

**African Regional and Sub-Regional Organizations:
Assessing Their Contributions to Economic Integration
and Conflict Management**

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Discussion Questions:

- 1. In conflict and post-conflict societies, what role can regional organizations play to help manage, mitigate or transform those conflicts?*
- 2. Should regional approaches to conflict management be a first option ahead of bi-lateral and international interventions?*
- 3. What can African regional organizations and the AU be doing to coordinate conflict management efforts?*
- 4. What can the international community do to encourage greater regional integration in response to NEPAD and the AU Charter?*
- 5. How should donors balance bi-lateral relations in Africa with regional concerns, e.g. should aid flows and conflict response be increasingly regional in nature?*
- 6. How can the international community strengthen African response to African problems?*

INTRODUCTION

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the President ECOWAS Commission, ask me to convey his sincere regrets, for not being able to make it to this important meeting, he is in India on ECOWAS official mission, and has ask me, to add my voice to that of my predecessors in conveying, his deepest thanks to the Woodrow Wilson International

Center for Scholars, for extending an invitation to ECOWAS to be part of this brainstorming exercise, leading we all hope to recommendations and actions for a better, safe and prosper Africa.

As you may be aware, regional economic groupings emerged on the continent to supplement and complement the efforts of the Organization of African Unity, now the African Union. They act under the Chapter VIII of UN Charter. They do not act at cross-purposes with the Union but act as the local framework for the realization of continental goals with emphasis on economic development and integration. Six regional organisations dealing with related issues of economic development, economic integration, customs union, tariff and trade and common market came into being between 1975 and 1999.

They are as:

- 1) ECOWAS – Economic community of West African States, established in 1975
- 2) SADC – Southern African Development Community, established in 1980
- 3) ECCAS – Economic Community of Central African State, established in 1983
- 4) COMESA – Common Market for Eastern & Southern Africa established in 1993
- 5) IGAD – International Authority on Development, established in 1996
- 6) EAC – East Africa Community, re-established in 1999.

The emphasis on economic development which is reflected in the names of some of these bodies was paramount. It attracted support from Africans and our friends overseas. I am aware of efforts of all these organisations in Africa to deal with the issue of economic development and integration alongside that of conflict prevention, resolution and management.

I will however focus on the Organisation which I have the privilege to represent as the Commissioner in charge of Political Affairs, Peace and Security. ECOWAS is proud to have taken the lead or been associated on initiatives, often in concert with the United Nations, lately the Special Representative of the UNSG in West Africa (formerly Ahmedoun Ould Abdallah and then General Lamine CISSE, here present), the African Union and our development partners, in response to the challenges of peace and security; underdevelopment and resource management; political and economic governance; regional integration; co-operation with the outside world; and the involvement of the populations organized under civil society organizations and local communities in these processes. I am sure His Excellency General CISSE will be pleased to share some of these experiences with the audience.

Regional Economic Communities emerged in the early 1970s at a time that the world was going through a crisis in international economic relations leading to even greater marginalisation of Africa. It is against this background that with the assistance of the UN, especially the UNECA in Addis–Ababa, a rational framework was agreed i.e. the creation of regional economic communities as a means of collective self–reliance for sustainable socio–economic development, and as building blocks of an African Economic Community.

ECOWAS emerged on 28th May 1975 as a consequence of these processes as well as the initiatives of West African leaders at the time, with a vision to create a single regional economic space as a prelude to the continental common market, through integration and collective self–reliance; an economic space with a single market and single currency capable of generating accelerated socio–economic development and competing more meaningfully

in the global market of large trade blocs and uneven patterns of trade between the industrialised north and raw material-based economies of the south.

The internal conflicts laden with devastating regional consequences were derailing the original economic agenda of ECOWAS. Worse, the implosion of States in the sub-region coincided with the spread of global anarchy that followed the collapse of the former Soviet Union and most notably, the beginning of the First Gulf War. With the attention of the international community focused elsewhere, therefore, ECOWAS had to act locally to avert the looming disaster in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The new paradigm had to be based on a systemic search for conflict prevention and conflict management mechanisms. The military agenda, for a time, overshadowed the economic agenda. The creation of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene in Liberia and Sierra Leone was, therefore, an

act of absolute necessity dictated by the unfolding realities.

From these trials and tribulations ECOWAS learned it lessons the hard way. Its leaders decided to avoid fire-fighters stance, to become proactive. Next to the economic tools they had already devised, they transformed the Protocols on Non-Aggression and that on Mutual Assistance into the more holistic and comprehensive Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security, signed in December 1999, in Lomé, Togo; closely followed by the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good governance of 2001, which is our framework for human security, to tackle the sensitive issues of peace and security, democracy, good governance and the Rule of law.

The focus of our discussion being on conflict management, let me quickly mention some of the steps ECOWAS has taken to promote economic integration in the region. There is the adoption of the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and Goods, abolishing the entry visa between Member States, the ECOWAS Brown card to enable cars to move in a more secure way. We have been implementing a region-wide programme on road development and infrastructure foremost of which is the West African Gas Pipeline. ECOWAS has adopted a Common Agricultural Policy, an ECOWAS bank for Investment is fully functional and we are working hard toward convergence criteria on the way to the adoption of a common currency. The Community Levy has been established to replace voluntary contribution of Member States. On democracy and good governance, election fact-finders and observations are common and Member States are engaging in the African Peer Review Mechanism of the NEPAD...among others.

ECOWAS is going through changes, from an advocacy structure, the Secretariat, to a more active Commission, with a vision, to consolidate gains, and implement the aims of its founding fathers. For this purpose, ECOWAS Institutions have endowed themselves with the necessary framework and instruments to tackle insecurity and instability to allow their Member States to orient their efforts towards creating the conditions for economic and social growth towards citizens well being and welfare.

Ladies and gentlemen, in order to address the specific concerns raised through the interrogations contained in the concept paper, I will refer to the framework and subsequent MOU signed with UNOWA and lately the African Union point to what should be, from now on, the scheme for future crisis mitigation and conflict prevention.

In ECOWAS, under Article 58 of ECOWAS Revised Treaty, we fully play the principle of subsidiarity, which means that the prime responsibility for creating and maintaining the conditions for peace, security and stability is bestowed first on the concerned Member State, buttressed with subsequent tensions mitigation mechanisms.

The second in line to intervene, in case of aggravated tension, crisis or conflict, should be the regional body, before any other external actor, how important should its interest, that in close coordination with the region. In this area, the Member States of the region agreed to give a specific mandate to ECOWAS in areas where they feel ECOWAS can add value in complementing, sometimes supplementing their own endeavours. This gives some kind of legitimacy to the regional body, which should in return be impartial, or at least neutral in all its actions.

Therefore ECOWAS and the other REC should play the role of honest brokers in conflict or post-conflict societies.

If we agree that African Union is not an entity by itself hanging into some kind of vacuum, detached from t Member States' concerns, it should act on behalf of its constituencies, namely the Member States. It was therefore agreed in Algiers, at the January 2008 meeting with the RECs, that AU should set aims and goals, indicate general direction, coordinate and impulse the activities of the RECs and mobilize resources on their behalf, either bilaterally or multilaterally to strengthen their mechanisms and reinforce their capacities.

By so doing partners do contribute to the aims and goals of the United Nations geared towards the axiom: "think globally, but act locally".

I thank you for your kind attention.