

INTERROGATING NIGERIA'S HEGEMONIC ROLE IN ECOWAS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's hegemonic role in ECOWAS has been influenced by her territorial size, abundant resources, thriving economy and military capability. Hegemony as a concept within the context of international relations is an indirect form of state dominance in a geopolitical environment. In line with her Afrocentric foreign policy initiative, Nigeria wants to be a leader, not only in West Africa, but also in Africa and of the black race worldwide. The oil factor has greatly influenced the political economy of Nigeria in a way that has empowered her to play a leadership and dynamic role in ECOWAS. The paper argued that Nigeria's engagements at the sub-regional level in maintaining political stability has greatly strengthened her hegemonic power in West Africa. It is evident that, Nigeria, through her hegemonic role, imposed order in the sub-region as was done in the 20th century in Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, the quality of leadership role in ECOWAS seems to be declining in comparison with the 1990s when Nigeria played active role in restoring peace in West Africa. In this Fourth Republic, Nigeria has wrestled with internal instability, corruption and political economy of violence. This has been compounded with challenges of terrorism in West Africa. The future of ECOWAS depends on sustainability of Nigeria as a sub-regional hegemon. The paper concludes that the success of Nigeria in maintaining her hegemonic status in ECOWAS must be measured in her capacity to solve her domestic problems, integrate the region economically and to sustain peace in West Africa.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Hegemony, Leadership, ECOWAS, Peace*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's hegemonic role in ECOWAS needs a critical appraisal if the economic development, governance and security issues in the region is to be fully understood. The roles and activities of Nigeria in ECOWAS can be understood within the context of its foreign policy initiative. As observed by Alli (2010) the key interests of states in the international arena which determine the content of foreign policy include the achievement of security, socio-economic welfare, and power. However, the use of national interest as a cornerstone of foreign policy is a key element of the road more travelled in world politics (Rouke, 2005: 181). Indeed, it is important for states as actors in the world system to be conscious of what constitutes the principal objectives of their foreign policy and also those of other countries, which is greatly determined by the promotion and protection of national interest. To be sure, Nigeria's national interest includes; the defence of the country's sovereignty/independence and territorial integrity, the restoration of human dignity to black men and women all over the world, particularly the eradication of colonialism and white minority rule from the face of Africa; and the promotion of world peace. Apart from engaging in global peace and security, Nigeria has remained quite consistent in her policy towards Africa, particularly towards the West African region. It is quite obvious that regional policy issues, constitutes major aspect of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives. Despite her constantly changing government, her underdeveloped economy, and the fractures in her internal political structure, Nigeria strives to maintain her foreign policy objectives, particularly towards West Africa (Ojekwe, 2010: 43). Thus, it is clear that Nigeria had established herself as the leader of Africa in line with her Africa-centred foreign policy. In the same vein, Nigeria's dominance in sub-regional affairs is accepted by ECOWAS. This hegemonic dominance has been the hallmark of Nigeria – ECOWAS relations. As Osuntokun (2013: 21) has rightly observed:

The fact of Nigeria being a hegemon in this sub-region is therefore firmly established and based on economic and demographic factors. There are other factors that add in the weight of Nigeria as a hegemon in the West-African sub-region. Its location in the mid-Atlantic and also at the geographical breast of the continent guarding the waters of the West Atlantic and the South Atlantic adds to the country's importance.

There is any doubt about Nigeria's commitment to the social, economic, political and cultural progress in ECOWAS. In this light, this paper discusses Nigeria's leadership role in ECOWAS with a view to analyzing the challenges and prospects of maintaining such sub-regional hegemon.

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse of Hegemony

Hegemony as a concept is very complex, which means different things to different scholars. Rouke (2005) defines hegemony as the ability of one state to lead in world politics by promoting its worldview and ruling over arrangements governing international economics. At the developing stages of the concept, the U.S.A was persistently been used in analysing the concept sequel to her global exploits and the ability to laying the law down to others through its dominant and assertive tendencies since the demise of the former USSR, which, appears to have placed the country as a global hegemon.

Schmidt (2018) provide generic definitions of hegemony from two stand points. The first is the notion that hegemony entails overwhelming or preponderant material power. The second is the idea that hegemony involves the exercise of some form of leadership, including domination over others. The second definition of hegemony according to Schmidt is pronounced in the definition provided by *The International Studies Encyclopedia*; which sees the concept of hegemony to international leadership by one political subject, be it the state or a "historical bloc" of particularly social groupings, whereby the reproduction of dominance involves the enrolment of other, weaker, less powerful parties (states/classes) constituted by varying degree of consensus, persuasion and, consequently, political legitimacy (Schmidt, 2018: 4).

Layne (2006: 4) argues that hegemony is about structural change, because if one state achieves hegemony, the system ceases to be anarchic and becomes hierarchic". Layne posits that there are four features of hegemony. First, is that hegemony entails hard power. Layne argues that hegemonies have the most powerful military. They also possess economic supremacy to support their preeminent military capabilities. Second, hegemony is about the dominant power's ambitions; namely, "a hegemon acts self-interestedly to create a stable international order that will safeguard its security and its economic and ideological interests". Third, "hegemony is about polarity", because if one state (the hegemon) has more power than anyone else, the system is by definition unipolar. Finally, "hegemony is about will. According to Layne, "not only must a hegemon possess overwhelming power, it must purposefully exercise that power to impose order on the international system". The major view of the concept of hegemony connotes "dominance" of one power in and over the international system (Kindleberger, 1973, Keohane, 1980, Rouke, 2005).

Similarly, some scholars have conceptualized hegemony in regional context. Destradi (2010:908) argued that a regional power is a state that belongs to a distinct geographic region, has superiority in power capabilities, and exercise same form of influence over the region. To be sure, a state as claimed by Nolte (2010) must articulate a self-conception of having a leading

position within the region, articulate a common regional identity, provide collective goods, and act as a representative of regional interests in international fora in order to be considered a regional power. Thus, regional powerhood rests on having superior material capabilities in comparison to the rest of the region. In the same vein, the external world as observed by Hulse (2016:8) often perceives powerful states as having a special duty of care towards their sub-regions, and holding the expectation that the regional power should bear responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in its neighbourhood.

More importantly, a regional hegemon is a powerful state that enforces rules through dominance. In addition, recognition by other states serves as one of the criteria for state to claim regional leadership. Nolte (2007:15) proposes ten indices that qualify a state to claim regional power; for him, a regional power is a state:

- that is part of a region which is geographically, economically and politically delimited;
- which articulates the pretension of a leading position in the region (self-conception);
- which influences in a significant way the geopolitical delimitation and the political ideational construction of the region;
- which displays the material (military, economic, demographic), organizational (political) and ideological resources for a regional power projection;
- which is economically, politically and culturally interconnected with the region;
- which truly has great influence in regional affairs (activities and results);
- which exerts this influence also (and more and more) by means of regional governance structures;
- which defines the regional security agenda in a significant way;
- whose leading position in the region is recognized or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region, especially by other regional powers;
- which is integrated in interregional and global forums and institutions where he articulates not only its own interests but acts as well, at least rudimentary, as a representative of regional interests.

The theoretical postulation of this paper is drawn from Hegemonic Stability Theory. The starting point of hegemonic stability theory is the presence of a single dominant state. Robert Keohane (1984) argued that the theory of hegemonic stability defines hegemony as preponderance of material resources. Keohane further pointed out that hegemonic powers must have control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods (Keohane, 1984: 32).

While it is true that hegemonic stability is a realist prescription of how to achieve international stability in an anarchical international system, it is very important to emphasize on the liberal variant of hegemonic stability theory. Liberal hegemony according to Ikenberry (2011) refers to rule and regime-based order created by a leading state. According to Ikenberry there are three institutional features of liberal hegemony. Firstly, “the leading state sponsors and operates within a system of negotiated rules and institutions”. Secondly, “the lead state provides some array of public goods”, and thirdly, “the hegemonic order provides channels and networks for reciprocal communication and influence” (Ikenberry, 2011: 72). Therefore, this paper utilized the liberal theory of hegemony in analyzing Nigeria’s hegemonic power in West Africa; which places so much attention in the leadership functions that successful hegemons fulfill in fostering liberal international order.

Nigeria and the Formation of ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 by the Treaty of Lagos through the efforts of Nigeria and Togo, with the formal aim of promoting economic co-operation within the region. The ECOWAS scheme was no doubt driven by the lofty vision and expectation that underscored similar projects in other geographical spheres of regions, especially Europe, North and Latin America, Asia and East Africa (Bassey and Nyong, 2012). The idea then was to create an economic community that would cut across linguistic and cultural barriers, as a prelude to the pursuit of African common market and collective self-reliance.

Preliminary negotiations that culminated in the formation of ECOWAS actually started between Nigeria's General Yakubu Gowon and Togo's General Gnassingbe Eyadema in April 1972. Before the formation of ECOWAS, France had seen Nigeria as too large and a threat to its interests in Francophone West African countries, and thus attempted to counter the Nigeria – Togo initiative by facilitating the preliminary agreements in June 1972 to establish the *Communauté Economique D' Afrique Occidentale* (CEDAO) exclusively for Francophone West Africa in May 1973. The initiative was cleverly anchored on the 1970 protocol in Bamako (Mali) and got started by its confirmation of the Treaty of Abidjan in April 17, 1973. This was perceived by Nigeria as an attempt by France to exploit and perpetuate colonial divisions to counterpoise its big brother" status within the West African sub-region (Omede, 2006: 9).

Quite obviously, the formation of ECOWAS has clearly manifested Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa and her interest in developing international organizations. In the same vein, Nigeria's foreign policy approach towards ECOWAS after its creation was to consolidate on the Afrocentric foreign policy doctrine it has developed that is well known to the international community before the formation of ECOWAS. This necessitated its determination to lead the newly formed organization right from the beginning to preserve its supposed leadership status in West Africa. Nigeria's foreign policy towards ECOWAS during its formative years were also defined by the prevailing circumstances in the region that allows the kind of foreign policy which was premeditated to respond to the frequent political instabilities across the region; because of incessant military coups, religious intolerance, lack of socio-economic development, and supremacy struggle between Anglophone and Francophone countries in the region due to their historical experience (Omo-Oghebor, 2017: 4017). Therefore, the initiative for ECOWAS stemmed from a desire by some of the member states, particularly Nigeria, for an economically and/or politically stable and developing region.

Factors that Influence Nigeria's Leadership Role in West Africa

Nigeria's leadership role in West-African Sub-region is based on economic, demographic and military factors.

1. *Economy*

In terms of economic potential, no West African Country can compete with Nigeria. According to the IFS model used by Cilliers et al (2015) in determining Nigeria's economic potential, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is forecast to grow from slightly over \$525 billion in 2014 to slightly over \$4.2 trillion by 2040. Nigeria is by far the continent's largest market. She is endowed with considerable mineral and agricultural resources. These include oil and gas, coal, iron, tin, limestone and crops such as cocoa, tobacco, palm products, peanuts, cotton, soya beans and rubber. The oil industry is today the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, accounting for some 80 percent of government revenue, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 40 percent of GDP and 4 percent of employment (Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012: 390).

2. Demography

The current population of West African countries based on the latest 2020 United Nations estimates is 396,765, 899 (www.worldometers.info/world-popu). Nigeria's 206, 139, 589 has more than double the population of Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. See Table 1.

Table 1: Countries in West Africa and their Population (2020)

Country	Population
Nigeria	206,139,589
Ghana	31,072,940
Cote d'Ivoire	26,378,274
Niger	24,206,644
Burkina Faso	20,903,273
Mali	20,250,833
Senegal	16,743,927
Guinea	13,132,795
Benin	12,123,200
Togo	8,278,724
Sierra Leone	7,976,983
Liberia	5,057,681
Mauritania	4,649,658
Gambia	2,416,668
Guinea – Bissau	1,968,001
Cape Verde	555,987
Saint Helena	6,077

Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/western-Africa>.

From the above, Nigeria remains the most populated country in West Africa; and is also having the largest concentration of black people in the world. This demographic factor placed Nigeria above other countries to assert her influence at the sub-regional level.

3. Military Capability

Cilliers et al (2015) argued that assessing a country's influence is as complex as measuring its capabilities. However, two potential ways of assessing influence in the foreign-policy domain in the African context may be firstly, to look at a country's commitment to peacekeeping missions, and, secondly, its membership in the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) (Cilliers et al 2015:20). At the sub-regional level, Nigeria possesses an overwhelming military strength. Her sizeable and relatively well-equipped armed forces are capable of defending the country against any likely external threat and of projecting power in the region. Also, Nigeria is the fourth largest troop contributing country to the United Nations (Zabadi and Onuoha, 2012: 394). Already a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Nigeria has the largest Navy in Africa with the country's power felt all over the continent (Ogunsanwo, 2015). Without doubt, Nigeria's sub-regional hegemonic status has often been advanced on the basis of its superior advanced military capabilities within West Africa.

Nigeria's Hegemonic Role in ECOWAS

In other to understand Nigeria's hegemonic role in West Africa, it is very important to review Nigeria's foreign policy towards the region. The main thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy towards the West African region is anchored on the three doctrinal concepts; African centre-peace perspective, the concentric circle model which outlines the following: Anti-colonialism, anti-apartheid and anti-racism principles. Cooperation with immediate neighbours and with other ECOWAS member states and promotion of peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). As a driving power in the sub-region, Nigeria's policy planners had an expressed objective of enhancing its economic and security interests through ECOWAS for the transformation of prevailing regional neo-colonial structures and power relations (Bassey and Nyong, 2012: 279).

Since 1975 when ECOWAS was established, Nigeria is the only hegemonic leader in the sub-region. The logic here is that economic, demographic, military and other factors add to the weight of Nigeria emerging as an hegemon in West Africa.

One major area of displaying its hegemonic power at the sub-regional level is on the basis of Nigeria's superior economic capability. The leadership role in which Nigeria finds itself within the ECOWAS is as much a function as it is a product of the country's active participation in the organization. Nigeria has sustained ECOWAS financially more than any other member of the organization (see Table 2). Nigeria provides about 33% of the ECOWAS annual budget and contributes more than 32% to the fund for development (Oche, 2010: 343). In addition, Nigeria's financial contributions can be classified into three types: statutory financial contributions, voluntary contributions and voluntary assistance to individual member- states of ECOWAS (Osondu, 2015).

Table 2: Financial Contribution of Member-States of ECOWAS

S/No	Member Country	Financial Contributions for ECOWAS Sustenance
1	Benin	3.9%
2	Birkin Faso	2.6%
3	Cape Verde	1.5%
4	Cote D'Ivoire	13%
5	The Gambia	6%
6	Ghana	12.9%
7	Guinea Bissau	1.5%
8	Liberia	6.7%
9	Mali	1.9%
10	Mauritania	2.6%
11	Niger	2.1%
12	Nigeria	32.8%
13	Senegal	5.4%
14	Sierra Leone	4.4%
15	Togo	3.6%

Source: Osondu, M.O. (2015): "Membership in the Multilateral Economic Organizations: An Evaluation of Nigeria's Participation in ECOWAS (1985 – 2014)", *International Journal of Development and Management Review*, Vol. 10, pp. 95 – 109.

Apparently, Nigeria continues relentlessly to sponsor, assist and support many West African states that have needed and/or requested her assistance, whether with economic, technical and/or human resources. As the richest country in the sub-region with huge revenues from export of petroleum, Nigeria has had to play a more crucial role in sustaining the speed of regional integration and in providing targeted economic assistance to other countries in the sub-region. Under General Yakubu Gowon, particularly after the Civil War, Nigeria tried to buy regional influence through generous donations to other West African states from revenues derived from oil (Adebajo, 2008: 8). No doubt, Nigeria voluntarily assisted individual member states of ECOWAS to demonstrate and confirm her leadership position in the sub-region.

According to Adamu (1992) Nigeria between 1977 and 1987 donated two buses to Benin Republic to enable her host ECOWAS games, financed road projects in Benin and Niger Republics, trained Benin military personnel, sent Nigerian judges to offer legal assistance to Gambia and offered scholarships and technical assistance to Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. Over the years many ECOWAS members (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Gambia, Liberia, Niger and Senegal) have benefitted from the Technical Aids Corps (TAC) programme, which deploy Nigerians experts across West Africa as requested by governments (Alli, 2012: 33).

More importantly, the size and quality of Nigeria's military force is also another indicator for measuring her hegemonic power in ECOWAS. To be sure, Nigeria's role as important member of the UN is epitomized by its large contribution to peace-keeping operations globally. It is these facts that have sometimes made Nigeria and others to suggest that as the pre-eminent black African country, Nigeria should have a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations security council. However, the material dominance of Nigeria in ECOWAS is analysed using the correlates of War's National Material Capabilities Index (Hulse, 2016). Nigeria is the most powerful country in West Africa within the context of military capability. Table 3 reveals the military personnel of members of ECOWAS and significantly indicate the extent to which Nigeria is claiming sub-regional hegemon.

Table 3: Military Personnel of Members of ECOWAS

Country	Military Personnel
Benin	4750
Burkina Faso	11200
Cape Verde	1200
Cote d'Ivoire	35000
Gambia	2500
Ghana	7000
Guinea Bissau	4000
Guinea	45000
Liberia	2100
Mali	12500
Niger	12000
Nigeria	130000
Senegal	19000
Sierra Leone	13000
Togo	7000

Source: Alli, W.O. (2012): *The Role of Nigeria in Regional Security Policy*. Abuja: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

In the ECOWAS context, Nigeria is playing a leadership role by providing resources in men, material and diplomatic muscle through peace-keeping, mediation, and training of military personnel (Alli, 2012). Nigeria has remained committed to ECOWAS and by extension, its monitoring group Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). The leadership role Nigeria played in ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone cannot be underestimated. It is instructive to note that General Ibrahim Babangida, whose regime was confronted with the Liberian Civil War argued that:

The ECOWAS region completes what has been termed the three concentric circles governing Nigerian foreign and defence policies. There is therefore no gain saying the fact that when certain events occur in this region depending upon their intensity and magnitude which are

bound to affect Nigeria's politico-military and socio-economic environment, we should not stand-by as a hapless and helpless spectator (Babangida as cited in Bassey, 2011: 7).

The above quotation helps us to understand why Nigeria as a sub-regional hegemon had a strong incentive to use ECOWAS to prevent the regionalization of wars and conflicts in West Africa. No doubt, Nigeria's role in ECOMOG is determined by its interests which are strategic in nature. Under the sub-regional hegemony of Nigeria, ECOMOG was deployed to some of the conflict zones as a regional peacekeeping and intervention force. ECOMOG's conflict resolution mechanism has mostly involved multidimensional peacekeeping i.e. traditional peacekeeping through monitoring implementation of peace agreements reached between conflicting parties. In addition to her role in ECOWAS' efforts in resolving conflicts in Africa, Nigeria has also been instrumental to most of the conflict mediation, diplomacy and peace settlement agreements in almost all the recent wars in West Africa. Nigeria has played a prominent role in ECOWAS through the commitment of its substantial military capacity, notably in supplying the leadership and the majority of troops for ECOMOG peacekeeping force in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Thus, Nigeria's initiatives in restoring peace in both Liberia and Sierra-Leone in the 1990s is a proof of Nigeria's hegemonic power in West Africa. Nigeria has borne the greatest burden in terms of peacekeeping in West Africa. By 1999, it was estimated that Nigeria had committed over 13 billion US dollars to peacekeeping operations in West Africa (Bamali, 2009: 100).

In addition, Nigeria continued to demonstrate its support towards ECOWAS zero tolerance for the unconstitutional and undemocratic change of government. Its condemnation of the undemocratic change of government in both Mali and Guinea Bissau is evidence of this fact. Nigeria negotiated a peaceful resolution of the crisis and prevented the coup leaders in those countries from executing their detained erstwhile presidents and prime ministers (Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013).

Nigeria's commitment to regional security is very crucial in her foreign policy posture to West Africa. The Cote d'Ivoire crisis was a particularly unpleasant experience for West African leaders because the country was regarded as one of the most stable in the sub-region. The keenly contested election in October 2000 followed an intense power struggle between Laurent Gbagbo and his allies on the one hand and Alassane Quattara and his supporters on the other hand in the light of an intense debate over "Ivorite" or Ivorianess" about who is truly an Ivorian (Alli, 2012: 26). This later generated into serious political crisis, thereby breaking the country into two parts. Building on its track record as the regional powerhouse that dominates ECOWAS and its track record in peace building, Nigeria was keen to take the lead in resolving the Ivorian crisis and profiting itself internationally as a pro-democracy force (Bassuyt, 2016). The same gesture was repeated in Gambia's constitutional crisis in 2016. Following the disputed December 2016 presidential elections in the Gambia, ECOWAS managed to restore democracy in the country by using the threat of force, but without any use of direct physical violence. Nigeria claimed leadership of the mediation and participated in the military intervention without any clear material interest in the small country (Hartmann, 2017).

The final factor which places Nigeria above other countries in West Africa in relation to hegemonic posture is soft power attributes. Ogunnubi (2013) attempts to locate Nigeria's soft power within the ambits of Nye's three prescription of culture, foreign policy and public diplomacy. Clearly, Nigeria's soft power resources are enormous. But the two that is most obvious are its "Nollywood" industry and International mega churches. The Nigerian Nollywood industry is today recognized globally as the second largest movie industry in the world in terms of production output and third in terms of value. Also, Nigeria's mega churches have branches in virtually all countries in the world. The point been made here is that Nigeria's Nollywood

industry and mega churches not only give Nigeria international recognition, but also boost Nigeria's tourist business (Ogunnubi, 2013). Thus, as far as assessing the hegemonic profile of sub-regional actors, Nigeria's soft power position in ECOWAS is very feasible and unquestionable.

Explaining the Challenges

It is worthy to note that Nigeria faces many challenges in its hegemonic role at the sub-regional level. The former President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr. Muhammad Ibn Chambas, identified the strategic importance of Nigeria to the West Africa Project and how the success of the Nigerian experience holds the key to West African integration. Chambas, however, could not hide his hopes and fears as well as the impediments which could hamper the realization of Nigeria's full potential in West Africa (Ibn Chamber, 2005: 111). The first issue raised by Chambas is the importance of constitutional and democratic rule to enhance the leadership role of Nigeria. For Chambas, a democratic Nigeria in which there is respect for human rights, the rule of law, a culture of tolerance and dialogue, is morally placed to mediate in the numerous conflicts plaguing the sub-region and Africa as a whole (Ibn Chambas, 2005). However, democratic Nigeria is often accused of being unable to project power because of a profound domestic governance deficit, which includes high levels of internal violent. Nigeria's successive military governments found it easier to intervene in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The transition from authoritarian military leadership to one with greater accountability has clearly reduced Nigeria's ability to project power. In 2009, in an election to the UN Security Council, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Togo did not vote for Nigeria (Cillier et al, 2014: 23).

For Nigeria to continue asserting influence in ECOWAS, it has to change its current political culture. Currently, Nigeria is ravaged with internal security challenges; from Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, kidnapping, Farmers/ Herdsmen conflicts and secessionist threat in the South East. Amuwo (2014) argues that Nigeria has effectively lost its pre-eminence in Africa despite the engagement role it plays in West Africa, and more specifically ECOWAS, and that the country does not have a coherent foreign policy. There is a nexus between foreign policy and domestic politics. A country that is strong at home would be influential abroad. Domestic strength largely depends on economic and political stability. As a matter of fact, the decline of oil influence may gradually be noticeable even in West Africa where for years Nigeria's oil diplomacy has been very effective. Today, the economy is in a terrible state of rehabilitation as one can see in the huge debt Nigeria owes as external debt as well as the country's unemployment rate. Of course, the persistent loss of value of the Naira in relation to convertible currencies has serious implications on trade and investment in the West African Sub-region. Nigeria's natural and mineral resources may be in good supply but the country's deficiency in industrial establishments, and her inability to use the resources to foster rapid economic recovery, do not augur well with the economy. Therefore, Nigeria's position as the economic power in the sub-region is likely to be challenged sooner or later by other countries that are not comfortable with Nigeria's hegemony (Osondu, 2015: 104). In essence, Nigeria's status as West Africa's biggest economy does not correlate with the poor living standards of its people.

Furthermore, Nigeria does not fulfil a leadership role in trade integration within ECOWAS. The reasons for this are rooted in Nigeria's domestic politics, involving a mix of legitimate opposition from interest groups, and rent-seeking interests (Hulse, 2016). Regional trade liberalization would threaten Nigeria's nascent manufacturing sector, which focuses on producing goods for its large market. Interest groups such as the National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS) and the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN) are well organized, extremely vocal, and almost universally opposed to trade liberalization, both within the context of ECOWAS and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Thus, Nigeria as

observed by (Hulse, 2016) has proven to be a difficult and obstructionist actor within the context of trade liberalization in ECOWAS.

In the area of defence and security sector, Nigeria faces many challenges. (Cilliers et al, 2014) argues that Nigeria has witnessed a substantial decline in the number of troops deployed; from a high of 6,020 in August 2009 to 2930 in December 2014. Also, the quality of Nigeria's contribution to international peacekeeping efforts seems to be declining in comparison with the 1990s, when Nigeria played an active role in managing two civil conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone. At the domestic level, the country is increasingly being confronted by several domestic security challenges which impact negatively on its effectiveness in international affairs (Alli, 2012). In the same vein, it can be stated that the increasing rates of terrorist activities in Nigeria could affect the chances of the country to have much influence in the international system. It could also be argued that if the current wave of insecurity in Nigeria continues, it will affect other countries in the West African sub-region. To be sure, if Nigeria is destabilized due to internal security threats and terrorist activities, then the other West African countries will have to contend with harbouring Nigerian citizens as refugees (Danjuma, 2014).

More importantly, the perception of neighbouring countries in West Africa in terms of Nigeria's leadership intentions is also a challenge. There is the desire of other members of ECOWAS to protect their national pride and the influence of extra-sub-regional powers on some of the members to act in a certain way. Indeed, some states question the legitimacy of Nigeria in sub-regional matters. Even some of the countries that have benefited from Nigeria's sacrifices are not prepared to back Nigeria in critical situation (Alli, 2012). Sierra Leone was the country that blocked ECOWAS from taking a united stand in favour of Nigeria's candidacy for a UN Security Council's permanent seat. This is a country that have benefited from Nigeria's military assistance in the past.

Conclusion

This paper was premised on the view that Nigeria's hegemonic role in ECOWAS is firmly established based on economic, military, demographic and soft power attributes. Without doubt, Nigeria is a sub-regional hegemonic power defined by the above identified attributes, in asserting considerable influence on ECOWAS. Within Nigeria's foreign policy agenda, Africa has been the central focus. Thus, Nigeria has aspired to Pan-African political, economic and military leadership so much so that some have described the object of its ambition as the *Pax Nigeriana*. Clearly, Nigeria has imposed on herself the greater responsibility of shaping the destiny of Africa by providing effective and responsible leadership. At the sub-regional level, Nigeria has subsequently played a strong leadership role in ECOWAS' security sector, especially in the 1990s. There is therefore a sense in which one can agree that commitment to the promotion of peace and security in ECOWAS is Nigeria's heaviest leadership role in West Africa. In spite of Nigeria's leadership role in ECOWAS, the paper identified some challenges that have placed limitations on Nigeria's hegemonic power. One of such challenges is the inability of Nigeria to lead ECOWAS in trade integration. However, Nigeria cannot fully opt out of ECOWAS trade integration, as doing so will hampered its hegemonic project in the sub-region. The most important thing is that Nigeria must support economic integration of West Africa as a prelude to political integration. But the most salient challenge confronting Nigeria today is internal security issues. This ranges from growing influence of Boko Haram terrorist attacks in the Northern part of Nigeria, to violent conflicts in other parts of the country. This has undermined Nigeria's leadership role in ECOWAS. This has been compounded with high level of elite corruption, poverty, electoral violence and underdevelopment. Despite all these challenges we have identified, it is very clear that only Nigeria has the hegemonic power to lead not only Africa, but also ECOWAS. But for Nigeria to continue maintaining such leadership, it would require a stable domestic politics, good governance and committed political leadership.

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