The Question of Number and Mode of Membership in Regional Integration: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Community of ECOWAS and ASEAN

(West African States “ECOWAS” and Association of South East Asian Nations “ASEAN”)

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Abstract: All the founding members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) attained independence between 1950s and 1960s. Both bodies started regional integration between 1967 and 1975 respectively. Today, ASEAN has recorded huge successes than ECOWAS in terms of performance in regionalism. Many scholars have attributed the differences in performances to various factors. This study aimed at assessing the question of number and mode of membership in both regional bodies to ascertain its influence in their performances in regional integration. The study adopted the descriptive-historical method of investigation. The study discovered that the ASEAN adopted club mode of membership which allowed them to screen would-be members and set conditions for them to satisfy before admission. By so doing, only member-states who are serious and actually desirous of integration are allowed to become members. On the other hand, ECOWAS adopted convoy mode of membership which allowed them to admit all the members at the same time. The study further noted that starting with smaller number of members and gradually admitting new members, creates less managerial problems than starting with higher number of members. The study recommended, among other issues, that ECOWAS should establish direct relationship with selected group of its members based on comparative economic advantage and with industrialized nations of the West as well as Asia to facilitate quick industrialization of the West African Sub-Region.

Keywords: Regional integration, economic development, Pan-Africanism, ECOWAS & ASEAN.
1. Introduction

Since the twentieth century, nations of the world have tried to sought out and create conducive environment which could bring about a rapid development. In this quest, they have sought to create regional economic groupings to serve as a spring boards to their economic development. This desire and seal saw the proliferation of all sorts of regional economic groups in the world. Gavin (1986) has pointed out European Union (EU) in Europe, Associations of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia Pacific Economic Corporation (APEC) in Asia, the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in America, The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa, The Latin America Integration Association (LAIA) in Latin America, The Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU) in the Middle East, among others.

These regional economic groupings have in one way or the other performed well and this explains why writings and studies in these areas have been expansive and intensive. Writing about ECOWAS for example, a lot of scholars have tried to explain that ECOWAS has not made giant strides in terms of the trajectory economic development. Ibanga (2006) blames the ECOWAS debacle from the over ambitious goals the organisation set out for itself in the beginning. Schelling (1997) cites the heterogeneity among regional members as the greatest obstacle to ECOWAS economic regional integration. Nnanna (2000) has also pointed out the Francophone-Anglophone divide as the greatest obstacle to the attainment of regional economic integration. However, Alaba (2006) and others have cited differences in currencies among member states of the West Africa sub-region and ECOWAS and military posture as obstacles to regional economic integration.

Of studies carried out so far, none has been able to look at ‘the question of number and mode of membership’ as possible obstacles to ECOWAS regional economic integration. This indicates the imperative of this study. While it is not subjected to a mono causal explanatory power, it draws its analysis from two powerful variables, - the question of number and mode of membership - as two most potent obstacles to ECOWAS economic regional integration. In doing so, one needed to make a comparative analysis with ASEAN. The justification for this trend lies in the fact that both ECOWAS and ASEAN were formed within the same decade (ECOWAS in 1975 and ASEAN in 1967). In terms of economic development, the nations of South East Asia were either on the same level or even more backward than states in the West African sub region.

Today, the nation of the South East Asia has made phenomenal progress in terms of regional economic development while those of the West Africa are still lagging. This, therefore, calls for interrogation as to why the nations of the South East have made such progress than ECOWAS using the question of number and the mode of membership.

2. Theoretical Framework

The adoption of a sound theoretical framework is imperative for any political science- oriented research, not because of the explanatory potency of theories, but because theories provide the functional guide that can throw light on the phenomenal issues being discussed. In this regard, this study is anchored on the Traditional K-group theory as popularized by Olson (1965). The theory posits that when enforcement is central to cooperation, as it most often is when there are complex rules and regulation that must be implemented and monitored, the more participants increase and enforcement problem and lowers the benefits of cooperation.

It therefore implies that for issues requiring enforcement, large organizations may be impractical, particularly if entry requirements are low as in convoys, leaving the organization with few enforcement options. Within the context of the theory, it possible to compare the number of countries that founded the ASEAN, the ECOWAS, the EU and others to determine whether that of the ECOWAS were not too many thereby creating managerial problems. It against this backdrop this this seeks to determine if the number of member countries within the organizations under study from inception were not too many to support integration.

3. The ASEAN and Integration Process in South East Asia

On 8 August 1967, five leaders namely, the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand- sat down together in the main hall of the department of foreign
affairs building in Bangkok, Thailand and signed a document. By virtue of that document, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born. The five Foreign Ministers who signed it were Adam Malik of Indonesia, Narciso R. Ramos of the Philippines, Tun Adul Razak of Malaysia, S. Rajaratnam of Singapore, and Thanat Khoman of Thailand. They would subsequently be hailed as the Founding Fathers of probably the most successful inter-governmental organization in the developing world today. And the document that they signed would be known as the ASEAN Declaration.

It was a short, simply-worded document containing just five articles. It declared the establishment of an Association for Regional Cooperation among the Countries of Southeast Asia to be known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and spelled out the aims and purposes of that Association. These aims and purposes were about cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational and other fields, and in the promotion of regional peace and stability through respect for justice and the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter. It stipulated that the Association would be open for participation by all States in the Southeast Asian region subscribing to its aims, principles and purposes. It proclaimed ASEAN as representing the collective will of the nations of Southeast Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom and prosperity.

In its early stage, ASEAN had five members from Southeast Asia, including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines (Fifield, 1979). Its membership increased with addition of Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar in between the 1980s and 1990s. Brunei entered ASEAN in 1984 following its independence from the British. During the Cold War, Indochina countries like Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos could not join ASEAN due to power competition and internal problems, such as civil war and internal conflict. ASEAN that had successfully settled a few regional problems had given confidence to Indochina countries to join ASEAN. After the end of Cold War in 1991, ASEAN’s membership increased through the participation of the communist countries of Indochina. Vietnam decided to join ASEAN on the 23 July 1995 and this entry consequently influenced other Indochina countries to join, Laos entered in 1997, followed by Myanmar and Cambodia in 1999 (Nathan, 1984).

ASEAN is not a military pact, but a regional organization with a target of establishing economic cooperation, politics, social and culture. Through ASEAN’s establishment, it prioritizes economic cooperation growth and development and social and cultural development in the countries of Southeast Asia. Apart from that, ASEAN tries to protect mutual interest and creating regional solidarity as well as promoting regional peace and stability. The ASEAN too aims to encourage peace and political stability founded by the principles of United Nations (UN), besides fostering cooperation and close relationship between nations and other organizations. Therefore, ASEAN members should comply with the rules and regulations when building regional ties and observe the UN charter. Furthermore, ASEAN aims to promote a more effective cooperation in the industrial and agriculture field, expand trade, increase transportation as well as the living standard in member countries. Moreover, to strengthen present regional ties, ASEAN encouraged a more effective cooperation in matters pertaining to economy, social, culture, technical, science and administration. Through the establishment of ASEAN, assistance in terms of training and research especially in education, professional, technical and administration can be channelled. Through ASEAN, a more effective cooperation in the sectors of agricultural, industry, trade expansion including study on society and regional culture can be developed. This cooperation aims to upgrade society’s standard of living and make this region a developed and competitive region.

The Association of South East Asia (the ASEAN) has been hailed as one of the more successful regional organizations in the developing world, credited for maintaining regional peace and stability in Southeast Asia for more than three decades (Kivinnaki, 2001). The fact that the ASEAN was established at all is remarkable given the highly charged relations among its five founding members during the 1960s. Not only were there disputes over inter-state borders, some governments were accused of aiding secessionist groups in neighbouring states. Some multi-speed integration may also have developed in Asia, with the “ASEAN-X” possibility embedded in the new 2007 Charter and the “X+2” approach that allows two member countries to integrate certain sectors before other members are ready to join them.
Smaller groups can enhance their cooperation even within large group settings, as demonstrated by the ASEAN’s use of so-called “multi-speed”. According to Stubb (1996), multi-speed is a mode of differentiated integration which admits to unattainable differences within the main integrative structure by allowing permanent or irreversible separation between a core of countries and lesser developed integrative units. Thus, multi-speed differentiates integration across space rather than time. It is a more permanent acceptance of the fact that some states do not wish to participate in certain objectives. It allows more stable separation between the hard core and periphery, permitting a core group of states to advance their cooperation without the rest. The term is most often used to describe differential integration within the EU. Examples include Airbus, the European Operational Rapid Force (EUROFOR), Schengen, and the European Monetary System (EMS).

4. The ECOWAS and the Integration Process of West Africa

On the formation of the ECOWAS, Omagu (2001) argues that the paramount reason which strengthened the resolve of West African leaders to form the ECOWAS was to raise the living standard of West African people, to ensure economic growth, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent. He regretted that this impressive vision of a peaceful sub-regional community through integration of the economies of member states and creation of a common market have so far failed to materialize.

On the antecedents of the ECOWAS formation, Omagu traced them to three eras of the old Ghana Empire, Mali Empire and Songhai Empire all of which were in the pre-colonial times which more or less covered the entire West Africa. Omagu (2001) also traced the existence or Pre-ECOWAS regional groupings in West Africa and said:

The colonial era involving the federation for the eight French colonies as well as the four British colonies formation of National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) for Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria and lastly, the pre-ECOWAS era economic groupings and associations among the francophone countries such as UDEAO (Union Douciniere et Economique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest) in 1966 and CEAO (Communaute Economique de l’Afrique de l’Ouest) in 1970.

Omagu has shown that before the establishment of ECOWAS, indigenous pre-colonial leaders, more or less tried to bring various territories which now make up West Africa together.

In his opening address at International Conference on the on the antecedent of ECOWAS (Ciroma, 1983) traced the realization of the importance of economic cooperation by West African leaders to the Pan-African Congress meeting recommendation of 1945 which called for among other things, the establishment of a West African Economic Union as well as the views of the first conference of the political parties in Africa held in Accra, Ghana in December 1958 which called for the removal of customs and other restrictions on trade between African states. Others, according to him, were the subsequent conclusion of multilateral payments agreements with a view to enhancing economic-exchanges and the subsequent establishment of an African Common Market. He concluded by warning that if the noble objectives of the ECOWAS are to be achieved then, the problems attendant on any attempts to form countries into groups should be correctly diagnosed and the right therapeutic dose prescribed.

In similar vein, Adedeji (1983) traced the early attempts at achieving collective self-reliance in West Africa to the Lagos Conference of November 1963 on industrial harmonization in the sub-region. According to him, this was followed by the Niamney conference on economic cooperation of October 1966. In a similar conference held in Accra in April 1967, he explained that an agreement on the Articles of Association of a proposed economic community in West Africa was signed. This consisted of Nigeria, Togo and Ghana.

The case of ECOWAS has been enmeshed in the struggle to attain sustainable economic development and self-reliance through regional integration. It was for this reason that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in May 28, 1975 by the sixteen members of West Africa (now remaining fifteen as Mauritania withdrew), as a practical approach in
tackling the economic dilemma of the sub-region that was devastatingly entangled in excruciating poverty, underdevelopment and foreign dependency.

West Africa is part of Africa that is bounded in the West by the Atlantic Ocean, the Sahara Desert on the North and on the East by the Eastern boundaries of present day Nigeria. Practically, it is that area of Africa that “encircled in the North by a line running from the Senegal River to Lake Chad, in the East by a line running from Lake Chad to the Cameroon Mountain and in the South by Atlantic Ocean Coastline. However, even though the Southern and Western borders remain clearly cut out by the sea, the Eastern and Western boundaries are largely unclear due to the near absence of natural geographical barriers demarcating in from the rest of Africa.

Traditionally, West African people earn their living from the land and that is why agriculture remains the bedrock of indigenous economic activity. Other occupations such as trade and craft manufacture were rather undertaken on part time basis while additional types of productive enterprises were often made possible by financial surplus from agriculture.

However, the nature of economic activities in West Africa was drastically changed with the arrival of the Europeans on the West Coast of Africa between the 17th and 18th centuries, and the subsequent transformation of the hitherto local enterprises into a largely profitable transnational commercial enterprise, which for centuries gravely retarded socio-economic and political development throughout the region.

Also, the resultant partitioning and subsequent introduction of European colonial governance in West Africa with its colonial policy of legitimate trade in one or two cash crops to serve the industrial needs of Europe further worsened the resultant erosion of indigenous industrial skills and the basis for development of sustainable interactive economic activities throughout West Africa. In consequence therefore, by the time most of the new nation states of West Africa gained their independence in the 1960s, they were left with structurally fragile and disarticulated economies, with inherent acute devastating price distortions in the international commodity market. After 1960, efforts to coordinate economic cooperation on the sub-region level in West Africa were started. This was motivated by the need for industrial harmony and economic cooperation in the region. First, in 1963, the conference on industrial harmonization in the sub-region was held in Lagos, Nigeria and Niamey conference on economic cooperation in 1967, another conference was held in Accra (Ghana) where a tentative agreement on Articles of association for a proposed economic community in West Africa was signed.

An interim Council of ministers mandated to prepare a Draft Treaty for the proposed community recommended that the inaugural meeting of the proposed community be held at the level of heads of states and government. Though the Heads of States and Government actually met in Monrovia in 1968 and signed the protocol for a regional group, neither the Draft Treaty nor the Protocol on customs union submitted by the interim council was adopted.

In 1972, the process was revived by the heads of state of Nigeria and Togo by mandating their officials to streamline a framework for community cooperation based on the following guiding principles:

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

The proposals of a joint Nigeria-Togolese delegation embodied in a Draft Treaty was reconsidered at yet another ministerial meeting in January 1975, and finally signed on 28th May, 1975, by the Heads of State of Government/Representatives of the fifteen member countries of West Africa, thus, marking the end of over a decade of unfruitful strenuous efforts to institutionalize a framework for coordinating sustainable development and collective self-reliance in West Africa.

The ECOWAS was established in 1975 to coordinate and promote trade, cooperation and sustainable development throughout West Africa. The signing of the ECOWAS Treaty in Lagos on May 28, 1975, was indeed a kind of radical response to the plague of poverty and underdevelopment bedevilling West Africa, and as a result, practically provided the much desired framework for the realization of rapid and sustainable socio-political and economic development throughout the sub-
region. To date, the following are member states: Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Republic of Togo. All these countries differ considerable in their colonial history, natural resources endowment and institutional and administrative systems. At the one end of the scale is Nigeria, rich in human and natural resources, and at the other end is Burkina Faso with poor human and natural resources. These remarkable differences significantly and constantly shape their regional relations and their ability to participate meaningfully in regional economic integration programmes.

The ECOWAS Treaty provided for a gradual establishment of a customs union, common external tariff and harmonization of economic and financial policies of member states within a period of 15 years. It also made provision for compensation for losses encountered by member states in the course of the implementation of the provisions of the treaty. The original treaty was revised in 1993, to broaden economic integration and increase political participation and cooperation throughout the sub-region, the revised treaty sought to attain an integrated common market and a single monetary union with an institutionalized Parliament for stronger political cooperation and participation within the sub-region.

One alluring assumption is the fact that integration positively affects the gross national products of member countries, as the resultant enlargement of the size of the market increases efficiency and greater advantages of economies of scale within the integrating area. Thus, as competition increases, better specialization is ensured as producers concentrate on areas in which they have the greatest advantage, thus better positioned to exploit large scale economies while at the same time, restructuring the regional economy to enhance the production base of the region.

Another contention lies in the argument that the enlarged market offered by integration will sufficiently sustain heavy industries and better ensure the least unit cost of production which will in turn stimulate demand and consumption as well as increased investment and economic growth. Similarly, as better allocation of resources is attained, prices should go down in favour of consumers in a way that is not detrimental to producers, thus, benefiting both the producers and consumer. Adding to the theoretical benefit is the argument that he enlarged market size from integration will ultimately lead to increased trade within the region. As tariffs are eliminated, free flow of trade between members’ states increases, leading to trade creation as member states trade more with each other.

In West Africa, economic integration is also viewed as an ‘illustration of Pan-Africanism’ and indeed, a practical step toward the economic liberation of the African continent. Some of the states such as Nigeria viewed integration as a veritable instrument for ensuring not only regional peace and security but also ‘national security’. In general terms, it has been the hope that economic integration in West Africa will not only usher in sustainable socio-economic and political development, but will to a large extent provide a solid platform for a united front in negotiation, involving the region and other regions of the world. Their aims are to support and enhance socio-economic development of member states and the welfare of their citizens by promoting and coordinating trade, increased cooperation and self-reliance among them; and this they hoped to achieve by ensuring a common policy regime geared toward economic and financial stability through the institutional framework of the ECOWAS.

5. Number and Mode of Membership: ASEAN, ECOWAS and other Regional Organizations in Comparative Perspective

It has consistently been argued that the mode of membership, the role of membership rules, as well as the number of member states of regional organizations determine the speed and velocity of integration. In terms of the mode of membership, there are a wide range of modes. However, the most outstanding models are the ‘convoy’ model and the “club” model. The convoy model allows all regional states to automatically become members and participate in the activities of the organization without precondition for membership.

Regional organization can pursue a wide array of membership models. The most inclusive choice is a “convoy” model which allows all regional states to participate. Such organization have low admission and participation criteria. They may still debate the admission and participation of a given state, but the state is not asked to meet a set of formalized criteria as the impact of mode and role of membership on the performance of regional organization a standard condition of entry. At the other
extreme, organizations choose a club mode, enforcing strict admission criteria. The entry requirements may vary. For example, states may be required to have mechanisms for controlling corruption or to implement the fiscal and monetary policies of the organization, or to protect human rights. Of course, organizations can choose a compromise between these models and membership rules can vary in many ways.

From the above, it may not be an error to describe ECOWAS as an organization that adopted the convoy model while the ASEAN adopted the club mode. The club model enhances integration process than the convoy model; this is so because membership is restricted. As argued by Downs, Rocke and Baroom (1998), if an organization uses a club model to manipulate the order and timing entries, including promoting earlier entry for states that favour deeper cooperation, this allows it to reduce the negative consequences increasing the breadth and depth of cooperation.

Using a formal model, they argue that starting out small with club model and them admitting more states, as they align their preferences with the organization leads to organizations greater depth than those based on a convoy model, because a club model with conditional enlargement can achieve both breadth and greater depth. Forming smaller clubs and then relying on strict admission criteria also allows the existing members to establish their preferred policies before inviting outsiders (Hauslcen, Mattli and Pluemper, 2006). Clubs can, therefore be much more demanding of newcomers, offering asymmetrical benefits to the core founding states.

These claims also align well with the experiences of the European Union (EU). The initial six member states were able to cooperate on a deeper level and in a manner closer to their preference than would have been if the case had a compromise been reached with the states that choose instead to form European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Only after the EFTA’s member states changed their preference towards greater integration did they join the EU, and they did so on the EU’s terms, adopting wholesale its existing policies and obligations (Winters, 1997). This does not mean that the new member states have been entirely unable to influence the future policies of the EU. But as a counterfactual, it seems plausible that the EU has greater depth of cooperation because it waited to admit member states only as their preferences for integration changed.

Indeed, the European clubs have been quite effective at using membership conditionality. Because the organizations offer considerable benefits and because they are clubs, these organizations have been able to extract considerable concessions from applicant states. This has been true even for the Council of Europe, although it does not offer benefits commensurate with those of the EU. However, because no state has ever joined the EU without first joining the Council of Europe, the Council has been able to benefit from the leverage of the EU attraction on non-member states. Still, the Council of Europe has applied membership conditionality with mixed results, partly because its broad membership has sometimes made it difficult for the organization to be consistent in its enforcement of the membership criteria. However, there are clear success cases, for example, since 1994 the Council of Europe has been effective at requiring the abolishment of the death penalty in any applicant states (Schabas, 1999).

The EU in particular has been strict in its entry requirements and has grown even more so as it fine-tuned its accession tools during the 1990s. For example, the December 1999 Helsinki European Council made it an explicit condition that a country must have stable democratic institutions, not only to join the EU but also to be able to open negotiations to join the EU. This was why the opening of Turkey’s negotiations was delayed once again and did not start until 2000. The success of the EU is using membership conditionality to solicit behavioural changes in candidate states is strongly establish in the extensive literature on the subject as presented by the following authors (Pridham, 1994; Sasse, 2008; Schimmelfennig, 2008; Sedelmeier, 2008). The tenuous transitions from post-communism were greatly aided by the assistance and incentives of the European organizations, leading to greater convergence of preferences between the formerly divided halves of Europe and enabling broader and stronger regional integration.

Furthermore, the EU has been able to ensure that candidate states adopted the required legislation and created needed capacity to address the economic commitments of their membership. Although candidate states have been able to choose how they would like to meet their obligations in
many areas (Jacoby, 2004), the candidate states have not been able to negotiate the content of their obligation as members; the rules of membership had to be taken as a given at the time of entry.

Some argue that the candidate states have adopted polices much faster than current member states did. For example, Grabbe (2002) argued that it took Greece well over a decade to adapt to the EU’s single market norms. By contrast, prospective Central and Eastern European (CEE) members are expected to have oriented their institutions and policies to the EU prior to membership, which means less than a decade in practice. Moreover, they have done so from a much lower starting point and very limited scope for negotiating transitional periods. The EU has been able to push CEE policy reforms faster than they would otherwise have done because of the priority accorded to accession by their governments and because of the institutional lacunae resulting from the communist era. This would suggest that leverage is greater on countries outside the club than inside it and, therefore all else being equal the more behavioural adaptations the organization can extract prior to entry, the better.

Of course, the effectiveness of the club approach depends on whether the non-member states indeed do eventually align their preferences with the club members. But the CEE case suggest that to the extent that the club is able to achieve deep cooperation that yields highly valuable benefits, exclusion may become too costly for non-members, even if originally they preferred not to cooperate. Thus, strong regional clubs will likely present non-members with increasing incentive to meet the requirements to join the organization. The examples of the EU and the ASEAN suggest that club membership is superior to convoy membership of the ECOWAS.

Secondly, the initial membership composition has an effect on the level and rate of integration of both regions (West Africa and South East Asia nations). For the ECOWAS, it inception in May, 1975 when the treaty was signed, the number was sixteen, on the contrary, the ASEAN started in 1967 with five members (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand). It has been suggested therefore that the number of the ECOWAS countries vis-à-vis the ASEAN as much and it negatively affected its implementation of many decisions. It must be pointed out that in 1991, the common market of the South (Mercosur) was established with a small number of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay and is South America’s leading trade bloc. This suggests that the smaller the starting number, the better for the organization. The crucial question we need to find out is “Do the numbers matter?”

Given that membership rules influence the number of countries in an organisation, it is important to consider whether the number of countries involved in regional organizations hampers cooperation. Traditionally, a greater number of actors has been considered to hamper cooperation, but this conjuncture may well be overstated and in some instances, even misleading.

Traditional k-group theory argues that when enforcement is central to cooperation, as it most often is when there are complex rules and regulations that must be implemented and monitored, then more participants increase the enforcement problem and lower the benefits of cooperation (Olson, 1965). This theory implies that for issues requiring enforcement, large organization may be impartial, be particularly if entry requirement is low as in convoys, leaving the organisation with few enforcement options. The ECOWAS is a victim here by adopting the convoy approach where every member of the region became a member at the start, it became difficult to enforce decisions; this hamper cooperation.

Regional experiences seem to confirm this. The West African efforts to move towards a single monetary zone illustrate the difficulty of accomplishing such ambitious goals convoy style because member state have different economic policies which make it difficult to harmonize monetary policies of the region. Also member states were not willing to surrender the supra-nationality of their currencies e.g. Nigeria won’t like its currency (Naira) to be over shadowed by Ghanaian Cedi or CFA of Benin Republic. The ECOWAS established the West Africa currency unit with the goal of achieving a single monetary zone for West Africa. Various sub-regional grouping has proceeded highly unevenly, however, and some states have sought to break free of the laggards by creating their own “fast tracks” towards greater monetary cooperation (Nnanna, 2006). Conversely, in South America, Mercosur started a process of regional economic integration with a smaller number of states and has been somewhat more successful. The same was true for the ECSC, formalized in 1951 and comprising the “inner six” of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, while the so-called “outer seven” of Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK) were either unable or unwilling to join the successor organization to the ECSC the European Economic
Community (EEC) - and instead cooperated among themselves through the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Starting small by no means guarantees successful cooperation, as the relatively weak performances of the Andean Community and many African sub-groupings demonstrate e.g. Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and South African Development Community (SADC). However, whereas there are some examples of regional organizations that started small and have been successful, there are no examples of large regional organizations that have achieved the same level of regional integration en masse. It may, of course still be possible for some organizations such as the Economic Community of West Africa States (the ECOWAS), to eventually accomplish this objective. However, date suggest, experience to that starting out with fewer states is a better formula for regional integration.

The question of the relationship between the number of member states and the depth of cooperation among them has been the focus of the classic widening versus deepening debate in the European Union (EU) (Hausclen et al., 2006; Lorz and Williamann, 2008). Contrary to the critics of enlargement, the EU has been able to continue to deepen cooperation while also widening membership. Thus, although there is no precedent for launching a fully functioning common market for a large number of states simultaneously, there is little evidence that the number of cooperating states alone makes cooperation infeasible, although it undoubtedly makes it more cumbersome.

Indeed, the difficulties of garnering cooperation among the many members of the ECOWAS may have been attributed to the number of members. Recent work by Koremenos and Lipson has found little support for the conjecture that in issue areas with greater enforcement problems, organizations tend to choose more restrictive membership models (Koremenos, Lipson 2001 and Snidal, 2001). However, there is some evidence that organizations tend to restrict membership more when there is greater uncertainty over prospective members’ likelihood to exhibit cooperative behaviour and compliance with organizational norms. However, rather that sheer numbers, it appears that the observed difficulties with cooperation among greater numbers likely stems from other fundamentals (for example, increased economic heterogeneity) that change as more states are brought into the integration efforts; it is these changes, as opposed to the number of actors, that may do more to hamper cooperation (Keohane and Ostrom, 1995). Greater number of members achieved by club-style as in the ASEAN is better than such greater numbers achieved by convoy style as in ECOWAS. The ASEAN members were admitted at different times after the initial five (5) while all 15 members of the ECOWAS were admitted at the same time in convoy – style. In effect, the smaller the number, the easier it is to manage and the larger the number, the more problematic it is to mangle, especially, where there are no necessary institutions.

Furthermore, institutional devices, such as voting rules, can ameliorate the difficulties of decision making introduced by wider participation of members. For example, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) amended its consensus based decision making structure to avoid de facto veto rights for any one state. Thus, the OSCE adopted the “consensus minus one” rule in 1992 so that in cases of a state’s “clear, gross and uncorrected violation” of OSCE commitments, decision could be taken without the consent of the state concerned. Thus, the OSCE has changed some decision-making rules to address its wide membership, as has the EU, which has moved towards majority rules and other compromise decision rules on several issues. The Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), however has maintained strong consensus-based rules. This poses problem under such pronounced heterogeneity as is the case with ASEAN, and does make a growing number of participants more problematic.

In the case of Common Market for eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), it was founded in 1994 three years later, the membership stood at twenty-two (22) including Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia. The aim was to create economic space that would attract domestic, cross-border and foreign direct investment. It would only be said that enough agreements and protocols have been signed by heads of states and finance commissioners to facilitate integration but not much has been achieved. According to former Secretary General of the PTA/COMESA “Successful integration is not measured by the type (technical,
administrative etc.) and regularity of meetings at which many resolution and declarations are adopted. Trade, economic growth and poverty statistics are more appropriate yardsticks (Muuka, Hanson and McCoy, 1998).

This comment is as a result of relative low performance of COMESA. It has the highest number of members in regional groupings, not through periodical admission but by adopting Convoy approach from the onset. The question of membership models is therefore related to, but distinct from, the question of the number of members or the optimal size of an intergovernmental organization. Numbers matter, but not merely because more is always worse. More is worse only to the extent that more increases heterogeneity.

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<th>Regional Body</th>
<th>Year of formation</th>
<th>No. of initial members</th>
<th>No. of present members</th>
<th>Mode of membership</th>
<th>Level of integration</th>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Custom Union</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMESA</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Convoy</td>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Convoy</td>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Monetary Union</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERCUSOR</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Custom Union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Custom Union</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the author.

The table above indicates that fifty-two (52) years after the formation of ASEAN (1967-2019), the number of members’ countries increased from an initial 5 states to 10 states. The mode of membership is club and its integrative efforts have reached the level of harmonized custom union. For the ECOWAS, which was founded in 1975 with an initial membership of sixteen (16) which has fifteen (15) states as of today because of the withdrawal Mauritius for political reasons. It adopted the convoy mode of membership. But her level of integrative effort remains low just at the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) level. In the case of European Union, which was founded in 1951, its members have progressed from an initial six (6) member states to twenty-eight (28). It adopted the club mode of entry and today has reached a high level of integration with the achievement of monetary union in many of its member states.

From the foregoing analysis, one can conclude that integration is faster and possible when initial membership is small and when the organization adopts the club mode of membership as in the ASEAN, the EU, the MERCUSOR and the NAFTA. All these have attained a high level of integration. ECOWAS and COMESA which adopted the convoy approach of membership with a large number of 16 and 22 members respectively at the start has low level of integrations just at the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) level. The performance in regional integrations of the ASEAN and the ECOWAS tend to be dependent on the initial number of members and mode of membership adopted by both regional organisations.

6. Conclusion

Comparing two regional organizations whose vision and mission as of the time of inception were similar is a very interesting enterprise. For one thing, both the ECOWAS and the ASEAN were created in 1975 and 1967 respectively, with the aim of integrating the economies of their respective sub-regions (West Africa and Southeast Asia) for developmental purposes. Several decades have passed, and one (the ASEAN) has made significant progress in this regard while the other (the ECOWAS) has not.
Obviously, there are some lessons the ECOWAS can learn from the ASEAN experience more especially, the question of number and mode of memberships to regional integration.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend that the ECOWAS should adopt the ASEAN way especially in the following areas:

a. The ECOWAS should establish a direct relationship between it and selected group of members based on comparative economic advantage and with industrialized nations of the West and/or Asia to facilitate industrialization of West African Sub-Region. The example of the ASEAN+3, the ASEAN+2 and the ASEAN+1 should be emulated. This is likely to lead the way to integration.

b. The adoption of the ASEAN multi-speed strategy remains important, where sub regional groupings are encouraged to be formed based on economic advantage. These sub grouping should be under direct supervision of the ECOWAS. This will also help to address the problems encountered by the convoy mode of membership adopted by the ECOWAS, because it could place entry requirement within the sub groupings. Even though, ECOWAS was formed using convoy approach. For example, according to Alaba (2006), Togo and Ghana who are known for production and procession of tomato can cooperate in that direction and set membership conditions for new entrants wishing to join in the tomato cultivation and procession business. However, this should be under the strict supervision of ECOWAS.

7. References


