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Regional Integration And Economic Development: A Study Of Economic Community Of West African States, 2020 – 2025

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ABSTRACT
The state of economic backwardness of West African countries is so worrisome that the region embraced regional integration as an escape route to economic development. For this reason, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975. Yet, despite decades of effort the region still struggles unabating in economic, political, security and social fronts. The study examined the relationship between regional integration and economic development in the ECOWAS (2020 – 2025). The study aimed at identifying the key challenges hindering effective regional integration within the ECOWAS framework (2020 – 2025). The study employed functionalist theory by David Mitrany (1933) as its theoretical framework to lustrate how harmonious cooperation could lead to better economic transformation. Functionalist theory was relevant in the study because of its altruistic tendencies which enables quick technological transfer and benevolent internationalism. The study employed descriptive research design generally on data gathering and analysis to reveal existing state of affair in the ECOWAS framework (2020 – 2025). Choosing the descriptive research approach for the study allowed the researcher to investigate closely the dynamic interaction among regional integration and economic development within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS 2020 - 2025). The study found among others that intra-regional trade remains low, despite policy commitments to liberalization; even as ECOWAS has implemented the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and other initiatives aimed at reducing tariffs and simplifying customs procedures, a development which is not encouraging to stimulate growth that could propel the region towards economic development. The study recommended that ECOWAS should intensify efforts toward harmonization of economic and trade policies as differences in tariff structures, customs procedures, and regulatory standards continue to impede intra-regional trade. Full implementation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) by simplifying certification procedures and addressing non-tariff barriers at border posts should be focused. The study contributed to knowledge by professing context specific styled regional integration model for ECOWAS.
Keywords: Regional Integration, Economic Development, Economic Community of West African States, 2020 – 2025

INTRODUCTION

Regional integration has been central to the development strategies of African states since independence. In West Africa specifically, the legacy of colonial partitioning left newly sovereign countries with fragmented markets, incompatible economic policies, and weak institutional frameworks, which hindered economic cooperation and sustainable development. The idea that integration could mitigate these structural weaknesses gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s amid broader Pan-African aspirations for self-reliance and economic autonomy in the face of global economic uncertainties, such as the oil price shocks of the 1970s. These discussions culminated in the creation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 28 May 1975, when fifteen West African countries signed the Treaty of Lagos in Nigeria. The founding states envisioned ECOWAS as a means to advance economic cooperation and development

across the sub-region by establishing a free trade area, customs union, common market, and later, a monetary union (Treaty of Lagos), institutions intended to stimulate trade, facilitate the free movement of goods and people, and harmonize economic policies. The Community's objectives were rooted in addressing the structural limitations of individual economies, amplifying collective bargaining power in global markets, and reducing dependency on former colonial powers and external economic shocks.

Regional integration refers to the process through which countries reduce barriers to economic and political cooperation to achieve common objectives. Theories of integration such as functionalism, neo-functionalism, and intergovernmentalism offer different lenses for interpreting why and how states integrate. Functionalists suggest that cooperation in technical and economic areas creates spill over effects leading to wider integration; neo-functionalists emphasize the role of supranational institutions in advancing integration beyond national control; while intergovernmentalists focus on the primacy of sovereign states in negotiating and controlling integration outcomes. In the West African context, these theoretical frameworks illuminate how ECOWAS was conceived and the institutional challenges it faces. The Community was initially modelled on the notion that economic cooperation would facilitate growth and structural transformation in its member states, yet political realities and governance challenges continually shape institutional capacities and integration outcomes. Economic development in this study is understood broadly to include economic growth (GDP expansion), structural transformation, employment generation, and improvements in living standards, as well as expanded intra-regional trade and investment, which are expected to arise from successful regional economic integration.

Economic development refers to the long-term process through which an economy improves not only its level of income and production but also the overall social and economic well-being of its people. It involves sustained increases in productivity, employment opportunities, infrastructure, human capital, technological advancement, and access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and decent housing. Unlike economic growth, which primarily focuses on increases in national output or income, economic development has a broader concern with improving people's capabilities, reducing poverty and inequality, and creating conditions that enable individuals to live healthier, more productive, and more fulfilling lives (UNDP, 2024). It also requires structural transformation, whereby economies move toward more productive industries and adopt better technologies, skills, and business practices. The World Bank (2024) emphasizes that countries seeking sustained development must progress beyond simply increasing investment by improving the diffusion of technology and eventually promoting innovation, productivity, and efficient use of labour and capital. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2024) highlights the importance of human capital, productivity, and technological advancement in determining whether economies can sustain higher levels of income over time. Therefore, economic development can be understood as a comprehensive and continuous process aimed at transforming an economy and improving the quality of life of its population through economic, social, institutional, and technological progress (World Bank, 2024).

Regional integration and economic development are closely related because integration creates a larger and more efficient economic space in which countries can trade, invest, produce, and share resources. By reducing tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and restrictions on the movement of goods and services, regional integration expands market access and enables firms to benefit from economies of scale. It can also improve infrastructure, strengthen regional value chains, attract investment, and encourage the movement of skills and technology across national borders. In Africa, for example, the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is expected to promote intra-African trade, economic diversification, manufacturing, employment, and investment, thereby contributing to broader economic development (UNECA, 2020). Similarly, the World Bank (2021) emphasizes that stronger regional connectivity through transport, energy, and digital infrastructure can facilitate trade, integrate financial markets, and support regional value chains, all of which are important foundations for economic transformation.

The relationship is also reciprocal because economic development can strengthen a country's capacity to participate effectively in regional integration. As countries develop their infrastructure, institutions, productive capacity, human capital, and private sectors, they become better positioned to take advantage of regional markets and investment opportunities. Regional integration can therefore support development by creating opportunities for industrialization, job creation, entrepreneurship, and productivity growth, while development provides the productive capacity needed to benefit from integration. For instance, UNECA (2020) reported that deeper implementation of the AfCFTA in East Africa could generate substantial welfare gains, increase intra-African exports, and create more than two million jobs, demonstrating how regional market expansion can translate into development outcomes. The World Bank (2022) similarly identifies the

free movement of people and goods, economies of scale, cross-border infrastructure, and regional investment as important mechanisms through which integration can accelerate Africa's economic and social development.

The effective regional integration of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is hindered by persistent political instability, insecurity, and weak democratic governance among member states. Since 2021, military coups and unconstitutional changes of government in countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger have created serious divisions within the Community and weakened trust among member states. The situation became more severe when Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger announced their intention to withdraw from ECOWAS in January 2024, arguing that the organization had adopted measures that were detrimental to their interests; their withdrawal formally took effect on 29 January 2025 (ECOWAS, 2025). These political tensions have made it more difficult for ECOWAS to pursue common policies on peace, security, free movement, and economic cooperation. In addition, terrorism, violent extremism, and insecurity, particularly in the Sahel, disrupt cross-border trade, discourage investment, damage infrastructure, and restrict the movement of people and goods. ECOWAS itself identified recurrent conflicts, coups, terrorism, and deteriorating peace and security as major challenges to regional economic development and integration (ECOWAS, 2025).

Another major challenge is the persistence of economic, infrastructural, and trade barriers that limit the practical benefits of regional integration. Although ECOWAS has established mechanisms for trade liberalization and free movement, member states continue to face non-tariff barriers, cumbersome customs procedures, inadequate transport infrastructure, inconsistent implementation of regional protocols, and illicit charges along major trade corridors. The IMF (2021) notes that the absence of harmonized customs documentation, incomplete rules for certifying the origin of goods, and unofficial road-transit charges continue to restrict intra-regional trade. Furthermore, many West African economies remain heavily dependent on unprocessed agricultural and primary commodities, with limited regional production and supply chains, thereby reducing opportunities for industrial integration and value addition (IMF, 2022). The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger has added another layer of difficulty because it threatens established trade and movement arrangements and could increase the costs of economic exchange across the region (European Parliament, 2024). Therefore, without stronger infrastructure, harmonized trade regulations, effective implementation of ECOWAS protocols, and greater economic diversification, the Community will continue to face difficulties in achieving deep and sustainable regional integration.

With regards to the prevalence of military coups in West Africa since independence, there is fear that the establishment of military regimes via coups in these Sahel states might have contagious effects on other states, since most West African countries are not grounded with civil rule. From empirical evidence, Al Jazeera (2023) estimated a total number of 214 coups in Africa from 1950 to 2022. According to Chilaka & Peter (2022), between 1960 and 2022, about 200 military coups (both successful and failed) occurred in Africa, of which West Africa produced 104 (successful and failed) coups. Again, just between 2020 and 2025, there were seven coups in West Africa: two in Mali on August 19, 2020, and May 24, 2021, respectively; one in Guinea in 2021; two in Guinea-Bissau in 2022 and 2025; one in Burkina Faso in 2022; and one in Niger. There was also a failed coup in the Republic of Benin on December 7, 2025 (Maclean, 2022; Alder, 2025). Shockingly, a recent military coup occurred in Guinea-Bissau on November 26, 2025, and it was immediately suspended by the AU (McMakin & Sambu, 2025). The exit of the Alliance of Sahel States from ECOWAS, their reluctance to embrace transition to democratic governance, their offering of safe passage by neighbouring states to plotters of unsuccessful coup attempts may embolden other countries with similar sentiments, which may lead to further fragmentation in ECOWAS.

The theory that was applied in the study is functionalist theory by David Mitrany (1933). Functionalism is a theory that grew largely from the outbreak of World War II, which raised concerns that the state had become moribund as an institution for social organization (African Development Bank, 2019). Functionalism's approach railed against power-politics and state-centeredness in international relations. Its position is that power-politics and state-centeredness lead to conflicts and wars in the international system as states battle to achieve their varied and competing national interests while also defending and protecting their sovereignty. Functionalism is, therefore, a theory that seeks conditions that promote peace and prevent disharmony among states.

David Mitrany's (1943) a working peace system-an argument for the functional development of international organization is an influential work in the tradition of functionalism. The main premise of classical functionalism is that nationalist tendencies and regard for sovereignty threaten peace and security in

the international system. Functionalism affirms that war is a universal problem that affects people and, as such, the need for world peace is shared by everyone. This need then provides a general basis for international understanding and cooperation in functional spheres of activities which do not encroach on individual state sovereignty (Adelegan, 2019).

Applied to ECOWAS, functional theory helps explain how cooperation in trade liberalization, customs union, free movement, and shared institutions can drive broader integration and development in West Africa. The strengths of functional theory (over its weaknesses) is that it focuses on practical needs (e.g., trade, infrastructure, economic cooperation) rather than abstract political ideals. In ECOWAS, programs like the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and free movement of persons show functional cooperation with tangible economic and social benefits.

Statement of the Problem

Economic development remains one of the major objectives of every regional economic arrangement because it is expected to improve the standard of living of citizens through increased trade, industrialization, employment creation, poverty reduction, and sustainable economic growth (Iwegbu et al, 2022). The establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was driven by the vision of promoting regional integration among member states through the removal of trade barriers, free movement of persons and goods, harmonization of economic policies, and greater economic cooperation. Despite these efforts, it appears that the level of economic development across many ECOWAS member states has remained uneven between 2020 and 2025. While some countries have experienced moderate economic growth, others continue to struggle with low industrial productivity, high unemployment, poor infrastructure, weak institutions, insecurity, and limited intra-regional trade, all of which may have reduced the expected benefits of regional integration (Kabari, 2021).

Empirical evidence presents mixed findings regarding the relationship between regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS. Obasaju et al. (2020) found that regional economic integration did not significantly improve the economic upgrading of ECOWAS countries in global value chains, suggesting that integration alone may not be sufficient to stimulate broad-based economic development without complementary domestic reforms. Similarly, a study on trade openness and economic growth in ECOWAS revealed that although trade openness showed a positive relationship with economic growth, the relationship was statistically insignificant, indicating that increased regional trade has not automatically translated into meaningful economic transformation within the region (Garuba & Sangoleye, 2022).

Iwegbu et al. (2022) reported that regional financial integration contributes to industrial sector growth only when supported by strong institutional quality. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of regional integration depends not only on economic policies but also on governance, regulatory efficiency, and institutional capacity. Likewise, Yeboah and Adamec (2025) found that investment and trade positively influence economic performance among ECOWAS member states; however, the magnitude of these benefits differs considerably across countries because of variations in investment climate, infrastructure, and policy implementation. It therefore appears that the expected developmental gains from regional integration are not equally distributed among ECOWAS member states.

Between 2020 and 2025, ECOWAS has also faced several political and economic challenges, including insecurity, military coups, border closures, inflationary pressures, and the withdrawal of some member states from the regional bloc. These developments may have weakened regional cooperation and slowed progress toward deeper economic integration (Ojo, 2020).

Consequently, the implementation of key integration initiatives such as the common market, monetary integration, and trade liberalization appears to have been affected, thereby limiting their contribution to economic development across the region (Yaya et al, 2019). Recent assessments indicate that these political disruptions continue to pose significant risks to regional economic cooperation and long-term development objectives.

Although several studies have examined regional integration within ECOWAS, many focused on specific dimensions such as trade openness, financial integration, or industrial performance, only few examined the extent to which regional integration has influenced overall economic development during the period 2020–2025. This creates a knowledge gap that requires further investigation. Therefore, this study examined the relationship between regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS during the period 2020–2025, with a view to determining whether the integration policies implemented by the regional bloc have significantly contributed to the economic development of its member states.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined the relationship between regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. Examine the relationship between regional integration and economic development.
2. Identify the challenges hindering effective regional integration within the ECOWAS framework.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the relationship between regional integration and economic development in the ECOWAS?
2. What are the challenges hindering effective regional integration within the ECOWAS framework?

METHODOLOGY

Investigating regional integration and economic development within the ECOWAS area, the study adopted descriptive approach. This study used secondary sources of data collecting technique. The various sources of secondary data that were employed in this study are: official reports from regional institutions, government publications and national statistics, international and multilateral organization datasets, academic and scholarly literature, think-tank and research organization reports and news media and industry reports. Content analysis was the method of data analysis. The study used the content analysis approach because the qualitative character of this study on regional integration inside the ECOWAS, focusing on the systematic study and interpretation of several communication formats, spanning texts, images, and multimedia material, content analysis stands as both a qualitative and quantitative research technique (Nwankwo, 2021).

RESULTS

Regional Integration and Economic Development in ECOWAS

Analyzing the patterns of economic development in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), helps one to see how regional integration procedures potentially affect economic directions. From the ECOWAS unique historical, political, and socioeconomic context, we observe instances of how regional integration influences economic progress.

Table 1 Trade Volume within ECOWAS vs. External Trade Volume

Country	Year	Trade Volume SMS	Trade Volume (SM)	Trade Growth Rate (%)	Trade Growth Rate (%)
Nigeria	2022	1,560	85,300	-	-
	2023	2,800	70,500	79.5%	-17.3%
	2024	*3,750*	65.200	33.9%	*-7.5%*
	2025	4,300	*78,450*	14.7%	20.3%
Ghana	2022	*450*	12,700	-	-
	2023	720	9,600	60.0%	-24.4%
	2024	910	11,300	26.4%	17.7%
	2025	1,050	14,200	15.4%	25.7%
Côte D'ivoire	2022	630	10,200	-	-
	2023	900	8,900	42.9%	-12.7%
	2024	1,150	10,750	27.8%	20.8%
	2025	1,370	12,500	19.1%	16.3%
Senegal	2022	320	7,000	-	-
	2023	480	6,200	50.0%	-11.4%
	2024	600	7,800	25.0%	25.8%
	2025	700	9,100	16.7%	16.7%

Source: UNCTAD, 2025; Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2025).

Table 1 reveals a consistent upward trend in intra-ECOWAS trade among Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal from 2022 to 2025, indicating strengthening regional economic integration. Nigeria's regional trade increased significantly from 1,560 in 2022 to 4,300 in 2025, despite fluctuations in external trade, which declined in 2023 and 2024 before rebounding in 2025. A similar pattern is evident in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal, where intra-regional trade expanded steadily while external trade experienced temporary contractions before recovery. The implication of these trends is that ECOWAS member states are increasingly deepening regional trade cooperation, possibly due to trade liberalization policies, improved regional infrastructure, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework. The temporary

decline in external trade between 2023 and 2024 suggests vulnerability to global economic shocks, fluctuating commodity prices, or global supply chain disruptions. The temporary decline in external trade between 2023 and 2024 was primarily caused by a combination of global economic slowdown, reduced demand, currency fluctuations, and disruptions in international supply chains (World Trade Organization, 2024). However, the sustained growth in intra-ECOWAS trade demonstrates the region's growing resilience and gradual diversification of trade partnerships within West Africa. Overall, the data imply that strengthening intra-regional trade can reduce overdependence on external markets, enhance economic stability, promote regional industrialization, and foster sustainable economic development within ECOWAS.

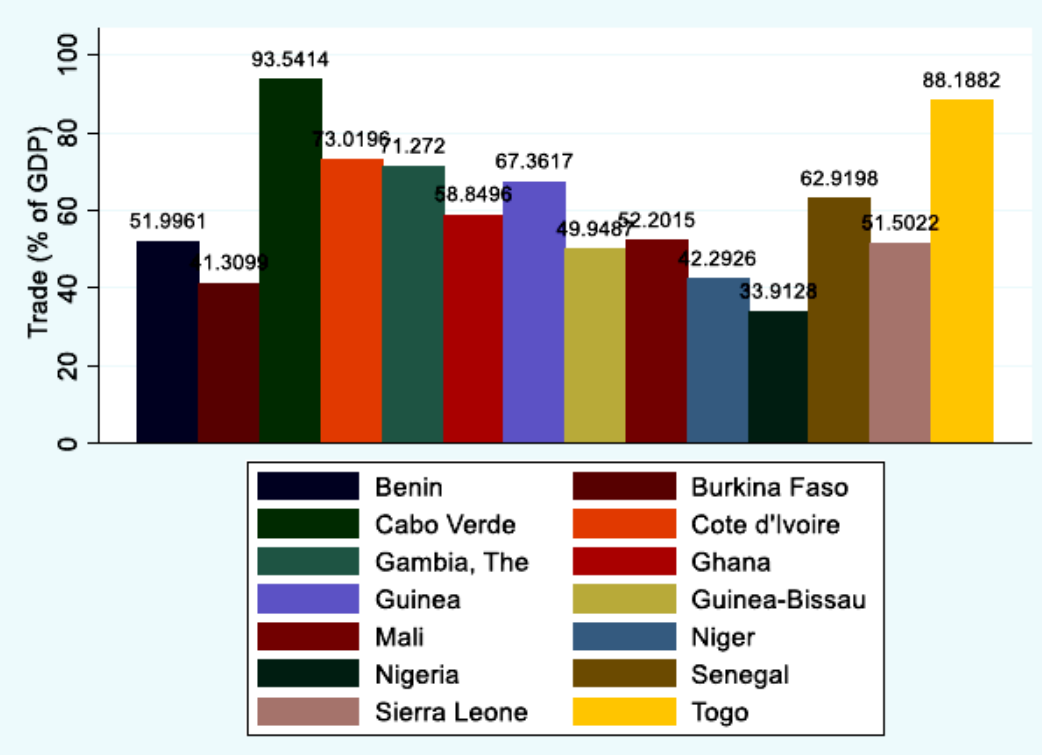

Figure 1: Average Trade Openness in the ECOWAS over 2020-2025
Source: Author, World Bank's WDI

In terms of FDI inflow in the percentage of GDP, we can say that Cabo Verde is the most attractive that recorded 4.170 percent of GDP followed by Ghana with 2.689 percent and the least attractive is Benin with only 0.342 percent.

The challenges hindering effective regional integration within the ECOWAS framework.
One of the most significant obstacles to integration has been the persistent political instability across multiple ECOWAS member states. Over the period 2020–2025, the region witnessed a wave of military coups and unconstitutional changes of government in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger (among others), undermining democratic governance and regional cooperation norms. These developments have strained intra-regional political cohesion and weakened confidence in collective governance frameworks. In some cases, ECOWAS's attempt to enforce democratic norms has deepened tensions, culminating in the formal withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the bloc in early 2025, which represents a serious setback to political and economic unity within West Africa (Raji, 2025).

Table 2: West African Countries and their GDP per Capita in 2023

S/N	Country	GDP Per Capita (USD)
1	Benin	$3,767
2	Burkina Faso	$2,461
3	Cape Verde (Cabo Verde)	$7,740
4	Ivory Coast (Côte dIvoire)	$5,939
5	The Gambia	$2,433
6	Ghana	$6,500
7	Guinea	$2,878
8	Guinea-Bissau	$2,057
9	Liberia	$1,552
10	Mali	$2,447
11	Mauritania	$2,337
12	Niger	$1,309
13	Nigeria	$5,459
14	Senegal	$3,768
15	Sierra Leone	$1,816
16	Togo	$2,380

Source: (World Bank, 2023)

Table 2 shows economic inequality and poverty in the GDP per capita numbers in West Africa, covering several nations, offers a basic knowledge of the socioeconomic processes in the region. Sadly, West Africa-a region distinguished by its immense cultural diversity and significant natural wealth-suffers with extreme economic inequality (Moyo, 2024). The GDP per capita data serves as a mirror reflecting these clear differences in obvious terms. For instance, countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the numbers are much lower, contrast countries like Cape Verde and Ghana, which have somewhat greater GDP per capita. This disparity reflects more significant, systematic economic inequalities resulting from historical, political, and geographical impacts rather than merely quantitative ones (Arnoak, 2023). These disparities have their roots in several very important factors. First of all, the colonial past has been significantly shaped the economic systems of these nations (Osadola, 2023). The attempt to establish trustworthy political institutions after independence has had various consequences for economic development in different nations in the region. Moreover, the distribution and management of natural resources are of great relevance. While nations like Mali and Niger mostly rely on agriculture, nations like Nigeria, with great oil resources, have different economic challenges and opportunities (Avom, 2024).

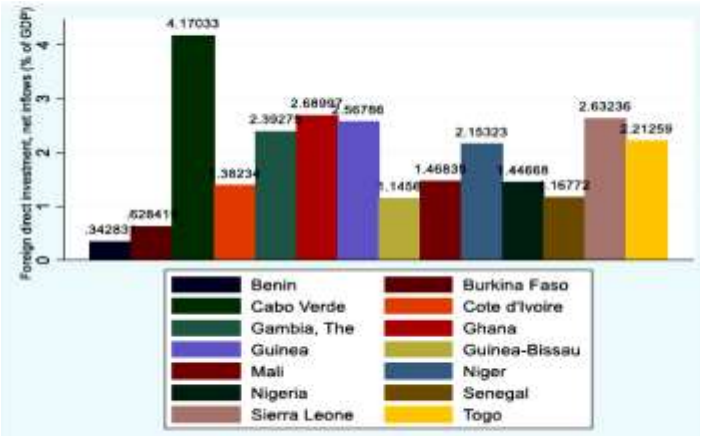

Figure 2: Average Net Inflow FDI in the Percentage of GDP in the ECOWAS over 2020-2025
Source: Author, World Bank's WDI

Considering the average growth rate of per capita GDP, Cabo Verde is the most performant with an averagely 4.674 percent annually followed by Burkina Faso with 2.137 percent per year and the last is Niger with -0.255 percent average GDP per capita growth. Niger had an average negative growth rate probably due to the instability in the region.

Still, it is important to understand that lower poverty rates do not always follow from a higher GDP per capita. There exist economic disparities within countries whereby a few number of people hold a great amount of the riches while most others live in poverty. Further aggravating this problem are aspects of corruption, ineffective administration, and insufficient financing for human capital development. Nyiawung (2023) assert that these differences go beyond simple financial ones and result in social and political inequities, hence increasing dissatisfaction and instability. Moreover, it is hard to overlook the influence of outside elements in producing these fluctuations. Since West African counties largely depends on one product for export revenue, global market volatility-especially in commodities-highly affects its economy. Dependency of this sort exposes businesses to changes in the international economy (Frankema, 2023). For an economy as reliant on oil as Nigeria's is, a decline in oil prices might have catastrophic consequences. Less government revenue brought about by this may lead to more borrowing, inflation, and eventually more poverty rates. The study of ECOWAS in terms of economic integration and its impact on growth and stability stresses the opportunity for economic development via integration remains essentially untapped, especially with better concerted efforts to fix structural challenges and encourage economic diversification.

Table 3: The Trend of Military Coup and Change of Government in West Africa

S/N	COUNTRY	COUP PLOTER	YEAR	OUSTEAD LEADER	FREQUENCY	CUM FREQ.
1	NIGERIA	MAJ.CHUKWUMA, NZEOGWU	JAN 15, 1966	PRESID. NNAMDI AZIKIWE	6	6
	NIGERIA	GEN. MURITALA MUHAMED	JUL 20, 1966	GEN. AGUIYI IRONSI		
	NIGERIA	LT. COL. BUKA SUKA DIMKA	JUL 29, 1975	GEN. MURITALA MUHAMED		
	NIGERIA	MAJ.GEN. MUHAMMADU BUHARI.	DEC.31, 1983	PRESID. SHEHU SHAGARI		
	NIGERIA	GEN. BADEMOSI, BABANGIDA	AUG, 27, 1985	MAJ.GEN. MUHAMMADU, BUHARI.		
	NIGERIA	GEN. SANI ABACHA	NOV. 17.1993	TRANSITIONAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT		
2	GHANNA	COL. EMMAUEL, KWASI KOTOKA.	FEB, 24, 1966	PRESID. EDWARD, NKRUMA.	2	8
	GHANNA	COL. IGNATIUS, KUTU ACHEAMPONG	JAN. 15, 1972	PRESID, EDWARD, AKUFO- ADDO		
3	GUINEA-BISSAU	JOAO BERNARDO VIEIRA	NOV.14 1980	PRESID. LUIS CABRAL	2	10
	GUINEA-BISSAU	GEN. VERISSIMO, CORREIA SEADRA	SEPT. 14. 2003	PRESID. KUMBA, LALA		
4	SIERRA LEONE	SIAKA STEVENS	MAR. 21. 1937	PRESID. ALBERT MARGAI	2	12
	SIERRA LEONE	CAPT. VALENTINE STRASSER	APR.29 1092	PRESID. JOSEPH SAIDU MOMO		
5	LIBERIA	MSTR. SGT. SAMUEL DOE	APR.12 1980	PRESIDO.WILLIAM. R. TOLBERT JR.	2	14
	LIBERIA	CHARLES, TAYLOR	AUG. 9, 1990	PRESID. SAMUEL, DOE		
6	BURKINA FASO	COL. ZERBO	NOV. 29, 1980	PRESID, SAYE, ZERBO.	3	17
	BURKINA FASO	CAPT. THOMAS, SANKARA. TRAOR.	OCT.15.1997	PRESID. JEAN BAPTISTE CUEDRAOGO		
	BURKINA FASO	CAPT. IBRAHIM. TRAORE	SEPT. 30 2022	PAUL- HENRI SANDAOGO DAMIEBA		
7	MALI	LT. COL. AMAADOU TAUMAANI TAURE	MAR. 26 1991	PRESID MOUSSA TRAORE	3	20
	MALI	CAPT. AMADOU, HAYA SANOGO	MAR, 22 2012	PRESID. AMADOU TOUMANI TOURE		
	MALI	COL. ASSIMI,	AUG. 18.	PRESID. IBRAHIM		

		GOITA	2020	DOUBACAAR KEITA		
8	MAURITANIA	COL. MUSTAFA, OULD SALEX	JUL, 10, 1976	PRESID. MOKTAR OYLD DADDA	2	22

Source: African Leadership Magazine (2022)

	MAURITANIA	ELY OULD MOHAMMED VALL	AUG. 06, 2005.	PRESID. MAAOUYA OULD SID'AHMED TAYA		
9	IVORY COAST	ROBERT GUEI	DEC. 24, 1999	PRESID. HENRI KONAN BEDIE	2	24
	IVORY COAST	DISSIDENT SOLDIERS (REBEL FORCES)	SEPT. 19, 2002.	PRESID. LAURENT GBAGBO		
10	GUINEA	COL. LANSANA CONTE.	APR. 3, 1984	PRESID. AHMED SEKOU TOURE	2	26
	GUINEA	MOUSSA DADIS CAMARA	DEC. 23, 2008.	PRESID. LANSANA CONTE		
11	NIGER	SEYNI KOUNTCHE	APR. 15, 1974	PRESID. HAMANI DIORI	3	29
	NIGER	COL. IBRAHIM BARE MAINASSARA	JAN. 27, 1996.	TRANSITIONAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT		
	NIGER	GEN. SALIFOU MODY	JUL. 27, 2023.	PRESID. MOHAMMED BAZOUM.		

Source: African Leadership Magazine (2023)

Military coup in West Africa can be traced to post independence experience of 1966, when Nigerian military took over democratically elected government. This opened the door for military rule and the accompanying crisis that usually snowballed into civil war.

The table below illustrates the trend of military coup in the West African sub-region with Nigeria ranking highest. From the trend, Eleven out of Fifteen West African countries have had experiences of military coup. From independence in 1960 to date, the region has witnessed a total of Twenty-nine successful military coup, averaging one coup in two years.

This military disruption of democratic governance offers ephemeral stability as political uncertainty dissuades foreign investment, impedes economic growth, exacerbates poverty and undermine economic development in the region.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Relationship between Regional Integration and Economic Development in West Africa

The findings reveal that the relationship between regional integration and economic development in ECOWAS between 2020 and 2025 is positive but uneven and constrained. Regional integration initiatives during the period contributed to economic development outcomes such as improved trade facilitation, infrastructure cooperation, labor mobility, and policy coordination. However, the magnitude of these benefits varied significantly across member states and sectors, largely due to institutional weaknesses, political instability, and structural economic similarities (Ouazzani, 2025).

The Challenges Hindering Effective Regional Integration within the ECOWAS Framework

One of the most significant obstacles to integration has been the persistent political instability across multiple ECOWAS member states. Over the period 2020–2025, the region witnessed a wave of military

coups and unconstitutional changes of government in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger (among others), undermining democratic governance and regional cooperation norms. These developments have strained intra-regional political cohesion and weakened confidence in collective governance frameworks. In some cases, ECOWAS's attempt to enforce democratic norms has deepened tensions, culminating in the formal withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the bloc in early 2025, which represents a serious setback to political and economic unity within West Africa (Raji, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that regional integration within ECOWAS has a significant potential to promote economic development through increased intra-regional trade, investment, market expansion, infrastructure development, and greater economic cooperation among member states. However, the extent to which these benefits are realized between 2020 and 2025 has been constrained by persistent challenges, including political instability, insecurity, weak implementation of regional protocols, inadequate infrastructure, trade barriers, economic disparities among member states, and limited political commitment. These challenges have weakened the effectiveness of ECOWAS integration efforts and limited their contribution to sustainable economic development. Therefore, strengthening political will, improving institutional capacity, removing trade and mobility barriers, and addressing security and infrastructural deficits are essential for ensuring that regional integration becomes a more effective driver of economic development within the ECOWAS framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made for implementation.

1. ECOWAS should strengthen its institutional capacity and enforcement mechanisms. While numerous protocols and agreements exist, weak implementation remains a major challenge. ECOWAS should enhance the autonomy and authority of its supranational institutions, particularly in areas of trade facilitation, free movement of persons, and macroeconomic coordination.
2. ECOWAS should intensify efforts toward harmonization of economic and trade policies. Differences in tariff structures, customs procedures, and regulatory standards continue to impede intra-regional trade. ECOWAS should accelerate the full implementation of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) by simplifying certification procedures and addressing non-tariff barriers at border posts.

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