

Economic Diplomacy and Leadership in Africa: The Impact of Conflict and Conflict Resolution

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ABSTRACT

This paper appraised the existence of conflict and the importance of conflict resolution for a sound and healthy economic diplomacy and leadership in the Sahel region of Africa. Recently, this region has been affected by high conflict and poverty. In this region of Africa, many have lived in displacement as a result of a continuous conflict (internal and organizational conflict) that cut across all the countries that make up the Sahel region. The region comprises countries that occupy the areas stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to eastward Senegal all through to Sudan. These countries are Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan. From the data available, the level of conflict violence in this region is unprecedented, which has affected the bilateral relations this region has with other nations of the world. The current challenges of the Sahel region require holistic and strategic long-term solutions. Providing protection and humanitarian aid to those affected in the conflict areas of the region must remain a priority but not the ultimate solution; this will save many lives and prevent the vulnerable states from collapsing further. Also, efforts to confront corruption and promote good leadership are an important goal for all, and efforts must be made to address the region's long-term underlying problems, such as climate change, food shortage, and bad leadership. Without that, all effort will be in vain.

Keywords: conflict, conflict resolution, Sahel Africa, economic diplomacy, leadership, Africa, West

INTRODUCTION

Intense economic diplomacy among African countries without conflict is crucial to strengthening African economies, poverty alleviation, and giving Africa a comparative advantage in the globalization era (Kumar, Kumar & Thenmozhi, 2019). United Nations (2020), navigating the global market has not been easy, with evidence of a decline in the African economy's share of the world trade export.

Dominantly, the key players of African economic relations in the pre- and post-independence eras have been the UK, US, France, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and lately, the people's republic of China (Sino-African relations). China is changing the Global Aid architecture, especially in Africa, using soft power and generous financial packages (Degele & Seshagiri, 2019).

Most often, it's being emphasized the relevance of diplomatic relations (Regional integration and Bilateral diplomacy) in trade and commerce facilitation (Akindele, 2023). Hence, it is argued that economic diplomatic relationships between counties are the substantial determinants of bilateral diplomacy and trade among countries. While, also conversely, conflict can flaw the gain of these economic diplomatic relationships and harm trades and commerce flow between countries.

With a deep thought, it cannot overemphasize the colonial factor in conflict and conflict resolution in Africa. According to Fonkom (2013), colonial factors are the root of any

African conflicts. The colonial masters and their institutions were indicted in their style of conflict management and resolution by maintaining colonial-style approaches to African conflict, which has failed in addressing the fundamental issues that have divided the parties in the African conflict, knowing fully well that African conflict (pre- and post-colonial) is concealed and rooted in Africa both in the colonization and decolonization era (Akindele, 2023). Subscribing to this view is Cohen (1995), who considered the numerous conflicts in Africa as a natural consequence of Africa's colonial past.

However, scholars like (Anyang'Nyongo 1991, Msabaha 1991, and Obasanjo, as cited in Fonkem 2013), submitted that African conflict is primarily from crises of the leadership of national governance and the failure of governmental institutions to mediate conflict resolution effectively when it broke out or started. Over 120 single sectoral multi-national and economic cooperation organizations were established among the African states to promote social and economic relations (Adedeji, 2002). Of course, the economic relationship goes beyond trade and commerce most times, but also in conflict resolution (Zunes & Jacob, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Significantly, most conflicts in Africa are significantly internal and not inter-state conflicts, with most having transnational elements. The Sahel region of Africa is one of the regions in the world that is so prone to conflicts. The region has been damaged by conflict for decades, causing immeasurable human suffering and poverty and imposing high economic costs on the region (Xiangming, Siddharth, Cameron & Mustafa, 2020). Hence, there appears to be literature on diplomacy in Africa and conflicts literature in recent years. Consequently, minimal work has been done in the area of economic diplomatic relations, conflict and conflict resolution in Africa, and, more importantly, the Sahel region of Africa, which has a high incidence of conflict and poverty in recent times. On this premise, this paper will focus on the existing economic diplomatic relationships in Africa with a focus on the Sahel region; it will also appraise the importance of conflict resolution for a sound and healthy economic diplomacy in region economies under study.

Objectives of the Paper

The main objective of this paper is to assess the existing economic diplomatic relation and the importance of conflict resolution in Africa, with a primary focus on the Sahel region.

The Scope

The scope of the paper is limited to the Sahel region of Africa. The Sahel region is made up of countries that occupy the areas stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to eastward Senegal all through to Sudan. These countries are namely, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan. Also, it will cover the period from the 1980s to the 2000s.

Significance of the Paper

This paper will contribute to the existing literature by focusing on the diplomatic relations in Sahel Africa with importance to conflict resolution. The existing literature on economic diplomacy in Africa and conflicts literature in recent years is very limited, with few works available on the issue, particularly as it relates to the Sahel region of Africa, which, in the general view, is one of the most regions of the world affected with a high degree of conflict and poverty. This is the gap identified, and this paper is to focus, work on this gap, and afterward, make meaningful recommendations for governments, policymakers,

governmental agencies, international communities and as well as a helpful reference point for further research purposes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This session of the paper will consist of the literature to be reviewed in the course of the paper and which will consist of two subheadings and be divided into two. The first will consist of the related literature reviewed as they relate to economic diplomacy and the second part will include literature on conflict and conflict resolution.

Economic Diplomacy

According to Afesorgbor (2016), economic diplomatic relationships on bilateral trade are quantitative and more pronounced when compared to regional integration among the African countries. The writer went further to say, there is little interaction between bilateral diplomacy and regional integration, which are the two instruments of economic diplomacy, and that there is a lack of solid interrelations between the two instruments of economic diplomacy among the African countries. Furthermore, from the same point of view, Van Bergeijk (2009) narrates the existence of insufficient knowledge about foreign trade markets among countries with regional integration than countries with bilateral relationships. The diplomatic exchange of information is relevant for economic relations and political ties and generates awareness about trade and investment opportunities among countries.

Bayne and Woolcock (2011) were of the view that economic diplomacy is a comprehensive concept that involves decision-making processes and negotiations at different levels of inter-governmental affairs. The four levels of international negotiation in economic diplomacy were identified as regional, bilateral, multilateral, and plurilateral. It was also emphasized that there is a complex interaction among the various levels of intergovernmental relations. The main theoretical interest of the paper was to determine the existence of a complex interaction between the two instruments of economic diplomacy, which are bilateral diplomacy and regional integration in intra-African trade relations. Then, it further reviewed that there was positive interaction in trade among countries with bilateral relations and pointed out that a complex interaction exists between the different levels of economic diplomacy.

Afesorgbor (2016) examined the impact of the two main instruments of economic diplomacy among 45 African countries. He tested whether there is any evidence of tradeoffs or complementary interactions in trade relations among the countries under study by comparing the effects of the two instruments of economic diplomacy on trade using the gravity model for all the nations under observation between the periods 1980 – 2005. The finding revealed that bilateral diplomacy is a relatively more significant determinant of bilateral trade among African countries than regional integration. In conclusion, the paper established the existence of a tradeoff between regional integration and bilateral diplomacy in trade facilitation between the two instruments of economic diplomacy.

Yakop and Van Bergeijk (2011), in their study, shows that diplomatic representations among developing countries are so much relevant as they contribute more significantly to enhancing trade relation. The study analyzed the impact of economic diplomacy on the geography and confine of international trade with 63 sample countries. The study demonstrated that diplomatic representation through consulates is not a relevant trade-enhancing factor for trade and bilateral relationships with the OECD but a more significant factor in bilateral trade relationships among the developing countries.

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

In conflict resolution, responding to conflict begins with a proper diagnosis analysis of the cause, what the conflict is about and what triggers the disagreement or violent struggle. Conflict management and resolution are more like the medicine or mechanical field that also require an application. Conflict in Africa is of diverse and complex nature, with efforts in managing and resolving them mixed (Aall, 2015).

Fonkem (2014), in his study, seeks to understand the imperfection of efforts at managing conflicts in the African continent from the impact of the colonial. The study claims that conflicts in Africa do not always stem primarily from crises of national governance and governmental institutions' failures of Africans to mediate as it identified the root causes of many conflicts in Africa to be caused by colonial factors. It went further to argue that the colonial factor ought to be a consideration in attempts to address African conflicts because the roots of many post-colonial conflicts in Africa remain buried in Africa's past and, specifically, in the colonization and decolonization era of the African states.

Fonkem (2014) also pointed out in the works of some writers (Obasanjo 1991, Anyang' Nyong'o 1991, and Msabaha 1991) and summarized that the colonial factors must be taken into consideration in the attempts to address African conflicts because these conflicts are deeply rooted in the pre and post-colonial, African conflict such as the case of South Sudan, remain buried in Africa's past and, specifically, in the colonization and decolonization processes. He argued again that conflicts at sub-national and national levels in African countries are of several types and that imposing peace-keeping forces, as has often been the case, or merely assessing new political and economic institutions on the various African conflicts may not provide the desired durable outcomes. Furthermore, and based on the same premise, the author questioned how far a just and equitable future could be structured on an unjust past of colonialism.

METHODOLOGY

The trend analysis with graphical illustration will be used to show a simple comparison among the countries which are the sample population, giving a knowledge base insight about the various countries that make up the Sahel region of Africa.

Data Sources

The data for this paper on conflict will be sourced from Uppsala Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED), which is collected by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Hence, there are other available sources of datasets, but the (GED) dataset has the advantage of providing more comprehensive information on conflict covering all geographical locations worldwide.

Also, the Correlates of Wars (COW) diplomatic exchange dataset will be used as the dataset captures diplomatic exchange between countries (regional integration and bilateral diplomacy) will be considered.

RESULT AND FINDING

In this region of Africa, many have lived in displacement as a result of continuous conflict that cut across all the countries that make up the Sahel region. It is one of the most affected regions in the war that has been affected by conflict for decades now without any lasting resolution. For decades now, the conflict has expanded in scale and scope. In Bukina Faso, millions have been displaced, likewise in the Northeastern part of Nigeria, Mali with about 381,289, Chad is 381,289, and Niger is 264, 257 and 103,411 in Mauritania. The level of conflict violence in this region is unprecedented, which has affected the bilateral relations this region has with other nations of the world.



Figure 1

Source: Web (In reference)

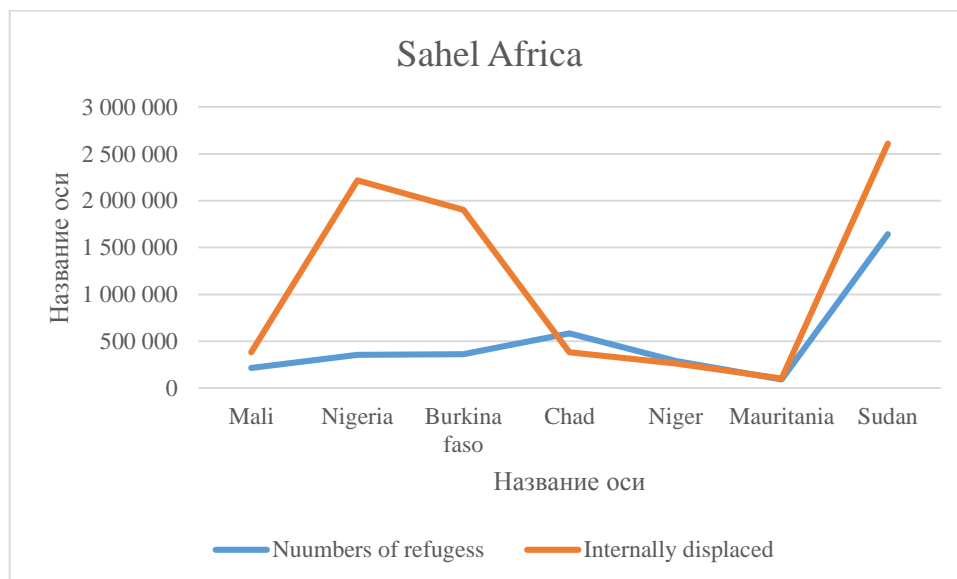


Figure 2

Source: Author's computation

The data of the Humanitarian development index put the Sahel region at the bottom of the table, with the counties from this region occupying the lower positions, Nigeria at 157th, Mauritania 159th, Senegal 164th, Sudan 167th, Mali 182nd, Burkina Faso 183rd, Chad 186th and Niger at 189th positions respectively, with Niger the worst in humanitarian development index.

According to available data, from the Norwegian refugee council in collaboration with other international agencies, there are about 4.2million people already displaced from their homes as a result of conflict in the countries that makes up the Sahel region. Conflict and violent have escalated beyond the country's leadership capacity especially in the parts of Mali, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Northeastern part of Nigeria.

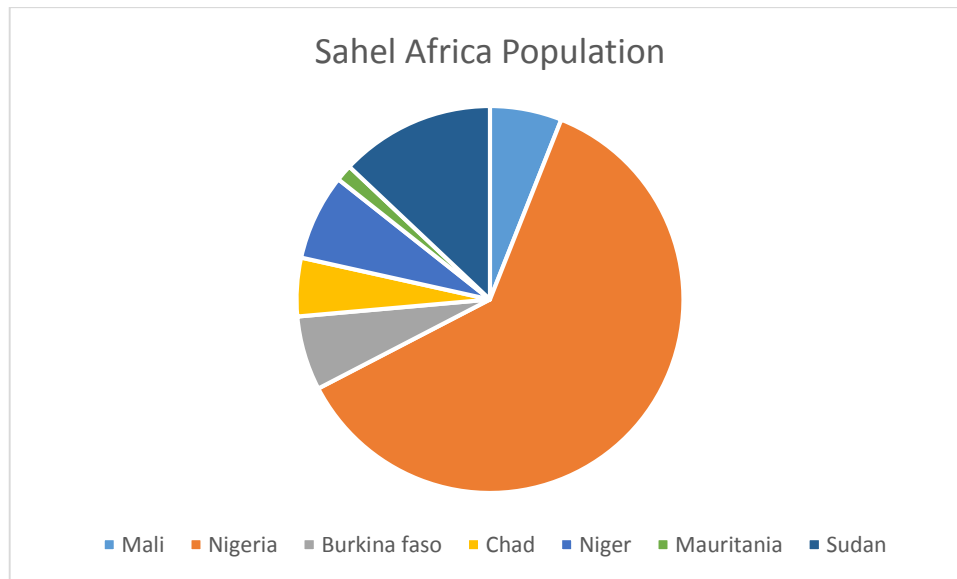


Figure 3

Source: Author's computation

It is an unfortunate reality, with the population of over 400million and a growth rate of about 3 percent annually. The conflict in the region has worsened the economic situation of the countries with high incident of poverty, famine, food storage, malnutrition, high mortality rate, unemployment and in optimistic terms, the bilateral relationship the exist with other countries of the world has been affected with the conflict in this region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The various humanitarian issues caused by arm conflicts affecting this vast zone of Africa, the Sahel region, should set off alarm bells to the leadership of the countries that made up this Sahel region, the continent of Africa, and the world at large. As it seems, if substantial efforts are not made immediately, we could be facing a massive crisis that will take years to resolve, if it can possibly be solved.

The level of conflict between different groups in the Sahel region is on the rise daily, with ISIS-affiliated groups dominating the conflict crisis arena, like IS West African Province (ISWAP), banditry, book haram, and so on. Relying on the data from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), more conflicts are likely to arise. There the the high probability for this trend to intensify in the coming years because of the lack of appropriate conflict resolution skills that suit the African situation.

The current challenges of the Sahel region require holistic and strategic long-term solutions. Providing protection and humanitarian aid to those affected in the conflict areas of the region must remain a priority but not the ultimate solution; this will save many lives and prevent the vulnerable states from collapsing further. More so, political leaders, religious leaders, and the regional block stakeholders must pursue a cease of all the conflicts with a proper and constructive dialog with all parties in the conflict and find a wave of lasting peace. Bilateral and regional integration must be robust to attract investment in areas of education and health in the region. The education of the girl child must be paramount and encouraged. This will discourage early child marriages and bring about better health, reducing the population growth rate. Also, efforts to confront corruption and promote good leadership are an important goal for all, and efforts must be made to address the region's long-term underlying problems, such as climate change, food shortage, and lousy leadership. Without that, all effort will be in vain.

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