



Incorporating Human Security in Regional Integration: The Case of CEMAC

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SUMMARY

The Paper looks at integration efforts in the Economic Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC) but seeks to push human security and development as primary efforts in this integration process. The paper concludes that there should be more succinct political will in incorporating and advancing the objectives of regional integration in the sub region.

Introduction

Over the years, African countries have continued to pursue programmes and activities aimed at accelerating regional integration¹ and cooperation. Regional integration has been a major part of the agenda of African leaders, in line with the objective of establishing the Africa Economic Community (AEC).² The regional communities have similar goals: strengthening economic cooperation between their member states and promoting economic

development in the regions³. One such regional bloc is the Communauté Economique et Monétaire d'Afrique Centrale (CEMAC) or Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa. The six member states of CEMAC are Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo and Central African Republic (CAR). These states also share a common and single currency zone, the CFA franc.⁴ The Central African sub-region is endowed

¹ Regional integration is the process by which two or more states transfer parts of their national sovereignty to a supranational entity having similar attributes of a state, with the structures and means to define and implement a common policy. This renunciation of parts of state sovereignty can be in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

² This was also known as the Abuja Treaty, promulgated in 1991 and entered into force in 1994.

³ Angela Meyer, 2011. Authored an article and discussion paper, *Peace and Security Cooperation in Central Africa – Developments, Challenges and Prospects & Central African Economic and Union*, 2011 www.internationaldemocracywatching.org

⁴ Communauté financière africaine

with natural resources such as oil, diamonds, gold, iron, cobalt, uranium, copper, bauxite, petroleum, cocoa, cotton and timber. Although it is a resource-rich region, it is paradoxically made up of the poorest and least-developed countries on the continent, with two-thirds of the population living on less than US\$1.25 a day.⁵ Furthermore, in the light of environmental degradation, wars (Chad, Central African Republic), corruption, human rights violations, absence of rule of law and the inability of many countries to take advantage of their opportunities and resources, it seems appropriate for the central African countries to refocus their regional efforts towards ensuring human security. This policy brief, therefore, seeks to draw attention to the critical importance of incorporating human security and development in discussions of regional integration and how this can ensure peace and stability in the Central African Region.

For a long time the concept of security was interpreted to mean security of territories from external aggression, protection of national interest or as global security from the threat of a nuclear holocaust. Emphasis was not placed on the individual on the assumption that the security of individuals emanates from that of the state. In 1994, however, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pioneered a new concept of human security with an expanded definition that includes the legitimate concerns of ordinary people who seek security in their daily lives⁶. This new concept, which is universal and people-centered, is

concerned more with the satisfaction of these legitimate needs, which are often dependent on the role of the state and the degree to which its institutions and managers are responsive. At the time of its establishment, the main objective CEMAC⁷ was clearly economic growth in the region. However, over the years, the organization has been confronted with a number of challenges that have impeded attainment of its goals. To address human rights violations and injustice, regional leaders need to ensure that agencies such as the CEMAC Court of Justice can widen their competence in such matters. In promoting peace, stability and ensuring the principles of good governance and rule of law, there is a need for states to be sanctioned in cases of non-compliance. There should be concerted efforts made to curb the brutal wars in the region. Although the initial dynamic for regional integration was principally on an economic basis, the narrative has now changed towards ensuring human security.

Efforts of CEMAC in Ensuring Regional Stability

Many reforms have been made towards the establishment of a common market in the CEMAC zone. The most significant advances at the end of the first decade of this 21st century include monetary integration, the achievement of free trade, and the relative efficiency of the free movement of persons⁸. The establishment of a biometric passport for all CEMAC citizens as well as community-wide number plates has to some extent facilitated the

⁵ UNDP, 2009

⁶ (UNDP, 1994 *Human Development Report*)

⁷ The CEMAC leaders created institutions such as: the Economic Union of Central Africa (UEAC); the Monetary Union of Central Africa (UMAC); the Community Parliament; the Court of Justice; and the Court of Auditors (art. 10 of the *CEMAC revised Treaty*; 2008). The organs of the CEMAC

are: the Conference of Heads of State; the Council of Ministers; the Ministerial Committee; the CEMAC Commission; the Bank of Central African States (BEAC); the Development Bank of Central African States (BDEAC); the Banking Commission of Central Africa (COBAC).

⁸ (Nono, 2014)

movement of persons and vehicles and constitute laudable advances.

The Challenges

Over the years, bilateral economic agreements with European states proved more profitable for Central African political elites than commercial exchanges with their neighbors. This arrangement was strengthened by the deep-rooted trade relationships with the former colonial power (France) and relatively low levels of economic complementarity within the region⁹. This led to slow growth of cooperation and trust between CEMAC states in terms of exploring mutual economic opportunities, which in turn hampered the growth of local economic activities in the region¹⁰. “Human security refers to the quality of life of the people of a society or polity. There by anything which degrades their quality of life, or diminishes access to stock or resources, is a security threat. Conversely, anything which can upgrade their quality of life; economic growth, improved access to resources, social and political empowerment, is an enhancement of human security.”

The absence of vibrant civil society organizations (CSOs) in countries of the CEMAC region is also a contributory factor to its slow pace at prioritizing human security. In his masterpiece *Perpetual Peace*, Immanuel Kant stated that when citizens are given basic human rights such as choosing their leaders in a free and fair process through ballots and

they enjoy civil liberties such as free speech and press, their countries will be far less likely to initiate wars than will countries ruled by kings¹¹. Civil society plays the role of “watchdog” in states thereby ensuring checks and balances in governance processes. Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens¹². Politically, it seems that public office has been hijacked by a selected few in the CEMAC region which accommodates some of Africa’s longest serving presidents – Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo and Chad have leaders who have been in power for more than a decade¹³ and counting.

Added to these, the fight for regional leadership has obstructed decision-making processes and damaged the weak regional coherence further magnified by the absence of a clear regional leader¹⁴. Unlike other regional communities in Africa, there is no clear hegemony to promote the interests of the entire region at the internal or the international level. A country such as Equatorial Guinea, previously isolated and underrated, has seen its value rise because of its new status as an oil-producing country and it now holds claims to regional leadership¹⁵. The leadership case of Cameroon has been on the basis of its demographic weight and its relative “political stability”. Gabon has economic weight as an oil-producer, and its claim to regional leadership mainly rests on late President Omar Bongo’s frequent interventions as peacemaker and mediator in

⁹ Angela Meyer, 2008

¹⁰ Vice Rector, Peace and Security, United Nations University

¹¹ Kant, 1795

¹² Schmitter and Karl

¹³ The President of Cameroon Paul Biya has been in power since 1981; President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang

Nguema Mbasogo (1979-2014); late President of Gabon, Omar Bongo (1979-2014); President of Chad, Idriss Déby (1990-2014), President of Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso (1994-2014)

¹⁴ (Awoumou, 2006)

¹⁵ (Owona Nguini, 2006)

conflicts. Chad's aspiration is often explained by its rise as an oil producer and exporter since 2003. It is reported that "Idriss Déby is setting himself up as the 'boss' of Central Africa. He already has the military power and with the oil, he's now got the economic power"¹⁶. Because of this competition for leadership, decision making on key issues is slow.

Differences in opinion persist with regard to critical issues such as free movement of people and right of establishment within Central African states. Although the region has adopted a common CEMAC passport,¹⁷ the free movement of people remains a challenge. Countries in the region such as Equatorial Guinea and Gabon especially seem not to disagree with decisions.¹⁸ In order to travel to Gabon for instance, citizens of CEMAC member states are still required to obtain a visa.¹⁹ This precarious situation in the CEMAC zone impinges on the development of the market for consumer goods while stifling local entrepreneurship²⁰. Local producers are left with no choice than to be involved in smuggling and other illicit trade.

Other challenges faced in the CEMAC region include the fact that while the agricultural value of the land in most of the countries is extremely limited, these countries have relied heavily on extractive industries for the development of their economies. In infrastructure, Equatorial Guinea has done comparatively well relative to other oil-producing states in the region. Yet the government has been accused of countless human rights violations, and corruption²¹. Prior to the discovery of oil reserves late in the colonial era, timber exports were the backbone of both the Congolese and Gabonese economies. Beginning in 1956 for Gabon and in 1957 for Congo, oil production soon replaced timber in this role of principal economic asset. Yet the people are still to benefit from oil production. Meanwhile, Chad has been accused of using the revenues from oil in increasing the military budget instead of improving the living conditions of its citizenry. For some years now Transparency International, has been rating Cameroon as one of the world's most corrupt nations. The US State Department and Amnesty International in their annual reports have faulted Cameroon on several human and people's rights issues. On the economic

¹⁶ (Eriksson and Hagströmer, 2005) Statement made by a high-ranking official from one of the six CEMAC countries, cited in Eriksson and Hagströmer; 2005: 36

¹⁷ CEMAC heads of state decided to cancel visa requirements and to begin issuing CEMAC biometric passports in order to promote better regional economic integration between Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, Gabon and Congo Brazzaville.

¹⁸ Among the preconditions for the free movement of people are: the establishment of police cooperation centres, the centralization of data, a file for missing persons and a network with Interpol. All these are yet to be set up.

¹⁹ Obtaining a visa is expensive and documents, especially an invitation letter, have to be notarized by local authorities in Gabon and sent to concerned individuals and organizations before they can obtain a visa. The process is very frustrating, especially for citizens of other CEMAC countries.

²⁰ On 6 January 2014, Cameroonians working at the Equatorial Guinean and Cameroonian border town of *Kyo-Ossi* were dismayed that the border was closed. Analysts have argued that a state like Equatorial Guinea is afraid that opening its borders to citizens of member states will encourage massive immigration of CEMAC citizens to the detriment of Equatorial Guineans.

²¹ "Corruption, poverty, and repression continue to plague Equatorial Guinea under President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has been in power since 1979. Vast oil revenues fund lavish lifestyles for the small elite surrounding the President, while a large proportion of the population continues to live in poverty. Mismanagement of public funds and credible allegations of high-level corruption persist, as do other serious abuses, including arbitrary detention, secret detention, and unfair trials". Human Rights Watch, 2014.

front, although Cameroon has been producing oil, Cameroon was in 2002 classified as a highly indebted poor country under the World Bank HIPC initiative.

The Way Forward

Economic integration is important but human security is an essential condition for economic development. Countries of the Central Africa region should understand that insecurity and instability are manifestations of the weakness and limited capacity their states and representatives to guarantee security and order within national borders²². Presently conflicts, as well as the series of political crises and upheavals in the CAR, in Chad and the Republic of Congo can all be considered as manifestations of the inability of state actors to satisfy the security needs of the population.

The importance of the role of civil society cannot be over-emphasized for this region. Civil society organizations (CSOs) can play an important and more active role in enhancing transparency and good governance. This would contribute to increased public debate on issues such as the formulation and implementation of government budgets as well as greater transparency in the use of public revenues. It is important for specific civil society forums to be set up in order to give public opinion more strength and influence.

Oil production has in most of the countries in the sub-region not had a trickle-down effect on the people. In order to diversify the economies and not make them too oil-dependent, it is important for

these countries to explore other areas of economic activity. Countries such as Republic of Congo can utilize the Congo basin for mechanized agriculture such as rice cultivation, as well as investing in eco-tourism. Cameroon, for example, can further improve agriculture beyond subsistence, develop its tourism sector and create an enabling environment for private investment. Considering its arid environment, Chad can boost its livestock production (cattle and goat rearing) whereas Equatorial Guinea on the other hand should improve its commercial fisheries and tourism relative to its oil production.

There has to be more political will in relation to the free movement of people within the CEMAC region, because free movement contributes tremendously to the region's economy, investment flows and tourism, while at the same time providing employment opportunities to more people. In a region where more than 30 percent of the active youth are unemployed, it is imperative to make economic progress that creates jobs.

Conclusion

Human security and development are fundamental prerequisites for peace and stability in any country. If the considerable resource endowment of the region was properly harnessed, CEMAC countries could have some of the fastest growing economies. But with continued political bickering and absence of concrete progress in the integration process, it will be a challenge for the region to reach an acceptable degree of its potential. As stated by Nono²³²⁴, "The objective affirmed by the heads of state for CEMAC to adopt a common policy concerning good governance is far from being achieved. The CEMAC

²² Angela Meyer, 2008

²³ Marcel Nono, *Integration Effort In Central Africa: The Case of CEMA*, 2014

member states are not sanctioned in cases of non-compliance with principle of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.” It is, therefore, imperative for member states to reiterate and implement their commitments to protecting and improving the lives of the people.

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About the Author

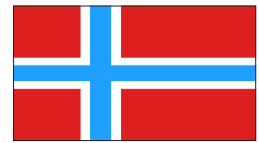
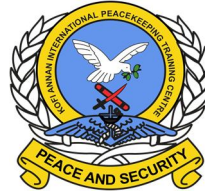
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