Terrorism: An Impediment To Socio-Economic Integration In Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS)

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ABSTRACT
Nations are seeking avenues to play bigger role in the global economy and the world at large. One of such quests led to the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 by a – 15 – member nation to promote socio-economic integration among member countries. As a result, this body has encountered numerous challenges in its quest to move West African countries to the desired direction. One of such challenges which reared its ugly head not too long ago is terrorism. The emergence of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (Mujoo), the Niger Delta Avengers, Ansar – Dine, Boko Haram and Juma'ata Ansarul Muslimina (Ansaru) and their activities within and around West Africa have become a matter of serious concern to governments and citizens of the region as their activities, being violent in nature, had negatively affected the flow of commerce and socio-economic interaction among Member States. This, of course has been identified by ECOWAS leaders as a major threat to the integration effort of the body. To this end, several regional mechanisms and instruments for enhancing security, development, good governance and counter terrorism activities were adopted by the body to stem the tide of crime and terrorism in the region. Among the security tightening measures to forestall terrorism and other forms of insecurity within the region include effective police to police co-operation in borderless communities, enhancement of police co-operation with the international police organization (INTERPOL), soliciting some intelligence agencies of the western world, as well as regional cooperation among security and intelligence agencies against terrorism. These measures, it is believed, would go a long way to check-mating the activities of terrorist groups and criminal gangs in the region, thereby enhancing and promoting the socio-economic interaction among member states. This paper work concludes that regional integration in ECOWAS is necessary if West African countries must play crucial role in the global economy and occupy a crucial position among the committee of nations. The paper recommends among others that ECOWAS as a body must re-strategize and enhance its security and intelligence apparatus for more proactive response to all forms of security threats and terrorism.

Key Words: Terrorism; Impediments; Socio-Economic Integration; ECOWAS

INTRODUCTION

The 20th Century witnessed the formation of regional blocks across the globe some of which include the Association of South East Asian States (ASEAN), the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the European Union (EU), The Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU), the Central American Common Market (CACM), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), The Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) and numerous others.

In Africa, the period between 1960 and 1980 witnessed the emergence of major regional associations that were aimed at pushing forward economic and social integration among concerned players in the continent. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example was one of such regional bodies. ECOWAS was established in May 1975 by a – 15 – member-nation to promote integration in all fields of economic activity among member-states. Since its establishment in 1975, ECOWAS has moved slowly and steadily toward achieving its ultimate goals with the establishment of notable institutions such as the ECOWAS Commission, the ECOWAS Parliament, the ECOWAS Court of Justice and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development.

However, the emergence of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the movement for unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), the Nigeria Delta Avengers, Ansar-Dine, Boko Haram and Jama'atu Ansarul Musilimina (Ansaru) and their activities within and around the ECOWAS sub-region have become a matter of serious concern to governments and citizens of ECOWAS. Of all the groups listed above, the Boko Haram remains the most dreadful and fearful terrorist group within the ECOWAS region considering its mode and scope of operation. According to Onouha and Ezirim (2014), the growing audacity of the AQIM, JUJAO and Boko Haram terrorist groups is one of the major developments that have made West Africa a region of growing terror concern which could have serious implication for international trade and investment in the region. The activities of these groups could dislodge regional trade and movement of people, goods and services within and across the West African region thereby reducing economic and social interaction among ECOWAS states. This could have serious consequences on its regional integration efforts.

Over the past decades, militants and terrorist groups have been operating in the West African sub region and this development was not taken seriously until few years after the 9/11 attacks in the United States (Onouha and Ezirim). For instance, an Algerian based militant group known as the Salfist group for preaching and combat first set its foot in northern Mali in 2003 and began to forge ties with the local population through intermarriage and trade. These developments according to Lateef, Ireti and Charles (2014) led to the emergence of insurgents and terrorists groups within ECOWAS.

OVERVIEW OF ECOWAS

ECOWAS was established by the treaty of Lagos in May 1975. Membership of ECOWAS cut across West African countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Coted'Ivorre, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Lone, Togo and Cape Verde, Mauritania which decided to withdraw to join the Arab Maghreb Union in 2000 has however recently sought to rejoin the union.

The region, being a highly complex one, is characterized by affluence and affliction. The region's states vary in territorial size, colonial history, economic strength, internal cohesion, external linkages, population size, level of development, stages of state building, nature of resource endowment, among others. The states are confronted with different levels of insecurity, governance and development challenges which have made progress and prosperity

looked unachievable (Halima, 2013). Having gained political independence from the colonial masters much earlier than other African countries, ECOWAS states were expected to spearhead the economic and political development of the continent. However, the reverse is the case as the states have failed to achieve a high degree of political and economic stability due to corruption, weak or failed governance and institutions as well as intra and interstate conflicts and porous borders, among others.

ECOWAS FREE MOVEMENT PROTOCOL

ECOWAS was established for the purpose of economic integration among member nations in addition to promoting the co-operation and development of economic, social and cultural activities in order to improve the standard of living of the citizens. The free movement protocol was enacted to accelerate these developments between 1985 and 1990 (Opanike and Aduloju, 2015).

The ECOWAS protocol on free movement of people, goods and services ensures free mobility and interaction among citizens. However, prior to the enactment of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement, people moved from one location to another with little regards for the artificial borders created by the colonial masters. Cross-border movement among tribes continued to be seen as not international, but part of their own internal movement as members of the same families are found in two different countries. However, cross border movement became increasingly difficult and hampered by states custom laws and requirements. The free movement protocol was borne to liberate trans-border mobility to accelerate regional trade and engender regional integration.

Regional Integration, which could be realized through the promotion of trade, mobility of labour and other factors of production was central to ECOWAS formation and exemplified what the community was all about right from inception (Yakubu, 1984). The free movement protocol therefore, seeks to remove every impediments or barriers to trade movement. And, for any regional arrangement to eventually transform to economic union, it must have gone through stages of integration which include Free Trade Area, Customs Union, Common Market, among others. Therefore, free movement of people, goods and services is crucial to the attainment of economic integration in ECOWAS. However, recent threats posed by criminal elements and terrorist groups within and outside region have forced experts to doubt the possibility of the realization of full regional integration in ECOWAS in the nearest future (Opanike and Aduloju, 2015).

OVERVIEW OF THREATS TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN ECOWAS

Today, ECOWAS is characterized with intra and inter states conflicts and crimes, but also linked with the activities of terrorist groups within and outside the region. Threats like drug and human trafficking, illegal economic activities and piracy, oil bunkering and arms trafficking had attained worrisome dimension. However, of more worrisome, are the activities of terrorist groups according to Onuoha and Ezirim (2014) which has posed serious threats to the regional integration of ECOWAS like never before. Terrorism in West Africa has emerged as a formidable threat to human and regional security and has now been given a singular attention in terms of national, regional and international engagement. This development cannot be dissociated from the role A-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Islamic state (ISIL) with operational base in the Middle East, has played in the recent conflict in Mali as well as the ongoing conflicts in Niger, Chad, Cameroun and Nigeria to dislodge the Boko Haram terrorists, including some pockets of violence recorded in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Senegal Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has also contributed in energizing Boko Haram, Angar Dine,

Ansaru and other sleeper calls dotting the ECOWAS region to conduct operations in countries like Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Senegal. Some of these groups were further energized following the emergence of ISIL in the Middle East. However, the most pronounced of all the groups which activities had caused the most noticeable damages in terms of the destruction of lives and properties is the Boko Haram group (The Nation Newspaper, 2014). Their activities have been constituting the greatest threat to economic integration in ECOWAS states as its operation cuts across Chad, Cameroun, Niger, Nigeria and possibly Benin Republic and has expanded to Senegal and Mauritania. According to Opanike and Aduloju (2015), the security of lives and properties in ECOWAS is guaranteed as weapons are readily available as a result of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons associated with existing conflicts within and outside the region. Additionally, the free movement protocol which was meant to enhance economic activities has further availed criminal elements the opportunity to perpetuate nefarious activities such as armed robbery, sea piracy, illegal arms shipment and terrorism.

In North Eastern Nigeria which is the operational base of Boko Haram, only two out of the thirteen functional border stations officially recognized as linking points between Nigeria and her neighbouring West African countries are functional (Angbalaga, 2017). This has drastically reduced the economic and Socio-Cultural interaction between Nigeria and her neighbouring countries.

Allison (2016) is of the view that Boko Haram insurgency may not be Nigeria's biggest threat. The activities of Avengers, a ruthless militant group operating in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria were noted. This group which was largely unknown or unheard of, came into prominence with the emergence of the Buhari's administration. Though, there were pockets of insurgency in the Niger Delta which the Yar'Adua' and Jonathan's administrations were able to manage, the activities of Avengers and other criminal elements, which include piracy, had drastically reduced shipping activities in the Niger Delta of Nigeria; an area originally known as a shipping and maritime hub. To Allison (2016), this has further delinked the region and the country from the other parts of West Africa and the world at large.

Burkina Faso, a land locked nation in West Africa has suffered several terrorist attacks. The member of the Sahel nations first experience a major terrorist attack in January 2016 when a popular hospitality centre was attacked in central Ouagadougou, in which thirty people (both locals and foreigners) were killed. There had also been several attacks on economic border posts with Mali, Niger and Cote d'ivoire including attack in Soum Province on 27th February, 2017. These persistent attacks had seriously slow down economic and social dealings between Burknabes and their neighbouring countries (The U.K. Independent, 2017).

Other activities of terrorists in Burkina Faso include kidnapping for ransom and illegal arm dealings. Kidnapping foreigners and high network business men for ransom has become a common occurrence, particularly since the March 2017 merger of AQIM Sahel, Ansar-al Dine and Al-Murabitun into the new group, Mamaat Nasrat al-Islam wal muslimeen.

The threat to western interests, investment and economic activities remains real according to the UK guardian (2017). On 13th August 2017, 18 people (both locals and foreigners) were killed in a Turkish restaurant and a coalition of terrorist group known as Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal muslimeen was the prime suspect (the U.K. Guardian, 2017).

Elsewhere in Senegal, many Jihadists had openly identified with Boko Haram in Nigeria (Zenn and Abdou, 2016) to create their own "Senegal project." This is said to be the hand work of

Alioune Ndao whose affiliation and sympathy towards Boko Haram has been established. Following this and other developments which include the affiliation of Boko Haram to AQIM and ISIL, business men and foreigners particularly investors have been greatly concerned and worried. This has reduced the ease with which the country interacts with its neighbors as the country has stepped up efforts to regulate activities in its boarders particularly with that of Mali and Mauritanian (Zenn and Abdou, 2016).

As of 2006, the debate centered on whether terrorism was a real threat to regional integration in West Africa. As of today, the rising number of terrorist attacks, the multiplicity of active terror cells and networks and the growing links among these groups and those that operate outside the region over the years, have made terrorism a major threat to economic and social integration of the region.

Elsewhere in Niger, Mali and Mauritania, the situation is not better as AQIM and other affiliated sleeper cells have carried out series of kidnappings and murder of westerners, business men, aid workers and the military (Onouha and Ezirim, 2014). In July 2011, AQIM attacked a military based in Bassiknou, near Nema, in Southern Mauritania. AQIM's ties with Mali militants have equally emboldened such groups to mount audacious attacks. Mali, which slipped into instability following the March 2012 coup detat that created a power vocuum in the country has not been able to fully overcome and over power the terrorist groups which seized on the opportunity provided to take control of nearly two-thirds of the country. The Taureg National Movement for the liberation of Azawad in collaboration with Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO, are actively involved in the Malian crisis making some part of the country, particularly Northern Mali Ungovernable. On April 5, 2012, seven Algerian diplomats were abducted in Goa. The timely intervention of the French military forced the terrorist to retreat into the mountainous region of northern Mali and the adoption of guerrilla style of attacks including suicide bombings. For instance, between February and May 2013, Mali experienced twelve suicide attacks disorganizing business and social interests in the country (Opanike and Aduloju, 2015). AQIM and MUJAO have also launched attacks in neighbouring countries as demonstrated by the twin suicide attacks on May 23, 2013 in Niger in which over 26 Nigerian were killed.

CONCEPTUALIZING TERRORISM

The concept of terrorism is as controversial as the word. Terrorism was not a baby of the cold war neither did it emanate from the horrors of September 9/11 attack. According to Memar and Solomon (2014) the term terrorism entered the English language at the time of the 1789 French Revolution. At that historical juncture, the term was used to refer to the revolution when Jacobins, a radical group who controlled the government, executed thousands of people they considered as threat to the revolution at the guillotine. Since then, the term has been used to refer to different forms of political violence by different actors. However, the modern use of the word originated in the mid twentieth century as a tool of ethnic and religious violence to serve political end, such as liberation from alien occupying group or to exact righteous vengeance against a group labeled as threat or enemy (Ewi and Uyo 2016).

There have been several arguments about who is actually a terrorist. That is to say what constitutes a terrorist for one group may be freedom fighter for the other. Some individuals who have been accused of committing acts of terrorism in the past by western governments or media were actually involved in liberation struggle. Good examples are of Nelson Mandela and Menachem Begin.

The United Nations (2004) however, described terrorism as any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to soft targets such as civilians or non combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or the authorities to abstain from doing an act. Others define it as a political violence designed to psychologically disorganize the people through attacks on soft and non combatant targets. The purpose of terrorism is to exploit the media to achieve maximum attainable publicity in order to influence the targeted audience(s) and achieve short, medium and long term goals (Mamar and Solomon, 2014). Irrespective of how worldwide terrorism is, it involves the deliberate harming or killing of innocent people to score a cheap point and this is what distinguishes it from other violence.

THE PROSPECT FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND COUNTER TERRORISM IN ECOWAS

ECOWAS has taken series of steps towards regional integration and future unification of the region. Institutions have been established and enabling laws enacted to enable the body function as a quasi united body. Such institutions include the ECOWAS commission, the community parliament, the community court of justice, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), among others.

Regional integration is an essential instrument for faster collective growth and prosperity and has been a central focus in ECOWAS. There is a growing conviction in ECOWAS that the future of each national economy lies with regional integration. Some states have therefore set up the ministry of regional integration and other national institutions to fastrack interaction with the body. The readiness of the body towards integration is further displayed by the creation and adoption of common passports among some member states, thereby, enabling the free movement of citizens across national borders. The need for a common currency has always been stressed. This has led to the establishment of "ECO" which is tradable in the foreign exchange markets across ECOWAS states and beyond.

The ECOWAS protocol on free movement has further demonstrated the willingness of the body to work towards economic and social integration. This development has allowed goods and citizens to move without hindrance from one place to another, in addition to facilitating economic growth and development of member state. ECOWAS possesses a rich resource base in terms of agricultural resources, oil and gas and other mineral resources most of which are largely untapped. The greater exploitation of these resources would facilitate regional integration and growth through infrastructural development. Good examples are the West African gas pipeline project, Globacom investment in communication and ICT infrastructure which has gone a long way to promote investment banking and ICT activities within the region.

SUPPRESSING TERRORISM

The need to address terrorism and security challenges has inspired the adoption of several regional mechanisms and instruments for enhancing security, development, good governance and counter terrorism activities in the region. Some of the instruments put in place to collectively suppress the challenges of insecurity and terrorism include the Mutual Assistance in Defense (1981); the Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace Keeping and Security (1991); the ECOWAS Convention and small Arms and light weapons, Ammunition (2006), and recently, the Political Declaration and common position against terrorism which provides for regional counter terrorism strategy and implementation plan to help member states combat terrorism among others. Severally, ECOWAS defense chiefs have met to digress on possible ways of combating the threat of terrorism in the region and the discussion focusing on the prevention of terrorism by identifying and deterring possible key elements inducing terror activities; dealing with occurred terrorism acts to prevent escalation including funding, training, recruiting; repairing damages done through the reconstruction of

affected areas in order to bring back trust, hope and further assistance and protection (Olakunle, 2014). This was demonstrated when Nigerian alpha jets conducted series of missions in Mali at the peak of the war on terror in that country. Similarly Nigeria and other West African States committed ground forces to the war.

There are a lot of best practices in other parts of the world which could be analyzed with a view to accepting them as part of security tightening measures to forestall terrorism and all forms of insecurity within the region. In particular, the region is to take concrete steps towards effective police-to-police co-operation with international institutions like the International Police Organization, (INTERPOL), which is believed to have a much longer history of breakthroughs in fighting and bursting crime syndicates. ECOWAS also needs to go a step further by seeking active collaboration between its forces and intelligence gathering units with that of the global community including that of the United States, Britain, France and Israel.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to examine the need for socio-economic integration among ECOWAS member-states in the West African sub-region. It was found that this laudable initiative has been impeded due to various acts of terrorism in the region. Today, nations are seeking avenues to play bigger role in the global economy and the world at large. They are therefore seeking and making strategic alliances all over the globe in order to achieve this goal. Regional integration is not only an instrument for fostering collective growth, prosperity and peaceful co existence; it also provides a platform for smaller nations to play bigger roles in the global economy. Regional integration in ECOWAS is therefore necessary, if West African countries must play a crucial role in the global economy and occupy a crucial position among the committee of nations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ECOWAS as a body must re-strategize and enhance its security and intelligence apparatus for proactive response to all forms of security threats and terrorism, if the socio-economic integration in the region must be advanced.
2. The region must make deliberate efforts to forgo Its colonial past and forge a common front by developing strong political will and commitment towards a successful integration.
3. The ECOWAS institutions must be assigned the powers to enact requisite laws, monitor and enforce them on regional priorities.
4. The average West African citizen must be educated on the efforts of the region towards integration. This is to ensure that the citizens key into the programmes and policies of their individual countries and ECOWAS at large to achieve regional integration for the betterment of all.

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