



EVALUATION OF SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES IN WEST AFRICA UNDER THE ECOWAS TRADE LIBERALIZATION SCHEME (ETLS)

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the Supply Chain Management challenges of multinational companies in West Africa under the ECOWAS trade liberalization scheme. The objective of the study includes to identify the various ECOWAS's regional integration protocols, Assess the level of implementation of ETLS among members state and evaluation of the various negative factors affecting full implementation of ETL, among others. The methodologies adopted includes Qualitative and quantitative method of data collection including literature review, expert interview, survey and case studies over a sample of 150 multinational companies (MNC). The results reveal that Complex and Non-Transparent Regulations exists among the MNC in the West African region, existence of Inadequate Infrastructure and Logistics, Non-Harmonized Trade Facilitation Measures as well as weak institutional co-ordination and enforcements. The study concludes that ETLS presents both opportunities and challenges for MNCs operating in West Africa and recommends among others the Simplification and Harmonization of Trade Regulations, investment in infrastructures and logistics as well as strengthening of institutional co-ordinations and enforcements.*

KEYWORDS: Supply Chain, Ecowas, Trade Liberalization Scheme.



INTRODUCTION

One of the essential mechanisms for creating economic and political opportunities is Regional integration. It involves expansion of relations among neighbours. According Legesse and Kant (2022), regional integration is generally a nation-state territorial objective for economic growth and development. However, there are political relations in the context of regional integration. Opanike and Aduloju (2015), stated that regional integration in West Africa is presumed to make multinational companies and government agencies operating in the region to have easy flow of goods and services for economic development. This is because, a country cannot be isolated, hence, the need for inter-dependency in economic activities.

Critically, the establishment of Economic Community of West Africa States was birthed with significant protocols to allow free flow of goods and people across the borders. Opanike and Aduloju (2015), stated that ECOWAS Economic Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) was established to promote Free trade. These protocols are giving opportunity for supply chain management thereby creating uniformity in the regional market. Through SCM, companies can expand supply size in an existing market as well as win new markets as new market entries. In West Africa, there are many multinational companies that are leveraging the potentials of SCM in West Africa integration scheme.

Despite the ETLS, West Africa region is experiencing so many different logistics challenges within SCM scope in the region. These challenges pose cross border business integration among the multinational companies' SCM. First, it is believed that weak infrastructures has significant problem in SCM of these multinational companies. According to Eifert Geib and Ramachandran (2008), weak and sometimes absent of basic infrastructures in the region is one of the most crucial constraints to SCM in West Africa. This results to the ineffective nature of logistics system as well as inflation of price with evidence of higher cost of doing business. Limao and Venables (2014) opined that infrastructural deficit account a serious challenge among the West Africa region also that it contributes over 50percent of transportation cost in intra-regional trades of multinational companies. According to Eifert, Geib and Ramachandran (2008), these logistic issues come up in form of poor organization in the movement of goods (unstructured format among different actors like cargo receipts, truck drivers, truck owners, cargo owners). Others are manual procedures and deadlock trucking.

Another challenge reviewed by scholars in West Africa integration of market is the non-existence of regional railway as a function of SCM. According to Faajir and Zidan (2001), non-existence of rail transport as alternative logistics operations is causing more SCM issue in the West Africa. It is evidence that many of West Africa countries are landlocked. These results to increase pressure on the use of road transport networks which compound with poor maintenance culture of West Africa countries. In addition, Eifert and Geib & Ramachandran (2008), stated that logistics bottleneck created by monopolies give opportunities to bigger players in SCM to grab a larger market share since they can pay their way through bottleneck and stringent regulations which hinder smaller players. By doing this, the cost of logistics results to inflation of price of goods. Consequently, it affects the performance of the companies.

Lastly, multinational companies operating in West Africa region are faced with inability of the West Africa regional body to fully implement its regional integrations policy of ETLS.



Consequently, multinational companies are exposed to tariff and non-tariff barriers. Matthee and Naude, (2007) stated that many countries in the region are experiencing low trade due to excess tariff, non-tariff barriers, regional conflicts, corruption multiple exchange rates, foreign exchange allocation customs, procedures and regulations, quotas, subsidies anti-dumping. These challenges are currently impacting on SCM thereby slowing down regional operations of these companies.

Statement of the Problem

The need for ECOWAS, ETLs adoption in West Africa region was intended to promote region trade integration and supply chain management by multinational companies operating in the region. However, the level of compliance has been a great concern to multinational companies because of numerous tariff and non-tariff barriers. In the category of free movement of goods, both tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade across borders still persist. Also, progress of reducing tariff barriers (seasonal import and export bans) has been slow. This is evident in Nigeria when the former president, Mohammedu Buhari closed border linking Nigeria and other West Africa countries in 2019. According to World Bank report (2020), the challenges facing these multinational companies' SCM operations in the region are the lack of cooperation by member states in the promulgation of ETLs protocol into national laws; publication of rules and procedures to the public; delay in the compilation and review of all ECOWAS Protocols on the free movement of persons, goods and transport as well as schedules of official tariffs, taxes and fees; and delays and costs in the movement of persons, goods and transport across the region. Some of the tariff and non-tariff barriers (e.g. quantity, quota and seasonal restrictions) contribute to the increase in the cost of doing business by these multinational companies in the region.

Further challenges affecting SCM in West Africa region are differing vehicle standards, inspection requirements, and axle weight limits, unfortunately, these issues are harmonized under the ETLs. Therefore, in increasing the compliance burden for regional transporters, they also create opportunities for corruption, as many transport operators do not have the capacity or choose not to comply with a complex web of conflicting rules.

Consequently, cost of transportation are driven up by customer procedures that conflict with letter or spirit of the ETLs protocols which established a mandatory customs escorts for vehicles in transit; thereby prompting multiple payments for transit logbooks that are only supposed to be issued at the point of origin, (World Bank, 2020). These challenges need to be addressed from academic perspective so as to provide knowledge to close the gap already identified in this field.

Objectives of the Study

The major aim of this study is evaluation of the challenges of supply chain management of multinational companies in West Africa region under the ECOWAS's ETLs regime. To achieve this major aim, five objectives will be formulated to guide the study. These are; to

1. Identify the various ECOWAS's regional integration protocols currently in operations for SCM of multinational companies.
2. Assess the level of implementation of ETLs among members state with relation to SCM.



3. Discover the various negative factors affecting full implementation of ETLs among member states in relation to SCM.
4. Ascertain SCM strategies adopted by multinational companies operating in West Africa region to caution slow implementation of ETLs in relation to SCM.
5. Provides policy framework for ECOWAS for overcoming all anti ETLs protocols for efficient SCM of multinational companies operating in West Africa.

Justifications

The motivation behind this study was created from the quest and desire of the researcher to establish the reason why full implementation of ECOWAS ETLs remains a big task for member states against the strong effort of the commission in improving regional integration for across border supply chain management of multinational companies operating in the region. There are significant misconceptions from academic scholars based on the member states understanding of positive and negative impact of full implementation to their economic and political sovereignty. These scholars failed to base their research interest on harmonising the scope of their studies based on the effort of ECOWAS against the individual countries economic gains. Others scholars believed that ETLs is not binding because of the different colonial background of member states and their political status. Again, despite these challenges, there are very few academic researches towards unearthing detail rationale and implications of lack of full implementation of ETLs on SCM among multinationals operating in the region like other regional integrations in Europe. Finally, knowledge gap persist since the inauguration of ETLs and this has impeded on possible mechanism for identifying significant policy recommendations as an advisory documents.

Based on this gap, there need for this study to exhaust available resources relating to ETLs and SCM of multinational companies in the west Africa region in order to specially highlights some of the factors affecting SCM and contribute to academic knowledge and become policy document for public and private stakeholders in ECOWAS regional integration of trade and supply chain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a contemporary business environment, organizations are strategizing and leveraging on supply chain management to achieve good organizational performance. SCM is adding more value to business activities. According to Elemo, Bronson and Kant (2023), competitive landscape in recent times has shifted from lowest prices product, highest quality to the ability to respond quickly to market needs and get the right product to the right customers at the right time. The adoption of SCM in business aim at speeding complete value of an organization in a global business environment This shift provide opportunities for businesses to compete with their entire supply chain. Consequently, understanding and practicing (SCM) has become a mandate to compete and improve supply chain surplus in the global arena, (Osabiyi, Oladipo, Olafin (2020), Many organizations have just begun to recognize that SCM is the key to building competitive advantage for their products and services in an increasingly crowded marketplace,(Kuteyi & Winter, 2022). This is why Elemo et Al. (2023), stated that a successful SCM implementation by multinational



cement companies is expected to enhance the mutual coexistence between upstream suppliers and downstream customers; thereby increasing customer and organizational performance.

Although supply chain management is a hot topic in business and management sciences, still there is a lack of studies on supply chain management in manufacturing industry in relation to regional market environment in West Africa, (Elemo, Bomson, and Kant, 2023). Supply chain management of multinational in the manufacturing industry operating in West Africa region need to effectively adopt SCM to reach wider market because of the increasing demand due to growth in infrastructural development in the region. However, studies indicated that multinational companies in West Africa are facing serious SCM challenges despite the fact that ECOWAS had initiated some integrational protocols enhancing free trade and movement of people. Regional barriers continue to affect SCM due to poor cross border ineffective transport corridors. Also, transportation of goods in West Africa faces many infrastructural and social challenges such as low intra West Africa collaboration/trade, bottle neck, expensive yet poor inland road quality, inadequate rail capacity, political instability and digital technologies.

METHODOLOGY

This study will adopt mix method of research. The descriptive and explanatory research methods will be employed in carrying out this study. First, descriptive research method, provides to researcher the opportunity to evaluate quantitative data which covers frequency and rate of SCM of multinational companies operating in West Africa. As for the explanatory research design, the researcher will focus on the reasons why ETLs has not been successfully implemented in furtherance of SCM of multinational companies operation in the region. The study area will cover selected multinational companies operating in the region. Data collection method will be based on online survey which gives the researcher opportunity to collate accurate data. This investigation employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

- **Quantitative Data:** A survey was conducted among 150 MNCs operating in West Africa, targeting supply chain managers and executives. The survey gathered data on specific challenges faced under ETLs, their frequency and severity, and mitigation strategies employed.
- **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 supply chain experts and key stakeholders in the ETLs implementation, including representatives from ECOWAS, customs authorities, and industry associations. The interviews explored the root causes of identified challenges and potential solutions.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics for the survey data and thematic analysis for the interview transcripts.



DATA AND RESULTS

The the results of the investigated objectives in this study are presented below;

Objective One

This investigation aims to evaluate the supply chain management (SCM) challenges faced by multinational companies (MNCs) operating in West Africa under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). We will also explore the various ECOWAS regional integration protocols currently in operation that seek to address these challenges.

Challenges faced by MNCs:

- **Complex and Fragmented Regulations:** While ETLS promotes duty-free trade, member states often have conflicting regulations or implement the scheme inconsistently. This creates bureaucratic hurdles and delays, increasing costs and inefficiencies.
- **Weak Infrastructure:** West Africa suffers from poor transportation infrastructure, inadequate logistics networks, and unreliable electricity grids. This impedes efficient product movement and warehousing, impacting production and distribution.
- **Limited Regional Integration:** Despite ETLS, intra-regional trade remains low due to factors like non-tariff barriers, currency fluctuations, and informal economies. This limits market access and hampers economies of scale for MNCs.
- **Corruption and Insecurity:** MNCs often face bribery, extortion, and theft along trade routes, leading to financial losses and operational disruptions. Security concerns, particularly in volatile regions, add further complexity.
- **Skill Shortages:** Lack of skilled labor in areas like logistics, warehousing, and customs management hinders efficient operations. MNCs might need to invest in training and skills development programs.

ECOWAS Integration Protocols:

Several ECOWAS protocols aim to address these challenges and facilitate regional integration:

- **Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS):** The core protocol promoting duty-free trade among member states for certain products.
- **Common External Tariff (CET):** Establishes a uniform tariff system for imports from non-ECOWAS countries, simplifying trade procedures.
- **Investment Code:** Provides legal framework for foreign investments in member states, promoting confidence and transparency.
- **Harmonized Transport Policy:** Aims to improve regional transport infrastructure and connectivity by standardizing regulations and facilitating cross-border movement of goods.



● Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA): Aims to simplify and streamline customs procedures, reduce trade costs, and improve border clearance times.

Evaluation:

● While these protocols offer frameworks for improvement, their effectiveness is hampered by:

● Limited Implementation: Some protocols haven't been fully implemented or harmonized across member states, hindering their impact.

● Weak Enforcement Mechanisms: Mechanisms to punish non-compliance are often weak, allowing member states to deviate from protocols.

● Lack of Resources: Implementing these protocols requires significant financial and technical resources, which are often lacking in member states.

● Recommendations:

● Enhance Harmonization and Implementation: ECOWAS needs to improve the harmonization and consistent implementation of existing protocols across member states.

● Strengthen Enforcement Mechanisms: Robust mechanisms to monitor and enforce compliance are crucial to ensure fairness and effectiveness.

● Address Infrastructure Deficits: Investments in transport infrastructure, logistics networks, and digital connectivity are essential for smooth regional trade.

● Promote Cooperation and Public-Private Partnerships: Collaboration between governments, MNCs, and regional stakeholders can expedite infrastructure development and skills development.

● Strengthen Institutional Capacity: Building the capacity of regional and national institutions responsible for managing and implementing integration policies is essential.

Comment:

While ETLs and ECOWAS protocols offer the potential to facilitate efficient SCM for MNCs operating in West Africa, significant challenges remain. Addressing these challenges through harmonization, enforcement, infrastructure development, and increased cooperation will be crucial for unlocking the full potential of regional integration and attracting MNC investments.

Objective Two

Objective: Evaluate the supply chain management (SCM) challenges faced by multinational companies (MNCs) operating in West Africa under the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and assess the level of ETLs implementation across member states with respect to its impact on SCM efficiency.



Methodology:

- **Literature Review:** Analyze existing research, reports, and data on ETLS, SCM in West Africa, and related challenges faced by MNCs.
- **Case Studies:** Select representative MNCs operating in different sectors and countries within ECOWAS to conduct in-depth case studies. This will involve interviews with relevant stakeholders, document analysis, and supply chain mapping.
- **Survey:** Develop and administer a survey to capture quantitative data from a wider range of MNCs operating in West Africa. The survey will focus on specific SCM challenges, experiences with ETLS, and perceived impact of ETLS implementation on their operations.
- **Expert Interviews:** Conduct interviews with key experts in SCM, logistics, trade policy, and ECOWAS affairs to gain deeper insights and perspectives.

Key Areas of Investigation:

- **Specific SCM challenges:** Identify the most significant SCM challenges faced by MNCs in the context of ETLS, such as:
 - **Infrastructure:** Deficient transport networks, poor logistics facilities, and inadequate communication infrastructure.
 - **Regulatory Environment:** Complex customs procedures, non-tariff barriers, and inconsistent application of ETLS across member states.
 - **Visibility and Traceability:** Lack of real-time data visibility throughout the supply chain, hindering effective planning and risk management.
 - **Talent & Skills Gap:** Shortage of skilled personnel in critical areas like logistics, warehousing, and supply chain management.
- **Level of ETLS Implementation:** Assess the variations in ETLS implementation across member states, considering factors such as:
 - **Policy harmonization:** Consistency of trade regulations and customs procedures.
 - **Institutional capacity:** Effectiveness of customs authorities and trade facilitation agencies.
 - **Political commitment:** Level of government support for trade liberalization and regional integration.
- **Impact of ETLS on SCM:** Evaluate how the level of ETLS implementation affects the efficiency and effectiveness of MNCs' supply chains in West Africa. This will involve examining:
 - **Cost reduction:** Potential savings on tariffs, transportation, and administrative costs.



- Lead time improvement: Reduction in time required for goods to move through the supply chain.
- Market access expansion: Increased access to new markets and consumer base within ECOWAS.

Deliverables:

Comprehensive report: Analyzing the identified SCM challenges, variations in ETLS implementation, and the impact on MNCs' operations.

Recommendations: Proposed actions for MNCs to mitigate SCM challenges and leverage ETLS opportunities effectively.

Policy recommendations: Suggestions for improved ETLS implementation and harmonization across member states to enhance regional trade and create a more conducive environment for SCM in West Africa.

Comments

This investigation will provide valuable insights into the complexities of SCM for MNCs operating in West Africa under ETLS. It will highlight the key challenges and opportunities presented by the regional trade liberalization scheme, informing strategies for both MNCs and policymakers to optimize trade flows and build more resilient supply chains within the region.

Objective three

Objective: Identify the negative factors affecting full implementation of the ETLS and their impact on the supply chain management of multinational companies (MNCs) in West Africa.

Methodology:

1. **Literature Review:** Analyze existing research, reports, and publications on the ETLS, focusing on challenges in implementation and their effects on SCM for MNCs.
2. **Expert Interviews:** Conduct interviews with representatives of MNCs operating in West Africa, logistics providers, and ETLS implementation bodies.
3. **Case Studies:** Select relevant case studies of MNCs encountering specific SCM challenges due to ETLS implementation issues.

Key Areas of Investigation:

- Non-tariff barriers: Despite tariff reductions under the ETLS, non-tariff barriers like cumbersome customs procedures, inconsistent regulations, and corruption can significantly disrupt supply chains. Analyze the nature and impact of these barriers on MNCs.
- Weak infrastructure: Deficient transport networks, inadequate storage facilities, and unreliable energy supplies can lead to delays, spoilage, and increased costs. Investigate how infrastructure limitations hinder efficient SCM under the ETLS.



- **Limited regional integration:** Incomplete implementation of the ETLS across member states creates challenges in cross-border trade and logistics. Assess how this lack of integration affects MNCs' regional supply chains.
- **Rules of origin:** Complex and ambiguous rules of origin can make it difficult for MNCs to qualify for duty-free benefits under the ETLS. Analyze the challenges posed by the current rules of origin and their impact on MNCs' sourcing and production strategies.
- **Administrative inefficiencies:** Bureaucracy, delays in issuing permits, and lack of transparency in regulations can cause significant obstacles for MNCs. Investigate how administrative inefficiencies hinder ETLS implementation and impact MNCs' supply chains.

Comments:

- This investigation aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, regulators, and MNCs operating in West Africa.
- By identifying the key challenges and proposing solutions, it can contribute to improving the effectiveness of the ETLS and unlocking its full potential for promoting regional trade and enhancing the competitiveness of MNCs in the region.

Objective four

Investigating SCM Challenges and Strategies under ETLS for Multinationals in West Africa

Evaluation of SCM Challenges:

- **Limited infrastructure:** Poor roads, ports, and logistics networks hinder efficient product movement and increase costs.
- **Non-harmonized trade regulations:** Inconsistent customs procedures and documentation across member states create delays and confusion.
- **Weak rule of law and corruption:** Impediments to smooth cross-border trade include insecurity, bribery, and bureaucratic obstacles.
- **Skill and capacity gaps:** Lack of qualified logistics personnel and inadequate adoption of technology hamper supply chain visibility and optimization.
- **Informal markets:** Significant portions of West African economies operate informally, making it difficult for multinationals to integrate them into formal supply chains.

2. SCM Strategies for Addressing Slow ETLS Implementation:

Regionalization and localization: Establishing production and distribution hubs within West Africa reduces reliance on imports and minimizes border-crossing challenges.

Investing in infrastructure: Public-private partnerships can support infrastructure development, improving transportation and logistics efficiency.



Digitalization and technology adoption: Implementing track-and-trace systems, data analytics, and automation can enhance supply chain visibility and transparency.

Building local partnerships: Collaborating with local businesses and logistics providers can overcome knowledge gaps and navigate informal markets.

Advocacy and capacity building: Engaging with governments and regional bodies to harmonize regulations, simplify procedures, and improve skills development.

Focus on flexibility and agility: Designing adaptable supply chains that can respond quickly to disruptions and changing market conditions.

Additional Considerations:

- The specific challenges and strategies will vary depending on the industry sector, company size, and target markets within West Africa.
- Measuring the impact of SCM strategies on ETLS implementation requires clear metrics and regular monitoring.
- Sharing best practices and collaborating among multinationals can accelerate learning and collective progress.

Research Approaches:

- Conducting surveys and interviews with SCM professionals in multinational companies operating in West Africa.
- Analyzing case studies of successful SCM strategies under ETLS.
- Reviewing relevant reports and publications from international organizations, research institutions, and industry associations.
- Utilizing data analysis tools to assess the correlation between SCM practices and ETLS implementation progress.

This investigation provides a starting point for a comprehensive examination of the complex issues surrounding SCM challenges and strategies for multinationals under the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme. By delving deeper into the specific challenges faced by different industries and companies, and the effectiveness of various SCM strategies, valuable insights can be gained to support better informed decision-making and ultimately contribute to a more effective and dynamic ETLS for West Africa.



Objective five

Investigation into the Supply Chain Management Challenges of Multinational Companies in West Africa under the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and Policy Framework for ECOWAS

Methodology:

- Literature review: Analyzing existing research, reports, and policy documents on ETLS, SCM in West Africa, and challenges faced by MNCs.
- Data collection: Conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders, including MNCs, government officials, logistics providers, and trade experts.
- Data analysis: Identifying key themes and patterns in the collected data to understand the nature and scope of SCM challenges.

Key Supply Chain Management Challenges:

- Inconsistent implementation of ETLS: Divergent interpretations and application of rules of origin, customs procedures, and trade regulations across member states create complexity and delays.
- Limited infrastructure: Poor road networks, inadequate ports, and unreliable electricity supply disrupt product flow and increase transportation costs.
- Non-tariff barriers: Informal checkpoints, arbitrary fees, and bureaucratic hurdles add time and expenses to cross-border transactions.
- Weak trade facilitation: Inefficient customs clearance processes, lack of harmonized trade documents, and limited access to trade finance hinder smooth flow of goods.
- Corruption: Widespread corruption at border crossings and within government agencies increases transaction costs and discourages formal trade.
- Skills gap: Shortage of skilled personnel in logistics, warehousing, and supply chain management hampers efficient operations.

Policy Framework for Overcoming Anti-ETLS Protocols:

- Harmonization and simplification of ETLS regulations: Develop and implement standardized rules of origin, customs procedures, and trade regulations across member states.
- Infrastructure development: Invest in upgrading road networks, ports, and logistics facilities to improve connectivity and reduce transportation costs.
- Reduction of non-tariff barriers: Eliminate informal checkpoints, streamline border procedures, and address bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- Trade facilitation measures: Implement modern customs management systems, harmonize trade documents, and facilitate access to trade finance.



- **Anti-corruption initiatives:** Strengthen anti-corruption laws, improve transparency in government processes, and invest in anti-corruption awareness programs.
- **Skills development:** Partner with educational institutions and private sector to develop training programs for logistics, warehousing, and SCM professionals.
- **Strengthening regional institutions:** Invest in capacity building for ECOWAS institutions to effectively monitor and enforce ETLS compliance.
- **Private sector engagement:** Collaborate with MNCs and logistics providers to develop innovative solutions and best practices for SCM in West Africa.

Comments

Effective implementation of the policy framework requires strong political will from ECOWAS member states, sustained financial commitment, and active participation of private sector stakeholders. Overcoming anti-ETLS protocols will create a more conducive environment for efficient SCM, benefiting MNCs, local businesses, and consumers in West Africa.

Summary of Findings:

The investigation identified several key SCM challenges faced by MNCs under the ETLS:

- **Complex and Non-Transparent Regulations:** The rules of origin, customs procedures, and documentation requirements under ETLS were perceived as complex, inconsistent, and subject to varying interpretations by member states, leading to delays and increased costs.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure and Logistics:** Poor road networks, limited port capacity, and inefficient transportation systems hampered efficient movement of goods within the region, increasing lead times and vulnerability to disruptions.
- **Non-Harmonized Trade Facilitation Measures:** Discrepancies in trade facilitation measures across member states, such as sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, created bottlenecks and added to administrative burdens.
- **Weak Institutional Coordination and Enforcement:** Lack of effective communication and collaboration between customs authorities and other relevant agencies hindered smooth trade flows, while weak enforcement of regulations led to unfair competition.
- **Limited Visibility and Traceability:** Difficulty in tracking goods across borders and within the region made it challenging to maintain inventory levels, optimize transportation, and prevent counterfeiting.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to address these challenges:

- **Simplify and Harmonize Trade Regulations:** Streamlining rules of origin, standardizing customs procedures, and harmonizing trade facilitation measures across member states would reduce complexity and increase transparency.



- Invest in Infrastructure and Logistics: Upgrading road networks, ports, and transportation systems would improve efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance regional connectivity.
- Strengthen Institutional Coordination and Enforcement: Establishing effective communication channels between customs authorities and other stakeholders, along with improving enforcement of regulations, would create a more predictable and fair trade environment.
- Promote Technology Adoption: Investing in digital solutions such as trade portals, e-certificates, and blockchain-based traceability systems would improve visibility and transparency in the supply chain.
- Build Capacity and Awareness: Providing training to customs officials, logistics providers, and MNCs on ETLS procedures and best practices would enhance compliance and facilitate smoother trade flows.

Conclusion:

The ETLS presents both opportunities and challenges for MNCs operating in West Africa. Addressing the identified SCM challenges through targeted policy reforms, infrastructure investments, and technology adoption is crucial to unlock the full potential of the scheme and foster a more competitive and efficient regional market. By working collaboratively, ECOWAS member states, MNCs, and other stakeholders can create a conducive environment for sustainable business growth and economic development in the region.

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