA protocols. The institution has facilitated national-level sensitization, designed trade facilitation mechanisms, and worked extensively with the AfCFTA Secretariat to reinforce complementarity of regional and continental trade arrangements (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2023). A participant noted that ECOWAS has its finger on the pulse when it comes to tracking member states’ readiness for AfCFTA implementation and is striving for collaboration among agencies to navigate infrastructural, legislative, and technical challenges. However, the data also suggested that ECOWAS’s organizational capacity is constrained by fiscal limitations, political interference, and uneven commitment by member states. The operations of ECOWAS are typically owed to the political fortunes of governing countries such as Nigeria, and weaker institutional autonomy undermines its ability to enforce cooperation (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2023). Despite this, ECOWAS is nonetheless a significant player in the implementation horizon of the AfCFTA, providing regional legitimacy and policy coherence to broader integration efforts.



### 3.2 The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

#### 3.2.1 Formation of the AfCFTA

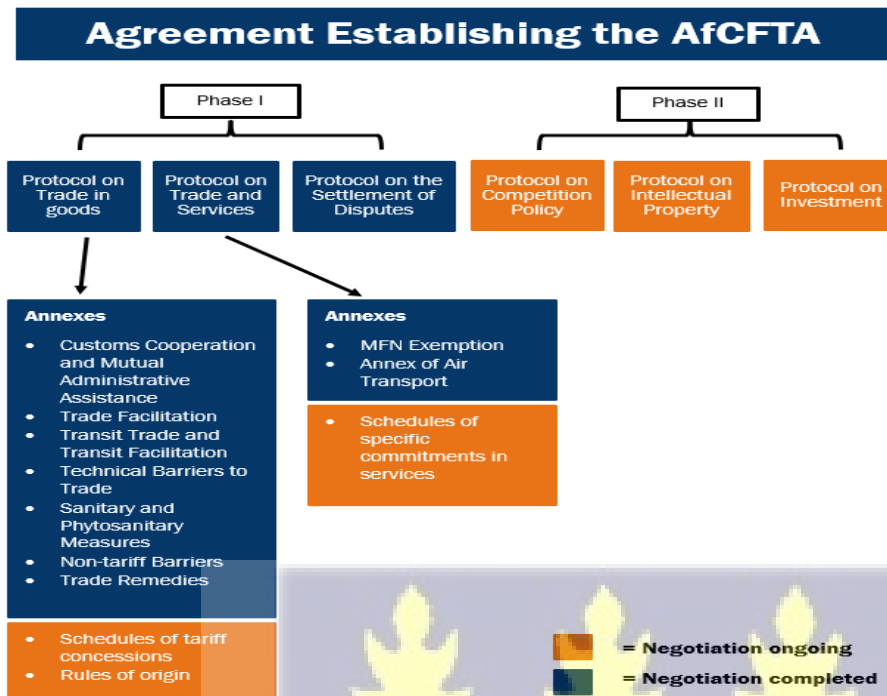
Based on the African Union's data, Africa possesses a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounting to \$3.2 trillion (Kimeu, 2022). However, when considering the purchasing power parity (PPP) adjustment, this figure escalates to \$6.6 trillion (Liu, 2022). At present, a total of 54 African nations have ratified the AfCFTA, thereby establishing the largest unified market globally. The AfCFTA might be considered as a crucial free single market for the future of global markets due to Africa's possession of the greatest youth population worldwide (Ogbole & Ogochukwu, 2022). This demography is expected to have a substantial influence on the global economy in the next years. The AfCFTA incorporates comprehensive tactics for entering the African market, as well as engagement techniques that may not be immediately apparent.

According to a participant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

*“The AfCFTA has significantly influenced ECOWAS by encouraging deeper integration and cooperation among member states. It has provided a broader framework that complements ECOWAS's objectives, leading to accelerated efforts in removing trade barriers, harmonizing regulations, and enhancing competitiveness. The AfCFTA has also pushed ECOWAS to align its policies with continental standards, fostering greater intra-African trade and economic resilience.”*



**Figure 3.1: Phases of implementation of AfCFTA**



Source. Africa Growth Institute at Brookings.

Phase I of the discussions encompasses trade in commodities, services, and the resolution of disputes. During the Kigali summit held in 2018, consensus was reached on various aspects including trade protocols, processes for resolving disputes, cooperation in customs matters, trade facilitation, and rules of origin. Additionally, there is an agreement in place to decrease tariffs on 90% of all commodities, with each participating countries having the option to exempt up to 3% of imports. On the date of its initiation, which was the 7th of July 2019, a total of five operational instruments that would oversee the operations of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) were put into effect. In lieu of this, a participant from the University of Ghana indicated that:

*ECOWAS has made concerted efforts to streamline customs procedures through the implementation of a single customs document and the harmonization of customs regulations. The organization has also worked on reducing non-tariff barriers by standardizing product regulations and certification processes. Additionally, ECOWAS promotes the use of technology in trade facilitation, such as electronic single windows and automated systems for customs data exchange.*

The aforementioned elements encompass several aspects such as the regulations pertaining to the rules of origin, the virtual platform for negotiations, the elimination of non-tariff barriers, the digital payment system, and the establishment of the African Trade Observatory (Signé & Van der Ven, 2019). There are still unresolved matters in Phase One negotiations, such as the timetable for tariff reductions and other explicit obligations.

The commencement of Phase II negotiations began in February of 2019. The scope of the discussion encompassed protocols relating to competition, intellectual property, and investment. To accomplish this objective, a National Conference on the Implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement took place in Accra, Ghana from August 19 to 21, 2019. The primary purpose of the conference was to inaugurate the AfCFTA Secretariat in Ghana (UNECA, 2019). According to Kituyi (2019), the selection of Ghana as the host of the AfCFTA secretariat indicates that the AfCFTA process is progressing smoothly. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is expected to facilitate the establishment of regional value chains and subsequently integrate them into the broader global value chains. The objective is to enhance Africa's economic autonomy by enabling consumers to avail themselves of more

affordable imported goods from other African nations (Saygili, Peters, & Knebel, 2018). This would result in an improved allocation of resources and expedited economic growth. The actors leading the efforts towards African integration are committed to reshaping the economic framework of African nations, shifting away from a reliance on natural resources and low technology industries, and instead focusing on the development of a more diversified knowledge-based technological sector (Saygili et al., 2018).

According to UNCTAD (2016), the complete implementation of the African Continental Free commerce Area (AfCFTA) would result in an estimated increase of US\$ 17.6 billion (equivalent to 2.8% of Africa's total commerce with the world) compared to a baseline scenario in 2022. Additionally, it is projected to stimulate exports by US\$ 25.3 billion, equivalent to a 4% increase. The industries most likely to experience positive impacts are agriculture, food, and industrial exports. Moreover, it is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in intra-African trade in agriculture/food, industrial commodities, and services, amounting to a growth of US\$ 34.6 billion, which is 52.3% higher than the baseline recorded in 2022. This data indicates significant progress, as intra-Africa trade was a mere 15.2% of overall commerce inside the continent from 2015 to 2017 (UNCTAD, 2019).

The African Development Bank (AfDB) in 2011, projected that the implementation of the AfCFTA will result in a significant increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Africa. Specifically, it is anticipated that the African GDP, which is forecasted to be \$3 trillion in 2020, will experience substantial growth and reach \$16 trillion by the year 2060. According to Mureverwi (2016), the full adoption of external imports is projected to result in a significant

reduction of \$10 billion per year. Additionally, it is anticipated that intra-African trade in agricultural and industrial exports will experience a corresponding growth of \$4 billion (7 percent) and \$21 billion (5 percent). The continent moreover possesses a growing middle class, presently estimated at 350 million individuals and projected to increase to 600 million by 2030 (Muchanga, 2020), demonstrating an engaged presence in online platforms and electronic commerce. According to a report by McKinsey & Company (2013), it is anticipated that the expansion of the African internet retail sector will amount to \$75 billion by the year 2025.

According to various sources, AfCFTA offers a potential solution to the perceived reluctance of global investors and multinational corporations to invest in the fragmented and smaller economies of African nations. The establishment of a vast and appealing continental market creates prospects in various sectors, including public-private partnerships and investments in infrastructure and logistics, which will facilitate interconnectivity among African economies.

### **3.3 Structure of the AfCFTA**

During the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union (AU) convened in Niamey, Niger, there was a completion of technical arrangements regards the elimination of tariffs on commodities exchanged under the AfCFTA. During the proceedings of the 33rd Ordinary Summit of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a host country agreement for the AfCFTA Secretariat was signed between Ghana and the African Union Commission. The host country agreement provides the necessary legal support, as well as immunities and privileges, to enable the Secretariat and its officials to carry out their functions effectively. The deal was executed on the 10th of February in the year 2020 (Ghanaweb, 2020). The provision of administrative support for the implementation

of the AfCFTA Agreement is anticipated to be undertaken by the Secretariat. This support encompass various tasks, including the organization of meetings, the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process, and the fulfilment of other responsibilities delegated to it by the Committee of Senior Officials, Council of Ministers, and the AU Assembly.

The institutional framework for coordination, facilitation and implementation as captured in (Article 9) of the agreement establishing the AfCFTA (2018) comprises:

- The General Assembly
- Council of Ministers
- The Committee of Senior Trade Officials
- The Secretariat

The Assembly is the highest decision-making organ of the AU with oversight responsibility to provide strategic direction, including the implementation of the Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) (Article 10). In addition, Article 10 provides that “The Assembly shall have the exclusive authority to adopt interpretations of this Agreement on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers. The decision to adopt an interpretation shall be taken by consensus.”

“The Council of Ministers ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the Agreement; take measures necessary for the promotion of the objectives of this Agreement and other instruments relevant to the AfCFTA. The Council of Ministers consists of Ministers responsible for Trade or such other ministers, authorities, or officials duly designated by the State Parties” (Article 11).

Additionally, other responsibilities work in collaboration with the relevant organs and institutions of the African Union;

- a) Promote the harmonization of appropriate policies, strategies and measures for the effective implementation of this Agreement;
- b) Establish and delegate responsibilities to ad hoc or standing committees, working groups or expert groups;
- c) Prepare its rules of procedure and those of its subsidiary bodies created for the implementation of the AfCFTA and submit them to the Executive Council for approval;
- d) Supervise the work of all committees and working groups it may establish pursuant to this Agreement; and
- e) Consider reports and activities of the Secretariat and take appropriate actions.

(Article 12) provides for The Committee of Senior Trade Officials; mandating the Committee to:

- a) be responsible for the development of programmes and action plans for the implementation of the Agreement;
- b) Monitor and keep under constant review and ensure proper functioning and development of the AfCFTA in accordance with the provisions of this Agreement;
- c) Establish committees or other working groups as may be required;
- d) Oversee the implementation of the provisions of this Agreement and for that purpose, may request a Technical Committee to investigate any particular matter;
- e) Direct the Secretariat to undertake specific assignments; and
- f) Perform any other function consistent with this Agreement or as may be requested by the Council of Ministers.

### 3.4 The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)


Efforts to integrate the West African sub-region extends back more than a decade previously, with numerous attempts in 1963 and 1966. According to Nagu (2019), a meeting on industrial harmonization took place in Lagos in 1963, while a forum on economic cooperation was conducted in Niamey in 1966. In 1967, a subsequent assembly was convened in Accra, during which an interim accord was ratified, serving as the foundation for a prospective Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Price, 2023). The Accra conference convened in 1967, advocated for the establishment of an Interim Council of Ministers tasked with the responsibility of formulating a preliminary treaty. This proposal was put forth during a subsequent conference held in Monrovia, Liberia. Following that, the leaders of the respective nations convened in Monrovia and unanimously approved a resolution pertaining to the establishment of an economic community (Price, 2023). Nevertheless, both the resolution and draft treaty, as well as the Convention on Customs Union, were not approved.

By 1972, enough groundwork had been carried out for President Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo and Nigeria Leader, General Gowon to revive the efforts towards the creation of an economic community through the following guidelines (Igwe et al., 2021):

- a) That, the envisaged economic community should cut across linguistic and cultural differences.
- b) Should pursue limited realizable objectives.
- c) The approach adopted should be flexible and practical.
- d) Necessary institutions are to be adopted allowing all countries to become members at their convenience.

The aforementioned set of recommendations underwent re-evaluation during a ministerial meeting in January 1975, resulting in the subsequent acceptance of a draft Treaty. On May 28, 1975, a total of fifteen West African states entered into the Treaty of Lagos, which established the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Odijie, 2023). The primary objective of this treaty was to establish an institutional framework for a sub-regional economic regime that would facilitate the promotion of economic self-reliance and self-sufficiency (Igwe et al., 2021).

Article 3 of the Revised Treaty (1993) mandates ECOWAS to facilitate cooperation and integration, ultimately culminating in the formation of an economic union within the West African region (Igwe et al., 2021). A participant from the AfCFTA Secretariat pointed that Article 3 mandates ECOWAS to ensure:



*Legal matters; legal issues; the harmonization and coordination of national policies; the promotion of integration programs, projects, and activities; the areas of 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; health; and tourism; and legal issues; and legal matters.*

In the face of global oil shocks, debt crisis, and drought, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established to provide oversight and foster accelerated and sustainable development among the fifteen West African states that ratified the Lagos treaty. These states include the Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea,

Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and the Republic of Togo (Anadi, 2005).

### **3.4.1 Basis for ECOWAS Integration**

The geographical and historical interconnectedness of the West African region underscores the pressing need for integration. The impetus to achieve a shared sense of identity and purpose, alongside the establishment and execution of institutions that embody a distinct identity and influence collective initiative within a specific geographic area, formed the basis for the motivations behind West African integration (Igwe et al., 2021).

In addition to the economic justifications for integration, the ECOWAS area faced significant security challenges. The abatement of the Cold War resulted in the emergence of subsequent armed conflicts. The region of West Africa did not escape the impact. The Mano River region emerged as a focal point for conflicts within the sub-region. According to Kimeu (2022), an organization originally established with the objective of promoting economic development underwent a transformation and evolved into a security group with a communitarian focus.

The occurrence of conflicts in the sub-region, including the Liberia and Sierra Leone wars, necessitated the mobilization of ECOWAS' security monitoring group to intervene in these areas to uphold the peace and stability of the sub-region. While the present analysis does not relate to a security-focused investigation, it is appropriate to contend that ECOWAS has demonstrated adaptability in its institutional frameworks and strategies to uphold regional peace (Leshoele, 2020). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has emerged as the

prevailing framework for sub-regional security considerations in the context of post-conflict reconstruction and development. This is particularly evident via its notable achievements in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Consistently, the ECOWAS has demonstrated greater effectiveness in ensuring communal security compared to its primary objective of fostering economic integration.

An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that:

*The primary goal of promoting economic integration and cooperation among its member states. Its objectives include the establishment of a common market, the free movement of people and goods, and the creation of a customs union. ECOWAS also works towards achieving peace and security in the region, political stability, and social and cultural cooperation.*

In addition, ECOWAS aims to achieve a comprehensive economic union by harmonizing several sectors such as agriculture, industry, transportation, communication, energy, and infrastructure development. Additionally, ECOWAS intends to establish common economic and monetary policies among its member states (ECOWAS, 1993). ECOWAS appears to be the fundamental REC that serves as the cornerstone for the economic integration process of the African Union. The Community possesses a free trade area in Africa that is widely regarded as highly influential. The implementation of a common external tariff has progressed significantly, utilizing a variable geometry technique, to move on with the establishment of a Monetary Union. According to another official from the AfCFTA Secretariat:

*ECOWAS has made substantial progress in harmonizing trade policies, standards, and regulations. Member states have agreed on common trade policies, including the CET and ETLs, which have reduced tariff and non-tariff barriers within the*

*region. ECOWAS has also worked on harmonizing technical regulations and standards, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, industry, and consumer protection. Additionally, there have been efforts to align legal and regulatory frameworks in areas like competition policy and intellectual property rights to promote a more integrated economic space within the ECOWAS region.*

A participant from the University of Ghana pointed out that:

*ECOWAS has undertaken several initiatives and policies to promote regional economic integration, including the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) initiative aims to remove trade barriers and tariffs among member states, promoting intra-regional trade. The ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) establishes a common tariff for imports from outside the region, helping to create a customs union within ECOWAS. ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons facilitates the free movement of people within the region, contributing to economic cooperation and cultural exchange.*

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has achieved notable progress in promoting integration among individuals in West Africa, resulting in significant economic benefits for the region. However, it is important to acknowledge the escalating and concerning occurrences of terrorism in countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and others. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the African Union (AU) have observed that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ranks second in terms of advancement among the Regional

Economic Communities (RECs) operating under the Abuja framework. Furthermore, ECOWAS stands out as the most advanced REC in terms of facilitating free movement. Consequently, it is worth noting that approximately 65.5% of the intra-African trade conducted by member states of ECOWAS takes place within the boundaries of the ECOWAS region (Leshoele, 2020).

### **3.5 ECOWAS' Efforts in Implementing the AfCFTA**

This subsection examines the involvement of the ECOWAS in the implementation of the objectives of the AfCFTA. The section explores how ECOWAS facilitates the attainment of precise aims of the AfCFTA.

#### **3.5.1 Analysis of Trade in ECOWAS**

Since its establishment, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has consistently advocated for the complete removal of tariffs and non-tariff obstacles. Nevertheless, the operationalization of the concept occurred in the year 1990 and was thereafter implemented in a phased manner (Igwe et al., 2021). The initial phase involved the elimination of trade barriers relating to traditional artifacts and uncooked food items. The second phase involved the gradual removal of industrial commodities. According to Kimeu (2022), a free trade area was established over the course of a decade. According to Kimeu (2022), it is evident that by the year 2000, a total of 12 governments within the Economic Community of West African governments (ECOWAS) had successfully eliminated non-tariff barriers. This significant achievement served as a crucial step towards the facilitation of free movements, as well as the simplification of visa requirements and travel throughout the ECOWAS community. The supranational framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has implemented trade protocols that effectively

enable and provide advantages to its member states. According to a participant who works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

*“ECOWAS and AfCFTA have complementary goals. Both aim to enhance economic integration, reduce trade barriers, and create a larger, unified market. While ECOWAS focuses on the West African region, the AfCFTA extends these efforts to the entire continent. Their objectives align in fostering economic growth, improving trade infrastructure, and harmonizing policies to create a conducive environment for business and investment.*

The primary trade integration initiative within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Policy (ETLS). This policy aligns with the objectives outlined in the ECOWAS Treaty, which emphasizes the elimination of customs duties on imports and exports, as well as the removal of non-tariff barriers among member states (as stated in Article 3 of the ECOWAS Treaty). Essentially, commodities originating from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are required to conform to the regulations governing their origin. The transportation of raw materials among Member States is not subject to customs charges or taxes and is not subject to any limitations in terms of quantity or administrative requirements. The primary objective of the trade liberalization initiative has been to effectively implement a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and a Common External Tariff (ECOWAS-CET), thereby transitioning the FTA into a fully-fledged Customs Union. Despite the concerted efforts to implement a unified external tariff by the year 2008, traders continue to encounter substantial taxes, prohibitions on some products, and stringent import regulations. Cumbersome rules and administrative bureaucracy, as well as issues related to bribery and

corruption, along with the high cost of transportation and communications services that are sometimes inefficient, have collectively impeded the progress of intra-ECOWAS commerce (Oloruntoba, 2020).

ECOWAS has emerged as a robust cornerstone of regional integration in Africa, as demonstrated by the considerable influence wielded by certain of its member states, namely Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Togo. These nations have been listed on the Ease of Doing Business Index and have also been ranked as part of the best-performing economies reported by the World Bank on an annual basis (Ogbole & Ogochukwu, 2022). While member countries under ECOWAS possess the autonomy to engage in international trade, the trade framework established by the organization promotes a certain degree of liberalized trade among its member states. This approach offers several advantages, such as the ability to preserve revenue and stimulate employment opportunities. The aforementioned ambitions are encapsulated under the (AfCFTA), which originated in ECOWAS as early as 1975. The alignment of the fostering of free commerce within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), alongside its facilitation of the free movement of individuals, corresponds with the goals of the AfCFTA. An academic from the University of Ghana indicated that:

*AfCFTA provides access to a larger market of over a billion people, offering significant opportunities for ECOWAS member states to increase exports and attract foreign investment. Increased production and economies of scale can result from integration with the larger African market, potentially reducing production costs and boosting competitiveness.*

An official from the AfCFTA Secretariat added that:

*Member states can diversify their economies by exploring new markets and sectors, reducing dependence on traditional trading partners. To meet the demands of AfCFTA, there's potential for investments in infrastructure, such as transport, energy, and telecommunications, which can benefit economic development.*

A total of forty-seven nations have officially ratified the legal instruments, signifying their preparedness and commitment to participate in the AfCFTA. Among the countries listed, thirteen are recognized as member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This indicates that the member nations of ECOWAS are achieving a range of 90-95% in terms of their dedication to the implementation of the (AfCFTA). The inclusion of export production from these nations is essential within the trade framework to promote seamless trade and augment the overall pool of marketable goods within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

### **3.5.2 ECOWAS and the AfCFTA**

The drive towards the AfCFTA rests on ramparts of RECs. As indicated in the preceding chapters, the ECOWAS FTA as well as the Tripartite FTA serve as the bedrock for the AfCFTA. A participant who is an academic with the University of Ghana stated that:

*ECOWAS and AfCFTA can complement each other by aligning their trade policies and objectives to promote economic growth in West Africa and across the continent. ECOWAS member states recognize the importance of integrating with the larger African market, and there are ongoing efforts to harmonize their policies and regulations with AfCFTA to ensure consistency. The two organizations can*

*work in tandem to create a more unified, prosperous, and peaceful African continent.*

Consequently, the significance of ECOWAS as the (REC) hosting the largest economy in Africa is crucial to the theoretical and discursive frameworks of the African Single Market. ECOWAS has been instrumental in facilitating the implementation of the AfCFTA initiative. The ECOWAS common external tariff (CET) served as the foundation for the negotiation of tariffs among the member nations of ECOWAS in the context of the AfCFTA. The ECOWAS Commission aided member states during the negotiation process and facilitated the coordination of their policy stances (Oloruntoba, 2020). The Commission facilitated the participation of business sector entities and civil society organizations in the process of negotiating the AfCFTA, allowing them to contribute their perspectives and recommendations (Bisong, 2020). It is expected that regional organizations such as ECOWAS will play a significant role in establishing the necessary structures and institutions to facilitate the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

### **3.6 ECOWAS and the African Union's Pillars of Integration**

UNECA's Observatory on Regional Integration in Africa has identified five essential pillars of integration based on agreements and protocols between the African Union and the RECs. They are: trade and market integration; convergence of macroeconomic policies; free movement of people; peace, security, stability, and governance; and sectoral policy harmonisation. These pillars act as the ramparts that stabilize economic progress and growth. The foundational elements support

the continent's efforts to create a successful African single market and effective continental commerce.

### **3.6.1 Trade and Market Integration**

The primary objective of the Africa single market is to enhance intra-Africa trade, augment the availability of goods, and mitigate the reliance on imports inside the African continent. The foregoing factors are associated with the augmentation of revenue, employment opportunities, structural diversification, and the promotion of sustainable development within the African economy. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2016), the proportion of intra-African exports in 2014 accounted for around 16% of the overall export volume. In comparison, Latin America accounted for 18%, Asia accounted for 54%, and Europe accounted for 66% of their respective total exports. In the view of a participant who works with AfCFTA Secretariat:

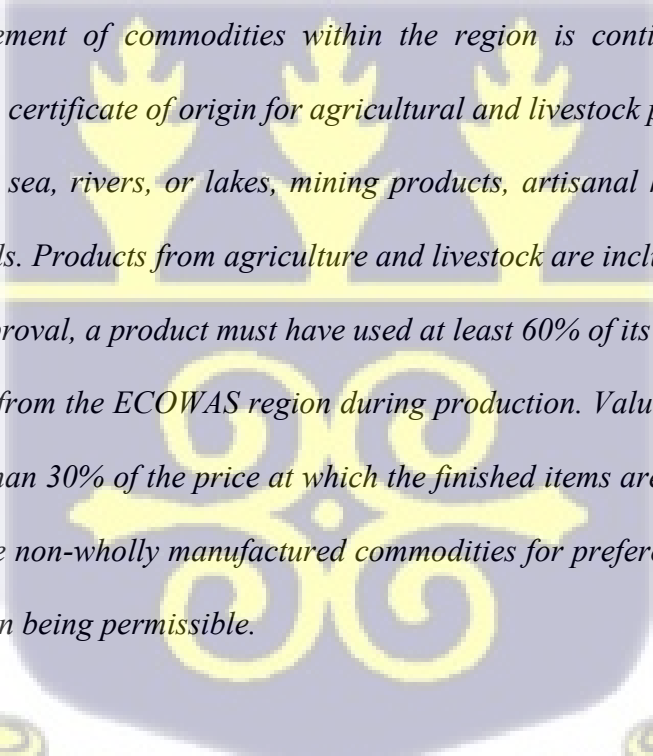
*It is true that intra-African commerce is still below what would be deemed to be an optimal level, despite the fact that it is substantially more diversified and contains higher shares of manufactured goods than primary commodities shipped inside the continent, 34% versus 11%, respectively. Boosting intra-African trade could help advance Africa's efforts toward specialization, diversification, and structural transformation; doing so is worthwhile.*

According to UNCTAD (2019), the proportion of extra-Africa trade, which predominantly consists of raw materials, fluctuated between 80% and 90% throughout the period from 2007 to 2017. The establishment of a unified African market is a significant challenge, as it necessitates the

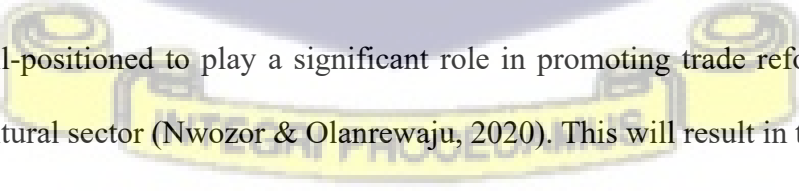
development of African economies to transition from primarily producing raw materials to becoming industrial centres. The viability of the African single market relies on the establishment of RECs such as ECOWAS as the foundation of the (AfCFTA). This entails the consolidation of production, ensuring a consistent supply of products and services, and achieving a favourable balance of earnings over expenditures. ECOWAS possess a wide range of structural variations, which might be leveraged to effectively realize the anticipated outcomes outlined in the AfCFTA agreement (Soutar, 2021). The entrepreneurial class plays a crucial role in facilitating trade and market integration. Within the ECOWAS, a significant number of entrepreneurs and business professionals are actively engaging in investments within the domains of services, innovation, and digital industries (Murphy, 2022). The Africa single market is expected to benefit from significant growth in retailing, services, and innovative economies, leading to a complement of primary and secondary manufacturing. ECOWAS has demonstrated its effectiveness in this aspect, as seen by the success of companies such as Jumia, Mpedigree, AgroCenta, and ExpressPay, which are at the forefront of the emerging trend of digital entrepreneurship in the sub-region (Quartey et al., 2017). Tariffs and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) impose restrictions on trade inside Africa. The removal of tariffs tends to have adverse effects on a country's tax revenue and might potentially lead to the decline of local small-scale companies and services (Alabi et al., 2019; Lefore et al., 2019). Many African governments exhibit reluctance to eliminate tariffs on imported commodities due to the substantial contribution of tariff revenues to their national budgets. In response to the negative impact of tariff elimination on Member States' revenue, ECOWAS has implemented a compensation mechanism aimed at mitigating this loss. The level of compensation is contingent upon the financial detriment experienced by the member state due to the importation of industrial goods from recognized sources (Lefore et al., 2019).

Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) present a considerable challenge in terms of quantification due to their diverse manifestations, encompassing extensive customs processes, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, product standards, anti-dumping measures, countervailing levies, licensing requirements, and inadequate infrastructure (Soutar, 2021).

In the year 2013, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) assessed the Rules of Origin (ROOs) that were implemented in the Regional Trade Agreements of the ECOWAS, ECCAS, COMESA, and SADC. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that:



*The free movement of commodities within the region is contingent upon the possession of a certificate of origin for agricultural and livestock products, fishing items from the sea, rivers, or lakes, mining products, artisanal handicrafts, and industrial goods. Products from agriculture and livestock are included. To receive this seal of approval, a product must have used at least 60% of its total quantity of raw materials from the ECOWAS region during production. Value addition equal to or greater than 30% of the price at which the finished items are sold ex-factory may qualify the non-wholly manufactured commodities for preferential treatment, with cumulation being permissible.*



ECOWAS is well-positioned to play a significant role in promoting trade reforms, particularly within the agricultural sector (Nwozor & Olanrewaju, 2020). This will result in tangible increases in salaries and wages, so contributing to the progress of the AfCFTA. The economy of Benin has experienced notable advancements within ECOWAS because of the trade reforms implemented

by the organization (Ikechi et al., 2022). The rationale behind this is that Benin's participation in regional and worldwide trade of products and services is relatively limited. The participation of Benin in global trade has experienced a decline in recent years, notwithstanding the notable growth of 44 percent in the value of Benin's trade from 1998 to 2010 (Oshomah, 2019). Nevertheless, the proportion of trade within the sub-region that Benin accounted for experienced a substantial increase of 96% during the period from 1998 to 2010, as reported by Mevel and Karingi (2013). The favourable regional trade policies have contributed to the ECOWAS states being the third largest trading partners of Benin. Nigeria holds significant importance as a partner due to its role as the recipient of numerous products passing through the port of Cotonou. It is worth noting, however, that a substantial portion of the bilateral trade remains unrecorded, as highlighted by Mevel and Karingi in 2013. The utilization of Benin as a case study to exemplify the importance of sub-regional trade arrangements within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) serves as evidence of the accomplishments and effectiveness of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). This demonstrates the progress made by ECOWAS in equipping its member states with the knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend the principles and implementation of free trade agreements, as envisioned by the African single market.

Given that ECOWAS, in conjunction with ECCAS, COMESA, and SADC, collectively comprising the Tripartite Free Trade Area, constitute the primary pillars for the implementation and enforcement of the (AfCFTA), it is reasonable to anticipate that the Rules of Origin (ROO) for the AfCFTA would be developed based on the harmonization of the current ROOs of these RECs. According to Mureverwi's (2016) global trade analysis model, which incorporates factors such as the efficiency of labour allocation, capital accumulation, terms of trade, tariff revenue, and

overall welfare, it was found that Nigeria has benefited significantly from tariff liberalization. Specifically, Nigeria has experienced positive outcomes in terms of capital allocation, terms of trade, and allocative efficiency. In relation to allocative efficiency, labour, and capital accumulation, it can be observed that Nigeria appears to be the primary beneficiary, with Senegal and Ghana following suit. According to Mureverwi (2016), the tariff liberalization within the AfCFTA is anticipated to primarily benefit South Africa, Nigeria, and Angola in terms of capital, terms of trade, and allocative efficiency.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is strategically positioned to effectively support the Africa Single Market by virtue of its implementation of low tariffs. This policy has resulted in a diverse range of economic consequences for member nations that have ratified the Continental Free Trade Agreement.

### ***3.6.2 Macro-economic Policy Convergence***

The convergence of microeconomic policies, together with the deepening of financial and monetary integration, facilitates the expansion of free trade by enhancing efficiency, promoting public accountability, and fostering economic growth. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2011) the establishment and subsequent implementation of macroeconomic targets have the effect of mitigating economic fluctuations and promoting stability in trade transactions. The alignment of significant macroeconomic indicators such as inflation, fiscal deficit, and gross domestic product (GDP) plays a crucial role in promoting trade liberalization. Additionally, this alignment offers a practical approach to mitigating revenue losses and transaction costs, fostering cross-border integration, and ultimately bolstering trade among

African nations. The current status of monetary integration in Africa is characterized by overlapping and intricate dynamics. A comprehensive examination conducted by researchers in the West Africa region. A staff of the AfCFTA Secretariat noted that:

*A number of customs and monetary union projects are in the works for the foreseeable future, but in fact, monetary integration is a slow-moving process. The sixth phase of the Abuja Treaty, which also includes an African Monetary Union and a Pan-African Parliament, aims to establish a common currency by the year 2028. West African CFA franc, Central African CFA franc, and South African rand are the only customs and monetary unions in Africa at the present time. Five more unions are in the works; however, ECOWAS member states are working toward the adoption of a common currency, the ‘Eco,’ which will simplify trade and financial transactions, further promoting economic cooperation and regional integration.*

The UEMOA, functioning as a monetary zone, has effectively shown the facilitation of trade and factor mobility through its practical implementation (Adu, 2019). The member countries of UEMOA experience minimal challenges related to exchange rates and foreign exchange due to the presence of a convergence criterion that functions as a mechanism for regulating economic interactions among them (Byiers & Dièye, 2022). The implementation of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (ECO) is anticipated to facilitate trade harmonization across Anglophone West Africa. This development signifies ECOWAS’ progression towards enhanced integration, surpassing the mere elimination of tariffs. The absence of integrated monetary policy is a significant obstacle to economic activities inside the African single market (Abrego et al., 2020). It is anticipated that the disparities in currency rates, inflation rates, and the absence of policy

convergence will lead to an increase in the expenses associated with trade activities across African nations. Although progress has been made in harmonizing monetary policy within certain RECs, ECOWAS has taken significant strides towards achieving this goal.

### ***3.6.3 Free Movement of Goods and Persons***

The majority of Africans travel within their own continent, with border nations accounting for 80% of South-South migration, according to the AfDB (2016). When looking at sub-regions, the percentages are considerably greater, with 63% of intra-regional transfers occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the AfDB's 2016 Africa Visa Openness Report, African nationals continue to have limited access to Africa. This entails the tiresome process of obtaining visas; protracted administrative procedures; money; and time. According to the African Development Bank (2016), this does not encourage trade or goodwill among African states.

The AfDB (2016) adds that on average, Africans need visas to enter 55% of other African nations; they can obtain visas on arrival in just 25% of nations, and they don't need visas to enter only 20% of other African nations. Although many nations benefit from free movement as a result of intra-subregional agreements within their regions, like the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, it cannot be stated the same on a continental scale (Kareem & Wieck, 2021). In its Agenda 2063 policy paper, the African Union (AU) outlined its goal of eliminating visa restrictions for all African residents in all of the continent's nations by 2018. At the conference in Kigali, Rwanda, in July 2016, the AU also unveiled an African passport. Only Heads of State, Ministers, and Permanent Representatives of Member Countries to the AU now possess the African passport.

The AU must seek to make the passport available to all Africans. A participant who works at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated that:

*A regional passport is available to citizens of ECOWAS, allowing them unrestricted travel throughout West Africa. In doing so, they may further explore regional integration and relations, which is good for business and beneficial to the region. This waiver of issuing a regional passport to ECOWAS citizens is groundbreaking and significant because it allows ECOWAS citizens to travel to other countries in the region without carrying their own passports, in contrast to the SADC region, where citizens can only travel to other countries in the region with the passports of their own individual countries. In terms of migration policy, ECOWAS is decades ahead of other RECs thanks to the adoption of the ECOWAS Protocol pertaining to the Free Movement of Persons.*

The establishment and facilitation of trade in the ECOWAS region are both centred on the free movement of people and goods. The foundation of the African single market is the flow of people and things and the potential benefits that come with it. The fifth step of the Abuja Treaty, which ECOWAS has completed ahead of schedule, calls for the freedom of movement and the ability to establish residency. The introduction of the ECOWAS card has made it easier for people and products to move around the subregion. Additional steps have been taken, including the withdrawal of the resident card, the adoption of a biometric identity card as a travel document in place of the ECOWAS travel certificate, and unrestricted access to employment in Member States (UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015a). Despite a few minor bottlenecks and a few obstinate immigration agents, travel inside ECOWAS is typically easy. The AfCFTA agreement has not yet been

concluded and must take into account the numerous obstacles and strains associated with traveling inside Africa. The accord must encourage African nations to adopt open and liberal visa policies and to decentralize the Africa passport so that it is accessible to all of its residents. According to the 2016 Africa Regional Integration Index, despite ECOWAS's enhanced infrastructure and transportation capabilities, more has to be done to streamline the procedure and further encourage cross-border movement, which is a key driver of economic growth and development in Africa (Alexander & Garba, 2021).

### **3.6.4 Peace, Stability and Governance**

There are several instances of how conflicts have destroyed booming economies and turned them into basket cases. Conflicts have wrecked the economies of Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Congo, Burundi, and Cote d'Ivoire, which serve as prototypes (Aworawo, 2012). According to a participant from the University of Ghana:

*It is well known that the region of Africa known as West Africa is the location of the continent's most frequent military coups. Regional conflicts have been worsened by several causes, including, but not limited to, poverty, human rights violations, inadequate leadership, corruption, ethnic group marginalization, and the proliferation of small guns. Most ECOWAS's efforts have been directed toward conflict resolution, with the organization working in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, most recently, Cote d'Ivoire.*

Africa is home to numerous fragile governments whose integrity is always in jeopardy from separatist organizations and within-state rivalries. Conflicts involving secession have increased

recently. Recent examples include Trans-Volta Togoland and Ambazaonia in Ghana and Cameroon (LonNfi & Pagbe Musah, 2021). Conflicts predominate, which deters RECs from pursuing growth, expanding the economy, encouraging investments, and boosting exports. ECOWAS, which has strayed from its original purpose of promoting economic development, has transformed into a communitarian security organization. The Mano River conflicts that shook ECOWAS in the 1990s have consolidated and fostered a tranquil atmosphere where trade flourishes. A number of recently published maritime surveys have positioned ECOWAS as a secure maritime trade route (Adepoju, 2015; Broohm, 2021; Ehizuelen, 2023; Nwatu, 2022). The peace-development nexus promotes effective trade, and ECOWAS is a prime example of a peaceful REC that can aid in the launch and expansion of the AfCFTA.

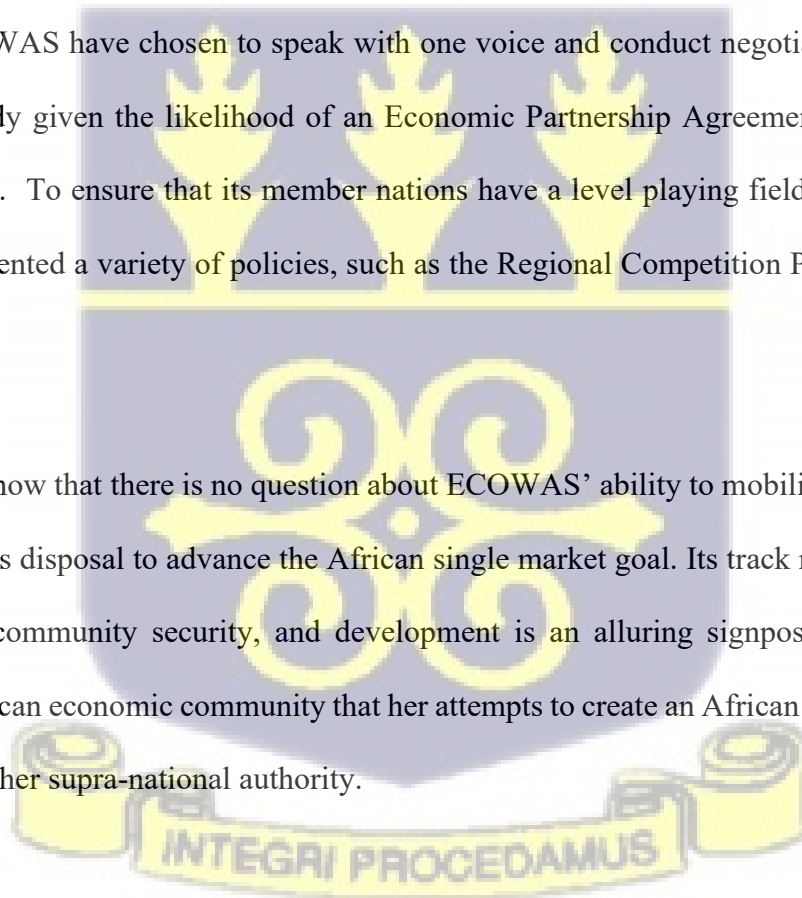
### **3.6.5 Harmonisation of Sectoral Policies**

The ECOWAS's shared policies and increased cooperation enable economies to fully benefit from regional integration, which promotes sustained economic growth. As a result, a key goal of the Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063 is to harmonize laws and regulations across all sectors of the economy (UNECA, 2013). A participant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ghana noted that Article 6(2) of the Abuja Treaty has once again gained prominence, emphasizing its relevance to current regional integration efforts.

*Coordination and harmonization of activities among the existing and future economic communities; and a strengthening of sectoral integration at the regional and continental levels in all areas of activity, particularly in the fields of trade, agriculture, money and finance, transport and communications, industry, and energy.’’*

A turning point in the evolution of ECOWAS from an FTA to a Customs Union was the introduction of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff (CET) by the Authority of Heads of State and Government in Niamey in January 2006 and the subsequent establishment of a joint ECOWAS-UEMOA Committee to guide the project to completion. Since then, ECOWAS has passed additional legislation through the Authority of Heads of State and Government to establish a fifth band of the ECOWAS CET at 35%. Additionally, all nations have agreed a set of uniform eligibility standards for the submission of products to this fifth band (UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015: p. 28). Even if it is not particularly fierce, ECOWAS member states' economies continue to perform consistently thanks to the alignment of policies across multiple sectors. The member nations of ECOWAS have chosen to speak with one voice and conduct negotiations through the sub-regional body given the likelihood of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union. To ensure that its member nations have a level playing field, the Commission has also implemented a variety of policies, such as the Regional Competition Policy (ECOWAS, 2018).

These serve to show that there is no question about ECOWAS' ability to mobilize the treaties and conventions at its disposal to advance the African single market goal. Its track record in post-war reconstruction, community security, and development is an alluring signpost to energize and reassure the African economic community that her attempts to create an African single market will be supported by her supra-national authority.



### 3.6.6 Infrastructure

The effectiveness of an RTA and, to a greater extent, an AfCFTA depends on cross-border infrastructure in the areas of transportation, energy, and telecommunications. While increasing market access, reducing economic distance, and encouraging investment, it makes it easier for people, products, services, and information to travel back and forth between states. It is well known that Africa's weak electricity and communications infrastructure, as well as its low degree of integration, are contributing causes. Transport expenses have become arguably the most prohibitive non-tariff trade barrier in Africa as tariff levels have declined over time. Given that several African nations are landlocked, air travel and land transportation have proven to be the most practical modes of transportation. According to Ancharaz, Mbekeani, and Brixiova (2011), Africa has the lowest road density in the world at fewer than 7 kilometers per 100 square kilometers of land. On this, an academic from the University of Ghana noted that:

*To meet the demands of AfCFTA, there's a need for investments in infrastructure, such as transport, energy, and telecommunications, which can benefit economic development.*

By developing a Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme that entails the establishment of five common border checkpoints along the sub-region's major corridors, ECOWAS hopes to facilitate sub-regional trade. The Lagos-Abidjan highway, the trans-coastal highway connecting Lagos and Nouakchott via Dakar, and the Dakar-N'Djamena trans-Sahelian highway are only a few of the high priority road networks that ECOWAS has designated. For instance, the Lagos-Abidjan corridor, which is home to more than 30 million people and acts as transit for 75% of

West African trade, accounts for almost 70% of all regional transit traffic (UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015a).

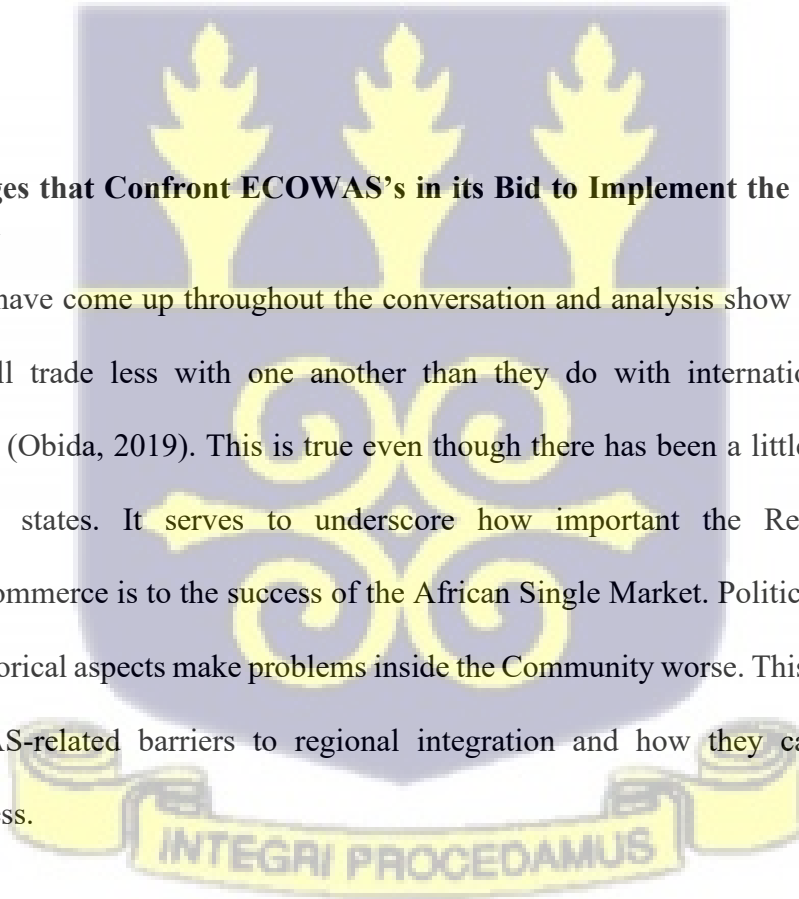
The sub-regional organization has also tried to resurrect the rail transportation industry. The ECOWAS statutory authorities have approved a master plan for the expansion of the region's railway network. To link member states, the sub-regional organization has also built a secure and trustworthy air transportation network. The ECOWAS Commission assesses member nations' progress in putting the Yamoussoukro Decision of 2002 into effect and works to support a healthy aviation sector in the region. ECOMARINE International, a project to establish a sub-regional maritime corporation, has been under consideration for some time (UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015b). The ECOWAS Commission is assisting in the creation of a strong regional West African telecom market in the area of telecommunications. With a view to creating a unified and liberalized telecoms market as well as a functional and contemporary regional telecommunications infrastructure, ECOWAS has outlined two key ICT sector objectives (UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015a). Implementing the INTELCOM II program, as well as alternative broadband infrastructure and underwater cables, are among these goals. Harmonizing telecommunications policies, legal frameworks, and regulations is another.

The ECOWAS Wide Area Network (ECOWAN), which would link all ECOWAS organizations, agencies, and projects as well as government services in the capital cities of member countries, is another initiative the ECOWAS Commission is working on. The sub-regional organization is also aware of the menace of cybercrime. As a result, ECOWAS has enacted the Electronic Transactions and Protection of Personal Data/Information Act and a Directive on combating cybercrime

(UNECA & ECOWAS, 2015a). The AfCFTA will ultimately benefit from increased sub-regional economic cooperation and integration as a result of improvements in the telecoms sector. The structural development and growth of African states now depend heavily on the services sector. The services sector is essential to trade, especially when it comes to payment systems and communication networks. ECOWAS and UEMOA have taken the lead in launching numerous measures to encourage the integrated growth of the energy sector. Two mechanisms that support the sub-region's drive to attain energy efficiency are the West African Power Pool (WAPP) and the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP). These initiatives, which encourage trade and investment, save prices, and ease travel across the continent, will be helpful in establishing an African Single Market.

### **3.7 Challenges that Confront ECOWAS's in its Bid to Implement the Objectives of the AfCFTA**

Challenges that have come up throughout the conversation and analysis show that West African governments still trade less with one another than they do with international counterparts, especially China (Obida, 2019). This is true even though there has been a little increase in trade among member states. It serves to underscore how important the Regional Economic Communities' commerce is to the success of the African Single Market. Political, administrative, cultural, and historical aspects make problems inside the Community worse. This section examines certain ECOWAS-related barriers to regional integration and how they can jeopardize the AfCFTA's success.



### 3.7.1 *Weak Institutional Structures*

Weak institutional frameworks, which come from restricted authority, are one of the main obstacles for ECOWAS. ECOWAS institutions at the national level have fought valiantly to further collaboration and sustainable development by implementing ECOWAS resolutions in member nations. Oloruntoba (2020) asserts that national institutions lack the expertise necessary to handle the complexity of integration in an appropriate and efficient manner.

According an academic from the University of Ghana:

*Looking ahead, ECOWAS's key strategies include further harmonization of trade policies and standards, development of regional infrastructure, and strengthening of institutional capacities. Prioritizing digital integration to facilitate e-commerce and modern trade practices is also crucial. Enhancing collaboration with other regional economic communities and ensuring inclusive growth that benefits all member states will be important. Fostering a conducive business environment through regulatory reforms and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are also key priorities for driving regional integration and cooperation in the context of the AfCFTA.*

Wapmuk & Ali (2020) argued that the adoption of unrealistic and impossible-to-meet implementation deadlines, as well as a lack of a regional economic community institutional planning with the competence, power, and resources to enforce decisions and supervise project execution. This has made it more difficult for the Community to achieve its main goals. The administrative level's inadequate capabilities inevitably causes implementation to lag. With the exception of Cape Verde, all member states, according to a report by UNECA and ECOWAS

(2015b), belong to a group of nations with low levels of human development. The fact that twelve out of the fifteen ECOWAS member states are considered to be Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (Nwangwu et al., 2019) indicates that the low-income levels of the majority of the countries are a major contributing factor in this predicament.

Similar to the sub-regional body, West Africa's integration administration has its own shortcomings. For the ECOWAS to succeed, it needs a strong, autonomous institution with clearly defined collective aims, free from manipulation by member states and outside interests. As contributions from member nations seem insufficient, an apparent shortage of resources has also contributed to the ECOWAS's weak institutional competence. Evidently, the continent's well acknowledged issue of a lack of institutional and bureaucratic finance extends to the West African subregion. Because its members lacked the financial power to undertake such a capital-intensive project together, ECOWAS was forced to accept a \$31.6 million Chinese gift to erect a new headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria (Nwangwu, 2019; Ogele & Adamu, 2021).

### ***3.7.2 Lack of Political Commitment***

Additionally, there appears to be a fear of losing sovereignty, which manifests itself in a lack of political will to carry out ECOWAS policies at the national level. Regional and sub-regional development plans are practically never included in national development plans or political party platforms, which leads to an imbalance between national development strategies and integration policies. When it comes to establishing supranational organizations with the authority to enact integration policies, political leadership on the continent has always shown hesitation. Insufficient legal support prevents regional organizations like ECOWAS from enforcing treaties, requiring

adherence to mutually agreed-upon tariff reduction strategies, and compelling member nations to fulfil their duties. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that:

*Even though the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Establishment Rights is operative, there have been cases of Africans being attacked or having their businesses taken over in nations that have signed the Protocol. These attacks and takeovers took place in nations that signed the agreement.*

Governments very frequently succumb to pressure from their people, civil society, and other interest groups, which prevents them from adopting policies for regional integration at the national level. The implementation of several plainly intended and mutually beneficial integration initiatives has stalled as a result of this seeming lack of commitment. The ECOWAS protocol on the free movement of people, products, and services, for instance, which first appeared to be a well-planned “community project” aimed at removing visas and other commercial barriers, has not yet been fully implemented. The project has been hampered by the prominence of trade barriers including roadblocks and checkpoints, where visitors are frequently the targets of extortion, harassment, and intimidation. Additionally, the lack of consistency between election cycles contributes to the lack of political commitment. 2019 (Nwangwu et al). Newly elected leaders frequently discard previously established policies and make an effort to steer their own “populist” course because they are keen to distinguish themselves from their predecessors. Political actors are more willing to execute short-term development strategies that appear to appease the populace than long-term integration objectives because they are aware of this fact and are always looking over their shoulders.

### 3.7.3 *External Influence and Historical Ties with Colonial Masters*

The presence of historical connections with various colonial powers is arguably the primary obstacle to achieving integration on the continent, particularly in the West African region. The promotion of intraregional trade among member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been impeded because of their colonial legacy. The impact of France, the United Kingdom, and Portugal as former colonists in West Africa has been crucial in creating the sub-region's borders, political structures, institutions, administration, and linguistic characteristics. France has consistently maintained a strong and enduring connection with its colonies, ultimately resulting in the foundation of the CFA currency, which is backed by the French Treasury. The preceding chapter has examined the impact of UEMOA on ECOWAS negotiations and the observed presence of an adversarial relationship. The presence of language hurdles among Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone populations has impeded the unrestricted mobility of labour throughout the region, thereby impacting trading operations (Adepoju, 2015). A participant who works with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that:

*External influence and an attachment to colonial masters impedes the progress of ECOWAS initiatives including the AfCFTA since such attachments breeds distracted loyalty to regional courses, mostly.*

The region was additionally connected to Europe through a series of aid and cooperation agreements that were struck with the European Union. The previously discussed agreements encompass the Yaoundé accord, the Lomé Conventions, and the Cotonou accord (Bossuyt, 2016). The existence of many rules of origin (ROOs) might provide a hindrance to the facilitation of international trade. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the context of Africa, where nations

have engaged in talks for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with many non-African counterparts. A notable illustration of this is the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs) concluded between the European Union (EU) and several African countries, including those belonging to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). One potential solution to this issue could involve establishing the AfCFTA as the standard for all future external trade agreements.

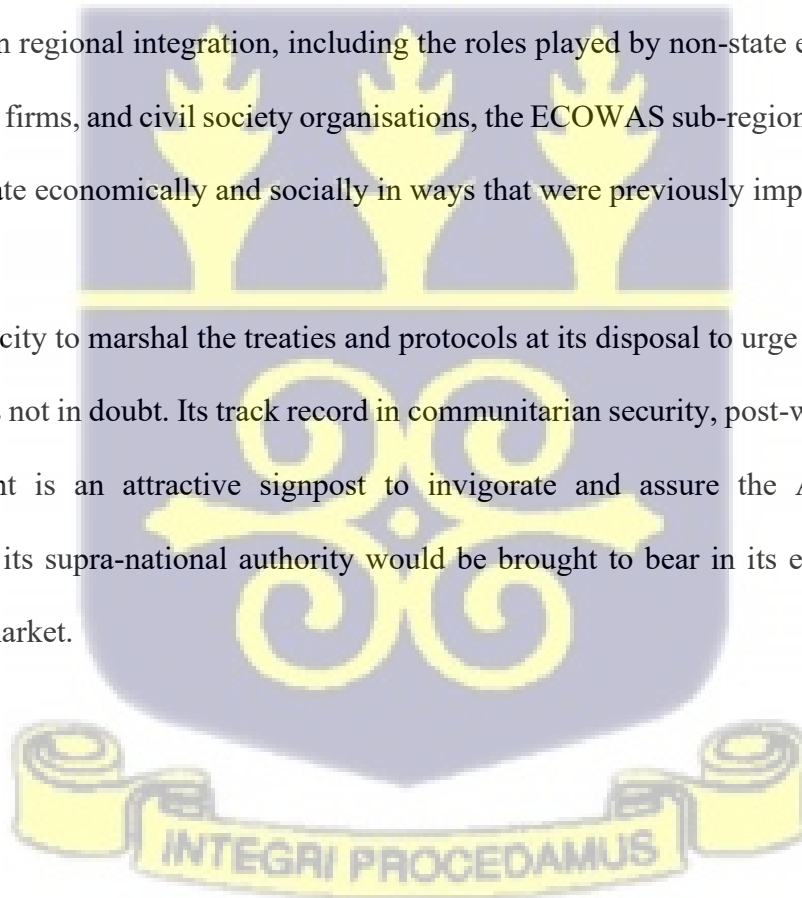
The region has been subject to the influence of international financial institutions, namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have played a significant role in shaping its economic policies. This impact can be traced back to the implementation of structural adjustment measures in the 1980s. The growing influence of China in the sub-region can be attributed to its pursuit of economic interests and desire to expand its sphere of influence. Similarly, Arab countries have played a significant role by providing generous support to Muslim nations to foster friendships and strengthen the position of Islam in this particular region. These factors should not be overlooked.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The Pan-African philosophy that underpins the historical anecdote of ECOWAS is manifested in her aspirations for free trade and is etched in its protocols of free trade as has been discussed in the previous paragraphs. Although established to promote economic integration, it has forged closer ties among the cultures of West Africa in, peoples and resources in the sub-region. The ECOWAS failed to achieve its primary objective of developing deeper trade links among its member states because it was founded against the backdrop of the neoliberal global economic system. Despite the challenges it faces, the organization has established systems that encourage

deeper levels of cohesion. The African Union's rapid progress toward continental integration has also prompted political elites in the subregion to pay more attention to regionalism. Evidence of this is the African Union's decision to assume control over this issue. In addition, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has little to no wiggle room to advance the integration agenda in the subregion because of the growing trend toward regional governance at global levels through the development of major trade agreements by established and emerging countries. To be effective, the ideology of integration must shift from the facilitation of market access to the promotion of developmental regionalism. Industrialisation, territorial expansion, and the spread of cross-cultural understanding are at the forefront of this sort of regionalism. As a result of recent shifts in regional integration, including the roles played by non-state entities like banks, communications firms, and civil society organisations, the ECOWAS sub-region now has a chance to further integrate economically and socially in ways that were previously impossible.

ECOWAS' capacity to marshal the treaties and protocols at its disposal to urge the African single market agenda is not in doubt. Its track record in communitarian security, post-war, reconstruction and development is an attractive signpost to invigorate and assure the African economic community that its supra-national authority would be brought to bear in its efforts towards the African single market.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a concise overview of the research findings, draws appropriate inferences based on the analysis, and provides recommendations for future actions.

#### 4.1 Summary of Findings

Apart from the general objective of this study, which was to analyze the role of ECOWAS as a foundational pillar for implementing the CFTA, the study specifically aimed at achieving three main objectives which were:

- To provide a historical trajectory of regional integration in Africa.
- To examine the efforts of ECOWAS in enabling the progress and growth of the AfCFTA.
- To interrogate the challenges that confront ECOWAS in its attempt at implementing the objectives of the AfCFTA.

##### 4.1.1 *Historical Pattern of Regional Economic Integration in Africa*

The integration in Africa stretches back to the early stages of the pan-African movement. Leading individuals like Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, and W.E.B. Dubois saw a continent that was strong enough to fend against the exploitation of its economic resources and guarantee the inclusion of the indigenous people in the region's "industrial development." The OAU and finally the AU have both worked to achieve market (and possibly political) integration in the past. In terms of the two phases that the Heads of State have approved, the AfCFTA is progressive. The

agreement was crafted to address the distinct economic circumstances of Africa. The conclusion on this objective is significant because it illustrates how the agreement took into account the diversity of Africa's economies and supported a mass approach rather than a variable geometry approach in recognition of the Pan-African ideals that underlie the promulgation of this agreement. The AfCFTA can help the continent's GDP increase from an expected \$3 trillion in 2020 to \$16 trillion in 2060. More significantly, if completely implemented, it is anticipated that external imports will fall by \$10 billion annually, while intra-African trade in agricultural and industrial exports would rise by \$4 billion (7%) and \$21 billion (5%), respectively.

#### ***4.1.2 Efforts of ECOWAS in Enabling the Progress and Growth of the AfCFTA***

ECOWAS continues to be a positive REC on trade and market integration and has mechanisms to improve AfCFTA implementation. In ECOWAS, the protocols for free trade and customs have largely been successful. This would be useful in putting the AfCFTA into practice. ECOWAS is a region that permits the free flow of goods due to its ease of movement and factor mobility. Free movement is essential to facilitating trade, and ECOWAS, as a REC, has met this goal under the Abuja Treaty, which requires RECs to regularize and loosen movement restrictions. Although ECOWAS has already adopted and implemented some policies and mechanisms to that effect, the study found that in order to ensure the success of the AfCFTA, ECOWAS would need to strengthen its current policies and also adopt new mechanisms.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges that Confront ECOWAS in its Attempt at Implementing the Objectives of the AfCFTA**

The ECOWAS region lacks adequate road infrastructure to support the mobility of people and products. In comparison to North Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa, West Africa's Road

index is considerably lower. This definitely taints the support that ECOWAS can offer the AfCFTA. The study additionally revealed that the disparity in ECOWAS' monetary and macroeconomic policies would make it a harder task for it to aid in the AfCFTA's implementation. The study also showed that member countries still have closer ties and relationships with their former colonial rulers than do their regional counterparts.

## **4.2 Conclusions**

### ***4.2.1 Historical Pattern of Regional Economic Integration in Africa***

The pursuit of African integration has a long historical background, and the AfCFTA signifies a substantial advancement, acknowledging the varied economies of the continent. In contrast to previous endeavours, this initiative places greater importance on a collective strategy rather than the interests of individual states, thereby embodying the principles of Pan-Africanism. This plan is expected to drive Africa's economic expansion, with forecasts of a growing GDP and enhanced intra-African commerce. The AfCFTA promotes the idea of shared economic success and recognises the existing economic disparities, therefore creating a path towards a more robust and cohesive Africa.

### ***4.2.2 Efforts of ECOWAS in Enabling the Progress and Growth of the AfCFTA***

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provides a solid foundation for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a result of its well-established regulations concerning free trade and customs. Expanding upon its achievements in promoting free trade and mobility in the area, ECOWAS has the potential to be a blueprint for the broader AfCFTA. Nevertheless, in order for the AfCFTA to thrive effectively within ECOWAS,

the organisation must strengthen current policies and possibly incorporate new strategies to tackle any remaining obstacles in the implementation process.

#### **4.2.3 Challenges that Confront ECOWAS in its Attempt at Implementing the Objectives of the AfCFTA**

ECOWAS encounters obstacles in providing complete support for the AfCFTA as a result of constraints in infrastructure and economic cohesion. The road network in the region is inadequate in comparison to other regions in Africa, which hinders the unrestricted movement of people and products that are essential for trade. Furthermore, the absence of coordination in monetary and macroeconomic policies among member states leads to complexities. Moreover, certain nations place greater significance to their connections with past colonial powers rather than focusing on relationships inside their own region.

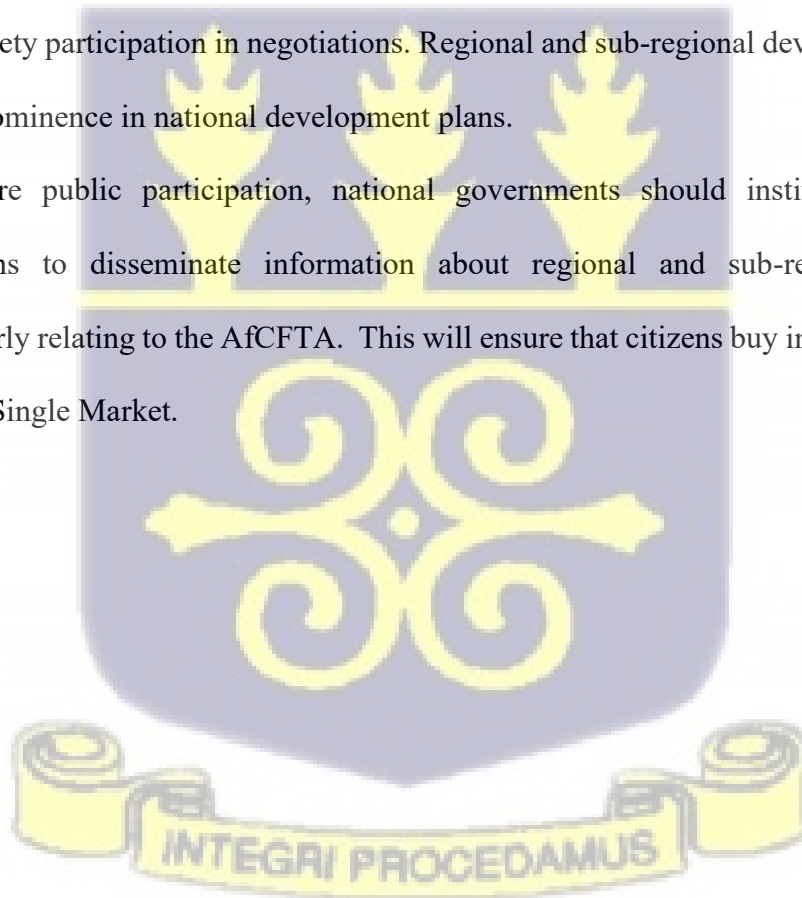
#### **4.3 Recommendations:**

In order to fully leverage the AfCFTA, the study recommends that:

- ECOWAS must endeavour to improve its transport infrastructure – road, rail, and air to facilitate trade and improve ease of travel in the sub-region. The existence of better transport facilities would likely expand trade routes deeper into the continent.
- ECOWAS must work to move towards basic industries that can produce exports. This would reduce the reliance on imports, reduce bills and increase earnings. These industries would bring diversity to trade, away from primary commodity exchange.
- Coordination between member states towards the development of an integrated services sector. This can be achieved through joint programs geared towards the improvement of

services infrastructure, particularly in transportation, communication, and information services.

- ECOWAS should work to harmonise macroeconomic and monetary policy for accelerated trade. This would eliminate forex inconsistency and hasten trade transactions.
- There should be a concerted effort to strengthen institutional and managerial capacity at the national level. There should exist a clear and frequent line of communication between the national, sub-regional and regional level. The siting of the AfCFTA Secretariat in an ECOWAS member state is an enormous benefit which should be taken advantage of.
- ECOWAS must impress on governments of member states to increase private sector and civil society participation in negotiations. Regional and sub-regional development must be given prominence in national development plans.
- To ensure public participation, national governments should institutionalize media campaigns to disseminate information about regional and sub-regional activities, particularly relating to the AfCFTA. This will ensure that citizens buy into the ideals of an African Single Market.



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## **APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE**

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**LEGON CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DIPLOMACY.**

### **Interview Questions**

**TOPIC: AfCFTA: A CATALYST FOR ECOWAS REGIONALISM**

#### **Questions**

1. Can you briefly explain the goals and objectives of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) in the context of regional integration and economic cooperation?
2. How has the recent implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) influenced ECOWAS's approach to regional integration and economic cooperation within West Africa?

#### **ECOWAS Integration Efforts:**

3. What specific initiatives or policies has ECOWAS undertaken to promote regional economic integration among its member states?
4. How has ECOWAS addressed challenges related to trade barriers, customs procedures, and non-tariff barriers to facilitate smoother regional trade?
5. Can you provide insights into the progress made in the harmonization of trade policies, standards, and regulations within the ECOWAS region?

#### **Impact of AfCFTA on ECOWAS:**

6. How do you perceive the relationship between ECOWAS and the AfCFTA in terms of their respective goals and objectives?

7. What opportunities and challenges has the AfCFTA presented to ECOWAS member states in terms of trade, investment, and economic development?

**Regional Cooperation and Conflict Resolution:**

8. In what ways has ECOWAS promoted regional cooperation and conflict resolution within West Africa, and how does this contribute to regional integration efforts?

9. Can you share examples of successful collaborative projects or initiatives undertaken by ECOWAS member states that have positively impacted regional integration and trade?

**Future Prospects:**

10. Looking ahead, what are the key strategies and priorities for ECOWAS to enhance regional integration and cooperation in the context of the AfCFTA?

These questions should provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of ECOWAS's regionalism and integration efforts, as well as how the AfCFTA is influencing its approach to economic cooperation and trade within West Africa.

