

Developmental Regionalism, Ecowas and Security in West Africa



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Abstract

Security challenges have dominated the socio-political landscape of developing countries, especially in Africa. Several attempts have been made to address these challenges but there has been little progress towards tackling them. Most of these security issues are common, especially within regional and sub-regional blocks. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) founded in 1975 to foster economic cooperation and integration towards enhancing the quality of life of West African people has had to modify its original mandate to accommodate challenges to the detriment of developmental efforts. This study argues that the ideal of developmental regionalism which is a framework for enhancing the economic wellbeing of regional structures is also a veritable tool for handling security issues. It concludes that ECOWAS can employ the framework as a means of emerging from its security challenges.

Keywords: Development, Regionalism, ECOWAS, Security, Africa

Introduction

Newly independent African States from the early 1960s were conscious of their precariousness as single, weak entities in a world that thrived through rat race competitiveness. Therefore, for them to not only survive but also make progress in the comity of nations, they would have to create frameworks to integrate at the continental and regional levels. This understanding was predicated on the arguments in international relations associated with institutionalism which contend that institutional arrangements can promote cooperation among states (Sarbo,2010). Regional integration was, thus, seen by these new States as a vehicle for enhancing their development. The security challenges in several parts of the world especially in Africa (and more particularly, West Africa) following the end of the cold war, persuaded many, including the UN, to envisage that regional integration and common.

institutions can also help in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts between and within states and hence global security. ECOWAS has therefore been at the forefront of evolving structures for regional integration to address the two inter-related issues of development and security in the West African sub-region.

Developmental Regionalism

Developmental regionalism is concerned primarily with regional approaches to development because development, in one way or the other has been linked to economic growth. Regional economic organizations were established by proximate states for the purpose of accelerating economic and social development in their Member States. The ECOWAS Treaty (as cited in Thierno, 2010) said that it was for this reason that the Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) was founded to “improve the living standards of its people, maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among Member States, and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent” (p. 1).

The concept has been defined by Hettne (as cited in Chandra 2009) as the “concerted efforts from a group of countries within a geographical region to increase the complementarity and capacity of the total regional economy as well as finding the right balance between function and territory” (p. 14). Dent (as cited in Chandra, 2009) also considers developmental regionalism as [regional cooperation and integration] activities that are particularly oriented to enhancing the economic capacity and prospects of less developed countries with a view to strengthening their integration into the regional economy, thereby bringing greater coherence to the regional community building overall.

Developmental regionalism analysis is clearly in the economic realist tradition, since the idea of state activism in both the international system and at the domestic level to manipulate or direct economic activity to serve the perceived interests of the state is a crucial element of this approach to regionalism (Nesadurai as cited in Chandra, 2009). According to Nesadurai (ibid), the theory which derives from the notion of the developmental state encapsulates the developmental state idea of state intervention in markets to promote national development agendas, in this case by adopting an approach to regionalism through which to nurture emerging domestic firms to eventually become internationally competitive. The strategy for achieving this is by creating an expanded regional market generated through inter-state co-operation and putting in place temporary protection or privileges for domestic capital in this expanded market.

Strategic trade theory from the international economics discipline postulates that both measures can help to secure benefits for domestic firms over their foreign

competitors. This position is amply argued by Krugman (1986) in his 'import protection as export promotion' variant of strategic trade theory, which reveals that when a domestic firm is given a privileged position in the home market, it enjoys an advantage in scale over foreign rivals that enables the firm to realize 'learning by doing' benefits. A larger protected home market offers greater dynamic scale and learning effects to the privileged firm (ibid).

Advocates of developmental regionalism contend that regionalism is not thereby being used to resist globalisation but rather, they do not fully accept the anticipated dominance of foreign/global firms that is associated with globalisation, however, an attempt to support the development of domestic capital through regionalism. Nesadurai (ibid) particularly puts it thus:

While the concern here is with distribution - the selective allocation of economic benefits including rents - to domestic businesses as a means to preserve and nurture them, the growth/efficiency imperative is not absent either. Rather, the growth imperative is infused with distributive concerns. Developmental regionalism is, therefore, not about resisting globalisation completely, but neither is it about complete acquiescence to global market forces. Instead, it encompasses a period of temporary and limited resistance to aspects of globalisation through which attempts are made to build capabilities that will enable domestic businesses eventually to participate in global market activities.

Ndayi (2009) describes this as a compromise between protectionism and liberalism since it is simultaneously concerned with internal economic development and integration as well as strategic integration of regional trading blocs into the world economy.

The *raison d'être* for regional integration arrangements is, therefore, developmental and related, especially to economic prosperity- several of them such as ECOWAS are actually termed economic communities. Emphasis is therefore placed on the pecuniary benefits that will accrue to the body and the members in particular. Foremost among these is what Fernández and Portes (as cited in Doidge, 2007) call the "largely unmitigated beneficial effect" whereby regional integration allows the creation of larger markets through reducing internal barriers to trade, allowing advantage to be taken of economies of scale in the production of goods and services, and increased potential for investment including foreign direct investment (FDI). This will provide opportunities for specialisation by firms reducing costs within the regional grouping and increasing profit, enhancing accumulation and growth. This argument is, however, not without contention. Nevertheless, the general position is

that economic growth and trade creation will occur where regional economic liberalisation takes place in the context of, rather than instead of, multilateral liberalization (ibid).

Exposing producers and exporters to competition within the region is also expected to prepare them for more rigorous competition at a global level. 'This is in line with Krugman's argument of developmental regionalism being a learning process. It therefore becomes a stepping stone, for economic operators, as the regional market can be large enough to realise efficiency gains through specialisation and economies of scale.

Developmental Regionalism and Security

Related to the general economic benefits is the relationship between stability and development - the conflict and (under) development nexus. Regionalism has an impact on securitisation because as intraregional trade flows increase, so the chance of conflict falls. This reasoning is based on a notion of rational self-interest that states involved in economic regionalism will not be willing to put the economic benefits, or even simply anticipated future benefits, of a PTA (Preferential Trading Area) at risk by engaging in confrontational behaviour.

It has however been observed that securitization, the creation of collective identities, and the emergence of some kind of collective bargaining capacity which is one of the benefits of regional integration arrangements have not been given prominence by theorists of developmental regionalism(ibid). There are scholars who even contest this benefit. For instance, Powers (cited in Doidge, 2007) points out that trade-producing RTAs (Regional Trade Agreements) may, in fact, promote conflict where the gains are asymmetrically distributed, a situation that may particularly occur in regional arrangements involving states with stark divergences in size or level of development (ibid).

This argument appears pale in the light of overwhelming evidence in support of the role of regional arrangements in enhancing peace. The very formation of the European Union (which has been presented as a model of regional integration) was aimed at ending the historical belligerence between Germany and France and uniting the whole of Western Europe into a security community (Mohammed & Alex, 2001). Kufuor (2006) plainly states that "No longer is regionalism focused solely on attaining a single goal. A more comprehensive approach that embraces economic liberalization, security, and political cooperation is being fostered". He goes ahead to assert that "Regional integration schemes help to counter internal security threats. These can be either civil wars or other forms of social upheaval" Kufuor (2006, p. xiv). The United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome document proclaims that, "We recognize that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked

and mutually reinforcing" (p. 2). This is the basis for the claim that there is a security-development nexus: that security and development are mutually dependent. The UN High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (United Nations, 2005) noted that "Development and security are inextricably linked. A more secure world is only possible if poor countries are given a real chance to develop" (p. viii).

Although scholars have argued that it is not easy to determine how developmental factors contribute to conflict neither is it obvious to what extent conflict is the source of a country's development problems rather than the consequence, there is, at a general level, considerable evidence of a correlation between levels of underdevelopment and levels of insecurity (Tschirgi, Lund & Mancini, 2010). Collier (2007) who popularized the concept of the bottom billion, asserts that "seventy-three percent of people in the societies of the bottom billion have recently been through a civil war or are still in one" (p. 34). They are increasingly seen as being caught in a so-called conflict trap, created by a vicious circle of insecurity and underdevelopment (Collier et al, 2003). The argument therefore is not whether there is a relationship between security and development but the nature of such a relationship.

Regional security arrangements are therefore platforms for the emergence of collective identities that enhance peace which in turn has a positive impact on economic activities and social and economic progress. Sarbo (2010) states that:

[In an] increasingly globalised world, where national isolation is detrimental to the states and welfare of peoples, as well increasing awareness of the need to cooperate across borders on various issues, there are specific and important areas that cannot be addressed singularly by states. There are areas that know no boundaries and can affect all regardless of state jurisdiction. They can be addressed only through a regional framework, and in order to overcome fragmentation, states have to coalesce, and cooperation regionally can greatly enhance effectiveness in tackling these issues (p. 64).

Such issues comprise what he refers to as "the regional commons" which include natural disasters, infectious diseases, like malaria and HIV/AIDS, and pests. The second set of issues includes resources and goods like watersheds, international rivers, and regional safety and security. The third is physical infrastructure and policy frameworks where tremendous benefits can be achieved only through interstate cooperation and regional integration. All of these will require a common legal and regulatory framework to tackle because they cut across borders.

ECOWAS, Developmental Regionalism and Security

The ECOWAS Revised Treaty (1993), the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security (1999) and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) (2008) as well as several other instruments of the Economic Community of West African States have been framed within the theory of developmental regionalism. The treaty provides for cooperation in several areas including trade, customs, taxation, statistics, money and payments in the economic sphere. The environment, the management of human and natural resources and health among others are also captured by the treaty. In order to enhance this, it addressed issues of regional stability relating to political, judicial and legal affairs, regional security and immigration.

The Protocol (ECOWAS Protocol, 2008) recognized that "cross-border crimes, the proliferation of small arms and all illicit trafficking contribute to the development of insecurity and instability and jeopardise the economic and social development of the sub-region" and that "these phenomena constitute serious social and economic problems which can only be resolved within the framework of increased and well-coordinated multilateral cooperation" (p. 2).

The issue of security has been given prominence by ECOWAS out of the realization that its original mandate which is the development of the region for the improvement of the quality of life of its people can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace. It has therefore been at the forefront of adopting protocols on regional mechanisms that would address causes of insecurity such as the production and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), drug trafficking, human trafficking, corruption and money laundering which particularly affect all the States in the region and the international community in general.

To this Fayemi (2012) aptly affirms that:

Although what the West African experience demonstrates is that cooperative security is possible, even among states that lack common values, the future success of cooperative security depends not only on spreading values that promote human security, but also on developmental regionalism that intensifies economic ties even in the quest to foster a sense of a 'security community' that serves the interest of all its members. The closer the ties among states and their citizens in the socio-economic spheres, the more they will find ways to further their security cooperatively (p. 9).

As well observed by Ukeji (2003), ECOWAS has succeeded in the adoption of several protocols relating to the progressive elimination of customs duties and charges; the abolition of quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among the member-states; the establishment of common custom tariff and commercial policies; the removal of obstacles to the free movement of people, services, and capital; the harmonization of the economic and industrial policies of member States; the elimination of disparities in the level of developments; the harmonization of monetary policies; and the establishment of a fund for cooperation, compensation and development. He noted however that their observance has either been predominantly in the breach or in their implementation has faltered. Much of this failure has been attributed to security challenges that have become major distractions to ECOWAS in the pursuit of its original mandates as the energy of the sub-regional body has been channeled to managing these challenges rather than focusing on developmental efforts.

It must be borne in mind; however, that paying attention to security issues per se will not be sufficient to deal with the problems if there is not much that is at stake between and among the states in the region. A framework that carries along what Overton (2000) calls “development in conflict” may need to be considered by ECOWAS. Overton argued that although the existing models of ‘peace-first, development may remain valid, we need to recognise that they may be inadequate and even counterproductive in some circumstances and these circumstances may become more common in a neoliberal world.

Overton (2000) asserted that “Development needs to be able to live with chaos. Development must not avoid-or follow–conflict but engage with conflict” (p. 4). This will necessitate a better understanding of the relationships between conflict, poverty, development and the state where the relationship is contemplated more in a circular and interconnected relationship rather than simple linear transitions. The necessity is because development itself is a panacea for conflict as several issues of (human) security are addressed by development. Where this is anchored at the regional level, it has the cohesive capacity to galvanize the components of the union and turn it into a security community in the likeness of the European Union.

Conclusion

The dividends of developmental regionalism should be enough compelling reason for the leadership of ECOWAS to commit every needed resource to ensure progress in actualising the various provisions of the organisation with regard to its developmental agenda. The situation where national interests often take precedence over regional interests among member states should be addressed to pave the way for a more robust economic relationship. One particular area that would enhance this is the unification of the ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union

(UEMOA) which has been largely unattainable. Similarly, ECOWAS should vigorously pursue its agenda of a common external tariff regime and of a single monetary zone by sorting out the issues that have kept its realization which border on disagreements over an appropriate formula and subsisting colonial considerations. In this way, the sub-region can be bound together by economic cords that the members cannot do without and they will individually and collectively be willing to ensure its survival and wellbeing as entities and corporately thereby achieving the goal of being a security community.

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