REGIONAL COOPERATION AND REGIONALISM IN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

[1]KABIRU IBRAHIM DANGUGUWA, [2]BELLO ADAMU HOTORO

Department of History and International Studies, Northwest University, P.M.B. 3220, Kano, Nigeria.
E-mail: [1]kabiru.ibrahim87@gmail.com, [2]hotoroadamu@yahoo.com

Abstract- The linkage between economic integration and regional development is admitted but has not been systematically analyzed in the study of West African regionalism. One of the key reasons is the lack of studies that analyze ECOWAS, its problems vis-à-vis the world most successful project of regionalism – the EU. In order to comprehend regional integration in West Africa, this article analyzes few things. These include the level of economic development in the region, divergence of national interest as a result of the involvement of big powers in the region, terrorism, and the 'negative' colonial legacies. The needs for ECOWAS to strengthen its economic integration and address new issues that afflict its member-states are also analyzed. It is argued that since the EU had ignored the 20th century's bad memory of great wars for economic development, Anglophonic and Francophonic divisions in Africa that created "we versus them" problem could also be ignored for economic development. Thus, despite the existence of many challenges that hinder the full implementation of some of the ECOWAS policies, there continues to be justifiable reasons for economic integration among its member-states. One of those reasons is the vagueness and complexity of regionalism that nation-states can join it for various purposes.

Keywords- Regionalism, Economic Integration, And ECOWAS.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, nation-states are more interested in uniting their economies for growth and efficiency, leading to the emergence of various regional economic and political blocs. Studies have been produced on the topic, and important advances have been made towards better understand contemporary proliferation of regional blocs. The well known and perhaps most successful case of regional integration – the European Union (EU) – serves as a model for other regional cooperation. Modeling EU means that even with a long history of conflict (like Europe in the 20th century) nation-states can solve the problems bedeviling their peace and prosperity more successfully as a group.

In West Africa, the conventional way to study regionalism is to follow monodisciplinary and fragmented approaches. In that regards political scientists are more concerned with power politics and inter-state regional issues; economists deal with regional economic flows and the economic consequences of change of economic policies; and sociologists and social anthropologists are concerned with regional sociocultural relations.

These are the dominant and of course discipline-centered ways of analyzing and constructing regionalism, which often results in the disciplinary methodology becoming more important than the reality of regionalism. This article has a novel contribution by paying attention to the historical context and 'reality' of regionalism in West Africa.

THE REALITY OF REGIONALISM IN WEST AFRICA SUB-REGION

There are several debates on the definition of regionalism. Generally, it refers to "a policy and projects whereby states and non-state actors cooperate and coordinate strategy within a given region" (Fawcett 2005, 24). In International Political Economy (IPE), regionalism refers to the process by which in a particular region, a group of nation-states (mostly from within) cooperate and share responsibilities to achieve common goals (Balaam and Dillman 2011, 296). These nation-states form a club to address specific issues that require coordinated and/or collective efforts. For example, nation-states form regional environmental clubs, regional security arrangements, and regional economic development clubs and so on. Therefore, regionalism can be viewed as new or simply a post-Second World War phenomenon (Söderbaum 2004). Gilpin argues that since 1980s the world has been witnessing the "growth of regionalism as a countermovement to economic globalization" (Gilpin 2001, xi). Despite several debates on the longevity of regionalism, Balaam and Dillman contend that what is novel in regionalism is its strength due to the significance of trade blocs such as the ECOWAS (Balaam and Dillman 2011, 297).

Despite the success of regionalism and regional cooperation in once the most chaotic region in the world – Europe – economic integration in West African sub-region has been moving slowly with obstacles. When critically examined, regionalism in

West Africa shares some similar characteristics with regional cooperation in the Middle East. Though the concept of "a region without regionalism" (Aarts 1999, 11) that described Middle East is not applicable to the West Africa due to the presence of regional trading bloc(s) such as the Economic Community of West African States (hereafter ECOWAS). The ECOWAS was established on 28 May 1975 as threshold to regional integration in West Africa. The ECOWAS came in to being as the demands of regionalism multiply globally especially after the World War II. The countries of the ECOWAS region are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

The ECOWAS exemplifies one of regional economic development clubs. Its aims include that of promoting economic cooperation and regional integration (ADB and ADF 2011). The WCOWAS was primarily created, according article two (2) of the treaty of its establishment to ensure:

- the elimination as between the member states of customs duties and other charges of equivalent effect in respect of the importation and exportation of goods;
- the abolition of quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among the member states;
- the establishment a common customs tariff structure and a common commercial policy towards third countries**;**
- the abolition as between the member states of the obstacles to the free movement of persons, services and capital;
- the harmonization of agricultural policies and the promotion of common projects in the member states notably in the fields of marketing research and agro-industrial enterprises;
- the implementation of schemes for the joint development of transport, communication, energy and other infrastructural facilities as well as the evolution of a common policy in these fields;
- the harmonization of the economic and industrial policies of the member states and the elimination of disparities in the level of development of member states;
- the harmonization, required for the proper functioning, of the community [ECOWAS], of the monetary policies of the member states;
- the establishment of Fund for Cooperation, Compensation and Development; and
- such other activities calculated to further the aims of the community as the member states may from time to time undertake in common (Akinyemi, Falegan and Aluko 1983, 671-672).

The ECOWAS is by no means a driver to regional integration which Coskun believes to be the most common type of regionalism (Coskun 2008, 90). However, several issues hinder the West African actors and often the citizens to see themselves as one let alone implement policies that may eventually lead to their unity. It's believed that West African nation-states, like other African countries have artificial boundaries created as a consequence of Berlin Conference of 1884-5. The conference served as the first step for official partitioning of Africa. These modern states of West Africa had hitherto coexisted under few entities ruled by limited number of traditional rulers. Kingdoms, empires and city-states such as Dahomey Kingdom, Benin kingdom (in Nigeria), Oyo kingdom (Nigeria) Kanem Borno Empire (Nigeria) were in charge of the entire region before modern states were created. In retrospect therefore, the modern euro-centrically created boundaries were to facilitate colonial exploitation and by extension to hinder economic and even political cooperation of West Africa.

Thus, West Africa has a long way to go as far as regionalism is concerned. The first and perhaps the most serious obstacle is the involvement of former colonial powers in the affairs of West African countries especially the two most significant (France and England) that had the largest colonies in West Africa which created a divide between Francophone and Anglophone countries and has been manifesting in ECOWAS summits that often end in impasse. More often than not, those European countries colonizers remotely influence what decision their former colonies take in ECOWAS. This almost deleted any feeling of Pan-Africanism, so head of states and policy makers allow the issue of 'we versus other(s)' when making any decision. This identity prejudices resonate more when for instance, some countries foreseen that a given decision may favor other(s) or against their blocs.

Another barrier closely linked to the first one is variance of national interest in West Africa. This automatically led to slow implementation of regional integration agreements "designed to eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers" (ARIA IV 2010, 10). In theory, nation-states involved in regional integration (especially from the stage of custom union onward) should give up some degree of sovereignty because trade barriers cannot be set independently. This failure to give up individual countries policies further slowed the implementation of some of the ECOWAS agreements. Similarly, despite the importance of free trade across borders in fostering economic growth, creating jobs and affording countries involved therein opportunities to specialize in the production of goods and service, protectionism exists within ECOWAS member states[1]. This is what this article refers to as afro-pessimism on neoliberal economic policies.

Other issues that hamper ECOWAS modeling the EU include a new security threat that now attracts much attention than economic integration. Nigeria, Mali Chad, Niger Republic and other Sahelian countries

[1] See David Ricardo's theory of Comparative Advantage.

have been spending millions of dollars to counter terrorism especially in the Sahel region and Northeastern Nigeria. The states of the Sahel region are characterized with long and porous borders, extremely difficult to patrol; complex and unstable ethno-religious make-up; political instability; economic underdevelopment; and high level of corruption. The weakness of the Sahelian states portray to the terrorist "opportunities for mobilization and recruitment" (Danguguwa 2014, 61) which has adverse effect on West African economic development. The security challenges that afflicted northern Nigeria since 2009 became a major blow to ECOWAS regional economic issues. According to Buzan and Wæver, any security arrangement within West Africa is uncertain, depending crucially on the fate of Nigeria. "If Nigeria implodes, then the 'back to the future' scenarios could easily describe the region's destiny" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 240). He further argued that the West African Regional Security Complex (RSC) is an unusual mixture. It comprises a set of weak states, most of which are weak powers, dominated by a regional power (Nigeria) that is also a weak state.

WHY ECOWAS MEMBER-STATES NEED TO BE INTEGRATED ECONOMICALLY.

Page (2000, 66-76) analyzes what members of a region have in common. Geography, common background, and size of the economy are some of the factors that hold countries together as a region. The ECOWAS member-states are certainly located on the same geography. When analyzed critically, it's the fact that the EU has no common borders but West African states share borders, which theoretically mean easy transportation of goods and services. Regional integration in West Africa can therefore follow the traditional concept based on geographical proximity.

Like the EU however, ECOWAS has a regional identity as well as common background. Even though countries like Nigeria have large population and relatively middle GDP compared to others, most of the other members however have small GDP, which means relatively same size of the economy. All these are in line with Abuja (Nigeria) Treaty of 1991, which demonstrates a common desire to establish the African Economic Community (AEC). The Treaty enjoins members of Africa sub-regional economic communities to "promote the coordination and harmonization of the integration activities of regional economic communities of which they are members with the activities of the Community" (ARIA II 2006, 1).

However, unlike in Southern Africa whereby for strategic and political reasons countries belong to more than one regional organization, all fifteen ECOWAS countries belong to only one regional economic community, (ARIA II 2006). ECOWAS member-states should therefore strengthen their membership to ECOWAS alone to foster economic development of the entire region. This is to ensure that continental/regional unity is achieved through the building-block approach, whereby sub-continental economic communities, such as the ECOWAS, are gradually fortified as intermediate steps towards the (AEC) (Söderbaum 2004, 69). West Africa also has a rich resource base**,** especially oil and mineral resources, which can be exploited to enhance regional integration and growth. There are also emerging regional economic integration efforts, especially in the financial services and infrastructure sectors. For example, the Ecobank Transnational is Pan-African bank, with branches in all the ECOWAS member-states. In telecommunications sector, *Globacom*, a Nigerian private owned telecommunication company, operates in Nigeria Benin, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. The region also "has a vibrant (albeit often informal) system of cross-border economic exchange" (ADB and ADF 2011, 13). This is common among citizenzy that engage in informal cross-border trading activities among member states.

For 'weak and poor' members strong ECOWAS will enhance their sovereignty. Realists believe that being a member of a powerful alliance gives a nation semblance of political power. Therefore, even smaller countries appear relatively powerful "as members of larger group than they would be as separate, unaffiliated individual nations" (Balaam and Dillman 2011, 301). In the same vein, regionalism is complex and vague hence can attract both economic and political actors for different reasons.

CONCLUSION

Regionalism, especially in Europe, shows that regional integration is likely to be successful if one country serves as institutional leader and regional paymaster. European integration was successful largely because of France and Germany's readiness to serve these dual roles. Germany was able to serve the role because of its strong economy, which by the mid-1990s was one of the largest in the world and exhibited higher productivity than the economies of other European countries. Its success was reflected in the strength of the Deutch mark and the Bundesbank, which became the model for the European Central Bank. The country is by far the largest net contributor to the EU budget, easing distributional concerns. In 1996, for example, Germany's financial contribution to the EU reached about two-thirds of EU net income (Coskun 2008).

But ECOWAS lacks dynamic leadership, and very few of its members are willing to serve as paymaster. For instance, the ability of the ECOWAS to link together the whole block of coastal states from Nigeria to Mauritania, and the three interior landlocked states Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, would almost certainly not have occurred "without

the oil wealth that allowed Nigeria to act as its core and leader" (Buzan & Wæver 2003, 239). This development eventually led to some security accomplishment in West Africa sub-region. In 1978 ECOWAS agreed a Nonaggression Protocol and a Protocol on Mutual Assistance and Defence in 1981. In 1990 a Standing Mediation Committee was established, which established ECOMOG (ECOWAS's cease-fire monitoring group), the Nigerian-led peacekeeping force that intervened in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars. Today, Nigeria is preoccupied with corruption, economic mismanagement, political miscalculation and ethnic and religious strife and therefore unable to provide the needed leadership. Countries in the community are also unwilling to compromise on important treaties or to persuade others to agree. For example, given the complexity of the shift towards a common currency, there are several challenges for ECOWAS to address. A Euro-style monetary integration is a complex and controversial process that will take several years for member states to comply despite the fact that the advantages of doing so appear clear for ECOWAS leadership.

All in all, few of the ECOWAS achievements are worth noting here. Since 1990 ECOWAS has operated under the framework of its Trade Liberalization Scheme, which calls for a free trade zone and the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers. Despite some implementation challenges, a Free Trade Area (FTA) has been achieved, with tariffs on products from member states abolished within the ECOWAS. Products eligible for duty-free status include raw materials, traditional handcrafts, and some industrial goods. A common passport was generated since 2000. Eight ECOWAS countries—Benin, Burkina-Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo—have adopted it (ADB and ADF 2011).

REFERENCES

[1] African Development Bank (ADB) & African Development Fund (ADF) (2011), *Regional Integration Strategy Paper for West Africa (RISP).*

[2] Akinyemi, A. B., Falegan, S.B., & Aluko, I. A. *Readings and Documents on ECOWAS.* Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs 1984.

[3] Aarts, P. (1999), "The Middle East: A Region without Regionalism or The End of Exceptionalism?," Third World Quarterly, Journal of Emerging Areas, 20:5 911-925. Cited in Coskun, B. B. (2008), "Regionalism and Securitization: The Case of the Middle East". In Harders, C. and Logrenzi, M. (Eds.), *Beyond Regionalism? Regional Cooperation, Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East.* England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

[4] Balaam, D. N. & Dillman B. (2011), *Introduction to International Political Economy*. USA: Pearson Education Inc.

[5] Buzan B. & Wæver O. (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Communications Development Inc.(ed.) (2006), *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa II (ARIA II): Rationalizing Regional Economic communities.* Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa.

[7] Coskun, B. B. (2008), "Regionalism and Securitization: The Case of the Middle East" In Harders, C. and Logrenzi, M. (Eds.), *Beyond Regionalism? Regional Cooperation, Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle. EasT,* England: Ashgate Publishing Limited

[8] Danguguwa, K. I. (2014), *Islamic Activism in Sahel: Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram.* Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.

[9] Fawcett, L. (ed.) (2005), *International Relations of the Middle East,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[10] Gilpin, R. (2001), *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic order*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

[11] Heywood, A. (2011), *Global Politics* (pp. 480-506). UK: Palgrave Macmillan

[12] Jalloh, S. M. (2001), ECOWAS and Regional Integration and Cooperation of West Africa. *M. A. Thesis, National University of Malaysia, Bangi.*

[13] Lahiri, S. (2001), *Regionalism and Globalization: Theory and Practice.* London: Routledge

[14] Maliniak, D. & Tierney, M. J. (2009) The American School of IPE, *Review of International Political Economy. 16: 1, 6-33*

[15] Page, S. (2000). *Regionalism among Developing Countries.* New York: S.T Martin's Press.

[16] Söderbaum, F. (2004), *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press.

[17] Söderbaum, F. and Shawn (eds) (2003), *Theories of New Regionalism.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

[18] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2010), *Assessing regional Integration in Africa IV (ARIA IV): Enhancing Intra-African Trade.* Ethiopia: Addis Ababa.

★★★