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ECOWAS and the Challenges of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods on Nigeria's National Security in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper examined the ECOWAS and the challenges of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods on Nigeria's national security in the 21st century. ECOWAS was established on May 25, 1975 to boost regional economic integrative effort of countries within the African sub region. Efforts have continued to be made by leaders and stakeholders on the ECOWAS project in arresting the bottlenecks hindering the realization of the objectives of the regional organization. Obviously, the full implementation of the protocol by all the member countries of ECOWAS has remained problematic due to a good number of factors. Theoretically, this paper is anchored on the theory of intergovernmentalism. Methodologically, this paper relied on secondary means of data collection. The content method was adopted in the analysis. The paper discovered that the implementation of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods by Nigeria to a considerable extent has been impacting negatively on her national security. The paper recommends the computerization of the common borders of member countries of ECOWAS for effective data sharing system.

Keywords: ECOWAS, National Security, Border, Persons, Nigeria

Introduction

Introduction

The formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was a conscious effort of some concerned leaders and statesmen from the African sub region who after the political independence of most countries in Africa later realized that political independence never meant economic independence. The quest for regional economic development and integration among countries of sub regional Africa therefore necessitated the signing of the ECOWAS treaty on May 28, 1975 (Aminu, 2022). Among the founding fathers were General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's Military Head of State at the time and President of Togo, General Gnassingbe Eyadema (Nwoke, 2005).

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ECOWAS has remained a formidable and most inclusive regional economic integrative mechanism as its membership was drawn from seven Francophone countries that are also part of Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO), three countries from the Mano River Union and the rest made up of Anglophone and Lusophone countries. A total of sixteen countries signed the ECOWAS treaty at the beginning. ECOWAS member countries include: Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Liberia, Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau (Adetula, 2009). Lagos, Nigeria was chosen as the Headquarters of ECOWAS whereas Togo was adopted as the administrative Headquarters of the fund.

A quicker realization of the objectives of ECOWAS has led the leaders of the organization to have course to revise the treaty that established ECOWAS as well as coming up with additional protocols. Among others, that of 1979 and 1993 has remained formidable. As the chairman of the Committee of Eminent Persons once observed "we believe therefore that the time is ripe to review the existing arrangements for cooperation and integration in West Africa and to update them in the light of the changes and reforms taking place both within and outside the region (Final Report of the Committee of Eminent Persons for the Review of the ECOWAS Treaty, 1979).

As a way of fast tracking the needed regional economic integration and subregional socio-economic development, the leaders of the ECOWAS states in 1979 drew up a treaty on free movement of persons and goods, Right of Residence and Establishment. The central objective of the treaty was to boost the level of economic and social integration among countries in the sub region by enabling the citizens have unrestricted movement across the sub region in inter-regional migration and business transaction (ECOWAS, 2021). The protocol granted ECOWAS citizens the right of free entry and exit within the ECOWAS states for a maximum period of ninety (90) days. Member states were given a 15-year window to fully implement the protocol. Within the first five years of the implementation of the protocol, the use of visas into ECOWAS member states was to be abolished (ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Goods and Persons, 1979). In furtherance to the move towards the realization of the protocol, Article 2(2) of the treaty require member states to abolish all forms of obstacles preventing the building up of a socio-regional economic cooperation and integration.

Realizing her leadership and big brother role in the sub region, Nigeria's uncompromising adherence to implementing the provisions of the Protocol on free movement of Persons and goods has continued to be met with some serious implications on her national security. The situation has also been worsened as several of Nigeria borders with some of her neighbouring ECOWAS member countries are largely undermarked, porous, improperly policed and uncomputerized (Osehume, 2020). Thus, the prevalence of large number of unauthorized routes through which immigrants criss cross and entre Nigeria on the guise of being protected under the Protocol on free movement of persons and goods has encouraged all sorts of transnational crimes such as arms and drugs trafficking, smuggling of contraband goods and other criminal activities that have remained serious security threats in Nigeria.

Following the resurgence of military coups in Africa especially in the sub region in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the affected countries were sanctioned by ECOWAS. A few months later, these countries by the first quarter of year 2024 announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS over some sundry factors which included an alleged influence on the activities of ECOWAS by some foreign powers.

National security measures the overall safety of a nation in terms of the nation's ability to counter both internal and external threats as well as her ability to repel possible attacks when confronted. Arising from this, this paper investigated the ECOWAS and the challenges of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods on Nigeria's national security in the 21st century.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of intergovernmentalism. The theory was developed in the mid 1960s in the works of Stanley Hoffmann, Andrew Moravcsik, Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer among others (Iain & Alistar, 2003; Sheriff, David & Adams, 2015). In the view of the theory, states are

free to cooperate in some areas of national need in order to actualize certain objectives while retaining their sovereign status. Thus, unlike in supranational bodies where there is formal delegation of autonomy, intergovernmental organizations do not expect states to share their power with other actors.

Intergovernmentalism as an offshoot of neo-realism supports the position of the realists that international politics involves the interaction of self seeking states as primary actors in an anarchic global system that lacks an overarching authority. Thus, these interacting units as nation states are considered equal in the eyes of the international community. In the present world system, international or regional organizations have become viable avenues for states to advance their national interest, pursue some shared goals and make themselves relevant in international politics.

In the views of Rosamond (2000) the following are the underlying assumptions of the theory of intergovernmentalism:

- i. Intergovernmentalism contends that the process of integration does not make international organizations lose their sovereignty as decisions are arrived at through an unanimous process. Thus, the enhancement in the power and relevance of supranationality stems from a direct initiative of governments.
- ii. There is a kind of unequal partnership in the integration process. Moreover, there is also a somewhat polarization of the benefits of the integration.
- iii. The theory contends that integration is basically state driven based on shared interest of states as well as prevailing domestic and economic objectives.
- iv. The theory does not accede to the idea that there is inequality among supranational organizations in terms of the political or other influence they wield or exercise.

In applying the theory of intergovernmentalism to the study, it is evident that the vision of the founding fathers of the ECOWAS was to ensure the joint integration of the resources and efforts of the countries in sub Saharan West Africa for regional socio-economic development. Although the international system is generally described as anarchic in nature, yet, the process of integration has been seen as one of the ways of containing the excesses of states towards orderly cooperation and co-existence for the ultimate survival of states.

Given the trust and adherence to the ECOWAS protocols by member states, there has been a considerable reduction of anarchic situation in the sub region. The signing of the revised treaty of ECOWAS in May 1979 that provided for the free movement of goods and persons across ECOWAS member states has not in any way undermined the sovereignty of these countries. Thus, although the relative weakness of these states in some noted areas such as weak border control mechanism has been responsible for some observed breaches and abuse, some level of success has continued to be recorded in line with the ECOWAS treaty. The ECOWAS integration mechanism has not also undermined the independence and sovereignty of the integrating states in view of the breaches and disregard to some of the ECOWAS treaty and protocols that have continued to be witnessed in some member states. For instance, against the ECOWAS protocol on democratic governance, good governance, human rights among others, the military in countries such as Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bisseau decided to remove constitutional governments in these countries within the last few years (Philip, 2022). After being sanctioned by ECOWAS, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger decided to withdrew their membership of ECOWAS over alleged meddling and exercise of influence on the activities of ECOWAS by some foreign powers. Nevertheless, ECOWAS has continued to forge ahead as much as its strength and recourses could carry it. In all, the theory of intergovernmentalism has been found suitable for this study.

Conceptual Discourse

The formation of ECOWAS was the aftermath of series of efforts towards regional economic integration for regional economic development and political self reliance. The move was orchestrated by both the Francophone and Anglophone countries in West Africa between the 1960's and 1970's. Much later, a proposed harmonization of the various efforts was adopted. Consequently, on May 28, 1975 the

Heads of State and Government of the Independent West African States played down on linguistic, ideological, and political divide and signed the treaty establishing the ECOWAS (Okwuosa, 2009).

Apart from being a major financier of the ECOWAS fund, Nigeria has been playing enormous leadership roles that have been contributing to the success of the activities of ECOWAS and its relevance in the 21st century. In terms of its objectives, ECOWAS was set up to promote regional cooperation and integration, social, and cultural activities with a view to establishing an economic and monetary union via a total integration of the national economies of the member states. ECOWAS was also intended to raise the standard of living of people of the component states; maintain and enhance economic stability; foster better relations among member states as well as contributing to the progress and development of the entire African continent. The integration policies of ECOWAS as well as the programmes took into account the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the member states. It also considered the major provisions of the African Economic Community Treaty (AECT) in addition to prevailing conditions on the international circle (Oche, 2010).

After a period of about two decades, it was observed that the ECOWAS treaty and earlier arrangements did not clearly make provision for issues such as political cooperation, regional peace and security, human rights, democracy and good governance among countries of the sub-region. This necessitated the Revised ECOWAS treaty of July 1993 and the 1979 protocol that was aimed at facilitating free movement of goods and persons among ECOWAS member countries. In both her civilian and military dispensation, Nigeria has remained committed to the realization of these objectives. For instance, it was during the regime of General I.B. Babangida (August, 1985 – August, 1993) that the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was formed to restore peace in some crisis ridden member states such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast (Onyedikachi & Wambu, 2020). In year 2000, former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo summoned a summit of Heads of State and Eminent persons in the sub region during which the 1979 protocol on free movement of persons and goods within ECOWAS member states was fine toned and strengthened the more.

Similarly, a coalition formed by ECOWAS member states with Nigeria taking the lead was formed in 2017 which helped in stopping the bid of former President of the Gambia (Jammah) from truncating the democratic process in the country after he lost in a general election after serving two tenures. In the recent past, Nigeria and some other ECOWAS member states did not shy away from condemning the resurgence of military coups in the sub region especially in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Although the military Juntas in these countries in the first quarter of year 2024 announced their formal withdrawal from ECOWAS following their suspension from the body and their allegation of ECOWAS being influenced by some foreign interests, that has not hindered ECOWAS from pursuing her stated objectives.

The 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment

In order to consolidate on the gains of regional socio-economic development and integration, the leaders and stakeholders of ECOWAS have not relented in drawing up further protocols and revision of the treaty that established the ECOWAS. One of such move was made on May 29, 1979. Labour mobility and migration was noted to be crucial in the realization of the goal of development, integration, and harmonization of the economies of the countries in the sub region. The protocol which was signed on May 29, 1979 came into force in 1980. Even before the signing of the agreement, Nigeria had witnessed the influx of nationals from neighbouring countries of Togo, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Morocco into Nigeria. This was because of Nigeria's relaxation of some of Nigeria's traditional visa requirements for entry into Nigeria (ECOWAS, Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment, May 29, 1979).

The protocol was drawn under a fifteen-year window to the effect that every community citizen should have the right to enter, reside and establish in any part of the sub region. A transitional period of three phases with specific goals was envisaged as follows: Phase one of the protocol was slated to last between 1980-1985. It provided for right of entry and abolition of visa for ninety days. The second phase

was made to last between, 1985-1990. It guaranteed for right of residence for every community citizen to reside in any part of the sub region. Finally, the third phase was slated to last between, 1990-1995. It provided for right of establishment. That is, for every interested ECOWAS citizen to establish his business in any part of any country in the sub region. Article 2 (4) of the protocol provided that the implementation from one phase to the other shall follow an incremental process. That is, the next level of implementation has to be based on the experience arising from the previous implementation.

Just like previous landmark efforts, Nigeria also played a pivotal role in seeing to the negotiations that led to the ECOWAS protocol of 1979. It became one of the outstanding feat ECOWAS attained then as it became a pathway to the emergence of a borderless community citizen. The negotiations were concluded and signed during the tenure of Nigeria's former military Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo as the chairman of ECOWAS before he handed over the chairmanship of ECOWAS to the Senegalese President, Leopold Senghor.

On assumption of office again as Nigeria's civilian President, Chief Obasanjo reinvigorated his zeal in seeing to the implementation of some already signed ECOWAS Protocols that suffered some delays in their implementation. On March 27, 2000, therefore, President Obasanjo hosted a mini-summit of ECOWAS Heads of state and Government aimed at the creation of a borderless ECOWAS. At the end of the Abuja summit, the following communiqué was reached:

- i) Granting ECOWAS citizens a maximum of a ninety-day period of stay at the point of entry into another ECOWAS country, effective April 13, 2000.
- ii) Abolishing the residence permit requirements for each others citizen in the spirit of equal treatment of community citizens.
- iii) Issuance and effective use of the ECOWAS travel certificate.
- iv) Introduction and adoption of a single ECOWAS passport.
- v) Adopting the introduction of a multi-country Shengen-type visa (Executive Secretariat, 2000).

The adoption and implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and goods among ECOWAS member states made ECOWAS become the envy of some other sub regions in Africa. For various reasons, the level of implementation of the Protocol has been varying among member states of ECOWAS. Some member states have been encountering serious challenges in their bid to reconcile between their economic predicament, under development and other internal constraints with the implementation of the Protocol. For Nigeria, her national interest was once placed ahead of the implementation of the Protocol. For instance, between 1983 and 1984 Nigeria was compelled to expel some ECOWAS citizens from the country and closed her national borders between 1984 and 1986. These moves however, ran contrary to the spirit of the 1979 Protocol. In several parts of the sub region, numerous border checks have continued to persist with the attendant cases of severe torture, harassment and extortion of travelers by some security personnel at the borders. Free movement of migrants have also been hampered in certain areas in the sub region due to linguistic challenges at the borders as adoption of a common language by ECOWAS citizens is yet to be made. Between 2002 and 2004, there were reported cases of torture and killing of community citizens at the borders by security personnel in countries such as Senegal and Gambia. About forty four Ghanaians in the Gambia were reportedly killed by security personnel in 2005 while exercising their right of free entry into the country under the Protocol (Ghanaian Times, 2007).

Table 1: State of Implementation of Protocols and Decisions Relating to the Free Movement of Persons within the First few years of the Adoption of the Protocol

| Country | Abolition of Entry Visa | ECOWAS Travel Journal | ECOWAS Passport | ECOWAS Brown Card |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Benin January 4 th , 1981 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Burkina Faso | Yes | No | No | Yes |

| | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| April 6 th , 1982 | | | | |
| Cape Verde June 11 th , 1984 | Yes | No | No | Island |
| Cote d'Ivoire January 19 th , 1981 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Gambia October 30 th , 1980 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Ghana April 8 th , 1980 | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Guinea Bissau August 20 th , 1979 | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Liberia April 1 st , 1980 | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Mali June 5 th , 1980 | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Niger January 11 th , 1980 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Niger January 11 th , 1980 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Nigeria September 12 th , 1979 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Senegal May 12 th , 1980 | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| Sierra Leone September 15 th , 1982 | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Togo December 9 th , 1979 | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Source: ECOWAS Commission, 2009

Although there has been some delays in the implementation of some contents and aspects of the protocol on free movement of persons and goods by some member states, the journey so far since the establishment of ECOWAS has been encouraging. In the 21st century however, member states have continued to be confronted with global pressures and challenges occasioned by globalization, socio-economic challenges; cross border crimes; terrorist insurgency and resurgence of military coups in some countries in the sub region.

The 1979 ECOWAS Protocol and Nigeria's National Security

Scholars have conceived national security in different perspectives. From the state centric point of view, national security, seen as total security is considered as a sine qua non to state survival as it captures both traditional and human security (Akpuru-Aja, 2009). National security encompasses all forms of security. That is, security of life and property, the economy and economic resource areas of the country; security of food and raw material resources; the general health of the people; the environment; national integrity and preservation of all that a society considers to be important and valuable (Imobighe, 1989; Imobighe, 2010). National security represents the ability of a nation to promote the pursuit and realization of the fundamental needs and vital interests of its citizens and to protect them from all forms of threats which may be economic, social, environmental, political, military or epidemiological in nature. These threats may emanate from terrorist attacks, pervasive poverty, violent conflict, natural disasters, transborder crimes, arms proliferation, trafficking in human and narcotics, as well as outbreak of

contagious diseases (Pogoso, 2013). The state centric dimension of national security further conceives it in terms of self defence through the acquisition of arms and ammunition to deter aggression. In this context, Ate & Akinterinwa (1992) defined national security as the defence and protection of the sovereignty of the country and of its territorial and political landscape against internal and external threats.

The human aspect of national security conceives it on socio-economic dimension. Thus, the security of any nation does not solely lie or even primarily depend on its military capability but equally in developing a relatively stable patterns of economic and political growth for national survival. In addition, Nte (2011) defined national security as the ability of a nation to protect its core or national values from internal or external threats.

As a founding member, Nigeria has remained committed to realizing the objectives of ECOWAS since its establishment. Thus, Nigeria's avowed commitment to playing the big brother role in Africa, more so in sub regional Africa among others, led her to acceding to the adoption and implementation of the 1979 protocol on free movement of goods and persons within sub-regional Africa. As a post colonial State, Nigeria is among the Countries that are yet to device effective border monitoring mechanism and surveillance. Much of her security personnel at the borders still make use of outmoded equipments and gadgets which have been inadequate in containing the maneuvering of cross border criminals, terrorist insurgents and other merchants of death that operate in the 21st century. In other words, some criminal elements and fraudsters have often cashed into the protocol on free movement of persons and goods to gain entry through some of the Nigeria borders that are basically unregulated, porous, uncomputerised and manned by unscrupulous personnel to gain entry into Nigeria. Little wonders why there has been incessant cases of banditry, terrorist attacks, kidnapping and other cross border crimes in Nigeria in the 21st century.

Challenges of ECOWAS protocol on Free Movement of Goods and Persons on Nigeria's National security

The ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods has impacted negatively on Nigeria's national security in several ways: This paper examined the following:

i) Infiltration of Criminal Elements and Terrorist Insurgents through the Nigeria Borders

The 1979 protocol on free movement of goods and persons was aimed at ensuring free movement of citizens of member Countries across the sub-region, so as to fast tract the socio-economic development of the region and living condition of its people. However, the abuse of the protocol by some community citizens has led to the infiltration of criminal elements through the borders that are largely porous and undemarcated. It has remained worrisome that some criminal elements from across the member countries and elsewhere often cash into the protocol, connive with some corrupt officials at the borders and smuggle arms, ammunition and engage in some other cross border crimes. In their bid to establish an Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) Boko Haram for instance, has been working assiduously with other global terrorist organizations to be carrying out cross border attacks in Nigeria and her neighbouring countries of Chad, Ghana, Cameroon and Niger (Alozie 2017).

It has been observed that the numerous unregulated borders across the sub-region has become objects of manipulation and a safe passage for people without clear identities and valid documents as the ECOWAS protocol on free movement has been misinterpreted by some to mean entering into a sister ECOWAS Country especially Nigeria without valid documents (Akinyemi, 2013). Corroborating this view, Opanike & Aduloju (2015:2) contended that:

The challenges of the protocol has not enhanced the security landscape of the sub-region... the ECOWAS protocol on free movement is poorly implemented. constituting more security concern than boosting regional trade and economic development... ECOWAS does not have effective institutionalized mechanism for checking or monitoring the entry of

immigrants and people who carry out nefarious activities across the borders...

The influx of unscrupulous foreign migrants has been exacerbating Nigeria's security challenges in the 21st century as no day passes in Nigeria without reported cases of security breaches. Nigeria has continued to experience serious security challenges due to trans-border criminal activities occasioned by the poor implementation of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods (Ojukwu, Nzube & Nwagbo, 2021).

The proliferation of small and light weapons into Nigeria and their misuse has remained a serious challenge to Nigeria and her security agencies. Despite the efforts being made by the relevant security agencies at the borders and elsewhere, huge losses of lives and property have continued to be recorded across Nigeria in the latest century due to unprovoked arms proliferation through Nigeria's porous and poorly regulated borders with her neighbouring ECOWAS member countries (Alozie, 2017). A study carried out by Nigeria security tracker in 2018 revealed that between 1999 and 2016, there were over eighty recorded communal clashes in Nigeria, sectarian violence and ethno-religious conflicts. Farmers-herders clashes also claimed hundreds of lives with huge items of property destroyed within the period. Boko Haram terrorist attacks, armed banditry attacks, and cases of kidnapping has been resulting to serious humanitarian crises leading to internal dislocation, social displacement especially of women and children as well as cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) particularly in Northern part of Nigeria. The bravery and surprising mode through which small and light weapons as well as the sophisticated ones are trafficked into Nigeria and acquired by criminal elements has remained a source of worry to Nigeria security agencies and those involved in detective and intelligence operations in the country (Anthony, Nwobashi @ Igwe, 2017).

ii) **The Challenge of Nationality Identification**

The unprovoked criss-crossing into Nigeria by citizens of ECOWAS member states has for long been generating the problem of nationality identification. This has been occasioned by the cultural affinity between Nigeria and some of her neighbouring countries that share common cultural and linguistic traits with her. For instance, revelations have shown that Nigeria's security agencies at the borders have been encountering the challenge of placing some Nigeriens alongside Nigerians in the course of performing their duties of actual identification of citizens of member countries alleged to have been involved in cross border crimes. As some people from the Hausa/Fulani extraction of Nigeria and those of Niger Republic are basically Moslems, they bear similar traits, names and some other physical features. The same also apply to some people from Yoruba of Nigeria and some of their Republic of Benin counterparts. Thus, Nigeria security agencies have continued to be faced with the problem of actually identifying who is who at the borders as some of the dubious citizens often take to disguising themselves and claiming to be who they are not to enable them perfect their nefarious activities. Nigeria national security has further been threatened due to the sabotage and unauthorized penetration or recruitment of immigrants into the security and other strategic sectors of the state and economy using common identity cards (Alozie, 2017). Due to haphazard or improper documentation, records have revealed that some non Nigerians that migrated to other ECOWAS member states without valid documents are often deported alongside some Nigeriens and other immigrants from some other parts of the sub region that may have visa or related issues into Nigeria due to the problem of nationality identification.

iii) **Illicit Trafficking in Hard Drugs and Narcotics**

The haphazard implementation of the Protocol on free movement of goods and persons among ECOWAS states has combined with globalization and other challenges of the latest century to heighten the illicit trafficking in drugs and narcotics into Nigeria. Hitherto, Nigeria was neither known as a country that its citizens thrive on drugs nor provide safe heaven for drug traffickers (Oche, 2010). In the 21st

century however, due to heightened cross border movements which often go with trans border crimes, criminals, insurgents, bandits, rapists, terrorists among others nowadays engage on the illicit trade on hard drugs and narcotics alongside some other dealers from some ECOWAS Countries. Some criminals across the sub-region have gone ahead to patronize these hard drug dealers as they often claim that they use the drugs to either get intoxicated or enhance their operations. According to Oche (2010:255):

The methods of drug peddling vary from simple concealment in personal effects, lining or clothing, animals (Pets), concealment in women's private parts, disguised as talcum powder, packaged in small molded balls and swallowed, engraved in cultural artifacts or buried in some parts of the body...

Among the ECOWAS countries, the hard drugs are often smuggled into Nigeria through her porous borders with the neighboring countries. To curtail the illicit trade on drugs and narcotics, the Nigerian government had earlier taken a pro-active step by establishing the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 1989 which has been working to curtail the illicit trade.

iv) Persistence of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has to do with the illicit trade on humans especially women (Girls) and children. They are often used for slavery, sex, economic gain or domestic purposes either with or without the consent of the victim. The illegal deal or business has reached an alarming rate in the 21st century for reasons ranging from poverty, use by terrorist insurgents, greed, prostitution recruitment as child soldiers, family or societal instability among others (Phil & Douglas, 1999).

In Nigeria, the menace has become a national and international embarrassment. Available records show that Nigeria is among the leading countries in Africa in human trafficking. Human trafficking has actually remained among the major threats against national security in Nigeria. The challenges occasioned by the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods has actually contributed to opening the Nigerian borders and parts of her territory for easy penetration by dubious citizens from neighboring countries. Findings made possible by Oche (2009:257) revealed that;

Syndicates operating within and outside Nigeria lure young Nigeria girls of about 14 years of age into the illegal business. The entire business is often shrouded in secrecy...some of the victims are transported outside Nigeria in the guise of pursuing higher education or employment. Subtle force, coercion, fraud or outright deceit are usually employed by the traffickers to actualize their objective.

Up until year 2023 and 2024, these syndicates have continued to modify, reinforce and re-strategize their mode of operation to the extent that the state and its relevant security agencies have been kept in dilemma on how to effectively checkmate the activities of these syndicates (Vision Africa, 2024).

Experience has shown that some of the victims of human trafficking are usually taken away or brought into Nigeria through the numerous Nigeria borders that are neither computerized nor properly guarded. Some of the victims of human trafficking are children from the crises ridden parts of northern Nigeria where Boko Haram, armed bandits, herders, kidnappers among other insurgents have been unrelenting in their attacks against defenseless citizens, families, churches, mosques, among others. Some other victims of human trafficking in Nigeria include, some of the kidnapped individuals or school children who are not often seen at last by their families after they must have been abducted or kidnapped (The Premium Times, 2018). Some missing persons have also been used for human trafficking in certain cases. In Nigeria, those families or individuals who may not have been part of the initial deal on human trafficking have continued to be left in tears over the whereabouts of their loved ones. A State of hopelessness and psychological trauma have therefore arisen for these category of persons (Alozie, 2020).

Conclusion

To the credit of ECOWAS, the regional economic organization has excelled highly as one of the successful regional integrative mechanisms in Africa. Since the signing of the ECOWAS treaty on May 28, 1975, the leaders and stakeholders in the sub-region have not relented in their efforts to ensure the realization of the objectives of the organization. No doubt, some improvements have been recorded in certain areas on the socio-economic development of countries in the sub region as well as in the living conditions of the people. This has been made possible through the revision of the ECOWAS treaty as well as the drawing up of some protocols through which certain bottlenecks militating against the effectiveness of the organization are being addressed.

As Nigeria is a leading partner in the signing of the ECOWAS treaty and some of the protocols and given her enormous natural and mineral resources vis a vis the rest of the countries in the sub region, her commitment to the realization of the objectives of the ECOWAS has not been in doubt. As a leader by example, Nigeria's commitment to the implementation of the protocol on free movement of goods and persons has ended up impacting negatively on her national security. Generally, national security is measured by the ability of a country to successfully secure her core national values, the people and their property as well as repel attack when threatened. Nigeria's experience over her national security in the 21st century has revealed that her implementation of the ECOWAS protocols on free movement of goods and persons given her porous unregulated and poorly guarded borders has led to the infiltration into Nigeria by criminal elements, terrorist insurgents, arms and drug traffickers and other merchants of death through the borders. This development has exacerbated the challenge of national security in Nigeria in the 21st century.

Recommendations

This study hereby advances the under listed recommendations:

- i) Given the re-occurring and recorded lapses in the implementation of the ECOWAS protocol on free movement of persons and goods, ECOWAS leaders and stakeholders should consider re-strategizing and addressing the noted gray areas in the implementation of the protocol.
- ii) ECOWAS member countries should work towards putting in place reliable mechanisms in identifying and bringing to book abusers of the protocol on free movement of goods and persons to serve as a deterrent to others.
- iii) The leadership of ECOWAS should not be deterred in moving the organization forward even with the purported withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger where the military recently truncated democratic governance.
- iv) ECOWAS should spare no effort in strictly invoking and implementing the additional protocols and clauses it signed on democratic governance, regional security, good governance, and accountability in the sub region as a way of forestalling further resurgence of military coups in the sub region.
- v) Effective mechanism on inter and intra State conflict resolution and management should be reinforced by ECOWAS in order to avoid the escalation of such conflicts.
- vi) In view of the increasing menace of cross border terrorism in the 21st century, the Nigerian State should do all to improve security at her national and other borders as a way of improving national security in the country.
- vii) There is a dire need for security agencies and officials at the borders of the neighbouring countries in the ECOWAS sub region to work in synergy and demonstrate the needed spirit of professionalism in order to effectively checkmate and confront transborder crimes and other security breaches across the borders in the sub region.

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