

Stronger Integration Ties between Cameroon and Nigeria than Cameroon and CEMAC Countries: Influence of Nigeria's Hegemonic Tentacles?

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Abstract: This study is set on the premise that Nigeria's hegemonic influence in the ECOWAS spills over creating stronger socioeconomic ties with neighbouring Cameroon than there is integration between the latter and other CEMAC member countries. The much talked of regional integration among CEMAC member countries has not been matched with concrete adequate steps towards establishing a strong regional bloc to address common political, security, economic and environmental stakes within the Central African sub-region. This paper seeks to assess the reasons and challenges for the weak regional integration amongst CEMAC member countries, how to surmount the challenges and build efficient integration. In the same vein, it probes into the reasons for stronger socioeconomic ties between Cameroon and Nigeria (non-member bloc countries) in order to evaluate the basis for this potency and draw lessons for efficacious integration within the CEMAC. To achieve this, the paper uses mainly secondary sources and interviews with key resource persons. The study posits that the absence of a regional hegemon (core state) within the CEMAC region impedes initiatives towards effective integration while fostering ties between Cameroon and Nigeria; thus the emergence of a regional hegemon with strong political will and economic base will propel the CEMAC integration.

Keywords: Regional integration, regional hegemon, hegemonic influence, CEMAC, socioeconomic development.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon and Nigeria have had closer and stronger political and socioeconomic ties dating back to pre-independence years than Cameroon and her eastern and southern neighbours despite their belonging to the same regional monetary and economic bloc. The reticence by Cameroon or another CEMAC member country to assume a leadership role for stronger regional integration within the Central African sub-region has weakened integration ties between Cameroon and other CEMAC countries on the one hand and created room for Nigeria, the ECOWAS regional hegemon, to wield strong socioeconomic ties with Cameroon. Due to Nigeria's economic prowess Cameroon transacts more with Nigeria economically than with the CEMAC, thus weakening regional integration of CEMAC countries. This absence of a regional hegemon within the CEMAC zone constitutes an impediment to its effective integration. Banlilon [1] posits that regional integration can be facilitated by the presence of a regional hegemon which is capable and willing to play a leadership role in propelling the scheme to success.

Regional integration became a major trend in international relations (IR) since the 1940s and has received much global recognition owing to the widespread acclaimed advantages of regionalism. It is generally seen as a panacea to the numerous security and development problems plaguing most regions. Regional integration is seen as a means by which neighbouring countries strengthen their economies by creating market integration through customs union and free trade areas; increased efforts in fighting border criminality and ensuring border security, amongst others [2, 1, 3]. Regional economic blocs account for a considerable amount of world trade [4]. There are a plethora of regional blocs the world over with diverse objectives, most of which aim at increasing economic integration and strengthening cooperation among member countries. The majority share common interests of Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) such as the EU, NAFTA, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, ECOWAS, amongst others.

This paper therefore seeks to analyse the nature and reasons for stronger integration ties between Nigeria and Cameroon and to draw lessons that can serve for a more efficacious integration within the CEMAC.

Conceptual framework

Some key concepts on which this paper hinges have been identified and attempts made at explaining them.

Regional integration

A cursory dictionary definition of integration is 'equal access for all in a process of opening a group, community, place or organisation to all; regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender or social class. Integration can also be defined as the process of accepting a member into a group or community. Regional integration can thus be defined as a process in which neighbouring states within a geographic region enter into an agreement to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules for economic, political and environmental objectives. This agreement could include commercial interests for achieving broader socio-political and security objectives as defined by the national governments. Kevin Wandrei¹ sees regional integration as the various types of political and economic agreements that form closer ties between sovereign countries. According to him it goes beyond trade agreements and treaties among member countries to sacrificing part of their sovereignty to a higher entity. A typical example is EU which has gone beyond an economic union into a new political body with each member state sacrificing certain powers such as the right to mint currency. McCormick [5] sees integration as a process which starts from economic integration and culminates in political integration.

Regional integration deals with an agreement for enhancing cooperation through regional rules and institutions entered into by states of the same region. The objectives are generally varied but hinge on political, economic, border security and commercial purposes, under the auspices of an intergovernmental or supranational organisation. The IDA [6] sees regional integration as a vital way to ensure the creation of infrastructure such as trade corridors, transport network, energy development, water resource management and telecommunications connectivity that poor countries need but are unable to build on their own. IDA holds that effective collaboration among countries can meet the critical gaps in basic access and service delivery that promote growth and development. The benefits of synergy through regional integration and collaboration are therefore seen as a means for African countries, especially the landlocked countries, to overcome their most pressing obstacles to development.

Regional Hegemon

The use of the nomenclature 'hegemon' is derived from international relations, where hegemony is considered to embody both coercion and consent. The concept of hegemony fathered by Antonio Gramsci holds that 'man is not ruled by force alone but also by ideas' [7] and that any fully hegemonic state must be both liberal and democratic [8, 9]. The concept has been widely used in IR with varied interpretations thus a caveat is necessary here. This write-up does not delve into this concept in the strict perspective of IR but borrows some basic definitions to better understand and explain the role played by a regional hegemon in fostering integration. The hegemon has the power to forcefully assert its dominance yet at the same time create alliances, ideas and institutions that attract the free participation of other states and peoples. The notion of a hegemon in this write-up does not focus on the exertion of offensive political control or authority of one country with domineering political, military and/or economic power over another. It hinges on the positive dominant political, economic and social influence exerted by one country in an economic union over the other members of the union in tackling the challenges that forestall integration initiatives, and in assisting in the furtherance of integration within the union. The use of the concept of a regional hegemon in this work is based on the Hegemonic State Theory (HST) propounded by Charles P. Kindleberger [10] that considers a regional hegemon as an independently powerful nation that exercises influence over neighbouring states—its sphere of influence—to maintain stability. A regional hegemon develops a sphere of influence over the states which relate with the hegemon and depend on it to provide leadership. To John Mearsheimer [11] cited in Banlilon [1], the anarchical nature of the international system, the desire for survival and the ability to be sure of the intentions of other states ultimately lead states to pursue regional hegemons.

The HST is guided by the realist, liberal and historical structuralist paradigms. The realist dimension explains the hegemon's ability to pursue its interests first and its ability to use coercion to pull other states to align, while the liberal dimension expounds the benevolent and philanthropic attributes possessed by the hegemon in exerting its influence. The structuralist dimension explains the patterns and significance of the interrelations between states. The theory posits that relative stability, peace, growth and development are the probable outcomes of the influence exerted by a regional hegemon that possesses not only a huge amount of resources but the necessary political will and ability to provide leadership towards effective integration and development of the region. This is glaringly evident for most economic communities. In the case of the ECOWAS Nigeria has played the role of a regional hegemon over the sub-region and with a spill over towards neighbouring Cameroon, especially in the economic domain.

¹ <http://peopleof.oureverydaylife.com/advantages-regional-integration-9904.html>, accessed 13/11/15

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Much of the data for the study was gotten from qualitative data surveys and secondary sources however; fieldwork generated a reasonable amount of data. Numeric data was collected from the Ministry of Commerce (Cameroon), the Nigerian Union in Cameroon and other relevant institutions. Interviews and review of records and reports were the main tools for data collection from these institutions. The charters and policies of the CEMAC institutions were reviewed for the definition of their missions in forging regional integration and examined for inconsistencies and lapses. Secondary data on other economic communities was also invaluable in assessing the role played by a regional hegemon in furthering regional integration. The data used for analysis was predominantly qualitative.

FINDINGS

Challenges and reasons for the weak regional integration amongst CEMAC member countries

A plethora of reasons can be advanced for the weak regional integration within the CEMAC that has given precedence to Nigeria's hegemonic tentacles over neighbouring Cameroon, a giant and prospective hegemon in the CEMAC.

Absence of a regional hegemon (core state) within the CEMAC region

The Hegemonic State Theory posits that regional integration is better developed and heightened by the presence of a core state or regional hegemon. This hypothesis has been widely supported [12, 1, 5] judging from other integration schemes like the European Union (EU) with Germany; the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) with Nigeria; and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) with South Africa. The absence of a regional hegemon in the CEMAC explains in the main the slow progress of its integration. None of its member countries has yet posed as a real hegemon, despite Cameroon's demographic prowess, Chad's military might or the current economic progress of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Disagreements on leadership role among member countries in an economic union slow down integration schemes. Efforts by the Southern African Development and Co-ordination Council to counter South Africa's dominance in the region in the 1980s forestalled the integration scheme of the southern African region, until 1991 when South Africa joined the council. This is corroborated by Mbuli [12] who holds that within the CEMAC region, the long but silent leadership tussle between late Omar Bongo of Gabon and Paul Biya of Cameroon from 1982 to 2009 complicated the leadership situation in the CEMAC region. He further asserts that the accession of President Biya to power over a more demographically and economically powerful nation posed as a threat to Bongo, a longer serving president, who saw himself as the next leader of the region after President Ahmadou Ahidjo. This precluded the rise of a CEMAC regional hegemon and slowed down the integration efforts.

Drawing from the HST, for a nation-state to rise to hegemony it must possess four critical attributes: i) political strength, military force and superior national power; ii) unrivalled economic supremacy; iii) the will to lead and to establish a hegemonic regime; and iv) commitment to the system. Basing on this, the emergence of such a hegemon within the CEMAC is in the distant future as no single country possesses all these qualities. Chad and Gabon are currently portraying more dynamism in forging their countries and the central African region further ahead than Cameroon that possesses more resources. The absence of a hegemon within the CEMAC with such political strength that is necessary to forge new international laws and organisations; a large and growing economy with economic supremacy; the will to lead and the capability to enforce the rules of the system amply justifies the weak integration. This vacuum has thus been filled by Nigeria, portrayed by her unrivalled economic supremacy over Cameroon.

Strong theoretical but weak practical integration

CEMAC member countries exert different degrees of political, economic, security and commercial influence within the sub region. Cameroon and Gabon are the leading countries in the banking sector accounting for 65% of total regional banking assets in 2008 representing 23.9% and 41.1% respectively [13]. Since 2010, Gabon has been playing a more central diplomatic role of mediation in the CEMAC region and further afield in West Africa while Chad and Cameroon have played key roles in the fight against border insecurity.

The free circulation of goods and people within CEMAC member countries is more of a slogan than reality. The closing of borders, police harassments and intimidation of foreigners with xenophobic colourations are commonplace especially in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea which deprive the citizens of other CEMAC member countries from free mobility within these two countries. In addition it enhances corruption and malpractices in a bid to avoid the harassments and intimidation. Citizens of the CEMAC countries do not travel; live and work freely in any member country of the CEMAC as is the case of the EU. The deportation of foreigners from Equatorial Guinea was rife in 2004 with over a thousand Cameroonians were deported [14] and over 3,000 from Gabon [15]. Guinean foreign affairs pundits in 2011

held that the major problem along the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea border is clandestine and illegal migration, a contradiction to the much acclaimed free circulation. Despite the efforts by the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea Ad hoc Commission on Consular and Trans-border issues, visas and resident permits still constitute documents that are sine qua non for non-diplomatic movements of CEMAC citizens between these countries. This clearly indicates that free circulation of people within the CEMAC is far from practical. Many Joint Commissions have been held between different and among CEMAC member countries with corporation agreements on border security, diplomatic ties, education, professional training, agriculture, construction and public works which are still to be translated into concrete actions. On the other hand, movements are more fluid between Nigeria and Cameroon.

A predominant feature typifying the CEMAC integration scheme is weak collaboration between member countries in the fight against economic ills at national and regional levels. Theoretically, there exist agreements for removal of trade barriers (tariffs, quotas and border restrictions² among CEMAC member countries but the practical realities on ground are quite the opposite. The circulation of people and goods especially between Equatorial Guinea and the citizens from other CEMAC member countries notably Cameroon is a farce. Judging from the number of Nigerian citizens residing in Cameroon and the volume of trade between these two countries (Table-2) and the absence of data on CEMAC citizens residing in Cameroon, it can be observed that there is a stronger integration between Cameroon and Nigeria, thanks to neighbourliness than to regionalism. Drawing from McCormick's integration scale (Figure-1), the level of economic integration between the CEMAC member countries is very weak.

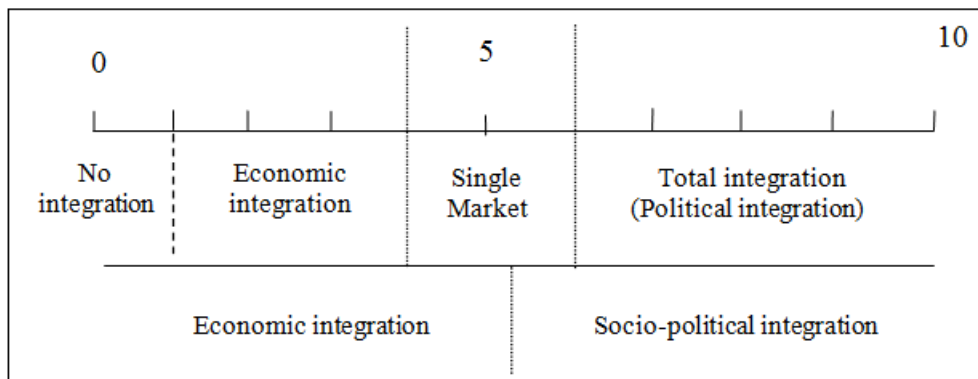


Fig-1: Integration scale

Source: McCormick, J, *The European Union: Politics and Policies*. Westview Press: Boulder Colorado, 1999

The rating of economic integration of the CEMAC can be placed at best at 1, judging from the low volume of trade amongst member countries and theoretical free circulation of people. CEMAC was formed from UDEAC³, itself formed from the ashes of UDE⁴, both defunct customs unions. The reverse trend seems to have been the case. McCormick [5] holds that integration begins from economic integration, progresses into a single market which depicts a state of customs union and culminates in political integration. This is compatible with GATT stipulations on Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) to promote trade liberalisation both within and without regional blocs. None of these is effective in the case of the CEMAC (Table-1). The financial system across most CEMAC countries is weak and poorly developed where most banks are foreign-owned or subsidiaries of foreign banks.

² CEMAC, *Traité Constitutif*, 16 mars 1994 www.Droit-Afrique.com;

³ Union Douanière et Économique de l'Afrique Centrale created on 8th December 1964 in Brazzaville which became CEMAC by a treaty signed on 16th March 1994 in N'djamena

⁴ Union Douanière Équatoriale created in June 1959

Table-1: Nature and ratings on level of integration

Type of integration	Nature of integration	Ratings on level of integration*	Integration status within the CEMAC
Economic	Removal of trade barriers between member countries	1- 4	Theoretical
Custom union (single market)	Common external tariff on other countries	5	Not practical
Currency union	Common currency and monetary policy regulated by a single central bank	6	Practical
Social	Common social policy on education, health care, unemployment benefits and pensions	7-8	Inexistent
Political	Common political institutions, foreign policies and merged army	9-10	Inexistent

* Derived from Figure 1 above

Institutions and organs with overlapping functions

According to the revised 1994 CEMAC treaty there are 5 institutions and 8 organs. However, in reality there exists a plethora of economic, monetary, military and political institutions and organs within the CEMAC. Most of these institutions are either created at best simply for political reasons or to handle emergency situations, and worst are simulated in a trendy manner to conform to the global world trend of regionalism; with little or no reflection on continuity and sustainability. This appears to be a phenomenon that typifies Africa especially, French-speaking Africa [16, 17] which explains the high degree of ineffectiveness. Most of these institutions are plagued by weak governance and feeble performance which hamper regional integration and growth. Non-payment of membership fees by the member countries is one of the major reasons for the poor functioning of these regional institutions and low level of integration. The CEMAC region is apparently plagued by an institutional approach rather than a functional approach to regional integration. The basis for the creation and/or superseding of institutions and organs is quite questionable. The frequent replacement of one institution or organ by another puts to question the initial motives or *raison d'être* for the creation of CEMAC—whether it was done in order to be fashionable, imitating other regions or in order to move the political, economic and social development of member countries forward.

There is need for restructuring to improve the union but such cannot be done through piecemeal changes. Drawing from the example of the ECOWAS, it was created in 1975 and was restructured 18 years after its creation due to the necessity to cumulate regional diplomatic, political and security functions with the economic and trade functions. Its security, economic and trade functions spill over to neighbouring countries. On the contrary, CEMAC, an off shoot of UDEAC which failed to attain the main objectives of liberalising trade among members and harmonising investment and industrial policies, is still to attain its objective of effective integration of member countries more than two decades after its creation. Drawing from Ndi *et al.*, [16], the creation and existence of a plethora of institutions which by right have to provide services, coordinate or directly supervise the functions of different actors with related and overlapping roles is a potential of conflict, inertia and inefficiency. The overlapping of functions constitutes in itself a seed of failure. Such overlaps and conflict of action will greatly increase disinterest, unaccountability and inefficiency. For example, the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), the Defence and Security Commission (CDC), the Multinational Force for Central Africa (FOMAC) and the Early Warning Mechanism of Central Africa (MARAC) have the same objectives or domain of activity. All these could be arms of a single institution for defence and security. The multiplicity of CEMAC institutions and missions equally dissipate scarce financial resources that could be channelled to fostering proper regional integration since this increases the setting up and running costs of these institutions. This is worsened by the delays in payment and/or non-payment of membership fees by the member states. For example, ECCAS was established on 18 October 1983 but remained inactive till 1985 when it began functioning due to financial difficulties. Another dimension of inefficiency can be measured based on the frequent superseding of one inefficient institution or organ by another, a common attribute of most defunct Cameroonian institutions, without properly assessing the causes of failure. MICOPAX⁵ was a mission of FOMAC that went operational on 12 July 2008 for peace keeping in Central African Republic superseded 'Force multinational en Centrafrique' (FOMUC) that was created on 2 October 2002. On 15 December 2013 MICOPAX was replaced by MISCA.

The inefficiencies of this elaborate fleet of existing institutions in executing their functions can be seen from the recurrence of pockets of conflicts within CEMAC member countries notably CAR, north Cameroon and South Chad.

⁵ Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (MICOPAX) composed of 2694 soldiers and police officers

Evaluating the causes of inefficiencies or failures of these organs/institutions would be a better option towards establishing more efficient institutions and organisations towards effective regional integration within the Central African sub-region. Does CEMAC need to rethink its objectives and the conception of its institutions towards laying a better foundation for a new and effective take off of regional integration within the Central African sub-region? For proper control, smooth functioning and crosschecking, there is need to limit the number of institutions to those which will serve as coordinating bodies and all the others merged and placed as departments under the coordinating bodies.

Reasons for stronger socioeconomic ties between Cameroon and Nigeria

Longstanding historical ties between Cameroon and Nigeria

Documented historical ties between Cameroon and Nigeria date back as far as 1919 after Anglo-French forces invaded the German colony. Then, one-fifth of the Cameroonian territory, which was contiguous with eastern Nigeria, became the British-administered UN trusteeship. Both Northern and Southern Cameroons were administered as part of the Nigerian Federation under British rule from 1945-1960. This was followed by the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons that masterminded the administrative affairs of the two entities during the 1950s. During this period both the Nigerian and Anglophone Cameroon state corporations and civil service employed labour force from both entities. With the accession to independence both nations were administered independently, though with some changes, however the historical ties were maintained. The post-reunification government embarked on the 'Cameroonisation' of labour force notably in the CDC and the civil service and restrictions in the activities of Nigerians in certain lucrative trading undertakings. Nigerians were proscribed from being middlemen in cocoa trade, from wholesale of palm oil and from operating inter-urban taxis [18].

These ties were further intensified on the diplomatic front after independence with the installation of the Nigerian General Consul in Buea in 1962. Upon its installation, the Nigerian 'Tribal Unions' which existed prior to 1962 with a more restrictive and ethnic character were rechristened the 'Nigerian Union in Cameroon' (NUC) which became more inclusive. The NUC is recognised by the Cameroon government and the Nigerian Consular office in Buea. It works in close collaboration with Cameroonian authorities through the Consular Office and the Nigerian embassy in Yaounde. As such, the interests of Nigerian migrants are legally managed and protected, both individually and collectively. The NUC, a constitutionally organised body, has been very influential in the integration efforts of Nigerian migrants in Cameroon by protecting and promoting their interests. It is a strong legal lobby group in negotiating the obtainment of consular cards, immigration travel certificate amongst other documents for Nigerian migrants. It equally serves in educating Nigerians on the respect of Cameroonian laws and living peacefully in their host country.

NUC is presently represented in all the major and medium-sized towns of Cameroon (Table-2) and elsewhere such as the USA, Europe, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal, amongst others.

Table-2: Demographic strength of the Nigerian Union in Centre Region, Cameroon

Towns in Centre Region	Number of registered members	Towns in East and South Regions	Number of registered members
Yaounde	53 000	Ebolowa	437
Mbalmayo	350	Sangmelima	420
Mbandjock	24	Kye-Ossi	180
Nanga Eboko	12	Bertoua	500
Bafia	165	Abongbang	23
Obala	92	TOTAL	1 560
Monatale	12	* Number of migrants in towns in the East and South Regions of Cameroon attend annual NU meetings in Yaounde with migrants from towns in the Centre Region, once every year. Figures represent only registered migrants, thus there are many more migrants than are officially registered. Source: Nigerian Union in Cameroon (NUC), Yaounde Branch, September 2017	
Ayos	54		
Akonolinga	47		
Ntui	19		
Soa	17		
Sa'a	27		
Ngoumou	11		
Mbankomo	09		
Ombessa	08		
Awae	25		
TOTAL	53 872		

On the commercial front, Nigerians have developed a niche in trade especially in Anglophone Cameroon where they have occupied a dominant position in the merchandise trade, automobile spare parts and fishing. Over time, Nigerians have extended their business tentacles to all regions of Cameroon. The flow of goods and labour between Nigeria and Cameroon has increased over the years even after the introduction of an international boundary between the two. This increase is equally witnessed in the demographic realm because of the favourable bilateral relations and exchange rates, the absence of efficient border controls and the complicity of customs officers and other state authorities [19] and thriving formal and informal cross-border trading activities [20].

Despite the growing trend, Cameroon-Nigeria business ties are however plagued by unofficial trade and absence of valid data (cf. Insert 1)⁶. According to the IBRD/WB [21], official statistics on trade between Cameroon and Nigeria are largely inconsistent and are at best estimates. Non-oil flows from Nigeria to Cameroon are estimated somewhere between USD 1 and 10 million, while non-oil flows from Cameroon to Nigeria are estimated at between 10 and 30 million over the last couple of years, representing only about 1.5 percent of Cameroonian and 0.4 percent of Nigerian non-oil exports⁷.

Insert 1

The economic relationship between Cameroon and Nigeria is a very cordial one. Nigeria and Cameroon have a long history of economic ties. It is estimated that 90% of the over three million of Nigeria's population in Cameroon own and run SMEs, contributing significantly to Cameroon's GDP. The trade relations have deepened following the opening of a cement factory in Cameroon by Nigerian multi-billionaire and Africa's richest man Ahlaji Aliko Dangote. According to the World Bank, Nigeria supplies 38% of Cameroon's imports, 16% more than France but these prosperous ties are hampered by the absence of statistical information. There is no formal trade agreement between Nigeria and Cameroon. It is informal because we do not have definite figures that define the trade relationship between both countries.

Nigeria Consul General to Cameroon Mohammed Akan

Nigeria: a bi-regional hegemon?

Nigeria has played a dominant role in forging the success of ECOWAS on the economic, security and stability planes. There is no doubt that this hegemonic role coupled with her demographic, economic and commercial prowess gives Nigeria a larger sphere of influence beyond the ECOWAS. Her hegemonic tentacles are felt in most parts of Africa, especially in neighbouring Cameroon. ECOWAS member states have recorded better macroeconomic performances since 2005, attaining average growth rates of more than 5% and have been considered among the most dynamic growth zones in the world with high quality macroeconomic management [3]. The spill over is very evident in Cameroon judging from the official records of the number of Nigerian migrants and Nigerian businesses in Cameroon (Table-2), the predominant consumption of products from Nigeria by Cameroonians.

Nigerian strategy for business establishment of 'master-servant-settlement'⁸ explains the high success rate among Nigerian business men and Nigeria's economic and commercial supremacy. This strategy is common practice among Nigerian businesses which guarantees the setting up of successful and sustainable business establishments as the sales boy learns practical business skills and procures the indispensable take-off capital.

Stronger commercial and investment connections with Nigeria and Cameroon

Cameroon's leading trade partners for exports include Spain, Italy, France, Netherlands and the United States while the main partners for imports are France, Nigeria, the United States, Germany, Japan and recently China. From official data on Cameroon's trading partners, none of the CEMAC member countries is a major trade partner of Cameroon. However, much unrecorded trade especially of foodstuff goes on between Cameroon and Gabon, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea that depend on Cameroon for foodstuff as plantains, cocoyam, vegetables and fruits.

The volume of trade and the numerical strength of Nigerian businesspersons based in Cameroon depict the remarkable importance of trade between Cameroon and Nigeria. Mainly manufactured products such as automobile spare

⁶ Trade relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon needs to be formalized <http://www.gsmenetwork.com/index.php/middle-east-africa/news/item/1209-trade-relationship-between-nigeria-and-cameroon-needs-to-be-formalised#>

⁷ IBRD/WB (2013) Estimating Trade Flows, Describing Trade Relationships, and Identifying Barriers to Cross-Border Trade between Cameroon and Nigeria, CM-Cross-Border Trade Between Nigeria and CEMAC Countries, Report No: 78283 and ACS2876

⁸ A sales boy serves his master for a number of years after which he is paid off (settled) and he starts off his own business.

parts, consumables, etc. imported from Europe are re-imported into Cameroon through Nigerian businesspersons. The port of Garoua, though open only for two to three months a year, handles most of the trade with Nigeria and the northern part of Cameroon. In the south, the ports of Limbe and Tiko handle much freight and passenger transport from Nigeria, besides transport via Ekok-Mamfe.

More recently, the financial and manufacturing landscapes of Cameroon is witnessing outsourcing of major Nigerian-based and West African-based banks and manufacturing industries into Cameroon. A number of financial institutions outsourced into Cameroon notably ECOBANK in 2001, United Bank for Africa-UBA in December 2007, Oceanic Bank in May 2009 are dominant financial service providers in Cameroon. Oceanic Bank acquired majority shares and became a core investor in Union Bank of Cameroon. The Dangote Cement Company for cement manufacturing located in Cameroon since May 2014. Most of these Nigerian based banks, for example UBA have representative offices in the CEMAC region notably in Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo and Gabon. The effect of this, among others, has been a drop to 2.6% in the growth of financial services within the CEMAC down from the 4.1% [22].

Nigeria has an extremely large diaspora in Cameroon. According to the Nigerian High Commissioner to Cameroon, Hadiza Mustapha, there were over 4 million Nigerians in Cameroon in 2013⁹ scattered in all the major and medium-sized cities of Cameroon, most of who are business persons. Besides running thriving businesses in Cameroon, many Nigerians are also involved in agriculture, fish farming and harvesting especially in the coastal areas like Limbe, Idenau, the Bakassi Peninsula and Mouanko where about 67% of the population are Nigerians [23].

All CEMAC member countries in recent years have developed closer and stronger trade links with other non-CEMAC member countries than among themselves. Gabon, for instance, has diversified her trade and foreign investment partners from France, her traditional partner to Morocco (2009), Spain (since 2006), China and Russia since 2010 [13]. Cameroon for example has diversified from France towards China as her main business and investment partner in recent years. The scenario is the same for all the other CEMAC countries (Table-3).

Table-3: Main trading partners of CEMAC member countries

Country	Main export partners	Main import partners
Cameroon	China 16.7%; India 15.7%; Spain 6.2%; Belgium 6.1%; France 6.1%; Portugal 5.6%; Netherlands 5%; Italy 5%	China 27.9%; Nigeria 13.9%; France 10.9%; Belgium 4.1%
Gabon	China 13.7%; Hong Kong 11.3%; South Africa 8.6%; Indonesia 7.1%; Canada 6.2%	France 21.8%; Cameroon 16.2%; Belgium 10.1%; China 9.6%; United States 5.5%; Netherlands 5.1%
Chad	United States 58.5%; India 13.3%; Japan 11.3%; China 4.1%	France 16.5%; China 14.2%; Cameroon 11%; United States 6.4%; India 6%; Belgium 5.7%; Italy 4.8%
Equatorial Guinea	France 20.1%; China 15.1%; United States 12.6%; Spain 11.3%; Netherlands 8.3%; Belgium 6.4%; India 5.2%	Spain 18.8%; China 16.5%; United States 11.1%; France 8.6%; Cameroon 7.1%; Italy 6.2%; Brazil 4.8%
Republic of Congo	China 38.9%; United States 12.9%; France 9.5%; Australia 8.8%; Netherlands 6.8%; Spain 5.3%; India 5.3%	France 19.2%; China 13.3%; Brazil 9.0%; United States 6.1%; India 5.7%; Italy 4.8%; Belgium 4.3%
Central African Republic	Belgium 31.5%; China 27.7%; DR Congo 8.6%; Indonesia 5.2%; France 4.5%	Netherlands 19.5%; Cameroon 9.7%; France 9.3%; South Korea 8.7%

Source: CIA Fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

There is little or no official trading among CEMAC member countries. Much trade especially in imports between Cameroon and Nigeria or other CEMAC countries is not recorded officially.

⁹ [http://irokoheritage.com/2013/09/16/Cameroon/Nigerian-The-resident-permit “wahala” that will not go away](http://irokoheritage.com/2013/09/16/Cameroon/Nigerian-The-resident-permit-“wahala”-that-will-not-go-away), accessed 05/11/2015

Lessons for efficacious integration within the CEMAC

Migrant unions and regional integration

Nigerian Union is a phenomenon that characterises the Nigerian Diaspora in Cameroon and other Nigerian migrant communities. The Nigerian migrant community in Cameroon has developed strong ethnic networks, solidarity and mutual support which have served as endogenous survival strategies both for establishing and sustaining business establishments and for social integration. The NUC, with a more national character than the former *Tribal Union* and *Igbo Union* of the 1950s, displayed a large measure of flexibility and dynamism in helping Nigerian migrants cope with the changes in the political and economic landscape of Cameroon in the 1960s. The NUC has been very influential in the integration efforts of Nigerian migrants in Cameroon by protecting and promoting their interests as a strong legal lobby group in negotiating the terms for the obtainment of legal documents for Nigerian migrants. It equally serves in educating Nigerians on the respect of Cameroonian laws and living peacefully in their host country. The NUC serves as a good lesson for the CEMAC member countries to emulate in fostering integration of their citizens within the various member countries. The founding of migrant unions of the different CEMAC member countries will serve as a medium for close collaboration between migrants and host governments and a strong lobby group for migrant interests. Migrant unions will help to identify and register migrants, check malpractices and illegal residence of migrants; help the host government in monitoring tax collection from business establishments set up by migrants and provide a legal instrument to facilitate the issuance of immigration papers.

Few but strong institutions and concerted planning

One of the major features that weakens the effectiveness and influence of CEMAC is the plethora of institutions with overlapping functions. This multiplicity triggers conflict of competences and unaccomplished functions, increased budgetary expenditures, more ineffectiveness, etc. There is need to reduce the number of institutions to a few coordinating bodies representing the member countries whose roles are clearly defined to avoid overlapping and ensure effectiveness. Life and relationship are organic phenomena that best exist and function naturally, and are stifled when institutionalised. The institutionalisation of relationship between countries is inevitable for its smooth functioning however; this process carries in it the very seeds of its demise because institutions are not organic while life and relationship are organic. The relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon could be likened to life forms while that between the CEMAC countries is institutional; hence its take-off, existence and growth have been quite problematic.

In addition, the dichotomy in the economic visions and aspirations of member countries regarding their respective dates of economic emergence (e.g. 2020 for Chad and Gabon; 2035 for Cameroon) contrasts with CEMAC agenda for economic emergence by 2025. This indicates the absence of coordinated and concerted thinking, planning and action within the CEMAC. This has not only marked a failure by CEMAC to attain its visionary objectives of integration but has equally created an economic vacuum that favoured the 'bi-hegemon' Nigeria, to exert its economic hegemony over Cameroon.

Way forward

What qualifies a nation to become a regional hegemon? Cameroon is the largest economy within the CEMAC. By virtue of her demographic, economic and financial prowess, she could emerge as the CEMAC regional hegemon, however, there is more to being such a core state than Cameroon is able to provide at the moment. Other CEMAC countries like Chad and Gabon display more military and diplomatic dynamism respectively while Equatorial Guinea is forging its economy ahead. The economic performance of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon in the last decade could indicate a shift in the power structure within the CEMAC zone. The demographic strength of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea is far less important than that of Cameroon but their economic performance is better than Cameroon based on their economic growth rates and their purchasing power parity in the last five years. None of these nations possesses all the four qualities of a hegemon; therefore basing the HST attaining a strong and efficacious integration within the CEMAC seems far-fetched. There is need for a concerted driving policy force agreed upon by all member countries to forge the bloc ahead. This could constitute mutual agreement on which country should act as a core-state with the goal of propelling the bloc and the other member states act as aficionados.

In addition, migrants from CEMAC member countries need to emulate the example of civil societies like the NUC and the lobbying power of these societies should be recognised and fostered for the integration of migrants from member countries. Such institutions do not only help migrants to settle but equally serve as a support arm to guarantee the respect the laws of the host nation by migrants.

CONCLUSION

Etymologically, the word hegemony means authority or political supremacy. This traditional perception of the word in itself forestalls efforts towards regional integration, at least within the CEMAC. Viewed and interpreted as such, no independent state would consciously concede to any form of supremacy by another state. As a result, for there to be

any meaningful regional integration, member countries would need to perceive a regional hegemon more objectively as a propellant to forge the union ahead and not as a regional “*supreme authority lording it over them*” and manipulating the value systems and mores of the union; besides the customary agreements for integration. Within the CEMAC, whichever state therefore emerges as the regional hegemon should be capable of providing leadership and the driving force towards strengthening member countries economically, socio-politically, security-wise and probably militarily. The emergence of such a hegemon must be by concerted agreement or by self-appointment reflected in outstanding economic and socio-political prowess or dominance of the hegemon rather than just demographic strength. The latter is the case of Nigeria within the ECOWAS, Germany within the European Union, among many others.

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