Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affairs, Vol.12 No. 2, December, 2024
ISSN: p. 2354-3558 e. 2354-3493 DOI: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Open Access Journal Available Online

ECOWAS, the Politics of ECO Currency and Economic Development in West Africa

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Date Received: 07.08.24
Date Accepted: 02.12.24

Abstract: This paper examined the attempt made by ECOWAS member states concerning the adoption of ECO Currency and identified the challenges militating against the monetary policy vis-à-vis the laid down criteria. Group Theory was adopted for this study. Also, secondary method of data collection was adopted for the study. The findings revealed that the inability to fulfil the macro-economic convergence criteria is the bane of adopting the ECO Currency, coupled with the trust deficit syndrome in relation to the disunity amongst member states; over the subject matter. The study concluded that the interest shown by President Emmanuel Macron of France appears to be partially responsible for the trust deficit vis-à-vis the disunity in adopting the ECO Currency. Consequently, this study recommended that there should be transparency amongst ECOWAS member states in order to come to terms with operating a unified monetary policy that would subsequently lead to the implementation of Eco-currency. Besides, member states should look inward in order to guarantee economic development and enhance financial benefits for residents within the sub-region.

Keywords: Economic Community, Eco Currency, ECOWAS, Transparency, Development,

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established by the treaty of Lagos on 28th of May, 1975. This was largely due to the initiative meant to facilitate social and economic integration of the16 nation states in the sub-region by Nigeria's leader, Gen. Yakubu Gowon and Togo's leader, Gen. Gnassingbe Eyadema. However, Mauritania, one of the founding members of ECOWAS withdrew its membership in the year 2000, leaving 15 member states remaining in the regional body. The regional body has achieved some milestones including free movement of citizens, establishment of an administrative commission as well as establishment of parliamentary and judicial bodies within the sub-region. Furthermore, achieving economic integration among member states is a major objective of ECOWAS. To this end, a common currency has been proposed as the ultimate instrument of achieving the vision of an economic union for seamless economic activities. Finance ministers and central bank governors from the 15 members of ECOWAS advanced plans to launch a single currency initiative known as Eco in 2019, aimed at bringing economic and political unity to the sub region especially in the aspect of helping to remove trade and monetary barriers to boost the economy of the sub region. The proposed launch received Nigeria's endorsement since it is envisioned to propel economic growth and development throughout the West African sub region (ECOWAS Report, 2020, October, 9). www.independence.ng.

ECOWAS has followed the footsteps of European Union in terms of structure and operation and members of the subregional body had undergone series of deliberations through regular meetings; leading to the creation of Eco similar to Euro which was adopted by member states. One of the main purposes for its creation is to have a common currency to serve as legal tender across the sub region with the intention of reducing obstacles of doing business and increasing trade overall across the sub region. However, there is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria has suspended the adoption of Eco currency because of lack of effective collaboration with regards to monetary policy amongst stakeholders in the sub region coupled with pockets of disagreements amongst member states possibly influenced by external forces via neo-colonialism vis-a-vis Anglophone-Francophone dichotomy (Chown, 2003).

According to Plasmans et al. (2006) & De Grauwe (2000), monetary unifications entail three basic arrangements namely, common currency, common central bank and common monetary policy'. It is obvious that these three variables will be difficult to attain in the midst of disunity amongst member states. It is most likely that the reason for the disunity might be the fear of domination of a larger economy of one country over other countries. Aside this reason, the fear of the loss of a fraction of a nation's sovereignty cannot be dismissed by a wave of the hands in the context of this discourse; because it is most likely that nation states view this as very costly while acknowledging the fact that monetary unification comes with both benefits and costs and ECOWAS member states seem to be looking more to the direction of the costs than the benefits. The 'benefits' include the elimination of exchange rate uncertainty, transparency in price, peculiarity of a country's policies etc. On the other hand, the 'costs' point to the loss of control over a country's monetary policy instruments such as exchange rate and interest rate. Consequently, the fear expressed by nation states with regards to the costs that might possibly be encountered compared to the benefits had caused the delay in the implementation of the Eco currency which was initially scheduled for use by the year 2020.

Review of Related Literature

The preconditions of forming a monetary union as guided by optimum convergence areas theory points to the fact that the economy of member states needed to open and well diversified (Kinnon,1963). Plasmans et al (2006) state that fiscal integration plays an important role in actualizing a monetary Union. Alagidede et al (2012) assert that there is need to find the existence of a significant heterogeneity in the behaviour of members of West Africa Monetary Zone (WAMZ) in terms of inflation. According to (Masson (2005), policy coordination should be enhanced amongst ECOWAS members' central banks before embarking on a monetary union. Fielding (2004) posits that member states should develop and calibrate a model in which the incentives to join a monetary union is provided by the negative spill over from the independent monetary policy.

Lee (2004) states that asymmetric shocks or low level of regional trade are the main obstacles against creating a monetary union. Hefeker (2010) posits that symmetric monetary policy causes fiscal authorities to adopt distortionary fiscal policy, hence reducing their structural reform effort. More so, asymmetric monetary policy causes further polarization amongst member countries. Houssa (2008) states that correlations of demand shocks are much more similar amongst the francophone countries compared to the Anglophone countries within the West African sub-region. Chuku (2012) asserts that symmetry in the responses of economies to external shocks is high and correlations of their demand, supply and monetary shocks are asymmetric. Usman et al (2012) assert that the main factors that have been contributing to foreign direct investment flow within the euro-zone include single currency, research and development, trades and exchange rate stability.

Bower et al (2018) state that with regards to the temporary response of domestic shocks to regional inflationary shocks, Ghana is much lower in this respect compared to Nigeria. However, their paths of response are very similar. In the same vein, the path of response of Guinea Bissau lies in between the paths of Francophone and Anglophone countries respectively; however, it is closer to the paths of its fellow members of West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU). Furthermore, the Gambian path of response was quite unique. Although, regional shocks caused her inflation to fall and this could be ascribed to the fact that the Gambian currency, the Dalasi is stronger than other currencies in the sub-region apart from the Ghanaian currency; the Cedi. The paths of most of WAEMU countries are similar except for service based economies like that of republic of Benin which joined WAEMU in January, 2008. Bowel et al. (2018) states that Republic of Benin showed a negative response to regional shocks partly due to Nigeria's restrictions on car import through its land borders. Tsangarides et al. (2008) state that the paths of impulse responses of Ghana and Nigeria stand out of the rest of West African states in the sense that the two economies are singletons.

Theoretical Framework

Group theory was adopted for this work as propounded by Author Bently in the year (1908). This theory states that understanding a community is hinged on examining the characteristics of each of the groups contained in the community. The theory argues that the characteristics of the groups in the community points to each of them pursuing its own interest. Meanwhile, there are criteria that determine legislation, administration and adjudication to be agreed upon by all the groups in the community and failure to do so, becomes counter-productive.

In the context of this study, it is no longer news that there are two economic blocs otherwise known as economic groups of ECOWAS member states; namely, West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU) and West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ). Each of these two economic blocs or groups pursues individual interest. In this circumstance, the two blocs appear not to be prepared to actualize the dream of adopting a common currency within the sub-region in view of their disagreement over the subject matter on the premise of ECOWAS's criteria. Meanwhile, the ECOWAS member states are aware that monetary policy cannot address idiosyncratic shocks such as inflation. Secondly, the monetary policies of each of their central banks are not coordinated. These two reasons run contrary to the criteria of adopting the Eco currency. Consequently, in their own interest, members of the West Africa Monetary Zone (WAMZ) who are mainly the citizens of the English-speaking countries (Anglophone) in the sub-region are wishing to find the existence of a significant heterogeneity in the behavior of inflation; hence, they suggested that policy coordination should be enhanced among the members' central banks before embarking on a monetary Union vis-à-vis the Eco currency. However, this suggestion did not go down well with members of the West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU) which consists of citizens majorly of French speaking countries (Francophone) in the sub-region based on their own interest; hence, bringing to the fore; the disunity amongst the two economic blocs within the sub-region.

In a nut shell, the disunity amongst the two economic blocs emphasizes the group theory which argues that every group pursues its own interest not given consideration to legislation, administration and adjudication of a community. This points to the assertion made by (Debrun et al (2005) which says that more often than not, lack of fiscal convergence of a community is the main obstacle against forming a monetary union and this is a formidable factor observed to be militating against the floating of Eco currency within the West African sub-region; hence, the need for ECOWAS to rise up to the occasion in no distant time.

ECOWAS CRITERIA AND THE DIVERGENT VIEWS ON ECO CURRENCY

A significant step towards the realization of a single currency for ECOWAS was taken on June 29, 2019 when regional leaders at a summit in Abuja formally adopted the name 'Eco' for the single currency and a timeline of 2020 for its takeoff. However, after due consideration, Nigeria authorities consider the envisaged takeoff time as over ambitious and unrealistic in view of the technical and political issues which needed to be sorted out before any prospect or successful implementation of the regional single currency scheme. A major factor in this regard is the disunity vis-á-vis the monetary divisions within ECOWAS which has on one hand, eight Francophone countries and two Portuguese colonized countries of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde that are grouped under the auspices of West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). The member states of this union as mentioned above, has the French CFA frac as their common currency. On the other hand, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) comprises the five Anglophone countries and the Spanish colonized Guinea-Conakry in the sub-region and each of these countries has a different currency of its own. Nigeria leads the WAMZ group while Cote D'Ivoire leads the WAEMU group. Nigeria was not surprised that in the political maneuvering of the ECOWAS single currency, the Ivorian president, Alassane Quattara in the announcement made on December 21st, 2019 stated that 'Eco' is a rebranded French backed CFA franc. This drew the ire of Nigeria-led five Anglophone WAMZ nations and Guinea-Conakry which described Quattara's announcement as contrary to the decisions of ECOWAS summit. (Punch Newspaper Report, July 3).

In a joint communiqué after an emergency meeting in Abuja on January 16th, 2020, the WAMZ convergence Council had reiterated the need for member countries to respect the authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government towards the implementation of the revised roadmap of ECOWAS Single Currency Programme and called for the convening of an extraordinary summit of WAMZ member states to discuss the issue further. Following that meeting, Nigeria's Minister of Finance, Zainab Ahmed had described WAEMU's action as inconsistent with the decision of ECOWAS for the adoption of Eco as the name of an independent ECOWAS' single currency. According to her, it is instructive that it was Anglophone countries and Guinea Conakry at the launch of WAMZ in December, 2000 that initiated the idea of a common currency; before being extended to the whole of ECOWAS as a formidable agenda with a target implementation date of 2020. Prior to the decision of the target implementation date of 2020, it had since become an ECOWAS agenda with missed target implementation timelines of 2003, 2005, 2010 and 2014. However, in February 2018, ECOWAS affirmed its intention to restart the single currency process with 2020 implementation date; but with 10 convergence criteria which must be met by all member countries (Punch Newspaper Report, 2020, August 9).

Ten convergence criteria were divided into two unequal share; four primary and six secondary respectively which cut across a single digit inflation rate at the end of each year, a fiscal deficit of not more than 4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a public debt ratio of less than 20 percent of GDP, gross external reserves that can cover imports for a minimum of three months, a stable and positive real exchange rate and a tax revenue that should be equal to or greater than 20 percent of GDP amongst others. While Francophone member nations of WAEMU and their allies want the implementation of ECOWAS single currency in the year 2020 irrespective of whether the criteria are met or not; with only one of her members, Togo that was reported to have been able to meet the convergence criteria then. Given this dismal performance; hence, comes the argument that it becomes unrealistic to push for the take-off of the ECOWAS single currency in year 2020. It is worthy of note that the Francophone countries and their allies have implemented an aspect of financial delinking with French bureaucrats. To this end, these bureaucrats were removed from managing the operations of the Central Banks of Francophone West African States. However, a sticking point is a plan that was orchestrated by Anglophone ECOWAS member states and their ally to have the 'Banque de France': the French Central Bank as the guarantor of Eco-currency convertibility. This seems not to have gone down well with the French authorities (ECOWAS, Report, 2020, August 9).

Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Geoffrey Onyeama told journalists on January 16, 2020 in Abuja that Nigeria cannot support the takeoff of the ECOWAS single currency until the convergence criteria are met. Majority of member countries in the sub-region understood that we are not quite ready immediately to go into this single currency market because it is a process. We endorsed Nigeria's position that member countries must meet relevant criteria before the takeoff of the Eco - currency. We are opposed to an implementation push that amounts to a stampede. (ECOWAS Report, 2020, November, 5). www.independence.ng.

NIGERIA AND GHANA'S RESPECTIVE POSITION ON ECO CURRENCY

According to Ademila Adegbamigbe, President Alassane Quattara of Republic of Cote d' Ivoire, during the 56th ordinary session of ECOWAS in Abuja, announced that France, the colonial master of Francophone's eight member West African States is in total support of the proposed adoption and possible implementation of the ECOWAS common currency, Eco. He quoted French President, Emmanuel Macron to have described the decision as a 'historic reform'. In the same vein, Ghana, an Anglophone country hailed the decision. However, Nigeria is still handling the matter with caution; a development that has sparked off debates beyond the issue of a common market. Against this background, there was a statement signed by the spokesperson of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Yunusa Abdullahi in Abuja that Nigeria has received the news of the change of UEMOA currency, the CFA (Communaute Financiere d' Afrique) to Eco as ECOWAS single currency. Nigeria is studying the situation and would respond in due course. However, people who see Nigeria's statement as being terse may have to examine critically the matter to avoid blaming Nigeria. The truth of the matter remains that what is being conversed in diplomatic circles is that France, the colonial master of Francophone West Africa countries might have hijacked ECO with the tendency of extending her area of influence amongst the entire nation states within the sub-region. (Punch Newspaper Report, 2020, December 9).

Furthermore, Ademola Araoye, a former Nigerian Diplomat at the United Nations and a visiting Professor to University of Johannesburg submits that the politics of ECO Currency is a multi-dimensional issue. Accordingly, Nigeria is directly responsible for this development that has potential to alter the strategic landscape in West Africa in the sense that strategically uninformed support for Alassane Quattara championed by the then authorities of the Nigerian State against a Pan-regionalist, Laurent Gbagbo provided the opportunity for France to consolidate her hold. Nigeria might need to be aware that the challenge is not about the place and role of France in this matter; but, also the continued link of Eco to the Euro which suggests that France might be pulling the strings. Meanwhile, Ghana received the news of the adoption and the possible implementation of the Eco currency by the Francophone West African States with joy. In a statement signed by the Director of Ghana's communications Directorate, Eugene Arhin, the declaration by the Francophone countries and their allies within the sub-region to discontinue the use of the CFA franc in favour of the proposed Eco currency is a welcome development and the Ghanaian state warmly applauds this move. It is a good testimony to the importance that is being attached not only to the establishment of monetary union, but also to the larger agenda of West African Integration. We in Ghana are determined to do whatever we can to enable us join the member states of West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) very soon to commence the use of Eco currency as we believe it will help remove trade and monetary barriers, reduce transaction costs, boost economic activities and raise the living standard of our people (ECOWAS Report, 2020, December 9).

Ghana further urged the other member states of ECOWAS to work rapidly towards implementing the decisions of the authorities of ECOWAS. That is the adoption of a flexible exchange rate regime, instituting a federal system for ECOWAS central Bank and other related agreed convergence criteria, to ensure the region achieves the single currency objectives of ECOWAS as soon as possible for all member states. We have a historic opportunity to create a new reality for the people of ECOWAS, a reality of general prosperity and progress (Ademila Adegbemigbe, www.thenewsnigeria.com.ng). In his own submission, Ademila Araoye states that close observers of Ghana's President Nana Akufo Addo would not be surprised at this anti-Nigeria's policy. Right at the inception of his administration in a speech at Chatham House, London; he betrayed his deep-seated animosity to Nigeria and has subtly reiterated this in many Fora. The instigator of his current position is most likely the closure of the Nigerian land borders. (ECOWAS Report, 2020, December 9).

Furthermore, Ademola Araoye stated that one have to understand Ghanaian politics. President Akufo Addo's party perceptions and policy in relation to Nigeria is consistent with the nationalist orientation of the Dankwa/Abrefa Busia traditions. The other aisle is the Nkrumalist/Gbedema/Rawlings Pan Africanist mould paradoxically. Ghanian nationalism is often measured against how it stands in its competition with Nigeria. The statement of Ghanaian authorities is so carefully worded as to lose meaning. In, addition, Ambassador Akinkolie asserts that for Ghana to join the Francophone group in the sub-region with respect to CFA vis-á-vis Eco currency the allegiance and solidarity with Nigeria based on the common colonial heritage is over and does not count much anymore. This is mainly because of the then Nigeria's border closure which had supposedly affected Ghanaian economy despite the fact that it shares no boundary with Nigeria but, it is certainly against Ghana's national interest; hence, this kind of reaction. However, for Rasheed Akinkuolie, what Ghana needed to know with regards to Eco-currency adoption despite the short comings of the Francophone countries' arrangement with France which Ghana may not be aware of is that these counties are still better off taking the risk of a total economic independence in the sense that France manages efficiently their electricity, water, transportation and educational system. For example, power outage for a day in any of the Francophone countries within the sub region is the same and it is fraud free. Also, their certificates are recognized worldwide. Besides, their medical services are about the same with France. Their national security; both internal and external are guaranteed by France. Although, France will only intervene as a last resort if the local security system fails. Most likely, all these social amenities may not be extended to Ghana by France even with Ghana's hurried support for the adoption and implementation of Eco-Currency without first examining critically the consequences that would follow thereafter. This is because of the simple reason that the principle of assimilation that had been put in place during the colonial era does not cover any member of the Common Wealth of which Ghana is a member and there is no assurance that this principle could be reversed as a result of a mere support from an outsider like Ghana. All the same, we are living in a free world; only time would tell (Punch Newspaper Report, 2020, December). www.thenewsnigeria.com.ng.

ECOWAS and Macro-Economic Convergence Criteria

Again, the history of Eco currency has unfortunately been replete with postponement as it was initially planned to be introduced in 2003 but postponed to 2005, 2010 and 2014 for various reasons. The launch of the currency was also rescheduled to 2015 owing to global and continental economic crises. Beyond the recent enthusiasm and excitement, there are underlying macro-economic convergence criteria to be met by member states before the adoption of the currency. Amongst the four primary criteria is sustaining single digit inflation rate at the end of each year by each member state. This criterion has not been met by some ECOWAS member states in 2024; see Table 1 below. Also, there is a primary criterion which stipulates the sustenance of fiscal deficit of not more than 4% of the GDP. Another condition is limiting the central bank deficit to not more than 10% of the previous year's tax and maintenance of gross external reserves that can provide import cover for a minimum of three months. In addition, there are six secondary criteria which include meeting tax revenue mark that is equal or greater than 20 percent of the GDP; sustaining a wage bill to tax revenue that is equal to or less than 36%; maintaining a stable exchange rate; maintaining a positive interest rate; ensuring public investment to tax revenue equal to or greater than 20% and prohibition of new domestic default payments vis-á-vis the liquidation of existing ones (ECOWAS Report, 2017, June 9).

Table 1: West Africa Sub Regional Inflation Rate

/No	Country	ast (2024)	revious
.	Benin	.8%	.3%
.	Burkina Faso	.4%	.4%
.	Cape Verde	.9%	.5%
.	Cote d' Voire	.9%	.6%
.	Gambia	2.8%	3.1%
.	Ghana	2.8%	3.1%
.	Guinea-Conakry	.4%	.3%
.	Guinea Bissau	.9%	.3%
.	Liberia	.72%	.45%
0.	Mali	. 2%	.2%
1.	Mauritania	.7%	.10%
2.	Niger	3.0%	0.99%
3.	Nigeria	4.19%	3.95%
4.	Senegal	.3%	.1%
5.	Sierra Leone	5.84%	8.06%

6.	Togo	.3%	3.9%

Source: tradingeconomics.com>country-list>in

The data in table 1 above revealed that Sierra Leone has the highest inflation rate in 2024 with double digit of 35.84% and the highest in the previous year with 38.06%; followed by Nigeria with double digit of 34.19% and with 33.95% previously. Gambia recorded 10.99% in 2024 and has 11.04% previously while Ghana recorded 22.8% in 2024 but, previously recorded 23.1% previously as against republic of Benin's lowest inflation rate of 0.8% in 2024 and Mali's lowest inflation rate of 1.2% previously.

In continuation with macro-economic convergence criteria, past and current assessment of efforts by member countries to meet these criteria have been unimpressive; for instance, the primary criteria which stipulate that deficit Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio should be less than 10%; gross mexternal reserves should be greater than 3 months of imports were met by only three member states; namely, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria compare to those that couldn't meet these criteria in 2015 which were Benin (6.2%), Gambia (9.5%), Sierra Leone (6.4%) and Togo (8.5%). And still with the primary criteria, only Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone recorded an inflation rate of less than 10% in 2016. In 2015, all ECOWAS members other than Ghana recorded an inflation rate less than 10%. The Anglophone countries recorded higher inflation rates. The higher inflation rates could be attributable to the depreciation of the currencies of these members in 2015 and 2016 respectively (ECOWAS Report, 2017, September 6).

The secondary criteria include debt-GDP to be lower than 70 percent; central bank financing of the budget deficit should not be above 10% of the previous year's tax revenue; and variation of nominal exchange rate to be within the band of ± 10 percent. Only Cape Verde (128.6%), Gambia (117.3%) and Togo (79.4%) have not met the first secondary criterion. Regarding the third secondary criterion, three currencies in 2016, compared to two in 2015 experienced an average variation outside the ±10% band. The affected currencies are Guinean franc (16.4%), Nigerian naira (23.5%) and the Leone as Sierra Leonean currency (19.1%). These dismal performances go a long way to question the commitment of member countries in implementing the Eco currency. Going by this, experts are of the view that effective implementation of the single currency will depend on strengthening and achieving macro-economic convergence. Furthermore, aside from the challenge in meeting the macro-economic convergence, the sub region is characterized by minimal trade convergence (volume of trade among member countries) as against huge volume of trade divergence (volume of trade between member countries and other countries outside the economic union; a development that is considered unsettling (ECOWAS Report, 2017, September 6).

It is obvious that to achieve a sustainable economic integration, the volume of trade convergence amongst the countries in the sub-region must be greater than trade divergence between ECOWAS member states and other countries of the world. Unfortunately, this status is yet to be achieved. This is evident from the fact that a good number of ECOWAS member states' foreign exchange reserves are still being partially managed by external entities; which gives the impression that such countries are not in full charge of their respective monetary policy management and control. Above are issues demanding urgent resolution before the adoption and implementation of Eco-currency by all the countries in the West African sub-region. Therefore, one cannot but agree with the decision of (WAMZ) which consists of the English-Speaking West African countries and their only ally, Guinea-Conakry with the exception of Ghana; that noted with concern, the unilateral declaration by (WAEMU) led by President Alassane Quattara of republic of Cote d'Ivoire to replace the CFA franc with Eco. According to a press statement released by West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), such unilateral declaration is not in accordance with the decision of ECOWAS with regards to adopting Eco as the single currency of the sub region. It is expected that concerted efforts towards the adoption of the Eco currency should focus more on convergence macro-economic criteria rather than political rhetoric in ensuring an enduring economic union (ECOWAS report, 2017).

THE FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST THE COOPERATION OVER THE ADOPTION OF ECO CURRENCY

There is politics surrounding the currency reforms with regards to contrasting visions and perspectives of the anglophone bloc led by Nigeria and the francophone bloc led by Cote d' Voire as there appears to be two contrasting visions of the currency. For example, in January, 2020, Nigeria criticized the December decision of French President, Emmanuel Macron, Cote d' Voire President, Alassane Quattara and eight member West African Economic Monetary Union to replace CFA franc (which is pegged to the Euro) with Nigeria saying that it conflicted with Eco broader vision of a single currency of all 15 West African Countries. The study observed apparently that the non-cooperation by the Francophone and the Anglophone countries under the auspices of WAEMU and WAMZ which had formed the basis of disagreement over the implementation of Eco currency between the two economic blocs within the ECOWAS sub region is not ordinary. There is likely some underlying factors to this ugly trend. The quagmire involved in the implementation of Eco as a single currency for the entire member countries in the region numbering fifteen could be linked to international intrigue within the European axis(Punch Newspaper Report, 2021).

The major visible player in this context is France which controls the Francophone economic bloc of the sub region that consist of 15 countries known as the West Africa Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU) headed by President Alassane Quattara of Cote d'Ivoire; except most recently, precisely on the 28th of January, 2024 when the countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger as members of WAEMU released a joint statement announcing their exit from ECOWAS. This became quite glaring with respect to the statement released by President Quattara in Abuja of which he mentioned the name of the French President, Emmanuel Macron as having endorsed the implementation of Eco-currency to replace CFA Franc for its members; while leaving the members of the Anglophone based economic block;

the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) with the exception of Ghana in great shock. The shock was most likely triggered by the fact that the criteria for the implementation of Eco-currency are yet to be met. Indeed, they are in the process of being actualized. With respect to Ghana's decision to toe the path of the Francophone countries in the sub-region is a different ball game in the sense that Ghana might have been driven by her ambition to take over the leadership of WAMZ from Nigeria thereby, making it the giant of the economic bloc. Secondly it could possibly be her annoyance over the closure of Nigeria's land borders with republic of Benin in 2019, in which the Ghanaian authorities believed that the policy had indirectly caused a blockade to the advancement of the Ghanaian economy as the closure lasted (ECOWAS Report, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study observed that there is a competing economic philosophy between the francophone and the anglophone blocs with Ghana as a possible potential bridge. Against this background, the adoption of Eco Currency by all the countries within the West African sub region has been a hard task to deal with owing to the disunity amongst the two economic blocs which has on one hand, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) which consist of five Anglophone countries including Guinea-Conakry. On the hand, there is the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) which consist of eight Francophone countries including Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde except most recently when Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali opted out of ECOWAS due a face-off between those countries and the sub regional body. WAEMU had adopted Eco-currency without due consideration whether or not the criteria of macro-economic convergence had been met. France was at the centre of it all, leaving the members of WAMZ except Ghana in great shock. The truth of the matter is that many members of WAEMU had not fulfilled the criteria; hence, bringing defeat upon the overall objective of the adoption of Eco currency. Ideally, having a single currency in the West African sub region would 'foster firm economic integration' vis-à-vis free trade across land borders which would boost economic development amongst member states which has been the primary motivation of the two major founding fathers and visionary leaders of ECOWAS, Gen. Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria and Gen. Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo.

In addition, these leaders, aimed at sustaining a United West Africa and not a conglomeration of anglophone or francophone blocs. However, Ordu et al (2021) states that laudable objectives seem to have been disrupted due to the challenge posed by disunity vis-à-vis macro-economic convergence which is driven by group interest while abandoning the overall interest of ECOWAS to suffer; and coupled with the disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic amongst other challenges. Although, many policy makers remain keen to forge ahead with the implementation now tentatively set for 2027 but, with double digit inflation in Nigeria and other countries in the sub region in 2024 as against one of the criteria that make it mandatory in sustaining a single digit inflation rate at the end of each year coupled with public debt reaching level, the Eco currency is not likely to enter circulation in 2027 as planned.

To this end, except deliberate efforts are made to foster cooperation amongst stakeholders in order to reach compromises on the contending issues over a unified adoption of Eco currency, the objective of ECOWAS on this subject matter may not be realized anytime so soon. Consequently, the study puts forward the following recommendations:

i. The Francophone states and their two allies should reconsider dropping their present stand with regards to adopting Eco currency and see reason in fulfilling all the macro-economic convergence criteria as agreed upon by ECOWAS.
ii. WAMZ and WAEMU should be disbanded by an act of ECOWAS to give way for a formidable economic front devoid of interference from any external force.
iii. Ghana, an Anglophone West African state should retract its decision to adopt Eco-currency without fulfiling the macro-economic convergence criteria and stop being overwhelmed by her dream to possibly overtake Nigeria and become the economic giant of the West African sub-region.
iv. ECOWAS member states should not allow disagreement to destroy the vision of the founding fathers which is tied to economic integration.
v. There should be transparency vis-a-vis trust amongst ECOWAS member states in order to come to terms with operating a unified monetary policy that would guarantee economic development and enhance growth to the benefit of all residents within the sub-region.
vi. The Central Bank of each ECOWAS member state within the sub region should be well coordinated by financial experts to meet current economic realities in relation to adopting Eco as a single currency for the sub region.

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