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**Título: The role of the African Union in Economic and youth development in Africa: A case study of ECOWAS**

Nome do candidato: Mohammed Siaka Sheriff

Mestrado em: Estudos Internacionais

Orientadores:

PhD Clara Carvalho, Associate Professor  
Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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SOCIOLOGIA  
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Departamento: History

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the role of the African Union (AU) in fostering economic development and promoting youth political participation in Africa, with a specific focus on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Despite the AU's efforts to promote regional integration and development, challenges persist, particularly in addressing youth unemployment and political apathy among the youth population. Through a case study of ECOWAS, this research sought to analyze the effectiveness of AU initiatives in driving economic growth and empowering young people to actively engage in the political process.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, combining analysis of AU policies and programs with quantitative data collected from the Kobo toolbox questionnaire sent to participants based on youth political participation and economic integration in ECOWAS member states. The research objectives were to analyze the historicity and changes of the African Union's economic development plan and policies and examine key components in its economic development agenda since its formation.

The present work e examines the African Union's programs and policies that focus on promoting youth political participation and representation locally and nationally and identify the perspectives and feedback from key stakeholders, including youth organizations and government officials, development practitioners, and youth advocates, on the impact and challenges of African Union interventions.

The results of this study show how youths from different ECOWAS countries have different perceptions of the AU's efforts to promote youth political participation and representation. Age, gender, occupation, education, lack of political will, lobby, and youth exclusion emerged as significant predictors, reflecting the complex dynamics shaping youth engagement in economic and political processes in the ECOWAS region.

**Keywords:** African Union, Economic Development, Youth participation, ECOWAS, Case study

## **ACRONYMS**

<b>AU</b>	Africa Union
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>ECOMOG</b>	Economic Community Monitoring Group
<b>OAU</b>	Organization of African Unity
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>NEPAD</b>	New Partnership for Africa's Development
<b>HR</b>	Human Rights
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**African Union (AU):** A continental organization comprising 55 member states in Africa, established to promote unity, cooperation, and development across the continent.

**Economic Development:** The sustained increase in the economic well-being and standard of living of individuals, communities, or nations, typically measured by indicators such as GDP growth, employment rates, and income levels.

**Youth Participation:** The active involvement of young people in political, social, economic, or cultural activities, including voting, advocacy, community organizing, and decision-making processes.

**ECOWAS:** The Economic Community of West African States, a regional intergovernmental organization comprising 15 West African countries, was established to promote economic integration and cooperation among member states.

**Regional Integration:** The process of harmonizing policies, regulations, and institutions among neighboring countries to facilitate economic cooperation, trade, and development, often involving the establishment of common markets, customs unions, and free trade areas.

**Governance:** The process of decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation by governments, institutions, or organizations, aimed at ensuring accountability, transparency, and effective management of resources.

**Sustainable Development:** Development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations to promote long-term well-being and resilience.



**Political Participation:** The engagement of individuals or groups in political activities, including voting, running for office, attending rallies, participating in protests, and contacting elected officials, to influence government policies and decisions.

**Human Rights:** Inalienable rights and freedoms are inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or nationality, as enshrined in international treaties and conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Governance Deficit:** A situation characterized by weak institutions, lack of accountability, corruption, and ineffective governance mechanisms, hindering sustainable development, economic growth, and political stability in a country or region.

## **1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Since its formation, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (hereafter AU) has been discussing the youth as opposed to discussing ‘WITH’ the youth. However, with the increasing trends of civil wars from the 1970s to the 2000s, the organization developed a trend called the ‘Youth Turn,’ the leadership discussed the young Africans as a constituency that has been increasingly becoming a threat as opposed to being an ally to the continent leadership (Sesay, 2022). In addition, with the trend of democratization in the world since the 1990s (Huntington, 1993, Fukuyama, 2015), and liberal hegemony, regional integration emerged strongly (Keohane, 2017, Keohane and Nye, 2003, Keohane and Nye Jr, 1998), and Africa has not been left behind (Kipo-Sunyezi et al., 2023).

The Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS), which is the focus of this study, plays a major role in economic governance and political cooperation in West Africa, leading to a new security agenda that created the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the 1990s (Francis, 2000), and ECOWAS’ council of the wise which was formed in late 1990s to coordinate with the AU on diplomatic matters (Van Wyk, 2020). Such regional organizations have played a key role in political and economic affairs regarding forging cooperation within the continent and beyond (Müller, 2022, Scholvin, 2018). Still, with the trends of diffusion of power from an international perspective to regional and community levels, the young people in Africa are slowly becoming involved in economic and political decision-making at the regional and continental levels.

ECOWAS has shown such trends, cooperating with member states in mainstreaming the youth in political parties’ activities and capacity building in policy agenda (Sesay, 2020). The AU Agenda 2063 has a strong focus on political and economic stability in Africa, pushing for the removal of trade barriers and creating a free trade area. The agenda emphasizes building an integrated, peaceful, and prosperous Africa, managed and driven by the citizens of the continent representing a dynamic strength in the international arena, standing on the regional frameworks, and integrating them into the AU agenda. Politically, the agenda is a people-driven framework, recognizing the youth bulge in policy dialogues in consultative platforms, and economically, it strives to create opportunities such as entrepreneurial, business, and job opportunities, and the role of the youth in technological growth (African Union, 2015). Such a

people-driven framework is the focus of this thesis, looking at how AU policy/Agenda interventions are promoting youth political participation and economic development in West African states.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Studies focusing on African youths have shown that the youth constituency has the qualities that can guarantee them to participate in policy making and implementation. However, their involvement has been limited, they are engaged in the agenda-setting but left out in the policy conduct (Fanelli et al., 2007), and African states rarely go beyond implementing international treaty obligations (Maluwa, 2012). Recent studies also show that there are gaps when it comes to rhetoric and reality in African youth involvement in political and economic policy formulation and conduct (Metelerkamp et al., 2019, Wakefield et al., 2022, Geza et al., 2022, Jacobs and George, 2022).

The involvement of the African youth in policy formulation and conduct has been vital since the 1970s to 2000s has shown that these youth constituencies have taken part as a ‘fighting force,’ thus, their active participation in governance is a necessity (Sesay, 2022). As such, ECOWAS (2009) came up with an initiative of youth policy; a strategic action plan that provides the outline of the obligation and role of young people in governance, political and economic activities, how member states should mobilize resources, collaborate with partners working on youth agendas, the framework also have a guide on implementation of thematic areas timeline, and youth involvement in decision making (ECOWAS, 2009, pg. 17). However, Kipo-Sunyehzi et al. (2023) point out that the conduct of the document is limited, there is lack of effective mechanism that track the implementation of initiatives and projects designed for the youth, and the programs are not meeting the expectations of the young people. In addition, there is limited literature showing the monitoring and evaluation of cooperation between AU and ECOWAS on the involvement of the youth in decision-making.

From the above conundrum, this study contributes to monitoring and evaluation research on policy analysis of the African Union and ECOWAS policies on the youth in West Africa. There is limited focus on the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of policy, most studies concentrate on the formulation and conduct of policy (see, for example, Forson, 2020, Uneke et al., 2020, Nwozor and Olanrewaju, 2020, Omisakin, 2013). These studies tend to omit M&E which is the last step of policy analysis, tracking the activities of the policy, looking at whether the activities are being implemented as the plan of the policy or examining the timely

indicators and information and verifying whether the policy or program is reaching the intended target; in other words, evidence-based analysis of policy activities and programs (Cloete, 2009, Ile et al., 2012). Thus, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the African Union and ECOWAS policy agenda on young people in the continent, particularly in West Africa. In addition, the study evaluates the policies focused on the political participation of the youth and their economic development in line with the AU and ECOWAS programs. Particularly West Africa. In addition, the study evaluates the policies focused on the political participation of the youth and their economic development in line with the AU and ECOWAS programs.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the historicity and changes of the African Union's economic development plan and policies and examine key components in its economic development agenda since its formation.
2. Examine the African Union's programs and policies that promote youth political participation and representation locally and nationally.
3. To identify the perspectives and feedback from key stakeholders, including youth organizations and government officials, on the impact and challenges of African Union interventions.

### **1.4 Research questions**

1. What factors influence the effectiveness of the African Union's Interventions in promoting both economic development and youth political participation in ECOWAS member states?
2. How has the African Union policy on continental free trade influenced the youth political participation and economic growth within the ECOWAS region?
3. How has the African Union supported ECOWAS in implementing policies to address issues of youth political participation and representation in the ECOWAS region?

## **1.5 Hypotheses**

1. African Union policies influence youth participation and economic growth in the ECOWAS region.
2. The African Union does not support ECOWAS in Policy Implementation on youth involvement in political participation.
3. There is a gap between rhetoric and reality in the African Union and ECOWAS policy formulation and implementation.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The significance of studying the role of the African Union (AU) in economic development and youth political participation within the context of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is multifaceted and pivotal for several reasons.

Africa stands at a crucial juncture in its development trajectory, with the AU and regional economic communities like ECOWAS playing increasingly central roles in shaping the continent's economic future. Understanding the dynamics of these organizations and their efforts in promoting economic growth and integration is essential for policymakers, scholars, and development practitioners seeking to advance Africa's prosperity and stability (Sesay, 2022).

Youth comprise a significant demographic in Africa, where most of the population is under the age of 30 (Anyanwu, 2014; Meagher, 2018; Habti, 2022; Lesthaeghe, 2023). Young people's political engagement and participation are vital for fostering inclusive governance and sustainable development across the continent. Investigating the AU's initiatives and strategies to enhance youth political participation within the ECOWAS region can provide valuable insights into how to empower and mobilize this demographic for positive change. Furthermore, ECOWAS is a pertinent case study within the broader African context due to its unique challenges, opportunities, and regional dynamics. As one of Africa's most economically vibrant regions, ECOWAS offers valuable lessons and experiences that can inform broader discussions on regional integration, economic cooperation, and political governance (Adeniyi et al., 2016).

Additionally, the study of the AU's role in economic development and youth political participation within ECOWAS holds practical implications for policy formulation and

implementation at both the regional and continental levels. By identifying successful strategies, best practices, and areas for improvement, policymakers and stakeholders can better align their efforts to promote sustainable development, democracy, and social inclusion in Africa (Kimeu, 2022).

Finally, the significance of this study extends beyond academic discourse to contribute to ongoing debates and initiatives aimed at advancing Africa's integration, prosperity, and democratic governance. By shedding light on the AU's engagement with ECOWAS in these critical areas, the study seeks to foster dialogue, collaboration, and collective action among African stakeholders towards achieving the continent's development goals. The study's significance lies in its potential to inform policy-makers, empower youth, inspire actions, and contribute to the broader discourse on Africa's socio-economic and political transformation within the AU and regional contexts.

### **1.7 Scope and limitation of the study**

The study is a mixed method study analyzing interviews from civil societies and youth participating in various programs to evaluate the AU interventions in promoting both economic development and youth political participation in ECOWAS member states. The study also targeted interviews with key informants such as policymakers and practitioners working with AU and ECOWAS. However, these key informants never responded to the interview call, and many feared to participate in the interview with some sighting political reasons and interest. Thus, a thematic analysis of the media interviews and conferences involving such key informants debating on AU and ECOWAS policies on youth involvement was done.

A development survey questionnaire was sent online to the youth in various economic and political programs in West Africa, and 104 responded. Thereafter, the media interviews, conference content, and the existing literature were evaluated through a thematic analysis, triangulated with the data gathered by the questionnaire, and analyzed through SPSS software to determine the impact of AU and ECOWAS policies on the youth in West Africa economic development and political participation. The study is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter gives the introduction and background, giving the problem statement and significance of the study, aim, objectives, and research questions.

Chapter II entails the intensive literature review, conceptualizing the terms being studied such as policy monitoring and evaluation migration, ECOWAS and AU policies, and youth constituency. The chapter also gives a historical and policy background of AU and ECOWAS policies and their focus on the young people in Africa, particularly West Africa. It also shows the literature gaps in policy formulation and conduct of AU and ECOWAS.

Chapter III exhaustively shows the methodology, research philosophy, design applied in the study, data collection, and analysis through various methods. The chapter also explores how secondary and primary data is collected and analyzed. Quantitative analysis is applied to identify, analyze, and explore each concept of the study before giving ethical consideration to the study. Chapter IV entails the findings and discussions from the data analysis and the existing literature. The chapter shows a triangulation of the quantitative analysis, compared to the literature section and the media information from key informants. The chapter connects the literature review and the results from the data analysis and then fills the existing gaps demonstrated in the literature review section. Thereafter, chapter V entails the conclusion and recommendation. Furthermore, the study also had limited time and monetary resources, thus, a triangulation of the multiple literature, analysis of the quantitative data, and the interviews is analyzed before reaching a conclusive generalization.

## **2.0 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This part of the literature review on the African Union in economic development and youth's political participation in Africa with special attention to the ECOWAS. Precisely, the literature review will be about the political involvement of African youth, which will explore the conceptualization of this issue, influential factors in youth development initiatives made by the AU and particular branches of ECOWAS, policy interventions, a theoretical perspective developed in previous researches, and the conceptual framework of the study.

### **2.2 Political Participation of Youth in Africa**

The pursuit of the involvement of youth in politics in Africa has become a center of attention because, firstly, it is a determinant of the future of African democracy and politics. However, the youth, which is a demographic majority, maybe a key player in their country's politics, bearing in mind the numerous barriers they experience in the process of being politically active (Zhou & Tandi, 2023). Nevertheless, both scholars and policymakers accept the integral rather than secondary importance of young people in driving political changes and promoting social inclusion and active decision-making.

The involvement of African youth in political processes, especially in electoral procedures, has been highlighted in the research by Jengre and Kpinpuo (2019). The youth population is becoming an increasingly key factor in politics as they are beginning to demonstrate their strength through democratic processes such as voting, advocacy, and campaigning. Taking part in their countries' elections is a significant channel through which they keep the governments in check and push to have the government's agendas respond to their needs and interests. However, aside from youth movements and mass mobilizations, the political landscape turns out to have intensified, especially as more young people are demanding a change that relates to society and governance, evidenced by the election in Senegal in 2024.

Research by Betancourt et al (2021) determined that the work to engage youth in political participation is not only seeing their vote but the youth are also set to participate in other forms of civic engagement and advocacy. Social organizations and youth movements play effective roles in the civil participation of the youth in governance processes, realization of their rights and even influence policy outcomes. These individuals use such platforms as



roads to convey their feelings, state the ill/good things, and come up with effective ways for their own countries or communities' further development.

Studies by Olajide et al (2022) and Titigah et al (2023) have highlighted the enduring need for youth to contribute to political decision-making. To mention a few, limited access to education, poor economic status, and political exclusion are common structural barriers that stop lots of young people from being as active as they can in democratic processes. Furthermore, although old power circles and consensus within political institutions usually displace youth opinions and hinder the rate of their leadership and representation, not only do political outposts need people, but also competent ones who are set to lead the country over the next few years, hence, considering their immense contributions to a nation at large.

### **2.3 Conceptualization**

African Union is a continent-wide organization comprised of 55 member states mostly located in Africa. It was formally established on May 26th, 2001 in the Ethiopian capital city, Addis Ababa. The Union was launched in Durban, South Africa on July 9, 2002. It replaced the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The AU has various organs and institutions such as the pan-African Parliament, the AU Assembly, the AU Commission, and the African Court of Justice among others. The AU's goal is to address continental and regional issues, promote economic and political integration, foster stability, peace, and security, and defend the independence of African States (Forson, 2013), including African states' cooperation, and unity, and address political and socio-economic challenges (Engel, 2023).

The AU works with various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the East African Community (EAC), the South African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (African Union, 2002, Anyanwu, 2014). The latter REC is the central analysis of this thesis, looking at the factors that influence the effectiveness of the African Union's Interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states. In addition, the thesis examines how the AU supported ECOWAS in Policy implementation to address issues of youth's economic development in the region.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded by Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Gambia, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Niger,

Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo; Mauritania seceded in 2002, and Morocco applied to join ECOWAS in 2017 and was accepted in June the same year, the former mentioned 14 members were the founders of the community in 1975 (Forson, 2020). However, Cape Verde joined in 1976 (Rosa, 2022). Currently, ECOWAS is a regional economic union with 15 countries, focusing on economic integration, including peace and security of West African States (Engel, 2023). Krapohl and Van Huut (2020) indicated that the REC's Trade and Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) came into force in 1979, yet, up to date, the free trade area has not been realized in the ECOWAS region.

The eight French-speaking members of the ECOWAS aim to integrate a monetary union, Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine (UEMOA), and the six English-speaking members aim to introduce a common currency under the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ), these strategies aim to be integrated into ECOWAS monetary and custom union. Despite these ambitious economic policies, only 9.6% of the ECOWAS member states trade with each other when it comes to balance of payment or export-import trade (Krapohl and Van Huut, 2020). As I highlight in the literature further below, policies such as ETLS, WAMZ, and UEMOA are an integral part of development, and more so, in promoting youth development in the region. However, such policies are shortly realized when it comes to their implementation.

ECOWAS has a peace and security architecture, a military wing by the name ECOMOG, with a mandate of complex and regional security structure. This architecture has been more successful, promoting ECOWAS as security architecture more than its initial mandate of economic integration and development. Since its establishment, the REC has been engaged in peacekeeping in the region with successful cases such as the military intervention in Liberia and Ivory Coast in 2003, Guinea Bissau and Mali in 2012 and 2013 respectively, and the Gambia in 2017 (Müller, 2022). However, as it shall be clear in the literature below, economic growth and youth development issues still face a challenge.

ECOWAS defines youth as young males and females between 15 and 35 years old. This definition is broader and reflects regional realities, conditions, and contemporary socio-political and economic factors within the West African region. Such a definition is different from the United Nations' classification of youth, which stipulates 15-24 years, which is based on social, cultural, and economic factors (ECOWAS, 2020).

Africa is a fast-growing continent, and it is characterized by a youthful population, about 60% of the population is 25 years and younger (Anyanwu, 2014, Meagher, 2018). Such facts were the case in 2022 (Habti, 2022), and it is the case today (Lesthaeghe, 2023). In the year 2016, 200 million youth accounted for around 37% of the total labor force in Africa (Ackah-Baidoo, 2016). Africa is the most youthful continent in the world and globally, Africa's youth constituency will be 42% by the year 2030 (Habti, 2022). Thusi et al. (2022) predicted that between 2015 and 2035 the population of working age in Africa will increase by about 450 million people, the increase is predicted to be 3% each year, and by the year 2050 about 362 million people will be of age 15-24 years. This constituency calls for attention, policy formulation, and conduct that reflects the youth economic development which will help to improve the challenges faced by the young people in West Africa. Such as illegal immigration, unemployment, political unrest, and poverty.

#### **2.4 Influential factors in AU's efforts for youth economic development in ECOWAS.**

Various factors affect the effectiveness of the African Union's interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states. Some of these factors are directly related to the failure of youth development; however, some are indirectly related. These are 1) Intra-African trade as a factor that impacts youth development, 2) institutional framework, collaborative efforts to such framework in the realization of regional and national policies related to youth development, 3) political will, commitment among member states and lack of practical actions; member states paying their dues late, some paying too little, and others not paying at all, 4) weak and slow institutions due to access to adequate funding, 5) limited capacity building, and 6) limited M&E programs to fast track policy initiatives about youth activities and development. I discuss all these factors, giving details from the literature below.

Forson (2013) points out that globalization creates implications within the ECOWAS region, international business operations lead to interconnectedness, free trade, an increase in sharing and flow of information, connection, and promoting awareness and links among people around the globe and in the region. However, the author affirms that lack of political commitment among the ECOWAS member states, conflict, military insecurity leading to instability, lack of or weak institutional framework, limited capacities such as competent human resources, lack of a monetary union, political divide, protectionism, and inadequate

modern cross-border infrastructure impedes ECOWAS goals towards development. Forson (2013) emphasizes that limited funding to the ECOWAS activities due to member state not paying their dues on time or not paying at all mainly impacts policy formulation and conduct, limited or lack of resources has a negative implication towards development initiatives, and it leads to the above-mentioned implications.

Anyanwu (2014) affirms that no studies explore intra-African trade unemployment in relation to policy formation and conduct. The study suggests that higher levels of intra-Africa trade from regional integrations reduce unemployment and enhance youth development in Africa. An increase of about 1% in intra-African trade increases a 1.47% reduction in youth unemployment which is 1.67% of employment of young female and 1.46% of their male counterparts. The study points out that institutionalized democracy, increased secondary education, economic growth, increased domestic investment rates, increased urbanization, and inflation reduce youth unemployment. In addition, limited access to credit to the private sector positively impacts youth unemployment and the real per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP). African countries observe that integrated continental and regional free trade area reduces unemployment and poverty, thus, enhancing youth development. However, regional integration has faced challenges when it comes to multilateral trade negotiations in international institutions such as the WTO, thus, undermining African countries initiatives on bilateral, sub-regional, or regional initiatives that support development (Anyanwu, 2014). Such facts are also pointed out by Forson (2013), giving the implication of globalization on regional integration and development. Baah-Boateng (2016) points out that youth unemployment continues to be the main economic and political worry in the African continent. Thusi et al. (2022) also affirmed that unemployment is the most critical and complex development issue in Africa, some of the economic giants in the ECOWAS region have a worrying youth unemployment rate. For example, Thusi et al. (2022) show that despite the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aiming to reduce unemployment rates, the Nigerian youth unemployment rate stands at 8.5%, and Ghana has 11.5%.

In considering the Inter-RECs trade in Africa, Anyanwu (2014) points out that ECOWAS did worse compared to the East African Community and Southern African Development Community (SADC). EAC intra-trade reached 14.3% between 1995 to 2012, and SADC was at 15.3% in the same period, while ECOWAS was trailing at 10.2. These are some of the factors that negatively impact the effectiveness of the promotion of youth economic development in ECOWAS member states. ECOWAS's level of collaboration and

coordination reduces the effectiveness of youth-focused programs that promote development and youth entrepreneurship. The author affirms that the AU has supported regional integration, pointing out that the AU Charter promotes well-being, rights, responsibility, freedom, and youth empowerment through participation and employment (See, for example, African Union, 2002, p. 3). In addition, the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps, and the African Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009-2018) promote youth engagement in entrepreneurship, governance, and education (See, for example, African Union, 2011). These are some of the policies and initiatives that address the effectiveness of AU intervention and policy on continental free trade areas in the promotion of youth economic development in the ECOWAS region. However, Anyanwu (2014) does not give specific information on how the AU has supported ECOWAS in policy implementation in addressing issues of youth economic development. In addition, the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of ECOWAS and AU policies on youth political participation is lacking, and how such policies impact youth economic development is limited.

Engel (2023) affirms that AU and ECOWAS collaborate on regional economic integration, development, and peace and security issues. ECOWAS receives support from AU to address various challenges such as conflict, and promotion of good governance, and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, (AfCFTA) is a mechanism that aligns with the ECOWAS objectives on economic development. The mechanism is a flagship project of AU's agenda 2063, it was adopted in 2018, and it is a free trade area project aiming to track intra-Africa trade in promoting economic growth of the continent and improving people's lives through intra-African trade. The African youth population is unemployed and lives in poverty, and Both AU initiatives such as AfCFTA and ECOWAS, have focused on Agenda 2063, "Africa We Want", addressing issues such as food security, agriculture, climate justice, and youth empowerment through economic developments (Thusi et al., 2022). However, the implementation of these policies is related to Member states paying their dues too late, some paying too little, and others failing to pay at all. Such challenges are also emphasized by Forson (2013) highlighted above. In addition, Engel (2023) points out that this affects policy budget and planning which results in low absorption capacity, and apart from the expert opinion or information, little on the AU is known about the Union's activities. Engel's writing has insights into policy interventions of AU engagement and activities that are relevant to African youth and development. However, the article does not specifically address the

effectiveness of AU intervention and policy on continental free trade areas in the promotion of youth economic development in the ECOWAS region.

## **2.5 Policy Interventions**

The ECOWAS (2020) youth policy stipulates that youth development is a vital mandate for government, non-governmental organization agencies, and development institutions. This policy promotes an enabling environment that assists in the sustainable development of young people and their capacity and skills. The document emphasizes gender inclusivity and equal treatment of all genders, it stipulates the need to emphasize rural development in addressing the youth issues in the rural areas, and it provides the basis for youth participation in development among ECOWAS members' states. Specifically, the document emphasizes access to education and employment, addresses gender-based violence and reproductive health, promotes youth-friendly health services as well-being among the ECOWAS young population, and establishes the ECOWAS youth and sports development center.

The policy addresses youth empowerment in areas such as access to financial resources, entrepreneurship opportunities and development, skill training, increase in female enrollment in education institutions and it stipulates the establishment of the ECOWAS youth fund framework. In addition, it stipulates a multi-sectoral framework, working with government ministries, the private sector, and NGOs to streamline the above-mentioned agendas. The policy has a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanism to ensure the success of the policy implementation. Such an M&E exercise is done at the regional, national, and community levels. The M&E exercise aims to carry out baseline research on youth agenda and development, establishing a database on youth activities and development programs.

Furthermore, the document stipulates the collaborative efforts with regional and national institutions in realizing the implementation of the policy, emphasizing the political will and commitment among member states, access to adequate funding, and capacity building (ECOWAS, 2020). As such, the document demonstrates regional support for ECOWAS Policy implementation to address issues of youth's economic development in the region. However, it does not specifically address how the African Union has supported such initiatives. In addition, it does not point out specific policy guidelines on what factors influence the effectiveness of the African Union's interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states.

Sesay (2022) affirms that AU and its RECs have provided institutional frameworks, and normative references for engaging young people and their economic development in Africa. There has been an increase of youth focus policies in the continent and regional institutions also champion such youth discourses, establishing frameworks, protocols, and mechanisms to promote youth participation, empowerment, entrepreneurship, and engagement in the respective regions. This leads to what Sesay refers to as the “Youth Turn” (see, for example, Chapter 3 Sesay, 2022). As Anyanwu (2014) affirmed earlier, Sesay also points out that there are some AU policies and initiatives that serve as a framework for regional organizations when it comes to engagement in youth development. These are the African Youth Charter and African Governance Architecture Youth Strategy (AGA-YES).

The Charter serves as a normative reference point when it comes to the engagement of youth, it provides a framework for the regional integrations when it comes to such involvement of the young people. The AGA-YES contributes to the evolution of AU and its RECs. AU works with ECOWAS to ensure AGA-YES implementation in the West African region. In addition, the initiative aligns with the AU 2030 agenda on sustainable development, and Agenda 2063 which emphasizes the ‘youth turn,’ engaging the young people in decision-making processes and governance issues. These policy initiatives are also declarations and resolutions involving member states that are also part of RECs focusing on socio-economic initiatives such as health, gender-based violence, and employment, which improves youth development in Africa. In addition, the AU youth division that coordinates youth-related programs addresses the youth's needs and concerns.

AfCFTA is an AU flagship initiative that seeks to promote ECOWAS objectives; it creates a single market initiative for goods and services, economic integration, and free movement of capital and people. The flagship initiative has the potential to create youth employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the ECOWAS region, and the AU and ECOWAS work closely to implement the initiatives. Thusi et al. (2022) affirmed that AfCFTA aims to open new businesses and trading opportunities in manufacturing, agriculture, and industries. In addition, the Economic Commission for Africa (2023) points out that the flagship project has a youth protocol claiming that youth play a critical role in economic transformation through entrepreneurship and industrialization.

AfCFTA is a policy initiative that aims to promote the free movement of the African populace, promote the African people’s ability to invest and start businesses, right of residence, tariff reduction, enhance the export capacity of youth since the youth accounts for

70% of the African's population and many Africa's small scale businesses are run by the youth and women, making up to 80% of businesses in the continent (Thusi et al., 2022). AfCFTA only recognizes that free trade zones should be youth-led with initiatives through financial technology, agriculture, creative industry, and information technology. However, the Economic Commission for Africa (2023) points out that the AfCFTA recognizes that such youth-led initiatives face challenges of modern technology, infrastructure, electricity, funding, access to the internet, and lack of implementation of government policies reflecting AfCFTA youth-led initiatives, thus, the youth are sidelined from the free trade area. Such challenges are the focus of this thesis, evaluating the policy frameworks and initiatives aiming to promote youth economic development and political participation in the ECOWAS region. Although, as it shall be clear below, the monitoring and evaluation of these policy frameworks look good on paper, the spirit of the policies or implementation mechanism is wanting.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has youth programs aiming at addressing youth socio-economic issues; it empowers young people in skill development, empowerment, and employment. The Union has supported ECOWAS in programs and policy development through the NEPAD programs. The AU Youth for Peace program (Y4P) engages youth in prosperity, peace, security, and conflict resolution. These policies reflect the AU and REC's commitments to youth development. Despite all these initiatives, Sesay (2022) points out that the AU and its RECs have been critiqued for being aspirational at the declaration level. Both AU and its RECs such as the ECOWAS lack the institutional capacity to translate aspiration into gains in youth development. Youth empowerment is tokenistic, not substantive and meaningful, thus, there is a lack of practical actions.

The development of the youth in the ECOWAS region and elsewhere depends on innovation in different sectors such as financing, research, development, and science and technology which is guided by public policy. However, the AU and its RECs such as ECOWAS face challenges that relate to the gap between science and policy formulation/conduct. Forson (2020) affirms that innovation financing and public policy face different dilemmas in the ECOWAS region. Policymakers face these dilemmas in the formulation and conduct of policy-supporting innovation. There is a lack of tax incentives that promote research and development activities, limited effective institutional frameworks that support Science, Technology, and Development (STI), and there is limited funding to support innovation.



As already pointed out above, the effectiveness of the African Union's interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states, and the AU's support to ECOWAS in policy implementation to address issues of youth's economic development lack institutional capacity. Forson (2020) affirms that there is a need for intensified implemented strategies between the AU and its sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS to promote sustainable economic development, structural transformation, and higher output turnover. As such, this focus will improve leveraging innovation policies that spur economic growth. The author referred to East Asian countries and Latin American countries who have transformed their economic growth through science and innovation strategies which are supported by public policy and science. However, Forson (2020) does not mention the link between such innovation and the development of the youth constituency in the West African region. Youth development is vital to such STI processes because they are the driving force behind innovation and technological advancement, and such processes are essential when it comes to entrepreneurship, and the creation of job opportunities. Moreover, the young people's ownership of the STI enhances sustainable development.

Kipo-Sunyezi et al. (2023) point out that some countries within the ECOWAS region such as Ghana incorporated the ECOWAS policy on youth into the national youth policy and programmes. Such are agencies that focus on the youth-based projects and programs promoted through public-private partnerships, and youth ministry. The country has also created a data bank on youth development and activities and other M&E mechanisms. The authors affirmed that the ECOWAS youth policy passed in 2008 and adopted in 2009, faced limitations in its implementation. The policy faced a lack of effective mechanisms. The track records of the implementation of projects and initiatives designed to enhance youth development did not meet their targets. The authors add that there is limited literature on M&E showing the collaboration and cooperation between the AU and ECOWAS. In addition, they indicate that there is a lack of cross-country and a longitudinal approach study that analyzes different youth developments and activities among ECOWAS countries. More so, the authors do not show the literature gap when it comes to the factors that influence the effectiveness of the African Union's Interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states. In addition, the literature does not show the support the AU has given ECOWAS in Policy implementation to address issues of youth's economic development in the region,

Müller (2022) affirms that over the past 20 years, Africa's regional organizations have increasingly been beneficial, they have acted in their own rights, intervening in their member states' affairs, promoting policies, resolving conflict, and providing a common voice for all member states. The institutional frameworks of regional organizations such as parliament, regional public administration, and courts of justice are sometimes irrelevant or weak (Hulse and Van der Vleuten, 2015). Thus, the progress of regional integration has been critiqued as slow and weak (Krapohl and Van Huut, 2020).

A comparison of the world's infrastructure shows that the ECOWAS region trails behind when it comes to quality and reliable infrastructure such as ICT, roads, ports, energy, and border crossing (Chambers et al., 2012). For example, Engel and Jouanjean (2015) affirms that transportation is quite high leading to higher costs of trade and economic development, poor infrastructure is a barrier to intergraded trade and economy, higher trade barriers are as a result of regional integration created by ECOWAS Trade Liberal Scheme (ETLS). Thus, ECOWAS has constraints to implementing some of its policies due to individual and collective actors' rational thinking on their interests. These interests are some of the barriers to the effectiveness of policy interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states, and the implementation of policies that address issues of youth economic development in the ECOWAS region.

Economic indicators showed that ECOWAS countries are some of the worst economic performers. ECOWAS (2013) report points out that the cost of transportation, the regulatory environment when it comes to doing business; limited finance, and inadequate transport links are some of the constraints to economic integration and development. Though the World Bank (2014) report points out that there are differences, some countries perform better in some indicators. The report gives details of 189 countries and their indicators in economic performance, and some of the ECOWAS countries trail behind. The report shows that the worst economic performers are from West Africa, Ivory Coast stands at number 158, Nigeria at 159, Mali is number 163, Burkina Faso takes the 174<sup>th</sup> position and Niger is at 179. These poor performances indicate why there are limitations in the promotion of youth economic development in ECOWAS member states, and why implementation of such policies is wanting.

## **2.6 Theoretical Perspective**

### **2.6.1. Dependency Theory**

The Dependency theory, which was first developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976, served as the foundation for this research. To emphasize the function that the audience plays in the communication process, the theory integrates elements from both psycho-analytics and social system theory. The media, the audience, and the greater social structure are all said to be connected by an internal link, as this theory proposes.

The dependency theory suggests that developing countries, particularly those in Africa, are characterized by the basic deficiencies and inequality in the world economic system due to the historical cases of colonialism and economic exploitation (Velasco, 2002). Respectively, this theory argues that African states' economies are strangled by the external dependence and misbalanced trade terms with which they carry on their business. The African Union's attempts toward building solid economic partnerships with regional blocks like ECOWAS is a case-in-point that can be looked at from a dependency theory perspective where it is aimed at developing a way forward to overcome these existing economic imbalances. As a result, this theory affords us the opportunity to analyze whether economic dependence on the political participation of young people is an obstacle or not, the reason being that it could limit the political activity of the youths since they are on the margins of the economy.

### **2.6.2. Modernization Theory**

Modernization theory presupposes that societies can progress in certain stages defined by economic growth, developing industries, and building stable democracies (Smith & London, 1990). The relevance of modernization theory to the African Union's (AU) efforts in developing ECOWAS member countries can be explored, given that modernization theory can be adapted to illustrate how the role of the AU in creating social and economic order (Akinola, 2019). Moreover, the concept can help to revisit the role of political engagement among the youths that is to some extent largely informed by the economy of the African Union. The modernization theory believes that as nations develop economically, they also face various changes like education advancement, urbanization, and growth in political consciousness among their people. It might be that kids will prefer our way, which is this tactic, then what is now the conventional approach.

### **2.6.3. Social Movement Theory**

Standing behind the social movement theory are groups of people seeking society to improve politically or how it is economically managed. Social movement theory as a broad domain of study in the social sciences is to shed light on where and how collective actions among individuals come from and the survival of such movements in diverse forms (Ibrahim and al., 2023).

The puzzle of humanizing the biology of aging is a multi-dimensional one, which requires not only a comprehensive approach but also constant vigilance and adaptability to new evidence and discoveries (Ali & Tariq, 2023; Ristasa et al., 2018). The social movement framework teaches us how youths make themselves united to make an impact in their home countries and across all over Africa. What lies on the table, however, is the social movement theory that can be used for measuring the level of youth involvement in politics as the African Union (AU) is following this course. The schemes involve the formation of youth leadership initiatives, civil education movements, and the fostering of policies that support young people in a wholesome manner in the ECOWAS member states.

## **2.7 Empirical Literature Review**

African Union (AU) has stepped up to become a great partner in the endeavor to promote the youth benefits related to economic participation and political participation. In this regard, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can be held up ECOWAS as a case study that illustrates the function of AU with the regard to stopping economic crises and including youth in political affairs.

Experts have, indisputably, delved into issues of AU involvement in the economic development of the ECOWAS region (Agbonkhese & Adekola, 2014; Usman & Adeyinka, 2019). This has been accompanied by the boosting of the supermarket sector, which promotes value additions and financial inclusion, thereby improving living standards. First, the article by Brown (2021) emphasizes the fact that establishing good economic connections and cooperation among various Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries represents a very crucial task that should be managed by AU through the following regional integration initiatives. They posit that the likes of the ETLs have had an impact on reducing trade barriers and increasing economic activity in the region

In addition, Orji et al (2022) investigated the AU's work in youth entrepreneurship and employment creation in ECOWAS countries. Adegbola et al (2020) pointed out the AU's initiatives aimed at backing youth-led businesses and promoting innovation across sectors of rural economies in West Africa Benin. Researchers did a qualitative case study that was centered on improving youth employment opportunities in rural economies. They made clear that economically empowering young people for the purpose of achieving sustainable development will result in a reduction in youth unemployment rates. The study by Ikelegbe and Garuba (2011) explored youth and conflicts in West Africa, regional potentials, and threats. The researchers conducted a survey-based study. The study observed that throughout West Africa, young people have played a central role in the prolonged hostilities, both as combatants and as a source of recruitment for conflict activities. The study determined that at the national level, member states of ECOWAS must undertake more extensive measures to address the escalating issue of youth unemployment in West Africa. This topic should be considered urgently, particularly considering ensuring socio-economic security and providing a sense of belonging and collaboration for the large number of unemployed youths who are willing to be mobilized in the sub-region. ECOWAS can spearhead the development of a policy framework that would enable member states to assume key responsibilities for guiding the youth towards working for peace and security in the sub-region.

In addition to the economic development, AU has played a key role in advocating for the youth to have more political say in ECOWAS member states. Scholars have researched the AU's part in democratization, youth inclusion in decision-making processes, and instilling a culture of political activism among young people. For example, Tella (2021) discusses the AU's effort to promote youth leadership and participation in electoral processes through initiatives like the African Youth Charter and African Governance Architecture.

Besides, the AU has been working with regional organizations such as ECOWAS to implement policies and programs focused on young people that will enhance their political participation and civic engagement. Bleck, Lwere, and Sangaré (2023) underline the role of multi-level governance systems in the promotion of youth participation in governance structures, with the AU giving institutional backing and advocating for youth inclusion initiatives at the regional level.

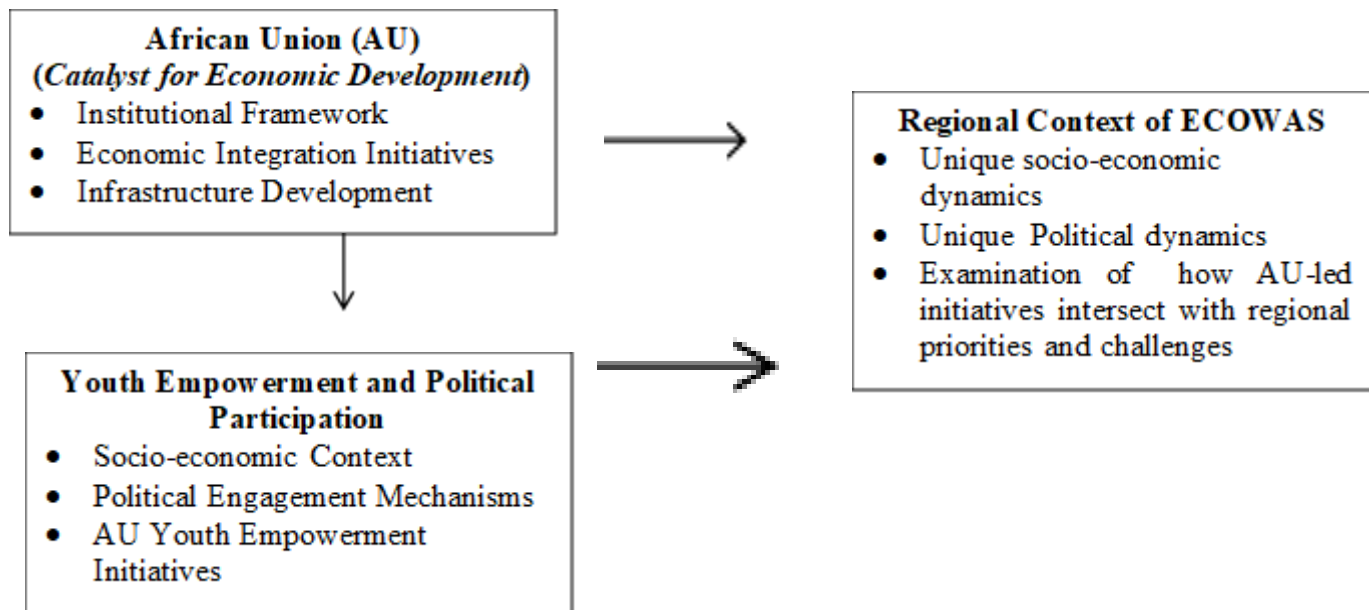
In research conducted by Ishola (2020), the focus was on regional collaboration for development, especially looking at the experience of the African Union. The study was an inquiry into AU's capacity and effectiveness as a regional collaboration tool in promoting

development. The researcher looked at the institutional part and policies of the organization to enhance the living conditions of the African population. Just as the member states of the African Union (AU) have been confronted with the dependency problem, that is seen through the formulation of their policies and activities, there have been some challenges with the financial status of the AU itself. It is the latter one that begs the question of whether it can serve as the engine that powers the entire continent towards development. Agbeba et al., (2018) examined the contribution of ECOWAS to peace, security, and developmental sustainability in the West Africa region, through their research. According to the study, it can be concluded that the agricultural sector in West Africa plays a pivotal role in maintaining peace and security in the area, which can only be achieved through interventions that are designed to stimulate the region's economic growth and development. It includes employment for youth and highly qualified security personnel who will be entrusted with the guarding of the borders. The strategy that is implemented with the greatest result for the goal to maintain peace within ECOWAS is ensuring that the ways to resolve conflict, manage conflict, and peacemaking are done professionally and in a good manner. Firstly, those who assure a state-led restoration of transparency and accountability likewise also need to have leaders who manifest proficiency to establish growth within ECOWAS, among other regions. Raji (2023) undertook a study aiming at discovering trends in youth empowerment that are directly related to sustainable development in the setting of the African Union. The crucial implication, in other words, is that an effective way to achieve long-term development and enhance opportunities is to assimilate students with comprehensive, technology-based education.

The study's findings show that education is the most essential element in determining Africa's future development. Given this, it proposes that the African Union urge its member states to improve their local youth's capacities and well-being. It is important to encourage, support, and provide young people with opportunities to obtain quality education so they can become influential, forward-thinking adults.

***Figure 1: Conceptual Framework***

## 2.12 Conceptual Framework



### **3.0 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the procedure by which data is collected and analyzed. The methodology entails detailed information on how data is gathered, interpreted, and analyzed (Florya, 2016; Mohajan, 2018). Philosophically, methodology entails the techniques used to justify the data collection and analysis, and how biases are avoided or dealt with in the process. The chapter also presents the research design that was used to target the population, sample size, research instrument, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations within the research (Carey, 2017).

In considering the gathering of information, the investigator is the engineer of the study, he/she influences the findings and the results of the study due to the chosen data collection techniques. As such, Bryman (2016) mentions that the researcher could create biases. Thus, I arrive at objectivity by applying a mixed method, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques for gathering data. As such, I used a survey questionnaire and analyzed media interviews from key informants. I also use SPSS software version 20 to analyze the data from the survey and conduct a content analysis of the media interviews.

#### **3.2 Research philosophy.**

The study follows two approaches, positivists and interpretivists in examining AU and ECOWAS policy intervention and how they promote youth political participation and economic development. Positivists believe that understanding such policy interventions on youth can be achieved through testing and observation (Clarke, 2016). In addition, positivists believe that knowledge can be gained through senses, and measurement (BRM, 2021). The approach affirms that the interpretation of data limits the researcher's role to interfere with the analysis. Interpretation is done through a quantitative technique, identifying the patterns through measurements and calculation of numbers that are statistically analyzed (BRM, 2021). The investigator concentrates on the facts that are generated from the statistical calculations (Crowther & Lancaster, 2012); this calculation follows logical reasoning (Russell, 1950). Therefore, the positivist approach is characterized by the hypothetic deductive method (Siponen & Kluavuniemi, 2020).



As I already explained above, the mixed method is applied, thus, I also appreciated the interpretivist's philosophy. The interpretivism paradigm assumes that reality is achieved through social construction, including shared meanings, language, research instruments, and consciousness (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In addition, interpretivism is based on the assumptions that reality, truth, and knowledge are subjective and are based on an individual's interpretation and experiences. Also, interpretivism is based on the assumptions that reality, truth, and knowledge are subjective and on an individual's interpretation and experiences. The AU and ECOWAS policy interventions are interpreted concerning youth political participation and economic development, and the media interviews are also interpreted in relation to these concepts. Interpretive philosophy opposes the process of measurement for reality and truth is constructed and cannot be determined by such processes. The relativist ontology is founded on the assumption that a situation under study has several realities, and the facts can be examined and meaning reconstructed or recreated through the interaction and exchanges between the study participants and the researcher (Pham, 2018). Thus, I derive meaning from various media interviews and literature.

### **3.3 Research design**

The study finds the quantitative approach suitable for it entails justifying facts through numbers. These numbers can be said to be valid if their measurement provides a repeated outcome. Bryman (2012) and Creswell (2013) point out that consistency causes reliability. If numbers consistently give an outcome, then we can rely on them as facts. A quantitative approach is suitable for inquiring or explaining the relationship between independent (causal) and dependent (outcome or effect) variables (Savela, 2018). In this case, I examine the relationship between AU, and ECOWAS policy interventions and youth economic development/political participation. In addition, I measure if African Union policies influence the economic growth of ECOWAS, if the African Union does not support ECOWAS in Policy Implementation on youth involvement in political participation, and whether there is a gap between rhetoric and reality in African Union and ECOWAS policy formulation and implementation. In doing this, I operationalized these concepts through a survey questionnaire on Kobo Toolbox. Such techniques help to create a deeper understanding, measure, and analyze the concepts through the SPSS software version 20. I used African Union and ECOWAS policy interventions as independent variables and youth economic development and political participation as dependent variables.

I also apply qualitative methods to analyze the media interviews and secondary literature. Studies related to policy interventions and political participation require in-depth understanding. Qualitative techniques are suitable for exploring such studies and investigating and analyzing what the past literature claims (Vaughan, 2019). Thus, through content examination of the secondary data (literature), descriptive design is applied to interrogate different ideas, concepts, perspectives, and meanings, including an in-depth understanding of the several academic work backgrounds. This is done by asking questions of how, when, what, and where (Nassaji, 2015). Therefore, descriptive design helps explore different perspectives (Sreejesh et al., 2014).

Exploring the study helps the researcher experiment with different understandings and perspectives from the data with counter options and thoughts. Exploring such views gives a deeper meaning to various concepts and ideas within the study (Creswell, 2013). In this case, the researcher is flexible, and able to adopt multiple meanings, accommodating new thoughts and emerging themes from the secondary data reviewed. The investigator explores by interrogating different definitions and words used. Also, flexibility helps the investigator expand the scope of the research by gathering innovative ideas, perspectives, and concepts. Therefore, such a design allows the investigator to get more meaning concerning the topic of study before drawing a conclusive finding or recommendation. I experimented and explored information, that is, the primary and secondary evidence in different themes to create an in-depth understanding through triangulation of secondary data, the qualitative data from the media interviews, and quantitative data gathered from the survey questionnaire. Triangulation is a qualitative technique that applies several methods in data analysis to explore and experiment with varying sources of data and credibility. Such an approach—triangulation helps gain a comprehensive insight into the phenomenon or understanding of the themes as they emerge (Cope et al., 2014). Thus, creating validity and reliability through a comparison of diverse sources of information.

### **3.4 Targeted Population and Sample Size**

The targeted population included young individuals aged between 15 and 35 years residing in ECOWAS member states. This demographic segment represents the youth population whose economic opportunities and political participation are of interest in the study. Another subset of the targeted population comprised government officials, policymakers, and representatives

from ECOWAS institutions involved in economic development initiatives and youth-related policies.

Determining the appropriate sample size for a quantitative study involves considering several factors, including the desired level of precision, confidence level, and the heterogeneity of the population (Adhikari, 2021). While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to determining sample size, researchers often use statistical formulas or sampling techniques to ensure the reliability and validity of their findings (Lakens, 2022).

Given the diverse nature of the targeted population, a stratified sampling approach may be appropriate to ensure adequate representation of different demographic groups and stakeholders. For example, the sample was stratified based on age groups, geographical regions within ECOWAS member states, and stakeholder categories (government officials, youths). Additionally, considering the need for statistical significance and generalizability of findings, a larger sample size was typically preferred. However, practical constraints such as time, resources, and accessibility of participants may also influence the determination of sample size (Kothari, 2014).

### **3.5 Data Collection**

I collected the quantitative data through a survey questionnaire, which I developed from the Kobo Toolbox software online. The question was operationalized from the concepts used in this thesis. Such concepts are African Union and ECOWAS policy interventions, and youth economic and political participation. The questionnaire was sent to different West African youth online platforms such as Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Such techniques helped in giving a chance to all the participants, therefore, a random sampling was applied. Random sampling is suitable because it gives the targeted population a chance to participate. The sampling techniques give a probable chance to the targeted population; thus, it gives a higher level of reliability. Such probability sampling removes biases that come with excluding some of the targeted population, thus, the validity is met by giving an equal chance to all targeted populations (Etikan et al., 2017). A total of 104 participants completed the questionnaire, therefore  $N=104$ .

The thesis uses secondary data to interrogate the relationship between the concepts being studied. Such data is gathered from academic databases such as Taylor and Francis online

database, Sage online publishing database, Elsevier, Wiley Online Library, Springer, and a more general Google Scholar search was made. I used keywords from the research questions or the hypotheses and the study topic to gather relevant data that has a similar topic or those that are relevant to the study. Such keywords were ‘African Union Policy intervention on youth political participation,’ and ‘African Union and ECOWAS policy intervention on youth economic development.’

Furthermore, boolean operators are used; first, ‘AND’ is used to narrow the search and get specific data with the main keywords. Secondly, ‘OR’ is used to broaden the search to give a chance to a wider range of data. The techniques used to include the data involved using the hypothesis and keyword mentioned above to search for the relevant data. Thereafter, reading the abstract or summary of the source, if the secondary source has some relevance to the topic of study, analysis can be made by interrogating its methodology, literature, and conclusion. Those not meeting academic standards such as journalistic work not that are not peer-reviewed are excluded from the collection. Furthermore, the exclusion is done using the keywords, those that had a similar topic to the thesis or concepts related to those that are being studied were included. See below inclusion and exclusion Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** *Explaining the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the selection of the secondary sources*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<b>Data that shows the relationship between African Union (AU) Policy Interventions and youth economic development</b>	<b>Data that do not show the relationship between AU policies and youth economic development</b>
<b>Data that show the relationship between AU and ECOWAS policies, and youth political participation</b>	<b>Data that do not demonstrate the relationship between AU and ECOWAS policies, and youth political participation</b>
<b>Data that show the relationship between AU intervention and ECOWAS Policies</b>	<b>Data that do not show the relationship between AU intervention and ECOWAS Policies</b>

### 3.6 Data Analysis

I applied mixed methods in the analysis as well, using content analysis, descriptive, and chi-square analysis. Through content analysis, I looked at the language used to describe various themes and concepts, identifying the partiality applied and the different meanings (Lacy et al., 2015; Neuendorf, 2018). Additionally, analysis of the vast secondary data gave a robust epistemological foundation. I analyzed such data through content analysis, looking at the relationships within various themes concepts, and words used to describe a concept or a particular theme to arrive at an in-depth meaning. After that, these gathered and analyzed contents are triangulated with the described and chi-square analyzed data before giving a justifiable finding.

A descriptive analysis helped me to identify the distribution of the controlled variables such as gender, age, and nationality of the participants. I applied for a Chi-Square test to identify the relation between the independent variables and the dependent variables. In other words, hypothesis testing was done to identify if African Union and ECOWAS policy interventions have a relationship with Youth political participation and economic development. Chi-Square tests the discrepancies between the actual results and the expected ones; this is done considering the number of variables in the relationship and the sample size. It tests the null hypothesis by using a degree of freedom (Rana & Singhal, 2015).

Chi-square gave the correlation and coefficient, testing the association between variables. The testing identifies the significance of the relationship but does not tell how strong that relationship is (Stockemer et al., 2019). If the test demonstrates some degree of freedom according to the null hypotheses, then the null hypothesis will be confirmed. However, if there is some freedom against the null hypotheses, then they will be rejected. The significance of the test, or the logic in the relationship, is measured by an alpha value of 0.05. If the value is more than the alpha value, the study confirms the null, and if the value is less than the alpha, the null is rejected (Rana & Singhal, 2015).

Chi-square tests are a statistical distribution that emerged from Karl Pearson's distribution. It tests the goodness of fitness. "The data are categorized along one dimension, and as a test for the more common "contingency table," in which categorization is across two or more dimensions" (Howell, 2011, p. 1). The Chi-Square test is given by the value ( $\chi^2$ ) and it is calculated by the sum ( $\Sigma$ ) of the observed data that is the data collected (in this case the data developed from the Kobo Toolbox software) minus the expected data or the predicted data

based on the null hypotheses, squared, then divided by the expected values (Turhan, 2020). The formula is given in Figure 1 below:

The Formula for Chi-Square Is

$$\chi_c^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

where:

$c$  = Degrees of freedom

$O$  = Observed value(s)

$E$  = Expected value(s)

Figure 1: The formula of Chi-Square retrieved from (Hayes, 2020)

### 3.7 Limitation

Study has several limitations, but such limitations are also improved to be the strength by addressing them with multiple techniques. First, the study used secondary data, and such data lacked up-to-date information concerning the study topic. Furthermore, some of the data had biases. Secondary data might be vague, giving too general information. Moreover, the investigator is the engineer of the study (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, such data might be subject to the author's biases. To address such weaknesses, I collected vast secondary data and confirmed their findings with claims from other secondary sources. In addition, I intended to conduct primary interviews with key informants, but none of them replied to my call. Thus, I chose to use the media interviews recorded by these key informants on YouTube and other social media.

### 3.8 Ethical Considerations

To maintain ethical standards in research, the researcher communicated to all participants that the research is exclusively intended for academic purposes. Before engaging with the respondents, the researcher obtained voluntary consent from each participant, making sure that no kinds of coercion or incentives were used to encourage their participation. To ensure the participants' identities remain undisclosed, rigorous confidentiality mechanisms were put in place for the questionnaire items (Vadrot & Hughes, 2023). In addition, the survey questions were meticulously designed to prevent any potentially invasive inquiries that could

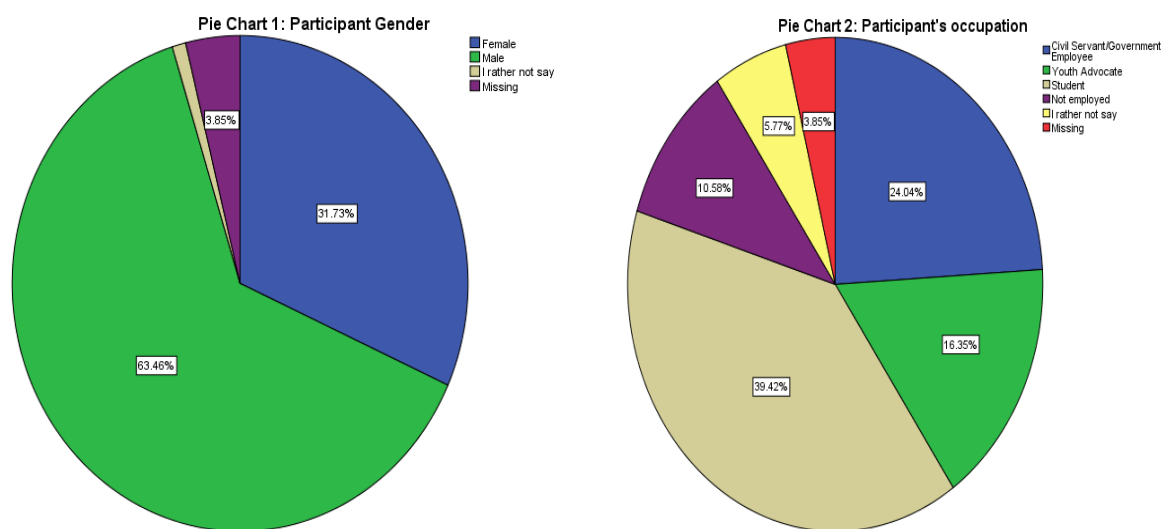
jeopardize the privacy of the participants which were approved by the supervisor before they were sent out to the participants.

#### 4.0 CHAPTER IV: FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results are based on quantitative and qualitative analysis, I applied descriptive and chi-square analysis to the data collected from the survey questionnaire sent to participants through Kobo Toolbox software. These questionnaire results are analyzed using SPSS software version 20, and the analysis is triangulated to the content analysis from media interviews, and literature from past academic sources. The response to the questionnaire was 104 participants, thus, N=104. Of these respondents, 94.23% consented to answering the questionnaire while 1.92% declined, see Table 1 below. Most of the respondents were male 63.46%, and the female gender recorded 31.73%, see Pie Chart 1 below. In terms of their occupation, most of the respondents were students 39.42%, and those who worked with the government were at 24.04%, see Pie Chart 2 below. The majority of the respondents knew the African Union and ECOWAS, having scored 93.27% and 92.32% respectively, see Tables 2 and 3 below.

**Table 1:** *Consent Form Project title: The Role of the African Union in Economic Development in Africa: The case of youth economic development in the ECOWAS region.*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		4	3.8	3.8	3.8
	No	2	1.9	1.9	5.8
	Yes	98	94.2	94.2	100.0
	Total	104	100.0	100.0	



**Table 2:** *Do you know the African Union (AU)?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		5	4.8	4.8	4.8
	No	2	1.9	1.9	6.7
	Yes	97	93.3	93.3	100.0
	Total	104	100.0	100.0	

**Table 3:** *Knowledge of AU and ECOWAS*

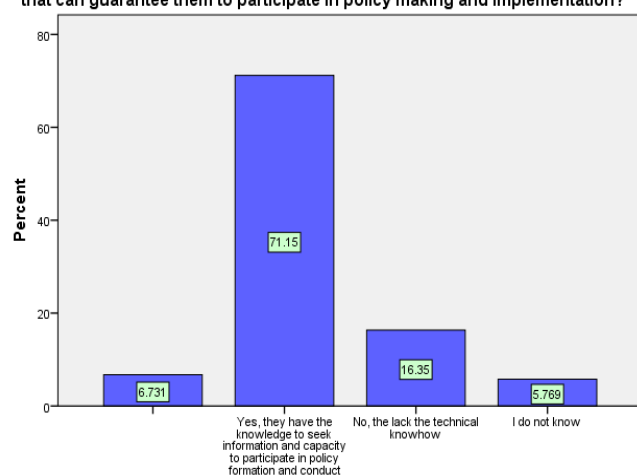
VARIABLE	PARTICIPANT RESPONSE	FREQUENCY (n)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Do you know the African Union (AU)?	Yes	97	93.3
	No	2	1.9



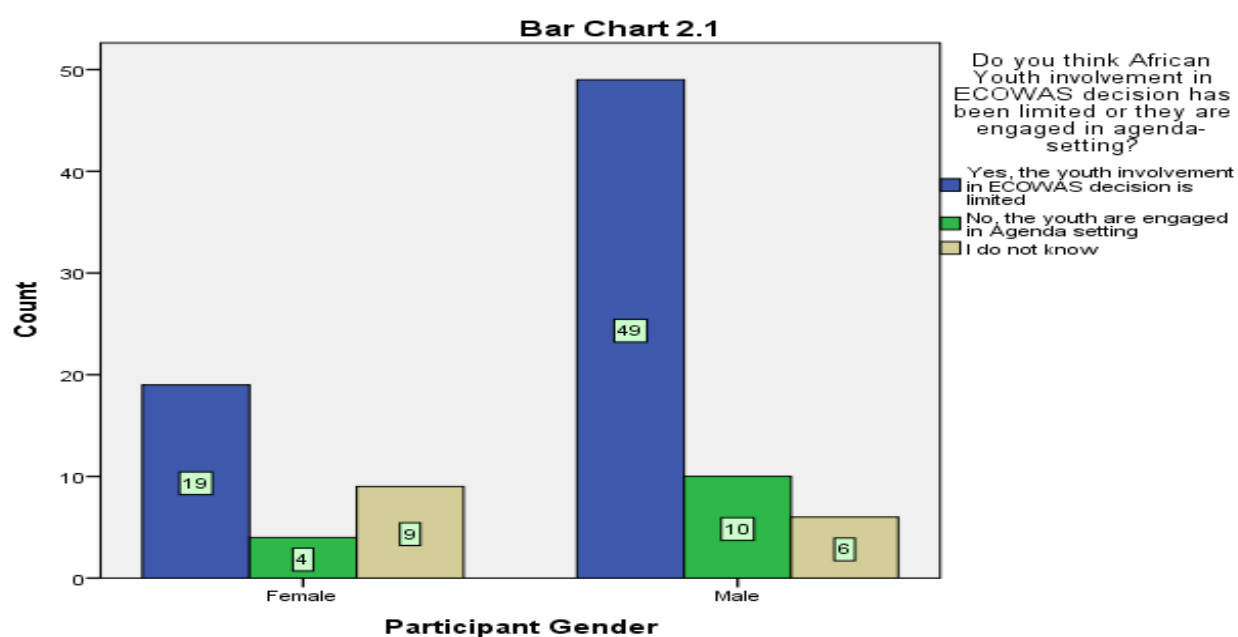
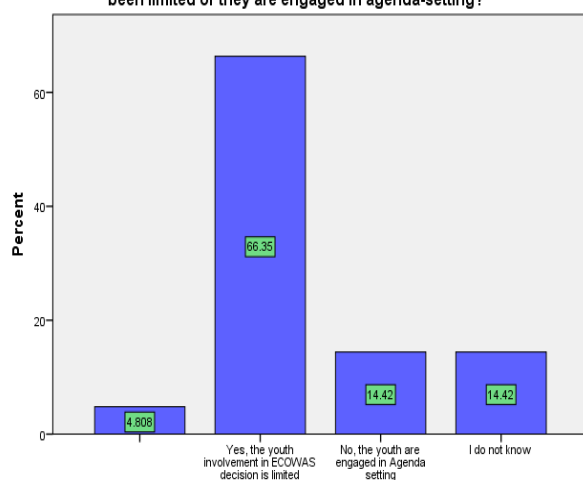
	Missing	5	4.8
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Do you know (ECOWAS)?	Yes	96	92.3
	No	3	2.9
	Missing	5	4.8
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The descriptive statistics showing whether West African youth have the qualities that guarantee them to participate in policymaking and implementation indicate that 71.15% of the youth know how to seek information and the capacity to participate in policy formation and conduct. Only 16.35% of the respondents indicated that youth lack the technical knowledge of policy formation and implementation, see Bar Graph 1 below. Despite the youth having knowledge of policy formulation and conduct, 66.35% indicate that the involvement of young people in ECOWAS decision-making is limited, see Bar Graph 2 below. Thus, there is a lack of youth political participation when it comes to engagement in agenda setting of policy decisions, yet they have the technical knowledge in decision-making processes. Both female and male counterparts recognize the limitation when it comes to the involvement of the African youth in agenda setting of policy decisions. However, many of the female participants have no idea whether the youth are involved in decision-making and agenda-setting, see Bar Graph 2.1 below.

**Bar Graph 1: Do you think the West African youth constituency has the qualities that can guarantee them to participate in policy making and implementation?**



**Bar Graph 2: Do you think African Youth involvement in ECOWAS decision has been limited or they are engaged in agenda-setting?**

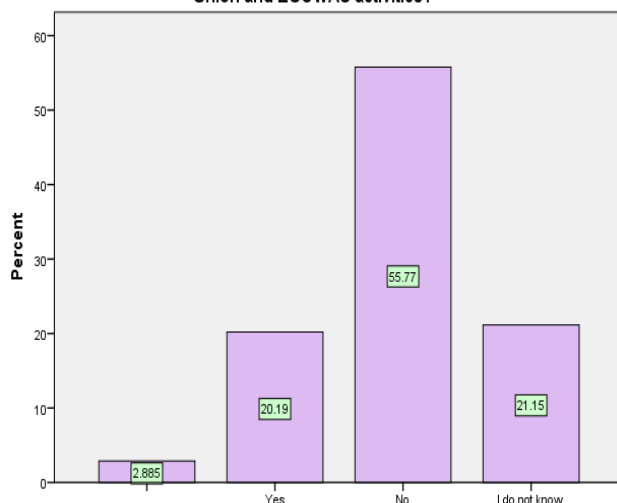


The concern whether the African youth are involved in policy implementation of the African Union and ECOWAS activities indicated that 55.77% of the population does not believe that the youth are being involved in the implementation of policy. Only 20.19% believe the young people are being involved, see Bar Graph 3. Equally, 73.08% of the participants doubted if ECOWAS programs designed for youth activities meet the youth's expectations of economic development. Only 9.615% had faith in such programs, see Bar Graph 4. Therefore, the notion that AU policies influence the involvement of youth participation and economic growth of ECOWAS is doubtful for many of the informants indicated such doubts. <sup>1</sup>the youth. <sup>[108]</sup> The doubts exist despite the ECOWAS (2020) youth policy stipulating the provision of youth participation in development and decision-making.

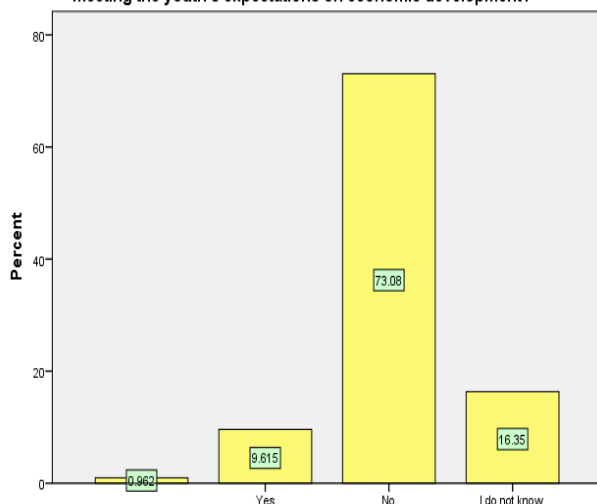
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<sup>1</sup> See, the conference on "AU, ECOWAS Advocate Youth Participation in Decision-Making," available at <[https://youtu.be/7eoT-DMZ\\_k4](https://youtu.be/7eoT-DMZ_k4)>; Lecture by Dr. Abdel-Fatau Masah Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, ECOWAS available at <<https://youtu.be/HiQQwkREfxM>>

**Bar Graph 3: Are African youth involved in policy implementation of African Union and ECOWAS activities?**



**Bar Graph 4: Do you think the ECOWAS programs for youth activities are meeting the youth's expectations on economic development?**



Participation of African youth in policy formation and implementation has been cited as limited, and the existing ECOWAS policies on youth are cited as half-hearted, and funding for youth activities remains low, leading to the limit of West African youth participation in decision<sup>2</sup> and economic development.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a sustainable intervention program for youth Participation is lacking in the ECOWAS region.<sup>4</sup> An earlier interview with Marc Sommer, an expert on youth and development in Africa confirmed these facts, citing an

<sup>3</sup> Presentation by Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musa, the Director of the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre Musa available at <<https://youtu.be/4e4KtRFYgo4>>

<sup>4</sup> See, the conference on "AU, ECOWAS Advocate Youth Participation in Decision-Making," available at <[https://youtu.be/7eoT-DMZ\\_k4](https://youtu.be/7eoT-DMZ_k4)>

increase in programs<sup>5</sup> youth however, these programs do not involve the African youth in decision-making, and Africans live in a sea of youth exclusion from economic development and political participation.<sup>6</sup> In evaluating public participation, the study interrogated whether the participants have been engaged in evaluating AU and ECOWAS policies, and 87.5% indicated they had never been contacted to participate in such exercise, only 9.6% indicated they had participated in the evaluation exercise, see Bar Graph 5 below. Those who participated cited a lack of youth capacity building/development and employment opportunities.<sup>7</sup> In evaluating public participation, the study interrogated whether the participants have been engaged in evaluating AU and ECOWAS policies, and an 87.5% indicate they have never been contacted to participate in such exercise, only 9.6% indicated they have participated in the evaluation exercise, see Bar Graph 5 below. Those who participated cited lack of youth capacity building/development and employment opportunities.

The ‘Youth-Voices-for-Change-Forum’ in Accra, Ghana confirmed such facts, citing limited youth participation in policy implementation (ECOWAS, 2024).<sup>8</sup> A key informant also cited the lack of, and a need for young people's involvement in policy discussions and decision-making processes, investments in science and technology, education<sup>9</sup> and vocational training. Such results were also highlighted by the Economic Commission for Africa (2023) affirming challenges to modern technology, funding, access to the internet, electricity, limited infrastructure and governments not implementing policies that are youth-led or youth-focused. Some of the 9.6% of respondents indicated having participated in the West Africa Internet governance forum, which emphasized a great digital divide among the African youth. Particularly, they cited the gap between male and female gender when it comes to the digital divide which hinders young people, more so, young African females from accessing information, limited participation, and economic empowerment. emphasised a great digital divide among the African youth. Particularly, they cited the gap between male and female

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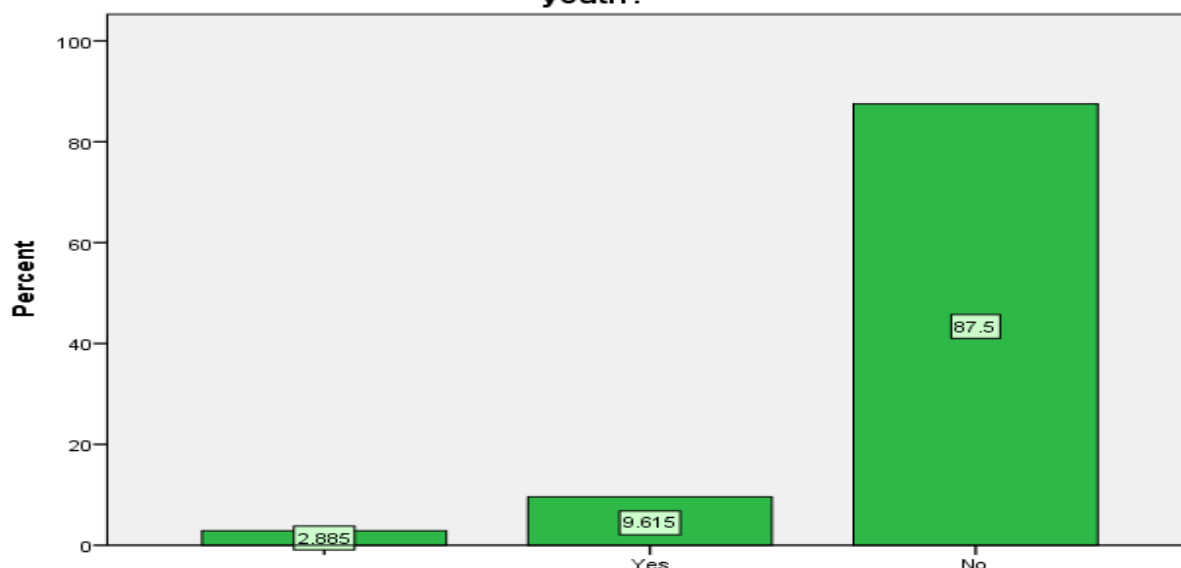
<sup>6</sup> USIP. (2016). *Youth and Development Practices in Africa: What Works*. United States Institute of Peace. Retrieved July 7, 2024 from <https://youtu.be/Ho91vpf7ZUY>

<sup>8</sup> ECOWAS. (2024). *ECOWAS and Its Partners Challenge the Youth in the Region on Using Digital Technology for Economic Growth, Peace and Stability*. Economic Community of West African States. Retrieved July 7, 2024 from <https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-its-partners-challenge-the-youth-in-the-region-on-using-digital-technology-for-economic-growth-peace-and-stability/>.

<sup>9</sup> Lecture by Dr. Abdel-Fatau Masah Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, ECOWAS available at < <https://youtu.be/HiQQwkREfxM> >

gender when it comes to the digital divide which hinders young people, more so, young African female from accessing information, limited participation and economic empowerment.

**Bar Graph 5: Have you been contacted to evaluate any AU or ECOWAS Policy on youth?**



4. In evaluating NEPAD, AU, and ECOWAS programs, 83.65% indicated a lack of knowledge of such programs, and only 9.615% knew about these programs, see Bar Graph 6. The 9.615 percent indicated the past strategic framework for youth programs<sup>10</sup> citing that despite the program providing the foundation for youth development and influencing the youth constituency in decision-making processes, there is little to show that such programs help in youth economic development. Such results have also been affirmed by Sesay (2022) critiques such policies as aspirational at the declaration level and hardly implemented. There have also been debates on whether such programs benefit young women in rural areas compared to those in urban cities in Africa, and the rural population has been cited to lack technical know-how or skills when <sup>11</sup>comes to engagement in startup businesses.<sup>1213</sup>s despite, ECOWAS ECOWAS (2020) policies and

<sup>10</sup> NEPAD. (2005). *A Strategic Framework for A NEPAD Youth Programme*. The Secretariat of the New Partnership for Africa's Development Retrieved July 6 2024 from <https://www.nepad.org/publication/strategic-framework-nepad-youth-programme>

<sup>12</sup> See, discussion on 'the role of AUDA-NEPAD and youth skills development in Africa' available at < <https://youtu.be/4aZwT3gMWml>>

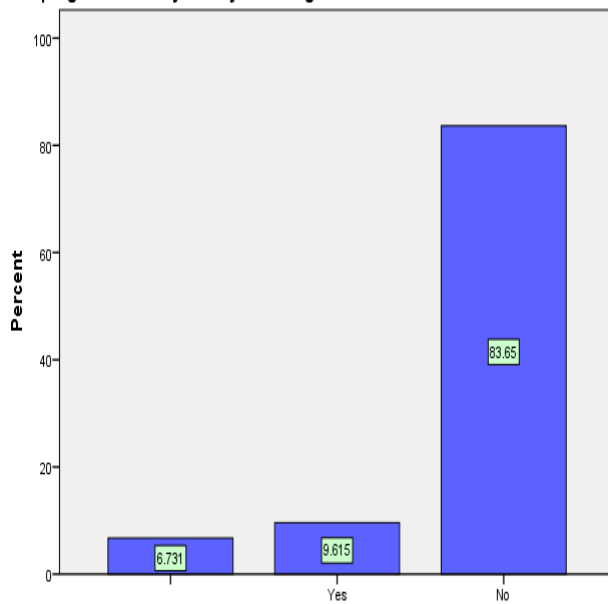
literature by Adegbola et al (2020) stipulate the need to address youth issues and development in rural areas. This is despite; ECOWAS ECOWAS (2020) policies and literature by Adegbola et al (2020) stipulate the need to address youth issues and development in rural areas.

Equally, 88.46% indicated they have never benefited from NEPAD and ECOWAS youth development programs, and only 3.84% indicated that they have benefited from such programs, see Bar Graph 7. Those who cited to have benefited from ECOWAS programs indicated the West Africa Internet Governance Forum (WAIGF) and intensive learning program for young West Africans to participate in digital governance and policy regulation initiatives. However, there are challenges such as indigenous knowledge and governance when it comes to cyber security and internet governance. The WAIGF forum indicated limited participation of West African youth due to a lack of knowledge, indigenous initiatives, and funding. As such, there is a gap between rhetoric and reality in the African Union and ECOWAS policy formulation and implementation due to the limited indigenous initiatives and lack of funding.<sup>14</sup> As such, there is a gap between rhetoric and reality in African Union and ECOWAS policy formulation and implementation due to the limited indigenous initiatives and lack of funding.

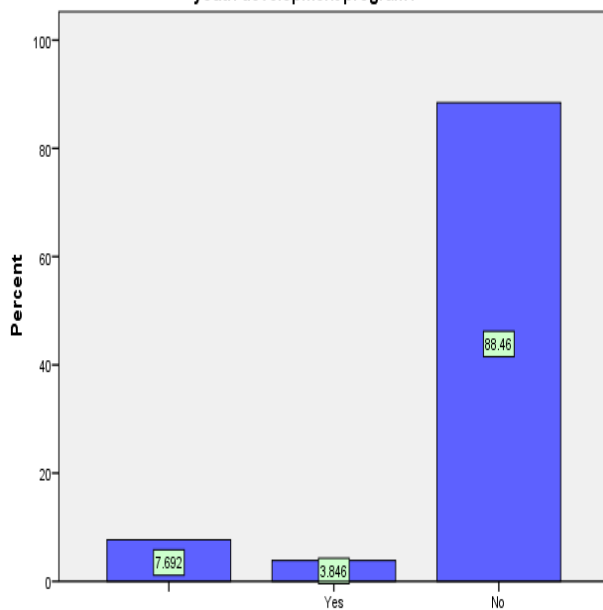
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<sup>14</sup> See, for example 'the west African Youth Internet Governance Forum' 2023, <<https://youtu.be/4-1Jg8hZLM>>

Bar Graph 6: Do you know the Africa New Partner for development (NEPAD) programme or any other youth Programme related to ECOWAS or AU?



Bar Graph 7: Have you benefited from any African Union, NEPAD and ECOWAS youth development program?

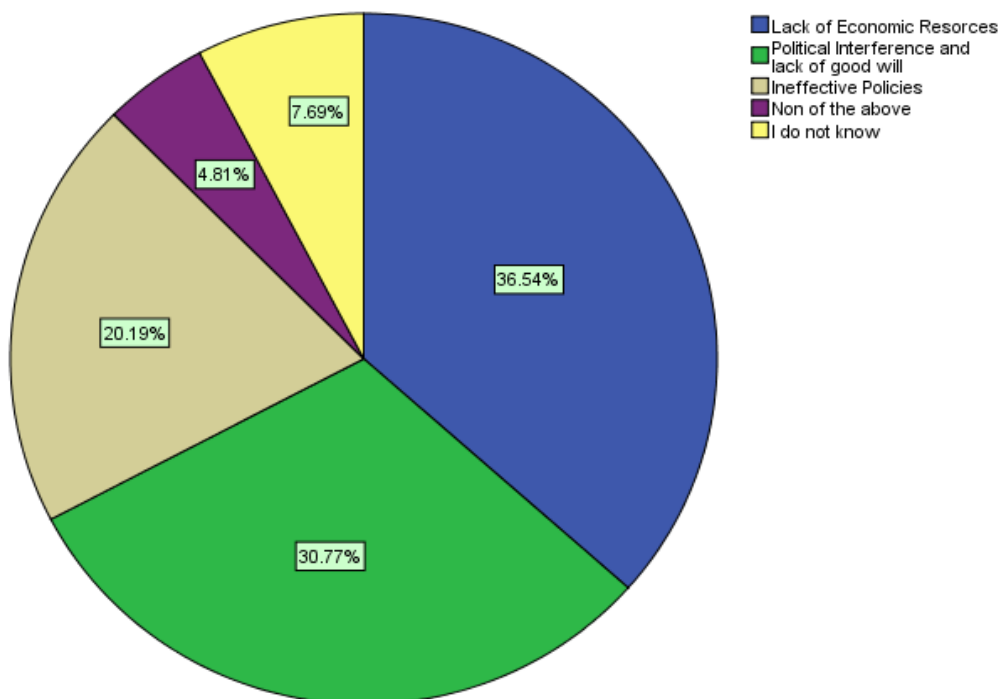


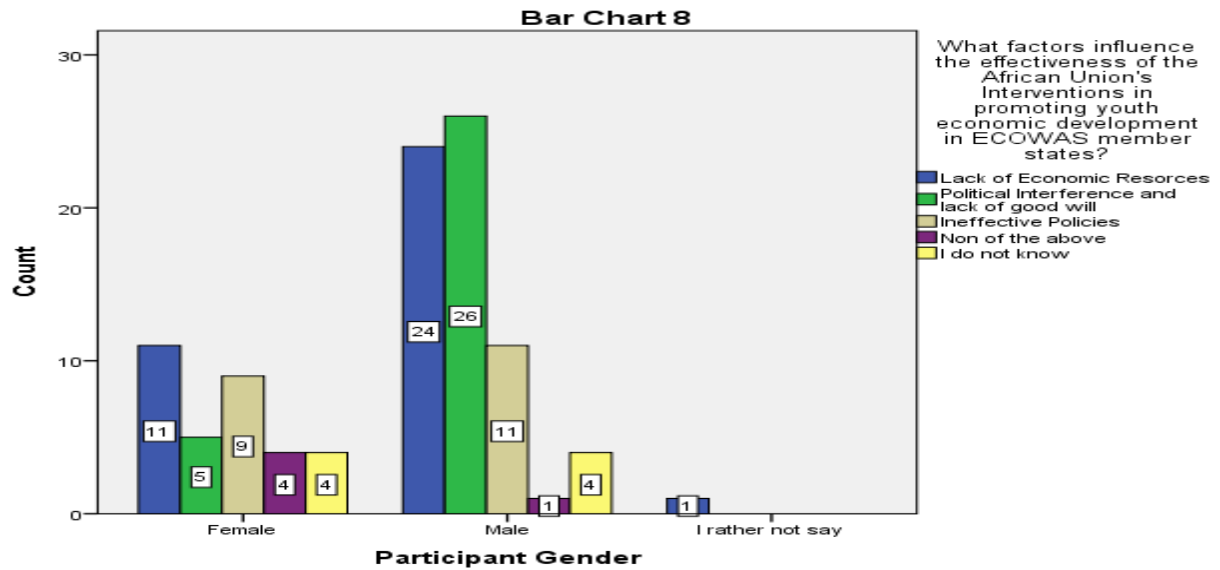
The result also identified a range of factors that influence the ineffectiveness of AU's intervention in promoting Youth economic development in ECOWAS member states. 36.54% of the participants indicated that there was a lack of economic resources, 30.77% of the respondents indicated political interference and lack of goodwill, while 20.19% identified ineffective policies as the challenge, see Pie Chart 3 below. Such lack of goodwill, ineffective policies and political interference are also highlighted by Forson (2020) affirming that such



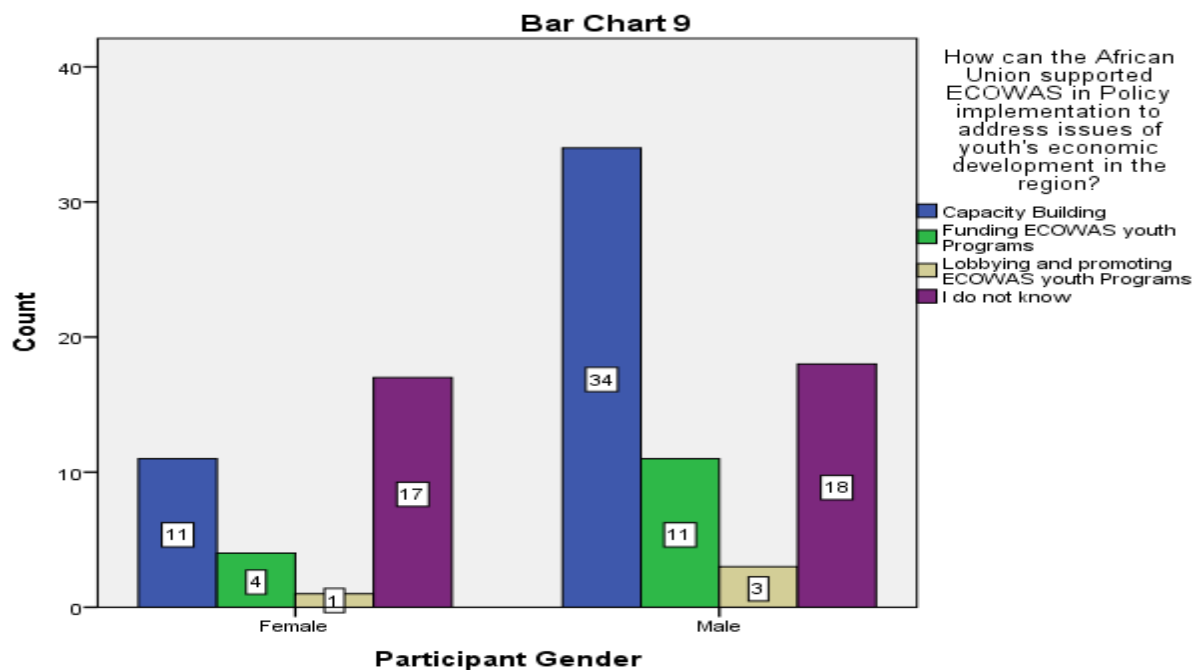
factors affect policy formulation and conduct. Most female participants indicated a lack of economic resources while their male counterparts indicated political interference and lack of goodwill as the hindrance, see Bar Graph 8 below. As such, African Union policies' influence on the economic growth of ECOWAS is limited due to political interference, lack of goodwill, limited funding, and policy interference. Such facts have also been highlighted in the literature citing that little is known about the AU activities, and lack of funding affects policy planning and budget (Engel, 2023). Thus, there is a gap between rhetoric and reality in the African Union and ECOWAS policy formulation and implementation.

**Pie Chart 3: What factors influence the effectiveness of the African Union's Interventions in promoting youth economic development in ECOWAS member states?**





The respondents identified some of these recommendations as capacity building of the youth, and increased funding for ECOWAS youth programs, including lobbying and promoting ECOWAS youth programs. The female respondents identified lobbying and promoting ECOWAS programs as a priority, while their male counterparts identified capacity building as the key recommendation, see Bar Graph 9 below.



## 5.0 CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

## 5.1 Conclusion

There is a youth turn in Africa, and policymakers are realizing the importance of involving young people in the policy process and adopting policies that involve the youth's economic development. The African Union's vision for 2063 is a people-driven policy agenda, striving to create economic development opportunities such as jobs, entrepreneurial skills, and businesses for young people. The agenda also recognizes the youth bulge and their involvement in policy formulation and conduct.

Since the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, its intended purpose of free trade has not been realized. There are political issues such as countries not willing to realize ECOWAS policies, others not paying their dues on time or paying little, and others not paying anything at all, yet policy commitments and implementations require economic resources. The African regions demonstrate that West Africa is doing poorly compared to the east, north, and southern regions of the continent. The AU and ECOWAS policies show that young people are involved in policy formulation. However, there are limitations when it comes to realizing the youth's concern in agenda setting, including the youth taking part in policy conduct. The young people in the ECOWAS region have limited access to education, they are excluded politically, and they are poor economically. Such facts are barriers that stop them from participating in political processes and economic development.

Most of the AU and ECOWAS policy shows rhetoric which is far from the reality when it comes to implementing policy programs. Policies such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the African Youth Charter and African Governance Architecture Youth Strategy (AGA-YES), AU Youth for Peace Programme (Y4P), and AU Youth Volunteer Corps and the African Youth Decade Plan of Action stipulate youth engagement in entrepreneurship and governance. These policies strengthen AU support to ECOWAS in policy implementation and addressing youth issues on economic development and political participation. Nevertheless, realizing these policy initiatives are wanting, most of which are aspirational when they are being declared, but there is a lack of institutional capacity to translate the aspiration into the reality of youth economic development and political participation.

This study robustly indicates that most young people lack knowledge of the existence of some of these policies, and a small number of youth benefit from the policies'

implementation. There are also challenges such as access to technology among the youth, a great digital divide between the female gender and their male counterparts, access to electricity, funding, and the lack of government commitment to implement these policies. Equally, there is political interference, and limited goodwill, and funding of these policies is a challenge.

The ECOWAS region has robustly demonstrated youth involvement in the conflict as a fighting force. The young people have continuously taken part in coup d'états in the West African region despite the realization of the ECOWAS youth policy in 2009. Such policy guidelines stipulate youth programs, but they do not meet the expectations of the youth. Thus, these programs have limitations. An effective mechanism is lacking when it comes to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the policy initiatives projects and programs designed for young people, and the existing programs do not meet the expectations of the youth.

Studies related to the political participation and economic development of African youth are limited. Particularly those that focus on the ECOWAS region. Yet, there is a great deal of evidence showing youth unrest and involvement in political conflicts. In addition, the youth are involved in illegal immigration, there is a high unemployment rate, and poverty in this region explains the political unrest. The sustainability of economic development and political engagement requires the realization of the youth turn, which involves discussing WITH the youth as opposed to discussing issues ABOUT the youth.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Research indicates that Africa is the continent with the youngest population in the world, and it is a fast-growing continent, 60% of the population in the continent are young people aged 25 and below (Anyanwu, 2014; Meagher, 2018), and by 2030, half of the population will be youth (Habti, 2022). The youth constituency in Africa is increasingly challenging the political sphere in the continent; they are demonstrating their political numbers through democratic processes such as advocacy, political unrest, campaigns, and voting. It is vital to include this youth constituency in decision-making through public participation since they are the foundation of African growth. This youth constituency is informed; they have the knowledge and qualities that guarantee them to participate in policy formulation and conduct, yet they are not involved in such policy processes, leading to misinformed policy implementation and political unrest.

Civil participation is an important process of engaging young people in both political participation and economic development, which is youth oriented. Such platforms convey the feelings of the youth when it comes to economic development and political participation. Institutionalization of youth concerns through policy requires economic commitment. Funding is vital when it comes to policy implementation. There is a need for funding of local innovation, science, and technology that strengthen youth economic development. In addition, strengthening democratic institutions, realizing tertiary and vocational education, promoting agriculture, financial and information technology, and increasing trade among ECOWAS members will reduce youth unemployment and poverty in the West African region.

There are already initiatives on mainstreaming youth-led policies among ECOWAS governments when it comes to political participation and economic development. However, such involvement is advantageous to urban youth, more so, the elite categories of youth. There is a need for mainstreaming exercise to incorporate rural youth and identify gaps between various youth constituencies. For example, identify the digital divide between rural and urban youth, including the gap between the female and male gender, promote this challenged constituency through economic innovation such as startups and engaging them in civic duties such as the creation of, and encouragement of youth-led political platforms at the local level.

Monitoring and evaluating AU and ECOWAS policy formulation and conduct processes is vital when advancing the youth-focused policies, stability, and prosperity of Africa. Both internal and external monitoring of these policies will help to identify the policy gaps and promote innovative ways to realize the needs of the young people, and such M&E exercises will promote informed decisions and public participation in policy implementation and conduct. Such processes are critical in putting their governments in check, and both internal and external M&E processes of existing policy initiatives will help identify sound and informed challenges affecting the youth's political participation and economic development in the ECOWAS region.

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