

Evaluating the Contributions and Achievements of ECOWAS in West African Regional Integration

AKAV SALEM DEBORAH

Phone:08132201344

Email: Akavsalemfanter003@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the contributions and achievements of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in promoting regional integration in West Africa. Since its establishment in 1975, ECOWAS has pursued the objectives of economic cooperation, political stability, and collective security among its member states. Using a qualitative and documentary research approach, the study relies on secondary sources including ECOWAS treaties, official reports, academic books, journal articles, and policy documents. The analysis is structured around three major themes: economic integration, peace and security, and the challenges confronting regional integration in West Africa. The findings reveal that ECOWAS has made significant contributions to economic integration through frameworks such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and regional infrastructure initiatives, which have enhanced cross-border trade and mobility. The study also finds that ECOWAS has played a pioneering role in African-led peacekeeping and conflict management, particularly through interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as through the institutionalization of conflict prevention and democratic governance mechanisms. However, despite these achievements, the study observes that the depth of integration remains limited by structural economic weaknesses, uneven development among member states, weak implementation of regional protocols, persistent security challenges, and the continued dominance of national interests over regional commitments. The study concludes that while ECOWAS has laid a strong foundation for regional cooperation and stability in West Africa, its integration project remains incomplete and uneven. It therefore recommends stronger political commitment, improved implementation and enforcement mechanisms, increased investment in regional infrastructure and productive capacity, and deeper institutional reforms to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of regional integration in West Africa.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Regional Integration, West Africa, Economic Cooperation, Peace and Security, Governance, Trade Liberalization.

Introduction

Regional integration has become one of the most important strategies adopted by developing regions in their quest for economic development, political stability, and collective self-reliance in an increasingly globalized world. Across Africa, the pursuit of regional cooperation has been driven by the recognition that most African states are characterized by small domestic markets, weak industrial bases, and limited bargaining power in the global economy (Adebajo, 2002; Ojo, 2012). In this context, regional organizations are seen as vehicles for pooling resources, expanding markets, coordinating policies, and addressing shared security and development challenges. West

Africa is no exception to this trend, and it was within this broader continental vision that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975.

The creation of ECOWAS was primarily motivated by the desire to promote economic integration and collective self-sufficiency among the states of the sub-region (ECOWAS, 2025). The Treaty of Lagos, which established the organization, envisioned a region characterized by the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, as well as the harmonization of economic and development policies. The underlying assumption was that economic cooperation would stimulate industrialization, reduce dependence on former colonial powers, and improve the overall welfare of West African populations (Ojo, 2012).

However, the socio-political realities of West Africa soon expanded the scope of ECOWAS beyond purely economic objectives. The outbreak of civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, along with recurring political instability in several member states, exposed the deep link between security, governance, and development in the region (Adebajo, 2002). As a result, ECOWAS gradually transformed into a multidimensional regional organization with mandates covering peacekeeping, conflict prevention, democracy promotion, and good governance, in addition to economic integration (Odobo, Nnamani & Nwankwo, 2017).

Today, ECOWAS occupies a central position in the political economy and security architecture of West Africa. The organization has developed a wide range of protocols and institutions aimed at promoting regional integration, including the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme, the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (ECOWAS, 2025). These frameworks reflect an ambitious vision of a unified and stable West African region capable of addressing both internal and external challenges. Despite these efforts, the record of regional integration in West Africa remains mixed. While ECOWAS has recorded notable achievements in peacekeeping, conflict mediation, and the promotion of democratic norms, progress in economic integration has been relatively slow and uneven (Ojo, 2012; Anderson, 2025). Intra-regional trade remains low, infrastructure deficits persist, and many member states continue to prioritize national interests over regional commitments. These challenges raise important questions about the effectiveness, relevance, and future direction of ECOWAS as an integration project.

Moreover, recent political developments, including military coups and democratic backsliding in parts of the sub-region, have further tested the authority and cohesion of ECOWAS (AP News, 2025). These events underscore the complex and often fragile nature of regional integration in a context marked by economic vulnerability, political instability, and external geopolitical pressures. The importance of evaluating ECOWAS lies in the need to understand not only what the organization has achieved, but also why certain ambitions remain unfulfilled. Such an evaluation is particularly relevant at a time when Africa is pursuing broader continental integration under frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which depends heavily on the effectiveness of regional economic communities like ECOWAS (ECOWAS, 2025).

This study therefore examines the contributions and achievements of ECOWAS in West African regional integration, focusing on its economic, political, and security roles. It seeks to assess the extent to which ECOWAS has advanced integration, identify the major constraints it faces, and explore the implications for the future of regional cooperation in West Africa. By doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on regionalism, development, and governance in Africa.

Objectives

- i. To critically assess the contributions of ECOWAS toward economic integration in West Africa, with particular attention to trade liberalization, monetary cooperation, and infrastructure development.
- ii. To evaluate the achievements of ECOWAS in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and political stability among member states.
- iii. To identify the major challenges hindering deeper regional integration and propose actionable recommendations to enhance ECOWAS's effectiveness.

Literature Review

The literature on regional integration in Africa and the role of ECOWAS is extensive and multidisciplinary, encompassing perspectives from political economy, international relations, development studies, and security studies. Scholars generally agree that regional integration in Africa emerged as a response to the structural weaknesses of post-colonial states, including small market sizes, limited industrial capacity, and overdependence on external economies (Ojo, 2012; Adebajo, 2002). Early theoretical contributions to the study of regional integration, particularly those of Haas and Mitrany, emphasize the role of functional cooperation and institutional spillover in driving integration processes. These ideas have been widely applied to the African context, although many scholars argue that African regionalism faces unique political and structural constraints that limit automatic spillover effects (Ojo, 2012).

In the specific case of ECOWAS, several scholars have examined its economic integration agenda. Ojo (2012) argues that ECOWAS was conceived as a response to the economic fragmentation of West Africa and was intended to create a unified market capable of supporting industrialization and development. Similarly, Anderson (2025) notes that the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons represent some of the most ambitious integration frameworks in Africa. However, both authors observe that the practical impact of these initiatives has been constrained by weak implementation, infrastructural deficits, and persistent non-tariff barriers. Other scholars focus on the political and security dimensions of ECOWAS. Adebajo (2002) provides a detailed analysis of ECOWAS's peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, arguing that these operations marked a turning point in African-led conflict management. According to Odobo, Nnamani, and Nwankwo (2017), the institutionalization of conflict prevention mechanisms within ECOWAS reflects a growing recognition that development and integration cannot occur in the absence of peace and political stability.

The role of ECOWAS in promoting democratic governance has also attracted significant scholarly attention. Isaac et al. (2025) argue that the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance has transformed ECOWAS into a normative actor with the authority to intervene in cases of unconstitutional change of government. However, recent political crises and coups in the region have led some scholars to question the effectiveness and legitimacy of ECOWAS's enforcement mechanisms (AP News, 2025).

On the economic front, Jibrin (2025) highlights the persistent problem of low intra-regional trade in West Africa, attributing it to weak productive capacity, poor infrastructure, and policy inconsistency among member states. He argues that while ECOWAS has succeeded in creating an institutional framework for integration, the region has yet to achieve the structural transformation necessary to benefit fully from market integration. Another important theme in the literature is the

problem of sovereignty and political will. Many scholars argue that West African states are often reluctant to subordinate national interests to regional objectives, leading to selective compliance with ECOWAS protocols (Anderson, 2025; Ojo, 2012). This tension between national sovereignty

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism as complementary theoretical perspectives for explaining the dynamics, achievements, and limitations of regional integration in West Africa under the auspices of ECOWAS. These theories provide a robust analytical lens for understanding both the progressive expansion of ECOWAS's mandate and the persistent constraints arising from state sovereignty and national interests.

Neofunctionalism, originally developed by Ernst Haas, posits that regional integration is a gradual, self-reinforcing process driven by functional cooperation in specific sectors. According to this theory, cooperation in technical and economic areas generates “spillover effects,” which create pressures for further integration in related sectors, including political and social domains. Applied to ECOWAS, neofunctionalism explains how initial economic cooperation in trade, customs, and transportation gradually expanded into areas such as free movement of persons, conflict management, democratic governance, and regional security. The theory suggests that as West African states increasingly interact within shared institutions and policies, they develop common interests and collective problem-solving mechanisms that deepen integration over time.

However, the West African experience also demonstrates the limits of automatic spillover, particularly in politically sensitive areas such as monetary integration, security cooperation, and supranational authority. This limitation makes Intergovernmentalism a necessary complementary framework. Intergovernmentalism argues that states remain the principal actors in the integration process and that progress depends primarily on the preferences, interests, and political will of national governments. According to this perspective, states cooperate when it serves their strategic or economic interests but resist integration that threatens national sovereignty or domestic political control. In the ECOWAS context, this explains why many protocols and agreements, although formally adopted, are often inconsistently implemented or selectively enforced by member states.

Together, these two theories provide a balanced explanation of ECOWAS's trajectory. Neofunctionalism explains the expansion of ECOWAS from a purely economic community into a multidimensional regional organization concerned with governance, peace, and social integration, while Intergovernmentalism accounts for the slow pace of implementation, recurring policy reversals, and resistance to deeper supranational authority. The theoretical framework therefore allows this study to assess ECOWAS not only as a technical integration project but also as a political process shaped by competing national interests and regional aspirations.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary and descriptive-analytical methods. The qualitative approach is considered most appropriate because the study focuses on evaluating policies, institutional frameworks, historical developments, and the practical experiences of ECOWAS in promoting regional integration rather than on numerical measurement or statistical modeling. The data for the study are derived entirely from secondary sources. These include official ECOWAS treaties, protocols, policy documents, communiqués, and reports, as

well as books, academic journal articles, conference papers, and publications from reputable international organizations such as the African Union and the United Nations. Additional materials were sourced from credible news outlets and policy think tanks to capture recent developments in the region, especially in relation to political stability and security.

The method of analysis employed is thematic and descriptive analysis. Relevant materials were carefully reviewed and organized around key themes corresponding to the study's objectives, namely economic integration, peace and security, and challenges to regional integration. Through this approach, the study systematically examines ECOWAS's contributions, achievements, and limitations in each of and regional authority is widely seen as one of the main obstacles to deeper integration. Overall, the literature suggests that ECOWAS represents both a significant achievement and an unfinished project. While the organization has made notable contributions to peace, governance, and regional cooperation, its economic integration goals remain only partially realized. This study builds on this body of literature by providing a comprehensive and balanced evaluation of ECOWAS's contributions and achievements in West African regional integration.

these areas. The analytical process involves comparing policy intentions with actual outcomes in order to identify gaps between formal commitments and practical realities. The study also adopts a historical-analytical perspective to trace the evolution of ECOWAS from its founding to the present, thereby enabling a clearer understanding of how its mandate has expanded and how its role in regional integration has changed over time. This approach enhances the depth and contextual relevance of the analysis and allows for a balanced assessment of both continuity and change in ECOWAS's integration project.

ECOWAS and Economic Integration in West Africa

One of the core objectives of ECOWAS since its establishment in 1975 has been the promotion of economic integration among West African states through the creation of a unified regional market, harmonization of economic policies, and facilitation of trade and investment flows (ECOWAS, 2025; Anderson, 2025). The underlying assumption is that regional economic cooperation would enhance economies of scale, improve industrial productivity, reduce dependence on external markets, and stimulate sustainable development across the sub-region. A major instrument for achieving this objective is the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS), which was designed to eliminate customs duties and quantitative restrictions on goods originating within the region (Jibrin, 2025). The ETLS represents a significant policy commitment toward the creation of a free trade area and has contributed to the growth of cross-border trade in agricultural commodities, textiles, processed foods, and light manufactured goods. In many border communities across Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Togo, and Niger, regional trade has become a vital source of livelihoods, illustrating the practical impact of ECOWAS integration frameworks (Anderson, 2025).

In addition to trade liberalization, ECOWAS has pursued the harmonization of customs procedures and trade regulations in order to reduce administrative bottlenecks and transaction costs. The introduction of joint border posts, regional transit guarantee schemes, and standardized customs documentation reflects a deliberate effort to simplify cross-border trade operations (ECOWAS, 2025). These initiatives are particularly important in a region where delays, multiple checkpoints, and unofficial levies have historically discouraged formal trade and encouraged smuggling and informal economic activity. Infrastructure development has also been central to ECOWAS's economic integration strategy. The organization has promoted regional transport and energy

projects such as the Lagos–Abidjan Coastal Highway Corridor and the West African Power Pool, which aim to physically connect national economies and improve the movement of goods, services, and people (ECOWAS, 2025). Scholars argue that without such physical connectivity, policy harmonization alone cannot produce meaningful economic integration (Jibrin, 2025). Although progress in infrastructure development has been uneven and slow in some areas, these projects nonetheless represent a long-term investment in regional economic cohesion.

Another significant dimension of economic integration is the free movement of persons, which is anchored in the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Establishment. This protocol has enhanced labour mobility, promoted regional entrepreneurship, and strengthened social and commercial networks across national borders (Anderson, 2025). In practice, millions of West Africans now live and work outside their countries of origin within the sub-region, contributing to remittance flows, skills transfer, and cultural integration. Despite these achievements, the overall level of intra-ECOWAS trade remains low, accounting for a relatively small percentage of the region's total trade compared to other regional blocs such as the European Union or ASEAN (Anderson, 2025). This weak performance has been attributed to several structural challenges, including poor industrial diversification, weak productive capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent non-tariff barriers such as roadblocks, harassment by security agencies, and administrative inefficiencies (Jibrin, 2025). Furthermore, differences in economic size and development levels among member states create asymmetrical benefits and fears of economic domination, which sometimes undermine collective commitment to integration. The issue of monetary integration further illustrates both ambition and constraint. While ECOWAS has long proposed the introduction of a single regional currency (the ECO), progress has been slow due to macroeconomic divergence among member states, including differences in inflation rates, fiscal deficits, and debt profiles (ECOWAS, 2025). The coexistence of the CFA franc zone and non-CFA countries further complicates coordination and convergence efforts.

Overall, ECOWAS has made substantial institutional and policy contributions to economic integration in West Africa, but the translation of these frameworks into concrete economic transformation remains constrained by structural weaknesses, limited political will, and implementation gaps.

ECOWAS, Peacebuilding, and Political Stability

One of the most significant and internationally recognized contributions of ECOWAS to regional integration is its role in peacebuilding, conflict management, and the promotion of political stability in West Africa. Although the organization was originally established as an economic community, the outbreak of violent conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s compelled ECOWAS to assume a security and political governance role (Odobbo et al., 2017).

The creation and deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) marked a historic turning point in African regional peace operations. ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia helped prevent the total collapse of the state, protected civilians, and eventually facilitated the transition to democratic governance (Shiru, 2024). Although the mission faced challenges related to funding, coordination, and neutrality, it nonetheless demonstrated the capacity of West African states to take collective responsibility for regional peace and security (Odobbo et al., 2017).

Following these early experiences, ECOWAS institutionalized its peace and security mandate through the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution,

Peacekeeping and Security. This framework established early warning systems, mediation structures, and preventive diplomacy mechanisms aimed at addressing conflicts before they escalate into full-scale wars (Odobbo et al., 2017). The establishment of the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network represents a shift from reactive to preventive security governance in the sub-region. In addition to conflict management, ECOWAS has played a crucial role in promoting democratic governance through the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. This legal instrument establishes zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government and mandates the Community to respond to electoral malpractice and constitutional crises (Isaac et al., 2025). Through election observation missions, diplomatic mediation, and, in some cases, sanctions, ECOWAS has sought to entrench democratic norms and political accountability across the region. However, recent political developments in parts of the Sahel have exposed the limitations of ECOWAS's enforcement capacity. The military takeovers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and the subsequent withdrawal of these countries from ECOWAS, illustrate the growing tension between national sovereignty claims and regional governance norms (AP News, 2025). These events suggest that while ECOWAS has developed a strong normative and institutional framework for democratic governance, its effectiveness is constrained by domestic political dynamics, popular discontent, and geopolitical realignments.

Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that without ECOWAS, West Africa would likely have experienced more frequent, more prolonged, and more destructive conflicts. The organization's role in peacebuilding has therefore not only contributed to political stability but has also created a more secure environment for economic cooperation and regional integration.

Challenges to Integration and the Overall Impact of ECOWAS

Despite its notable achievements, ECOWAS continues to face deep-rooted structural, political, and institutional challenges that limit the depth and sustainability of regional integration. One of the most persistent obstacles is the tension between national sovereignty and supranational authority. Many member states are reluctant to fully transfer decision-making power to regional institutions, particularly in sensitive areas such as security, fiscal policy, and border control (Anderson, 2025). This reluctance often results in selective implementation of protocols and weak enforcement of collective decisions. Another major challenge is the problem of uneven development among member states. Large economies such as Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire wield disproportionate influence, while smaller and less developed states often struggle to implement regional policies due to limited financial and administrative capacity (Jibrin, 2025). These disparities create both real and perceived imbalances in the distribution of integration benefits, which in turn generate resistance to deeper integration initiatives.

Institutional capacity constraints further undermine ECOWAS's effectiveness. The organization remains heavily dependent on external funding for peace operations, infrastructure projects, and technical programmes, raising concerns about sustainability and regional ownership (ECOWAS, 2025). Bureaucratic inefficiencies and overlapping mandates among regional institutions also reduce policy coherence and implementation efficiency. Security challenges, including terrorism, insurgency, and transnational organized crime, continue to divert resources and political attention away from long-term integration objectives toward short-term crisis management (Isaac et al., 2025). These threats not only strain ECOWAS's institutional capacity but also undermine trust and cooperation among member states.

Despite these challenges, the overall impact of ECOWAS on West African regional integration remains profound. The organization has created a shared legal, political, and institutional space, fostered a sense of regional identity, and normalized the principle of collective responsibility for peace, development, and governance. While integration remains incomplete and uneven, ECOWAS has laid a durable foundation upon which deeper and more sustainable regional cooperation can be built.

Summary

This study examined the contributions of ECOWAS to economic integration in West Africa, with particular attention to trade liberalization, free movement of persons, infrastructure development, and monetary cooperation. The analysis showed that ECOWAS has established robust legal and institutional frameworks such as the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, which have significantly enhanced cross-border trade, labour mobility, and regional interaction. However, the study also found that the practical impact of these initiatives remains constrained by infrastructural deficits, weak productive capacity, non-tariff barriers, and inconsistent implementation of regional policies by member states.

The study also assessed the achievements of ECOWAS in peacebuilding, conflict management, and the promotion of political stability in the sub-region. It was established that ECOWAS has played a pioneering role in African-led peacekeeping through interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone and has since institutionalized conflict prevention and democratic governance mechanisms. Through mediation, election monitoring, and sanctions, ECOWAS has contributed to reducing the frequency and intensity of violent conflicts and to promoting constitutional rule. Nevertheless, recent political crises and military coups have exposed the limits of ECOWAS's enforcement capacity and the continuing tension between national sovereignty and regional norms.

Finally, the study examined the broader challenges confronting ECOWAS and their implications for the future of regional integration in West Africa. It found that uneven economic development, limited institutional capacity, security threats, and weak political commitment continue to undermine deeper integration. Despite these challenges, the study concludes that ECOWAS has laid a strong foundation for regional cooperation and has significantly shaped the political, economic, and security architecture of West Africa.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that ECOWAS remains one of the most important and influential regional organizations in Africa, playing a central role in the pursuit of economic integration, political stability, and collective security in West Africa. Over the decades, the organization has evolved from a primarily economic community into a multidimensional regional body with responsibilities spanning trade, infrastructure, peacekeeping, governance, and social integration.

In the area of economic integration, ECOWAS has established comprehensive frameworks that have facilitated cross-border trade, mobility of people, and regional cooperation. In the political and security sphere, it has pioneered African-led peace operations and developed strong normative instruments for democratic governance. These achievements underscore the organization's relevance and its contribution to regional stability and cooperation.

However, the study also finds that ECOWAS's integration project remains incomplete and uneven. Structural economic weaknesses, institutional capacity constraints, security challenges, and the

persistent dominance of national interests over regional commitments continue to limit the depth and sustainability of integration. For ECOWAS to fully realize its vision of a unified and prosperous West Africa, stronger political will, more effective implementation mechanisms, and deeper institutional reforms are indispensable.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen ECOWAS's contribution to economic integration, member states should prioritize the full implementation of existing trade and movement protocols by removing non-tariff barriers, harmonizing customs procedures, and investing more aggressively in regional infrastructure such as roads, railways, ports, and energy networks. Greater emphasis should also be placed on supporting regional industrialization and value chains to enhance productive capacity and increase intra-regional trade.

To consolidate ECOWAS's achievements in peacebuilding and political stability, the organization should strengthen its early warning and preventive diplomacy mechanisms, improve the funding and operational capacity of its peace and security architecture, and deepen cooperation with civil society and regional stakeholders. Sanctions and diplomatic measures should be complemented with dialogue, development support, and governance reforms to address the root causes of political instability.

In addressing the broader challenges to integration, ECOWAS should pursue institutional reforms aimed at enhancing compliance, monitoring, and enforcement of regional decisions. Mechanisms for reducing development disparities among member states should be strengthened, while efforts should be made to reduce dependence on external funding by increasing member state contributions and promoting regional financial self-reliance. Above all, sustained political commitment by member states is essential for transforming ECOWAS from a largely intergovernmental forum into a truly effective integration community.

References

- Adebajo, A. (2002). *Building peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- African Union. (2018). *Protocol on free movement of persons in Africa*. African Union Commission.
- Anderson, K. (2025). Regional integration and economic development in West Africa. *Journal of African Political Economy*, 18(2), 45–62.
- AP News. (2025). West African bloc ECOWAS confirms exit of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Associated Press. <https://apnews.com/>
- ECOWAS Commission. (2020). *ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme (ETLS): Implementation guidelines*. ECOWAS.
- ECOWAS Commission. (2023). *Protocol on democracy and good governance*. ECOWAS.
- ECOWAS Commission. (2024). *ECOWAS conflict prevention framework*. ECOWAS.

ECOWAS Commission. (2025). About ECOWAS. <https://ecowas.int>

Isaac, O. A., Bello, S. A., & Mohammed, T. Y. (2025). ECOWAS and democratic governance in West Africa. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 10(1), 88–105.

Jibrin, A. A. (2025). Trade liberalization and regional integration in West Africa. *West African Economic Review*, 7(1), 21–39.

Odobo, O., Nnamani, D. O., & Nwankwo, C. F. (2017). ECOWAS and conflict management in West Africa. *International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 4(2), 55–73.

Ojo, E. O. (2012). Regional integration in Africa: ECOWAS, SADC and the future of regionalism. *Journal of African Integration Studies*, 6(1), 1–20.

Shiru, M. S. (2024). ECOWAS peacekeeping operations in Liberia: Achievements and challenges. *African Security Review*, 33(1), 14–29.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2019). Assessing regional integration in Africa (ARIA VIII): Accelerating the African Continental Free Trade Area. UNECA.