

EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF CULTURE IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE: CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Culture has always been considered as energy, inspiration and empowerment for groups and individuals and profoundly contributed to their social development. Most recently, in order to face the new challenges deriving from globalization, many studies were promoted in order to ascertain beneficial links between culture, environment and development. This paper seeks a multi-cultural approach to the prevailing socio-economic challenges in West African Sub-region. Employing both historical and comparative tools of analysis, it argues that putting divergent cultures into strategic use or as a driving force for social reforms will enhance regional integration and sustainable development among countries of the sub-region through the instrumentality of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy, Development, Regional integration, Culture, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed fluctuating global growth and fortunes, conflicts and new geopolitical formations. These strategic changes demand that culture in all its manifestations be championed as an indispensable agent of change and reconciliation in the face of unprecedented globalisation (Yudhoyono, 2013:5). Thus, cultural diplomacy has become an urgent necessity as a diplomatic tool in today's multicultural world. Apparently, the promotion of foreign cultures in several countries of the world has been very beneficial and this has helped in attracting tourists and supporting economic ventures, especially trade and foreign investment (Asobele, 2002). For West Africa, ECOWAS was established as economic integration scheme to drive the process of accelerated development in the sub-region. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was formed in May 1975 to promote economic integration and development. The launching of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) represented one of the most of numerous examples of regional integration among developing countries.

West Africa is a sub-region rich in oil, gas, gold, iron ore, uranium, cocoa, cotton, and cashew nuts, but has some of the poorest populations in the world. This is despite the fact that there are many cultural links across borders which should facilitate regional integration: Yorubas inhabit Nigeria and Benin; Hausas, Nigeria and Niger; Ewes, Ghana and Togo; Mandingos, Liberia and Guinea; while Balantas are spread across Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and Gambia (Adebajo, 2015). Generally, the development of creative cultural industries for instance, through the adoption of effective strategies and mechanisms, is expected to

transform into greater economic gains that should improve the living standards of the populations and promote regional integration.

However, promotion of regional integration remains an important economic and political goal in West Africa. Regional integration initiatives in West Africa aim at promoting regional cooperation and ensuring that trade and other activities are easily facilitated among countries within these regional alliances. This can be seen in the policies, programmes, projects and activities of ECOWAS as indicated by Article (3) of the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS, particularly in the areas of: food, agriculture and natural resources, industry, transport and communications, energy, trade, money and finance, taxation, economic reform policies, human resources, education, information, culture, science, technology, services, health, tourism as well as in legal matters

In view of this, it is appropriate to reexamine why regional integration is pursued, what is understood by regional integration, principles for regional integration in the sub-region and how this can be complimented by cultural diplomacy being the focus of this paper. According to Hagher (2011), cultural diplomacy has become an urgent necessity as a diplomatic tool in today's multicultural world. It has the potential to contribute much more effectively to foreign policy goals, to diplomacy, and to governments' domestic objectives. To enable cultural diplomacy to reach its full potential, however, the practice needs to be understood better, particularly its contributions to national image, branding and social cohesion (Mark, 2009).

The growth of cultural diplomacy as a means of engaging in international discourse has become increasingly prevalent in developed countries in the Western World, but it is by no means restricted to these states. In recent years, there have been numerous examples of cultural diplomatic effort exercised by states, corporations and individuals across the African continent. In the last fifty years, this region has undergone numerous political and economic changes. The region's cultural, linguistic and ecological diversity presents both opportunities and challenges for the integration process. The longing to combine forces politically and economically has always been recognised as a step forward in the desire to engender co-prosperity in the area.

For ECOWAS, it has, over the past decades, according to Bossuyt (2016), sought to promote an ever-widening regional integration agenda through a wide variety of strategies, action plans and programmes. Initially the regional body followed a state-centric, top-down approach to promoting regional integration. From the 1990s onwards, there were deliberate attempts by ECOWAS to broaden its overall approach with a view to also spur regional dynamics 'from below' through close collaboration between institutional actors, civil society and business organisations. The fundamental objective of this essay with regard to cultural diplomacy is how ECOWAS member states can use their cultural assets to produce soft power and reap the benefits thereof, particularly regional integration.

Cultural Diplomacy and Regional Integration: A Conceptual Analysis

Cultural Diplomacy

One significant finding is that it is becoming more important for us to pay attention to cultural diplomacy. We are moving from a world where the term was primarily concerned with relations between elites – where static and traditional cultural settings provided the opportunity and backdrop for relaxed ambassadorial and political contact, for example – to one where culture is also a medium between people on a mass scale (Bound, K. et al,

2007:16-17). Diplomacy in international relations is a major factor of power. Through diplomacy, nation-states are able to secure the objectives of their foreign policies without military force (Berridge, 2010). The term “Cultural diplomacy” was coined by Milton Cummings as “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding (Cummings,2009).

The UNESCO (2001) Declaration on Cultural Diversity defines culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs. In addition, Cummings’ definition combines “cultural diplomacy” with the notion of cultural relations. He therefore defines cultural diplomacy in the broader sense of the term as instances of cross-cultural exchange and intercultural interaction. Cultural diplomacy is expressed through tangible and innate medium such as exchange programs in person-to-person contacts made possible by the ever globalising world, new technologies and regional and the numerous international forums.

For some commentators, cultural diplomacy can be distinguished from other practices through the timeframe of its objectives. Leonard, for instance, sees cultural diplomacy as that part of public diplomacy that is concerned with the building of long-term relationships. The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy (n.d) describes cultural diplomacy as a course of actions, which are based on and utilise the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests. It also states that cultural diplomacy can be practiced either by the public sector, the private sector or civil society, giving credence to the definition of diplomacy as an act that could be carried out by persons representing any sector in the society. Cultural diplomacy is a soft spot of diplomacy that arguably has more influence than formal diplomacy in contemporary International Relations. Apparently, the promotion of foreign cultures in several countries of the world has been very beneficial and this has helped in attracting tourists and supporting economic ventures, especially trade and foreign investment.

Cultural diplomacy specifies a form of diplomacy that carries a set of prescriptions, which are material to its effectual practice. These prescriptions include the unequivocal recognition and understanding of foreign cultural dynamics and observance of the tenets that govern basic dialogue. It is a domain of diplomacy concerned with establishing, developing and sustaining relations with foreign states by way of culture, art and education. It is also a proactive process of external projection in which a nation’s institutions, value system and unique cultural personality, are promoted at a bilateral and multilateral level (Ayakoroma, 2012).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization actively works towards reducing divides between peoples of the world through intercultural communication and the protection of cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2009). According to UNESCO’s 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity “the respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security”. In this context, cultural diversity is not only referring to the various ways in which “humanity’s cultural heritage is expressed but also to the diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technology” (Article 4.1 of the 2005 UNESCO). The protection of cultural diversity and of the diversity of cultural expressions has been defined as an inherent

right of man as codified in the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Similarly, cultural diplomacy is connected to all the major issues of our society: economic stratification, race relations, international relations, technology, education, and community development (Atlas, 2015).

Regional Integration

In the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis, many countries are reassessing how regional integration can contribute to boosting domestic demand, employment, economic stability, and development objectives. Regional integration efforts have been ongoing in many regions for several decades, with both theory and experience supporting its potential for economic development (UNDP, 2011). Lavergne, (1997) contends that the concept of regional integration takes on a predominantly economic slant in the literature, to the point of confusion with that of “economic” integration. However, it should not be viewed exclusively in such terms. Regional integration can cover the full range of public-sector activity, including not only the coordination of economic policies, but also regional security, human rights, education, health, research and technology, and natural resource management. The concept of regional integration is thus a broader one than that of economic integration. The expression “economic integration” can be used in different ways.

Regional integration, according to Niekerk, (2005:4) can be defined along three dimensions: (i) geographic scope illustrating the number of countries involved in an arrangement (variable geometry), (ii) the substantive coverage or width that is the sector or activity coverage (trade, labor mobility, macro-policies, sector policies, etc.), and (iii) the depth of integration to measure the degree of sovereignty a country is ready to surrender, that is from simple coordination or cooperation to deep integration. For Sesay (1990), regional integration refers to the various forms and contexts of economic integration arrangements- including common markets, free trade areas and harmonisation policies- prevailing or proposed at both the continental i.e. African Economic Community, AEC, and regional such as ECOWAS, Southern Africa Development Community, SADC, levels among many others.

Regional integration can foster competition, subsidiarity, access to wider market (via trade), larger and diversified investment and production, socio-economic and political stability and bargaining power for the countries involved. It can be multi-dimensional to cover the movement of goods and services (i.e. trade), capital and labour, socio-economic policy coordination and harmonisation, infrastructure development, environmental management, and reforms in other public goods such as governance, peace, defense and security (Maruping, 2005:131). Regional integration processes are meant to provide a peaceful arena in which sovereign countries voluntarily combine their efforts in areas of mutual concern, creating common regional interests and objectives.

Robert (2005:24) identifies social dialogue is the most fundamental component towards building an integrated social dimension into regional integration. An open and participatory process that includes governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations and even other interested social actors has the potential to address a diversity of interests and to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the stakeholders. Furthermore, as part of a development strategy, strengthening the capacity of social actors and encouraging them to contribute to the integration process has benefits beyond cultivating the social dimension. It also has the effect of encouraging greater democratic participation and strengthening of local governance. As was pointed out by ECOWAS itself, Community decisions sometimes rely on the direct or

indirect implementation by non-governmental actors, making the social partners important conduits for regional action.

ECOWAS and Strategic Actions for Regional Integration and Development: A Sectoral Assessment

With the increasing global trends in international trade, economic, social and political relations, regional integration remains one of among the key drivers for economic growth and sustainable development. The benefits of regional integration are many and well documented. In general regional integration helps to promote and enhance: the sharing of resources among member States; economic growth and development; the conducive environment for business; foreign direct investment; economic competitiveness within the integrated space; the building of infrastructural networks; sharing of best practices; and peace and security. Regional integration arrangements can also increase investment in member countries by reducing distortions, enlarging markets, and enhancing the credibility of economic and political reforms (UNECA, 2012:6).

The formation of ECOWAS, as earlier alluded to, was to promote regional economic integration and to enhance close cooperation among its member states. At its inception, the hope was that ECOWAS would meet the region's developmental challenges, particularly in four key areas; 1) expanding intra community trade, 2) promoting free movement of persons, goods and services through improving physical infrastructure, transport and communication links between countries, 3) strengthening the weak production structures in the sub region in order to reduce ECOWAS' excessive external dependence and critical lack of productive activity, 4) enhancing monetary and financial cooperation in order to create a single West African currency (Asante, 2004).

The plans of its founders back in 1975 to unite the original 15 members towards the goal of creating an economic union are far from being achieved. Yet despite missed deadlines and at times political inertia, the region has pushed for even deeper political and social integration through initiatives such as the Community Court of Justice, the ECOWAS Parliament, and several protocols on the Free Movement of Persons. If the results of integration efforts have not proven as grand as the original ambition, ECOWAS Member States appear committed to keep their integration promises and to expand the role and responsibilities of regional governance beyond matters of trade and macro-economic policy. This expanded role is evident, among other examples, from the intention of West African leaders to use ECOWAS as the coordinating and monitoring agency for the implementation of the NEPAD regional programmes, an approach reflected across the continent in different regional groupings. Perhaps the most dramatic and publicized example of a deepening political cooperation in ECOWAS, however, has involved the activities of the Standing Mediation Committee and the Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which was set up in 1990 for conflict prevention and management in West Africa (Robert, 2005:6).

West Africa, according to Bundu (1997:31), should be counted among the regions of the world with a certain experience in the practice of regional integration and cooperation. Regional cooperation and integration has been, and will most likely continue to be highly relevant for West Africa. The strong domestic and regional demand in trade and finance, expanding cross-border infrastructure, and increased factor mobility provides tremendous scope and imperative. Conscious of the wave of economic cooperation around the world, the overriding need to foster and accelerate economic and social development and the promotion

of harmonious growth of the contiguous states of West Africa, there is need of effective economic cooperation and integration (Essien, 2013:1).

The principle underlying the key programs of ECOWAS is focused on achieving policy and structural convergence. Principal among them were: Free movement of goods and persons; Trade liberalization and a customs union (ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS) and Common External Tariff (CET); ECOWAS Monetary Co-operation Programme (EMCP); Development of infrastructure; Implementation of common policies in agriculture, environment, management of water resources; Consolidation of Peace, Democracy and the promotion of good governance. This framework was expected to boost intra-regional trade and factor mobility, enhance investment/growth, and create the necessary conditions for the operation of a monetary union (Essien, 2013:2). ECOWAS has also undertaken several key initiatives to develop regional development strategy and institutions. Along with WAEMU, it developed a regional poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), which is actually a development strategy that highlights priority sectors for the region. ECOWAS has re-established the Federation of West African Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FEWACC) and the Federation of West African Manufacturers Association (FEWAMA), as well as established the Federation of Women and Women Entrepreneurs (ECOWAS -FEBWWE).

There is wide recognition that regional cooperation is vital to tackle development challenges that cannot be solved at a national level. Many such inter-state problems affect poor people's lives in areas ranging from human security, mobility, rural livelihoods, trade, infrastructure, to environment and climate change (Bossuyt, 2016). Thus, in a highly competitive and globalizing world, the opportunities and synergy of cooperation accruable to ECOWAS Member States are limitless under the community's integrated development agenda based on five major pillars - peace and security; policy harmonization, promotion of trade and investment, infrastructural development as well as democracy and good governance (Ejime, 2011). It has been observed that ECOWAS currently functions on a regular platform with four pillars: peace and security, developing infrastructure, policy harmonisation to facilitate trade, and good corporate governance. Thus, a brief sectoral analysis of ECOWAS' Strategic Actions, for the purpose of this paper, will focus on three of the aforementioned areas.

Economic Integration

Many arguments exist in favour of economic integration between industrial nations and developing countries. The main argument in favour of mixed integration is that all the partner countries are winners because of the specialization according to the principle of the comparative advantage (KONé, 2010). Regional economic integration holds out the promise for achieving poverty free, prosperous, and peaceful West Africa. As noted by Omeje (2013:8), since its inception, ECOWAS has encouraged and implemented diverse policies and projects to foster regional integration. Some of them include liberal immigration and travel policies, free movement of certain consumer goods and services; construction of trans-regional highways, establishment of a regional commercial/investment bank (Ecobank), adoption of a regional security policy or the construction of the 680 km subsea gas pipeline from the Niger Delta linking Benin, Togo and Ghana to bolster energy cooperation and economic productivity.

In many ways, West Africa is a land of contrasts. For instance it is commonly accepted that its private sector has played a key role in the ongoing economic boom and stands ready to continue its effort. Yet, it has not been successful at increasing incoming foreign direct investment or securing significantly higher levels of domestic bank credit which, in both

cases, may hinder future growth prospects. A second notable contrast can be found in the sub-region's inability to foster higher employment, especially for the youth, in the context of more vigorous economic activity (Seck, 2013:1).

However, since its inception in 1975, the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) has initiated different instruments targeted at trade improvement among member-states as previously highlighted, the region cannot continue to flourish based on the current range of primary exports whose markets are limited, and does not have the industrial base which would readily allow it to penetrate manufactured export markets in the North. In comparison, there is substantial room for expansion of regional agricultural trade in cereals, livestock, and horticultural products. In the industrial sector, increased trade will depend on the implementation of major policy reforms away from the heavily distorted structure of incentives currently existing in the region, but there is no reason why substantial trade could not develop around basic manufactures (Lavergne, 1997). For economic integration in West Africa to succeed in its role as an instrument for fostering the development of the partner states requires that these countries have a clear sense of their own development objectives and strategies and be fully committed to the pursuit of these goals. A development culture must be fostered, both within government and among the people, so that concern for a better future replaces preoccupation with the satisfaction of immediate needs (ibid).

Public Sector and Infrastructure Development

The benefits of integration for growth and human development can be magnified if accompanied by investments in infrastructure, both national and cross border. These investments allow people and inputs to move to more productive opportunities, and allow finished goods and services to reach broader markets (UNDP, 2011). The need for improved regional infrastructure for communications, transport, and energy systems is widely recognized in the literature on regional integration and cooperation, and provides an opportunity for collaboration to proceed along project-driven lines that are less likely to encounter political difficulties than other schemes — provided that funding can be found (Lavergne, 1997). Infrastructure helps facilitate human activity, in particular by lowering the cost of various economic activities and by improving their quality. This is why it has an essential role to play in the economic transformation of the region.

Thus, deepening integration hinges largely on the region's ability to get infrastructure and energy in place so as to reduce the cost of doing business and increase competitiveness. Improving infrastructure can significantly boost the region's trade with itself as well as with the outside world. According to Traoré (2017), one of the objectives of ECOWAS' 2020 Vision is to better interconnect countries. These connections mainly take place through economic and social infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication systems, and energy, as well as sea and air transport. ECOWAS has put in place master plans for building infrastructure in these different areas.

ECOWAS has also launched programmes to improve the investment framework, in particular through the project of a common investment code. Furthermore, ECOWAS is in the process of implementing a regional quality infrastructure, which will help harmonise regional standards, provide the necessary certifications to companies and products, and connect analysis and metrology laboratories (ibid). To improve implementation of regional integration projects, particularly in the infrastructure sectors (transport corridors, energy

generation and transmission), ECOWAS¹ (2011), proposed that Bank-financed projects will provide for capacity building. Capacity building will also continue to be provided to appropriate regional organs in the areas of statistics, planning, budgeting, financial management, project coordination and management, monitoring and evaluation.

The organisation should however, strive to reduce cost and enhance provision of infrastructure service; increase involvement of the private sector and public-private-partnerships in infrastructure development. Also, it should secure adequate funding for infrastructure projects - facilitate member states access to funds, secure foreign capital and expertise while focus on multimodal transportation systems to improve connectivity between member states will be an added advantage to the integration agenda.

With countries in the ECOWAS sub-region mainly engaged in the export of primary commodities, having a functional and efficient rail system can provide a more efficient means of transporting these goods within the region and can be comparatively cost effective. Investment in infrastructure, mainly in the transport sector, is highly likely to have a positive impact on trade that will in turn accelerate growth and development within the sub-region (Odularu 2009). Regional infrastructure development policies should be strategically mainstreamed into West Africa's regional integration plans so that infrastructure policies respond and adapt to the needs of regional integration policies and not the other way round. Further, regional integration and transportation policies should be systematically harmonised at national and regional levels. Infrastructure development policies should provide opportunities and alternatives to West African businesses and also promote the use of relevant institutions and tools (e.g. risk management instruments, ICT-based market information systems, et cetera.) that foster regional integration (Deen-Swarray et al, 2014).

Regional Security

According to Eze (2010; 7), security policy deals with the broad issues of the management of the multiple threats to the core and context-specific values in the international system. Although the sub-region has one of Africa's most sophisticated peace and security architectures (Obi 2009: 119), it still faces formidable intra-regional security challenges. Of note are the threats posed by the connections between the proliferation of SALW, violent conflict and the activities of transnational criminal networks operating in the region and peace, security and development in West Africa. Also, there is no gainsaying that internal politics, regional power-plays, and bad governance nurture the acute insecurity in West Africa (Musah, 2009).

According to its general objective established during its creation, it is obvious that the security role was not at all an explicit task for ECOWAS. This western REC ventured into the field of security out of a later realization that for regional economic cooperation, an atmosphere of peace and stability must pervade the area, and that unresolved disputes between member states could escalate into armed conflicts (Adeniji, 1999:33). Unlike other regional communities, which have developed their security mechanisms within the framework or under the influence of the African Union (AU) peace and security architecture, ECOWAS's efforts in this field predate AU initiatives. In the 1990s, it developed its own conflict prevention and management framework, inspired more than anything by the West

¹ See the Regional Integration Strategy Paper for West Africa 2011 – 2015, Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/PolicyDocuments/RISP%20for%20West%20Africa%20-%20REV%202.pdf>

African political context, its own security experiences and the particular nature of instability in the region (ICG, 2016).

West Africa's complex security challenges, according to Musah (2009), are a function of three broad factors. The first set incorporates the region's natural resource endowments, the vulnerabilities inherent in its geographical location, and environmental and demographic factors. The second source of insecurity relates to internal and international governance processes. Finally, regional and external geopolitics exert distinct pressures on the region's security architecture. However, the context for understanding ECOWAS's peace and security policy development process is the organization's mandate and overall institutional framework, especially for decision making. Three legal and institutional reform documents are central to understanding both: the 1999 revised ECOWAS treaty; the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping, and Security; and the 2006 institutional reform process (Ismail, 2015).

ECOWAS has been the most sought-after African regional economic body in the field of peace and security in the past 25 years. The organisation, itself composed of fragile states, has been forced to put out fires within its own member states (ICG, 2016). The proliferation of conflicts in the region is linked to foundational factors such as historical trajectories, colonisation by different European powers, geography and natural endowments or demography. As a result, most countries in the region remain fragile states with limited social cohesion, common sense of identity or shared development vision. Inequalities are growing, increasing the chance of conflicts around access to resources and land. These material conditions explain to a large extent the chronic instability of the region as well as the generally poor levels of governance across the region (Bossuyt, 2016).

However, ECOWAS has, over the past decade, formulated a series of working arrangements with training and research institutions working on peace and security issues in West Africa within and outside the region (Ismail, 2015). ECOWAS interacts and engages with the broader peace and security policy community through short-term research and policy development consultancies. A significant gain for ECOWAS has been a growing interest among scholars and practitioners in researching and analyzing the organization and its peace and security activities. Since the 1990s, ECOWAS peace and security has been emerging as a field or discipline of study with a growing body of literature, especially pertaining to ECOMOG peace operations, conflict mediation, and norm setting (ibid).

The adoption of the Mechanism Relating to the Protocol for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in 1999 set the tone for a structured approach to the peace and security initiatives of ECOWAS. The structures established by this Mechanism, including the Commission for Political Affairs Peace and Security, are at the forefront of the wider peace and security pursuits of ECOWAS. Additionally, the ideals of the supplementary protocol on Good Governance and Democracy seek to fill the governance deficits that threaten security and stability in the sub-region (Akwa, 2015). The comprehensive conflict prevention framework of ECOWAS adopted in 2008 continues to guide its conflict prevention initiatives. The framework uses the ECOWAS instruments of peace and security, legal, and operational frameworks to manage anticipated and ongoing conflict situations in the sub-region. Relevant structures have been created at the ECOWAS Commission including a conflict desk and an observation and monitoring unit (Akwa, 2015).

In response to the myriad of civil wars and internal conflicts that bedevilled a number of countries in the region in the 1980s and 1990s, the Organization set up a Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 (Ejime, 2011). Even so, these conflicts throughout the region caught the region and ECOWAS unprepared. In the role of a regional organization, ECOWAS had to respond to the conflicts, shifting its focus away from the original agenda of commerce and economic cooperation (Chambas, 2007). Since its creation, ECOMOG has intervened militarily in three sub-regional conflicts: first in Liberia, then Sierra Leone, and in Guinea-Bissau. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, especially, ECOMOG responded when no other body was willing and proved committed to remaining engaged. ECOMOG was outstanding in Africa, especially with its performance in West Africa. At no time, ever, has a regional or sub-regional economic organization executed peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions as ECOMOG. However, this is not without serious implications for consent, neutrality, impartiality and minimal force used only in self-defence, which have long been the defining aspects of peacekeeping. ECOMOG appears to have highlighted the debate on approaches to African security and conflict management. It has become Africa's flagship in peace-making, peacekeeping and peace enforcement.

How Cultural Diplomacy can Facilitate Regional Integration and Development in West Africa

Culture, which comprises one of the primary elements of preparation to life in society, plays a particular role in the development of social capital. Culture-related undertakings contribute to an increase in the intellectual potential of regions and the building of a conscious, open and tolerant citizen society. It should be emphasized that culture is a base for initiating cooperation and human communications, performing numerous education functions and thereby activating various layers of society. Culture also comprises a link of social integration, preventing exclusions and social pathologies. At the same time, culture helps to restore handicapped persons to social and occupational life (e.g. therapy through culture, but largely by changing the mentality and overcoming prejudices) (Tylus, 2015). It should be emphasized that the social capital of a state is also created by institutions and increased by their capacity to work together. The quantity and quality of these institutions impacts in part on the building of a society based on knowledge: creative, innovative, open to change, capable of educating permanent social and economic bonds.

There is therefore, an inextricable relationship between cultural diplomacy and national development especially in contemporary international system. Cultural Diplomacy argues that today, more than ever before, culture has a vital role to play in international relations. This stems from the wider, connective and human values that culture has: culture is both the means by which we come to understand others, and an aspect of life with innate worth that we enjoy and seek out. Cultural exchange gives us the chance to appreciate points of commonality and, where there are differences, to understand the motivations and humanity that underlie them. As identity politics exert an increasing influence on domestic and international exchanges, these attributes make culture a critical forum for negotiation and a medium of exchange in finding shared solutions (Bound, K. et al, 2007:11-12). Cultural diplomacy is generally regarded as just one of the components of public diplomacy. When better understood, however, it has the potential to become a much more powerful tool for improving a country's image and its relations with other countries.

The intrinsic connection between culture and development, according to Ngu² (2011) is demonstrated by the fact that no nation can truly make sustainable economic progress and technological advancement without taking into cognizance the peculiarity of its cultural environment.” Cultural contact provides a forum for unofficial political relationship-building: it keeps open negotiating channels with countries where political connections are in jeopardy, and helps to recalibrate relationships for changing times with emerging powers such as India and China. In the future, alliances are just as likely to be forged along lines of cultural understanding as they are on economic or geographic ones (Bound, K. et al, 2007:11-12).

At the present, culture is one of the most impotent factors of development (Tylus, 2015). It is however, contended that cultural and creative activities are not significant only for their economic implications. People have a right to participate in the cultural world, and this active participation is a necessary aspect of their human identity and dignity, with benefits accruing for the well-being and quality of life of societies at large. The implications of this creative revolution are being felt globally, and governments have the responsibility to address their emergent needs in order to promote and sustain the development of forward-looking and open societies. According to Tylus (2015) the role of culture in development should be treated as multi-layered: on the one hand as an intrinsic value, on secondly as a real factor of regional development leading to increased attractiveness of regions for tourists, residents and investors, thirdly, as an active factor of social development based on knowledge, tolerance and creativity. Culture also belongs to a fundamental reference point in relation to metropolitan functions and the significance of cities in spatial, economic and social arrangements.

Cultural diplomacy, which is the art of winning hearts and minds of others by attracting them through cultural activities and exchanges, provides the meeting point between culture and policy. It seeks to propagate a positive image towards a better mutual understanding. Cultural Diplomacy is the preferred alternative to the conventional Diplomacy with emphasis on military might, political leverage, and economic power. This is so because it encourages dialogue and value sharing. It is multi-dimensional, comprising public diplomacy, information management, and relationship building (Hagher, 2011). It is evident that cultural exchange also gives states a chance to appreciate points of commonality, and where there are differences, to understand the motivations that underline them. Deutsch (1968) lists several factors that deepen regional integration most of which reflect a heavy cultural flair. These are: mutual relevance of the units to one another; compatibility of values and some actual joint rewards; mutual responsiveness; and some degree of generalized common identity or loyalty.

The pursuit of the goal of integration in West Africa can be seen as a process which is at once legitimate and natural. It is abundantly justified by reasons that are both theoretical and practical. West Africa is indeed composed of regional ethno-linguistic settlement areas that political borders resulting from colonization came to divide up in an entirely artificially manner. In fact, West African people are historically integrated and it is the States which stem from the colonization that have set up barriers to this integration. Moreover, in a context of increased globalization, integration also remains a powerful means for economic and social development, especially for low-income countries (ECA-WA, 2015:14). The progress made in the regional integration process has been strongly hindered by political instability

² He said this at the 4th Session of the ECOWAS Ministers of Culture on 25th November 2011 in Abuja

and the conflicts that have peppered the most recent history of this region (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Togo, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea), which have had an obvious socioeconomic impact and led to the displacement of millions.

Since the formation of ECOWAS in 1975, the region has been faced with many changes, ranging from political to structural and administrative. One of these changes, the Revised Treaty of 1993, was put in place at integrating the Community into a stronger and more cohesive body capable of combating the numerous challenges from globalization. In particular, the revision introduced the harmonization of economic policies towards transforming the region to a common market. The Revised Treaty provided an impressive organizational framework by stating that the Community shall, by stages (phases) ensure in Article 2(a) the harmonization and co-ordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programmes, projects and activities.

ECOWAS member states in pursuance of its the Community cultural framework Agreed to: encourage the promotion, by every means possible, of all forms of cultural exchange; Promote, develop and, where necessary approve structures and mechanisms for the production, propagation and utilization of cultural industries; and promote the learning and dissemination of a West African language as a factor in community integration (Revised Treaty of the ECOWAS), Annex VII-2 Cotonou 1993, Article 62). ECOWAS cultural development programme approved by the Council of Ministers is designed to strengthen and develop exchange to promote creativity, cultural tourism development, free movement of cultural products, and to enable African artists to have greater access to the international art market. It is also designed to ensure that culture is taken into account in the regional integration process for development and to foster sense of belonging.

Concluding Remarks

It is established in this paper that culture-led development includes a range of non-monetized benefits, such as greater social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship for individuals and communities, and the use of local resources, skills, and knowledge. Respecting and supporting cultural expressions contribute to strengthening the social capital of a community and fosters trust in public institutions. Cultural factors also influence lifestyles, individual behaviour, consumption patterns, values related to environmental stewardship, and our interaction with the natural environment (UNESCO, 2012:4). According to Oni (2001) the performance of African in the emerging scenario would be a function of the ability and commitment of African leaders to mobilize the productive forces of the continent for development. This is because African and its people have through its music made positive impact on the manual sensibilities of the world. He states further that he who controls knowledge dominate the world, since the advance countries controls knowledge that flows to other countries of the world, they benefit more from globalization.

The region is facing major political and economic challenges. From a political point of view, the image of West Africa is one of a region where certain countries are going through a transition to democracy, which is still fragile, and others are emerging from crises or are in post-conflict situations, and where ongoing or latent conflicts are having an adverse effect on development and transnational crime is growing. From an economic point of view, the fragmented nature of the area, the lack of development infrastructure and the small-scale industrial base combined with a limited competitiveness are all factors hindering regional integration, economic growth and poverty reduction. The ongoing rise in energy and

agricultural commodities prices and climate change also constitute major long-term political and economic challenges (EC-WA, 2008:22).

ECOWAS has developed a number of strategy documents and action plans in recent years to correct its shortcomings, but must implement them fully to address myriad threats. These include the trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans; the proliferation of groups linked to transnational terrorist organisations; and the major regional challenges of poverty, unemployment and significant population growth. Special focus should also be on the implementation of the institutional reform proposed in 2013 that aimed to strengthen the organisation's capacity in the field of peace, security, stability and social and economic development.

There is no doubt that effective implementation of regional integration will need a collective and comprehensive programmatic approach by all the stakeholders involved. This should involve: a clear understanding of regional integration at national levels (the socio-economic benefits of regional integration), by all the stakeholders involved; the link between regional integration and national development, particularly how it links to growth sectors of countries; how the implementation of the activities are linked to the financial resources of the countries; and what implications this has on the national budget, among other areas (EEC, 2012:9).

Domestication of activities, decisions, and protocols of regional integration, will no doubt contribute ultimately to overall agenda of economic growth, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development (UNECA, 2012:15-16). However, this requires a strong commitment to link the agreed decisions at continental and regional levels into national development plans. A number of regional projects and programs, such as regional infrastructure development, are implemented with the support of development partners. With the mainstreaming process, member States will be able to take advantage of these regional projects to achieve their national development plans. Given the scarcity of human capital within member States, pursuing joint mainstreaming could, to some extent, assist in addressing the problem of limited resources as there will be no need to implement the programmes separately.

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