

CIDOB International Yearbook 2008

Keys to facilitate the monitoring of the Spanish Foreign Policy and the International Relations in 2007

Country profile: Nigeria and its regional context
Annex Nigeria and regional integration in West
Africa*

*** These annexes have been done by Dauda Garuba, Senior Programme Officer at the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in Nigeria, in collaboration with CIDOB Foundation.**

Nigeria and regional integration in West Africa

There is a sense in which Nigeria plays a leading role in regional integration process in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. This sense is defined by certain specific imperatives which govern the conceptualisation and conduct of the country's foreign policy towards its regional neighbours.¹ These imperatives are: defence and protection of Nigeria's territorial integrity and sovereignty from both internal and external aggression; peaceful co-existence and maintenance of good neighbourliness and friendship with countries it shares contiguous boundaries (be they land, air and waters); and concerns about stability and economic integration in the West African sub-region within the framework of the ECOWAS Treaty. These obviously interlocking and coterminous elements, coupled with the ever-growing population of the country, define the behaviour and any realistic analysis of Nigeria's role in the regional integration process in the sub-region and beyond; though differences in emphasis is largely dependent on the circumstances of times, and style of leadership.

I. Nigeria and its Immediate Neighbours

Nigeria's immediate neighbours are Cameroon in the East, Chad in the North-east, Republic of Benin in the west, Republic of Niger in north, while maritime boundaries in the south are with Ghana and Equatorial Guinea. Of these, Cameroun, Chad, Benin and Niger are by virtue of their colonial histories French-speaking countries, just as Ghana is English-speaking and Equatorial Guinea (in south-east Nigeria's coast) is Portuguese-speaking. Colonial is a factor in the nature of the relationship between these countries. For instance, the political, cultural and military affinities which Francophone countries maintain with France account for the nature of relations between Nigeria and its immediate Franco-phone neighbours.

Nigeria had cordial relations with all its neighbours, except for occasional border disputes with Chad and Cameroon, precipitating outcry by Nigerian citizens who had wished military action by Nigeria against these countries in 1982 and 1983.² While the management of the relationship between Nigeria and its neighbours has been very challenging and at a huge cost, the country has continued to foster better relationships with them, based on its foreign policy principles of respect for equality of states, sovereignty and independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of states and commitment to functional cooperation as a means of promoting African

¹ Ibrahim Babangida, *For Their Tomorrow We Gave Our Today: Selected Speeches of IBB, Volume II* Safari Books, Ibadan, 1991, p.271.

² "Foreign Relations", *Country Studies*, <http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/foreign-relations.html> (Accessed on May 13, 2008).

unity.³ As much as the country had respected the principle of non-interference in the internal matters of its immediate neighbours since it attained independence in 1960, it was nevertheless forced to intervene in the Chadian crisis depicted by violent activities of warring factions in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Also, Nigeria had had to manage instances where Republic of Benin and Equatorial Guinea (formerly Fernando Po) were used as bases for the supply of military and humanitarian assistance to Biafran rebels during the Nigerian civil war. While Cameroun did not yield to France's pressure to allow such actions during the period, it was nevertheless involved with the country in a protracted dispute over Bakassi peninsula⁴ which has since been settled in its favour by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague.

Besides the above, there have been overlapping security relations between Nigeria and Republic of Benin in the areas of boundary and military relations since 1969. This resulted in a seeming arms race in the 1970s when Beninois government embarked on a reciprocal arms acquisition in response to the Nigeria's purchase of T-55 Russian tanks.⁵ Also, the strategic location of Equatorial Guinea to Nigeria's national security had been threatened by interests and activities of certain foreign countries in the island in the 1970s and the 1980s. These included: the US transfer of its Voice of America (VOA) transmitters from Kaduna in Nigeria (where they were expelled by the Murtala/Obasanjo government) to Equatorial Guinea; the increased Chinese presence; and the alleged construction of South-African air/naval base in the country during Apartheid years.⁶ This same heavy foreign countries' presence is what Nigeria is currently contending with in Sao Tome and Principe in the wake of the country strike of oil and the US move to establish a military based in the country to police the Gulf of Guinea (now labelled as 'Ungoverned space').

On the whole, Niger is about the only country that has not had any past frosty relations with Nigeria. However, there had existed in the past (and till date) pockets of incursions into Nigeria by itinerant and economic migrants from Niger with minimal security threats. Outside of this, it can be said with a high sense of conviction that "Nigeria and Niger continue to enjoy a relatively warm relationship".⁷

The strained relationship between Nigeria and its neighbours has been interpreted in the light of a misconceived suspicion that the country might succumb to the temptation to dominate its neighbours.⁸ But to promote

³ A. J. Omede, "Nigeria's Relations with Her Neighbours", *Stud. Tribes Tribals*, vol. 4, no. I, 2006, pp. 7-17.

⁴ Bakassi Peninsula is a low-lying region of about 50 square kilometres located on South-eastern tip of Nigeria, where it pushes southward into the Gulf of Guinea.

⁵ Vogt, M. A. "Strategies for the Enhancement of the Security of Nigerian Borders," *The Eagle: Journal of the Nigerian Command and Staff College, Jaji, Nigeria, Special Edition*, 1987, 39 - 40.

⁶ A.J. Omede, *Op. Cit.* p.12.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Shagaya, J. N., *Internal Affairs Ministry: An Overview*, Alfa Communications Ltd, Lagos & London, 1990.

continued cordial relations and re-affirm its good intentions toward its neighbours, successive governments in Nigeria have expended and acted with good intentions. Among such steps was the Nigerian presentation to the UN Goodwill Mission in 1996, where it emphasized that border conflicts between Nigeria and its neighbours have been largely avoided through: "The principle of good neighbourliness, policy of cooperative security and preventive diplomacy which Nigeria cherishes and upholds even at the expense of its [sic] own national interest"⁹ This has been serviced through established means of diplomacy, initiated processes of boundary demarcation with neighbours, thus offering a valuable opportunity for parties to discover and resolve anomalies and ambiguities that could cause conflict.

Nigeria has also engaged in series of confidence-building approach (both bilateral and multilateral) to manage its principle of good neighbourliness in relating with its immediate neighbours. Among such steps were the signing of a Military Cooperative Agreement with Republic of Benin in April 1979 to diffuse the mutual perception of threats and distrust that had hitherto existed between the two countries, and the collaboration with Niger on Food Security and Cross-border Trade in 2007. The country also operates the Nigeria-Cameroun Boundary Commission which resolved the Bakassi question after the International Court of Justice judgement in The Hague. Another remarkable progress in this regard had been the delimitation of international boundaries with Cameroun, Chad and Niger in the Lake Chad area. In the wake of security threats precipitated by activities of trans-border criminals, the country facilitated the establishment of Nigeria-Benin Joint Border Patrol Team now training together to monitor the menace of armed robbery, smuggling of goods and petroleum products and the booming pirate activities along the creeks and swamps between the two countries. The country also currently operates a joint border patrol team with Chad.

In a collective move, the country has also recently championed the formation of the Gulf of Benin Commission comprising Nigeria, Cameroun, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Sao Tome and Principe, Founded in Libreville, the Gabonese Capital, in August 2006, the Commission has the President of Sao Tome and Principe designated the Executive Secretary for a period of three years renewable once, while the Angola Capital, Luanda, serves as its Headquarters.

Through bilateral agreement, Nigeria has facilitated a system in which its citizens do not require visa to travel to its neighbouring countries that are outside of ECOWAS member states, while it also provides assistance and loans to its ECOWAS 'neighbours', including Ghana, Sierra Leone and Sao Tome and Principe. It has also established a strong presence in Equatorial Guinea since 1998.

⁹ A.J. Omede, *Op. Cit.*, p.9.

II. Nigeria and ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is the last of the three concentric circles on which Nigeria's foreign and defence policies are governed. Established by the *Treaty of Lagos* through the efforts of Nigeria and Togo on May 28, 1975, ECOWAS was billed to promote regional economic integration among member states. The idea then was to create an economic community that would cut across linguistic and cultural barriers, as a prelude to the pursuit of African common market and collective self-reliance. Preliminary negotiations that culminated in the formation of ECOWAS actually started between Nigeria's Gen. Yakubu Gowon and Togo's Gen. General Gnassingbe Eyadema in April 1972.¹⁰

Prior to its formation, France had seen Nigeria as too large and a threat to its interests in Francophone West Africa, and thus attempted to counter the Nigeria-Togo initiative by facilitating the preliminary agreements in June 1972 to establish the *Communaute Economique D'Afrique Occidentale (CEAO)* exclusively for Francophone West Africa in May 1973. The initiative was cleverly anchored on the 1970 Protocol in Bamako (Mali) and got started by its confirmation of the *Treaty of Abidjan* in April 17, 1973. This was perceived by Nigeria as an attempt by France to exploit and perpetuate colonial divisions to counterpoise its 'big brother' status within the West African sub-region.¹¹ But the global economic downturn and the growing inability of the raw material-based economies of the sub-region to withstand the resultant economic hardships and instability thus precipitated in the sub-region provided the awaited leeway for the establishment of ECOWAS in May 1975. The realities of post-Cold War (including the precipitated civil wars) have compelled the regional body to expand its scope of operation beyond economic realm to incorporate socio-political and peace and security issues now defined in its 1993 Revised ECOWAS Treaty.

The formation of ECOWAS has clearly manifested Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa. In the midst of competing allegiance and commitments to rival organizations, Nigeria has contributed to the development of the sub-region's economy and discouraged its comprising nation-states from relying totally on external economies, even without total success.

Several reasons have been identified to be responsible for Nigeria's commitment to the ECOWAS and its member states. These range from its experience during the civil war (1967 – 1970) when Cote d'Ivoire was used by France in an attempt to break Nigeria via provision of support to the Biafran secessionists, to the increasing need to strengthen and enhance its unity and bargaining profile with the rest of the world. Another source has stressed the point that "Nigeria stands for half of ECOWAS, in terms of population as well as GDP."¹² Former Nigerian military leader, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, has also adduced the factor of the complex and interlocking

¹⁰ S.K.B. Asante, "ECOWAS/CEAO: Conflict and Cooperation in West Africa", in R.I. Onwuka & A. Sesay, (eds), *The Future of Regionalism in Africa*, Macmillan Publishers, London & Basingstoke, 1985 p.74.

¹¹ Ibid; A.J. Omede, *Op. Cit*, p.9.

¹² International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Want in the Midst of Plenty*, Africa Report No. 113, July 2006, p.18.

security boundaries with West African countries which makes Nigeria vulnerable to any crisis that threatens to jeopardise or compromise the stability, prosperity of the country, and the reality of the country's population which puts one out of every three West Africans as a Nigeria; adding that these very objectives propelled Nigeria's efforts for the establishment and support of ECOWAS.¹³ It was these same reasons that prompted Nigeria to mobilise ECOWAS member states to invoke the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance in Defence (that was originally designed to deal with external threats and aggression in the light of Cold War realities) to intervene in the Liberian civil war, and other subsequent interventions in Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. Former President Obasanjo claimed in October 1999 that Nigeria spent \$8 billion and lost 500 men in Liberia and Sierra Leone civil war.¹⁴ In the spirit of good neighbourliness and friendship with ECOWAS member states, the country has helped to resolve conflicts between Liberia and Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Mali, and Togo and Ghana.

Nigeria has also attempted to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations with many ECOWAS member countries, while also assisting them in several capacities. With its huge population and resources, Nigeria's domestic market makes it a regional economic super power. It has also made overtures of selling oil at concessionary prices to poor countries to cushion the hardship precipitated by the global energy crisis of the early 1970s, thereby enhancing the country's position and influence in its efforts to build African solidarity and protect its security interests by preventing economic decline – generosity that accounted for its efforts to create ECOWAS in the first instance.¹⁵ Nigeria has also made this same overture to Cote d'Ivoire a few years ago in its desperate fight against the phenomenon of illegal oil bunkering in which the later is alleged to play havens of cheap stolen oil from Nigeria.

According to 2005 commercial relations information of ECOWAS, exports overcame 58.000 million dollars, whereas the imports placed in 27.790 millions, reflecting a commercial widely positive scale. As for the principal clients and suppliers of the region, important differences are observed; in this respect the European Union, it represents 24% of the whole of the exports and up to 43% of the imports, whereas in case of America the figures are practically inverse, this is 49% of the exports of the ECOWAS takes the American continent as destination, whereas only 18% of the imports comes from America. On the trade inside the same organization, the exports of fifteen countries members managed to add 5.389 million dollars, which represents 68% of the exports destined for Africa, which there added a whole of 7.869 million dollars. For what refers to the imports inside the community these came to 5.361 million dollars, which represent 79% of the whole of imports from African countries, which added a whole of 6.795 million dollars also in 2005.

¹³ Ibrahim Babangida, *Op.Cit.*, p.272.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Op. Cit.*, p.18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

In conclusion, Nigeria has over the years evolved to the point of acceptance of the fact that the conduct of its foreign relations involved diverse contractual obligations to its immediate neighbours, ECOWAS member states and countries lying in the Gulf of Guinea. These obligations have been pursued with vigour, believing in their essentiality for the stabilisation of political, economic, security and social facets of the country's national life as well as enhancing regional and continental integration and promoting peace and security in the sub-region, Africa and the world at large.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

