

Cross-Border Cooperation between Niger and Nigeria: Opportunities and Challenges for the Maradi Micro-Region in West Africa

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Abstract

Within Africa, renewed interest is being shown in sub-regional integration and West Africa is no exception. Micro-regions act as a microcosm and an entry point to the study of regionalism in Africa. This paper presents the case of a “micro-region” developing within the broader Benin-Niger-Nigeria border-zone. The study illustrates that cross-border cooperation is the driver and engine of regional integration, a kind of regional cooperation transcending the micro-region itself with a variety of integrative trends. The distinctive characteristic of the Maradi-Katsina-Kano micro-region is the promotion of regional trade beyond the borders of Niger and Nigeria. It contends that formal borders either essentially does not exist in the Westphalian sense, being ignored by actors such as local populations and traders, or strategically used by representatives of the state to extract resources and rents. The dynamism of this “micro-initiative” tends to cement peaceful relationships, develop social and economic interdependencies, and make up a base for “regional civil society”. Even though there is an increasing awareness by politicians and institutional leaders that micro-regional processes should be encouraged and included in the regional integration process, there is still a long way to go before the top-down and state-led macro-regional policies are synchronised with such micro-regional dynamics.

Introduction

The importance of micro-regionalisation phenomenon in Africa, a topic increasingly more relevant as globalisation intensifies and regional co-operation becomes crucial for countries to cope with competition for trade, investment and markets, has during the last decade been increasingly stressed. The study of micro-regionalism in Africa is anticipated to provide us with a clear understanding on how local communities regard regional initiatives “on the ground”- and how such actors create their own initiatives (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2007). Even though the African continent has not missed out on the number of such micro-regions which are currently reconfiguring the world (Breslin and Hook, 2002), and emerging from below, more than from above, the attention given to the study of micro-regionalism in Africa in general and West Africa in particular does not reflect the policy and scholarly importance of this emerging phenomenon, especially with the backdrop that, the state-led, formal regional integration efforts has yet to reposition Africa to be an active participant in the global environment. In contrast to a great deal of previous research on regionalism in Africa, this study is not interested in such rhetorical accounts, but rather favour an approach that looks at African regions *as they actually are*. In doing so, we follow Chabal and Daloz (1999) in their attempts to look at Africa as it really is, rather than how perhaps pre-conceived mores tell us how it should be. It is the neglect of this emerging dynamism, and form of regionalism, which fits well into the new wave of regionalism that motivates this study. As Söderbaum and Taylor (2007) notes, “the neglect of micro-regionalism in the study of Africa is unfortunate, since it is perhaps the form of regionalism most beholden to “real” “African” processes on the ground but also reflects in detail some of the processes occurring at higher levels or scales’.

This paper aims to use the case of Maradi micro-region in West Africa to spell out more clearly and to show how micro-regions are enhancing regional trade, and social cooperation beyond their borders, while at the same time problematising the phenomenon of micro-regionalism in West Africa. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews, with cross-border traders, civil society organisations, border security operatives, and key actors within the regions, as well as literature studies¹.

¹ Fieldwork in the Maradi-Micro Region was conducted in April-May, 2009, October-February 2010, and April-May 2010. Eighty qualitative interviews with cross-border traders and Niger/Nigerian officials were carried out, as well as 25 interviews with politicians, religious leaders, media representatives, and key other actors. The interview were open-ended and aimed to

Regionalism: Towards a Conceptual Clarification

Regionalism and Regionalisation

The concept of a 'region' has been given various theoretical interpretations as its scope permeates through various fields of human endeavour. There is therefore no single definition of this concept due to different use of the term depending on discipline and context. Even though the concept tends to refer to a variety of phenomena, there is a fundamental understanding of region that can be summarised as *interplay between actors and institutions within a given geographical area*. The literature on regionalism and regionalisation has identified four different conceptions of a region: territorial delimitation, scope or purpose of regional cooperation, regional governance, and territorial level.

However, in a broad perspective, regions can be differentiated in terms of social cohesiveness (ethnicity, race, language, religion, culture, history, consciousness of a common heritage), economic cohesiveness (trade patterns, economic complementarity), political cohesiveness (regime type, ideology) and organisational cohesiveness (existence of formal regional institutions) (Hurrell, 1995: 38). Such parsimonious attempts at definition seem have come to an end. Today, researchers acknowledge the fact that there are no 'natural' regions: definitions of a 'region' vary according to the particular problem or question under investigation. Moreover, it is widely accepted that it is how political actors perceive and interpret the idea of a region and notions of 'regionness' that is critical: all regions are socially constructed and hence politically contested.

It is however very important that a region should not be simplistically mixed up with a particular regional organisation. The organisation tries to shape what it defines as 'its' region by promoting cooperation among states and other actors, which is possible to the extent that a genuine experience of shared interests in a shared political community exists - that the region is 'real' and not only 'formal'. Regional integration belongs to an earlier discourse, primarily related to a spiralling translocal market integration (thus including the building of national markets as well). Regional integration as a translocal process, simply defined in terms of market factors, has occurred over a long period of time (Mattli, 1999). The concept of integration can also be made more or less complex. According to Joseph Nye, the concept of integration groups too many disparate phenomena to be helpful, and should therefore be broken down into economic integration (the formation of a transnational economy), social integration (the formation of a transnational society) and political integration (the formation of a transnational political system). Regional cooperation is somewhat less complex and normally refers to joint efforts by states to solve specific problems. Ernst B. Haas defined the concept as follows:

'regional cooperation is a vague term covering any interstate activity with less than universal participation designed to meet commonly experienced need' (1958:16). Andrew Axline asserted that *'regional cooperation can only be understood from the perspective of the national interests of the individual member states, and that the politics of regional negotiations will involve accommodating these interests for all partners'* (1994: 217).

Regional integration is, in contrast, normally taken to imply some change in terms of sovereignty. According to Haas (1970: 610), 'the study of regional integration is concerned with explaining how and why states cease to be wholly sovereign'. Regionalism and regionalisation are two more recent concepts relevant to our study, and much effort has been devoted to the distinction between them. Regionalism refers to a tendency and a political

bring out different descriptions and definitions of "micro-regionalism" in the Maradi-Micro Region, as well as encourage the interviewees to spell out their views of the role, impact, and problems of various actors in the micro-regional activities.

commitment to organise the world in terms of regions; more narrowly, the concept refers to a specific regional project. In some definitions the actors behind this political commitment are states; in other definitions the actors are not confined to states. According to Anthony Payne and Andrew Gamble, 'regionalism is a state-led or states-led project designed to reorganise a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines' (1996:2). They go on in their pioneering book to say that 'regionalism is seen as something that is being constructed, and constantly reconstructed, by collective human action², which sounds like a more comprehensive view as far as agency is concerned (Söderbaum and Shaw, 2003). Other authors find it difficult to confine the regionalism project to states. Helge Hveem also makes a firm distinction between regionalism and regionalisation, but talks about 'an identifiable group of actors' trying to realize the project (Hveem, 2003). Andrew Hurrell argues that the concept regionalism contains five varieties: regionalisation (informal integration), identity, interstate cooperation, state-led integration and cohesion. Sometimes, particularly in a neoliberal discourse, regionalism is identified with protectionism, normally with (worried) reference to the rise of economic nationalism in secluded regional markets in the interwar period (Hurrell, 1995).

On the other hand, regionalisation refers to the more complex processes of forming regions; whether these are consciously planned or caused by spontaneous processes is not agreed upon by all authors. It is of course right to argue that, they can emerge by either means. More recently, the concept of region-building (in analogy with nation-building) has been employed to signify 'the ideas, dynamics and means that contribute to changing a geographical area into a politically-constructed community' (du Rocher and Fort, 2005: xi). Neumann (2003) in particular has developed a region-building approach, which he himself terms 'poststructural' and which sees the region as born in discourse on 'inside and outside'. The enlargement of Europe, particularly the current debate on Turkey's inclusion or exclusion, provides a rich source for this kind of analysis.

Following from the above discussions, it will be important to distinguish between the two main waves of regionalism, and the context in which they emerged. The 'old' regionalism, also known as 'first wave' regionalism, emerged in the 1950s and stagnated in the 1970s (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000:457), while the 'new' regionalism came on the stage around the 1980s. There are certainly salient differences between the old and new regionalisms which are relevant for the present study. Whereas the old regionalism was imposed 'from above', focused on economic and security imperatives, and was dominated by states as main actors, the new regionalism is not solely driven by the state but also involves many other institutions, organisations, and movements (Hettne, 1999: xvii). The new regionalism places a strong emphasis on a market-led strategy of regional integration, conceived as complementary to structural adjustment. This involves a shift in orientation from protection to liberalisation, and from centralised bureaucratic regionalist institutions to a more decentralised approach grounded in popular support and private sector initiative (Daddieh, 1993:2ff; Bach, 1997:81; Lavergne and Daddieh, 1997:107).

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, this new approach to regional integration has taken particular inspiration from the widespread operation of informal cross-border trading activities, which have succeeded in affecting extensive market integration where state-led initiatives have failed (Hashim and Meagher, 1999). Moreover, some commentators have

² The first mentioned definition is called 'deliberately straightforward' in Anthony Payne, 'Rethinking development inside international political economy', in: Anthony Payne (ed.), *The New Regional Politics of Development* (Palgrave, 2004), p. 16.14]

noted that formal integration initiatives have been severely weakened by structural adjustment, owing to the pressures of mounting crisis, constraints on state spending, the liberalisation of trade policies, and a proliferation of semi-official road-blocks and brigand as civilians and officials alike resort to informal means of income generation under the pressures of increasing economic austerity (Daddieh, 1993:13; Herrera, 1995:148). By contrast, the same economic environment appears to have resulted in a flourishing of cross-border cooperation, even against the predictions of the architects of adjustments (Hashim and Meagher, 1999:5).

Micro-Regionalism

Micro-regions are political constructions under the state level of analysis that have a legal, political, economic or cultural singularity and which may or may not fall into the legal borders of a state (Tavares, 2004a:21; b) Söderbaum and Taylor (2003) agree that they are often constituted by “a network of transactions and collaboration across national boundaries, which may very well emerge as an alternative or in opposition to the challenged state, as well as to formal state regionalisms”. Micro-regions take different forms: distinct identity or ethnic regions, economic zones, growth triangles and polygons, development corridors, administrative regions, transfrontier growth areas, spatial development initiatives or fully - fledged regional governments (Keating and Loughlin, 1997; Breslin and Hook, 2002; Perkmann and Sum, 2002).

In Africa, the autonomisation of micro-regions is a market-driven process and carried out, with the tolerance of central governments, in an informal and little institutionalised way (Breslin and Hook, 2002; Mittelman, 2000; Kalam, 2001; Söderbaum and Taylor, 2003). These processes have been on the rise since the failure of the structural adjustments programmes to leapfrog Africa from its marginalised position. This study intends to present the case of a “micro-region” developing within the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region.

Theoretical Frame of Reference

Our theoretical framework is informed by the literature on the political economy of regional cross-border cooperation referred to as the ‘New Regionalisms Approach’ (NRA) (Grant and Söderbaum, 2003; Söderbaum and Shaw, 2003; Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000). The NRA takes the *region* to be an especially important level of analysis. Moreover, the NRA seeks to emphasise the importance of non-state actors and the informal sector in relation to state actors and formal structures as they relate to matters of political economy and governance. The works of Iheduru (2003), Bach (2003), and Bøås (2003) on the NRA in the African context are particularly helpful in drawing our attention to the dynamics between regionalism and regionalisation from ‘above’ (i.e., state-directed) on the one hand, and from ‘below’ (i.e., non-state forces) on the other. Although the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is known as state-directed initiatives to promote formal regionalisation and economic integration in West Africa, most economic transactions and trade conduits are autonomous from the state (Iheduru 2003: 58-59). Many of these cross-border commercial conduits and networks are based on ethnic ties from ‘below’. Since its inception in scholarly circles in the late-1990s (Bach 1999, Hettne et al., 1999, Hettne 1999, Bøås et al. 1999, Hettne and Söderbaum 1998), the NRA has tended to be a social scientific analytical tool.

The NRA is connected with a broader theoretical debate within the field of International Political Economy, and can be understood within the broader tradition of critical, reflectivist or “new” IPE and the effort to transcend and challenge “problem-solving” mainstream theories. The NRA is founded on the necessity to “unpack” the nature of the state, avoiding the Western conceptions of the state inherent in mainstream theorising in the field- be it neo-realism, institutionalism and/or economic integration theory. In doing so,

NRA critically assesses state-society complexes in the formation of regions and opens up for a broad and deep interdisciplinary, critical/reflectivist understanding of what characterises regionalism and regionalisation in various parts of the world. The NRA looks beyond state-centrism. This approach sees regionalism as a more comprehensive and dynamic process than inter-state action. States are not the only regionalising actors, and market, civil society- as well as external actors- are deeply involved in processes of regionalisation, including its political dimensions. Rather than separating actors into perceived “autonomous” groups of actors, the NRA suggests that actors will be grouped in- formal or informal—multi-actor collectivities (networks and modes of governance). The NRA will therefore serve as a useful guide in terms of understanding the theoretical aspects of Maradi micro region as a flexible and “people-centred” cross-border cooperation effort in West Africa, and the region-building strategies adopted by local communities.

The Maradi Micro Region: An Historical Perspective

It is currently fashionable to emphasise the pre-colonial origins of cross border cooperation, particularly, cross border trade. Studies of the origins of cross-border trading circuits have contributed greatly to our understanding of factors underlying the development of cross-border trading activities developed so rapidly in some areas of the continent such as West Africa, and not in others. The focus on origins, as Hashim and Meagher (1999:22) have informed us, has also served as a range of ideological purposes related to the promotion of market liberalisation. As a result, analysis of historical origins of cross border trade frequently suffer what they call ‘primordial romanticism’ which tends, on the one hand, to gloss over important changes and discontinuities that have emerged in the structure of interregional trade under the impact of colonialism and post-colonial economic change and on the other hand fails to adequately establish the link between pre-colonial trading structures and the increased cross-border cooperation in the 21st century.

Trémolières (2007:8) argued that West Africa is a patchwork of regional, sub-regional and micro-regional structures. Some of these are formal and dominated by states: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), and the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). Others are evolving and changing continuously, depending on networks, urban centres, cross-border dynamics and economic activities. The Maradi-Katsina-Kano micro-region is one of these patchwork aimed at promoting regional trade beyond the borders of Niger and Nigeria. The micro-region is characterised by both formal and informal relations, motivated by economic purposes and created through local level dynamics “from below”. It can thus be classified as an ‘active cross border area’ (Igue and Sole, 1993). This typology refers to “traffic and passage corridors” with activities insufficiently developed to “structure” the area. Trémolières (2007:8) agrees that this is the most common type of micro-region in Africa, regrouping areas that share the same colonial and political traditions of economic development, for example Francophone Sahelian countries.

The Maradi–Katsina–Kano route is located within the *Kasar Hausa* (Hausa territory) zone. In her influential work on the Maradi micro-regional initiative, Trémolières (2007) argued, this area has been subject to a continuous process of deconstruction and (re-) construction, borne along by the social, economic and political changes it has undergone. She further notes that, Hausa territory was confined to the area under the direct control of the seven pre-colonial Hausa states. It later expanded with the extension of the Sokoto Caliphate and, thanks to the dynamism of the language, has even led to the incorporation of certain non-Hausa ethnic groups located along its northern, southern, eastern and western borders. The territory therefore extends from the Tillaberi-Dakoro-Nguigmi line in the north to the

northern foothills of the Jos plateau in the south, and from the frontiers of the ancient Bornu to the Niger valley to the east and west.

This area is located in a tropical zone with a low altitude of generally less than 300m. The micro-region is heavily influenced by the rainy season, on which its primary production depends. The latter is utterly central to the extensive trade that exists within the area and beyond. The average annual rainfall there varies between 500 and 800 mm, increasing from north to south; Kano receives 120–130 days of rain while Katsina and Sokoto have a dozen or so days or less. The region's weather cycle is governed by two seasons: the rainy season, between May and September, and a dry season for the rest of the year. Caught between the Sahel ecological zone and the Guinean savannah, the region combines a Sahelo-Sudanese and Sudanese climate and is an area that is conducive to high agricultural production, such as cereals, peanuts and cotton, when climatic conditions are favourable. It is also an area favoured by pastoral and nomadic communities.

The Maradi micro region is believed to have its roots in the historical development of the Hausa feudalistic states. The Hausa civilisation is believed to have developed between the seventh and eleventh centuries with the growing influx of continuously mobile populations in the central Sahel. Historians attest to the antiquity of the presence of Kanuri, Gobirawa, Alozinawa, Wangarawa, Larabawa, Kabawa and other peoples in this area. Since the twelfth century, Peul (Fulani) cattle-breeders have been migrating to summer (Abdoul and Trémolières, 2007:24-25) pastures, settling in Hausa territory as clerks, marabouts and advisers to Hausa sovereigns. These neighbourly relations have led to extensive social and cultural interpenetration. Moreover, the rise in population density due to these migrations has been an important factor for the development of economic activities. The history of the Hausa city-states is closely linked to trans-Saharan trade and the Islamisation of western and central Sudan. These cities were located at the southernmost point of the caravan routes linking North Africa and the Mediterranean region with the afforested African interior. Land routes across the Sahara have been used for many centuries to transport goods (millet, salt, gold, slaves, kola)³ and they have played a major role³ in the organisation of space, even influencing human settlement choices. Long-distance trade routes linking the coastal forest area with the Niger bend cities and with Hausa land developed at an early date, Mande Dyula dominating these trade routes. A number of villages in the Maradi valley, those in the Gabi valley, as well as several cities in northern Katsina were incorporated in the trans-Saharan economic system, as they were connected through the major trade routes.

Kano City was for many centuries an important terminal of trans-Saharan trade routes. It was also an industrial centre for cotton weaving and dyeing, tanning and leather work. The city was surrounded by an area of permanently cultivated fields of food crops and cotton. Its indigenous population has always been mainly Hausa with some Fulani settlement and intermixture. In the early nineteenth century, the ruling Hausa dynasty was overthrown by a flag-bearer of the Fulani *Shehu* Usman dan Fodio, who had launched a *jihad* against the Hausa states for their failure to follow Islamic law. This flag bearer became the Emir of Kano, with Kano as the biggest state within the Caliphate of Sokoto. After successful campaigns, other flag-bearers became emirs of other Hausa states, including Katsina and Daura, which border what are now Zinder and Maradi Departments of Niger. The former Hausa leaders took refuge in Zinder and Maradi, and fighting continued between them and the new Fulani emirs of Katsina and Kano up to the arrival of the British and French. Border areas in consequence became depopulated.

³ Trémolière (2007) study of the region agrees that these trade relations also promoted the spread of ideas, which is how Islam reached Western and Central Sudan. The impact of Islamisation was so strong that Kano and Katsina gained fame as cities that exerted a strong intellectual and cultural influence on the Islamic world.

In the eleventh century, Hausa city-states such as Kano, Katsina and Gobir were fortified towns within which the caravan trade developed, alongside extensive weaving, dyeing and leather manufacturing activities. They were also major trading centres for cereals (millet and sorghum), cotton and sugarcane, which were produced in the hinterland. Commercial activities were organised into corporations that were self-regulatory and collected taxes. Tax income was submitted to the *Sarki* (traditional chiefs from Niger) as a pledge of loyalty; in return, the latter guaranteed the freedom and safety of trade.

The *Kano Chronicle*, a collection of traditions about the early history of Kano provides information on the beginning of state-formation among the Hausa. During the 13th and 14th centuries, small city-states developed, each centred on a walled city or *birni*. States grew up around these cities which served as centres of administration, as places of refuge in times of danger, as main markets for local trade and as centres of long-distance trade. By the 15th century several of the small Hausa city-states had developed into strong kingdoms with trade links south and south-west across the Niger to the coastal state and north to link in with the trans-Saharan trade. During the late 14th and the 15th centuries, Islam reached the Hausa states from both Borno to the east and the Niger bend area to the West. With Islam came literacy and new ideas about justice, taxation and methods of government, all of which assisted the process of state formation (Thatcher, 1980:18).

Mohamane (1993) refers to the administrative grid of this region as based on a very elaborate system with distinct, specific functions. Thus, ‘the existence of the posts of *Tafarki* (security guard along trade routes), *Madugu* (head caravanner), *Sarunan Sana’*a (trade chiefs), *Kofa* (city gate guards), and different industrial and artisanal activities leaves no doubts about the contribution of trade to the state’s and administration’s revenues’. This body of officials oversaw the proper functioning of the administration and the safety of economic activities and trade.

The Maradi region, extending from Kano, Katsina to Maradi, therefore came to be known for its strong sense of “a yearning for community” and “a sense of belonging to a community or a society’s common project”. Even before the incursion of colonialism and imperialism on the African continent, the Hausa-Fulani, with its centralised political system had shown a cohesive and decisive leadership and followership. The leaders of this region were devout Muslims who placed great emphasis on spreading and improving Islam. The religion’s connection with the wealth of the trans-Saharan trade and with the civilization of North Africa must have obviously added to its appeal. Moreover, to the rulers of this empire support for Islam provided many benefits: it meant the support of the influential Muslim communities in the cities, some unity between members of different people and the backing of Islamic political theory which stressed the obligation of the obedience to a just ruler. This became the strongest unifying factor within the region.

Under the authority of the Songhai and the Borno empire, the Hausa city-states, despite their political instability, were able to retain their territorial integrity and a very strong cultural unity. The Moroccan invasion of Songhai in the 1590s and the resultant chaos in the Niger bend area greatly benefitted Hausaland. The Tripoli-Ghat-Air-Hausaland trans-Saharan trade route became more important than the routes areas and the Hausa cities, especially Katsina and Kano, replaced the Niger bend cities as the major centres of trade and Islam in the Western Sudan (Thatcher, 1980:19).

However, as Trémolières (2007) notes, their structural stability was, however, put to a severe test by a series of particularly harsh droughts in the seventeenth and the eighteenth

centuries. The length of the famines and the social crises that followed created a feeling of discontent among the people, who made the most of the Peul Muslim reformists under the guidance of Usman dan Fodio. The *Jihad* or holy war that he initiated from 1804-08 led to the submission of the Hausa States: Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Zaria, Alkalawa and Birnin Gazarganu. This led to the emergence of a Sokoto Caliphate, in the form of a confederation of several Emirates, which agreed to place themselves under the suzerainty of the Caliph⁴.

The British signed a treaty with the Sultan in 1885, with the aim of persuading the Peul and Hausa chiefs to recognise the British protectorate of the Sokoto Caliphate's Emirates⁵. The caliphate already possessed a highly developed and efficient system of administration headed by the emirs, and the British believed, and they were right, that if they control the emirs, they will in turn control their subjects. However, it was not until 1903, after the capitulation of Borno, that the British planned the military conquest of Sokoto and Kano. The protectorate was established over Hausa territory and most executive and legislative powers were vested with its High Commissioner. Practically the entire traditional chain of command was 'assigned' to the level of low-ranking officers in the colonial order. The system of "indirect rule" that was set up nonetheless enabled the chiefdoms to retain a fair amount of autonomy and an ascendancy over people and goods that they still exert to this day. In fact, they enjoyed legal prerogatives in certain matters, such as divorces, disputes, debts, and the freeing of slaves, in the light of Islamic law (i.e. *Sharia*).

As far as possible, colonial policies avoided questioning the traditional and Islamic values followed in the former Sokoto Caliphate and its various Emirates. Trémolières (2007) is right in her remarks that, indirect rule played a role in strengthening the Hausa-Fulani domination and identity in northern Nigeria, with Hausa recognised as an official language. Additionally, under the British colonizers, the north underwent rapid economic development, in particular with the construction of the railways in 1912, which transported cash crops (peanuts and cotton) to ports along the Atlantic coast. Yet, the British were wrong in their belief that the African society was static and unchanging. This fact explains their policy to allow northern Nigeria to stagnate, and to deny western education to this region; a fact conditioning the low development of the region.

Today, the socio-cultural homogeneity of the *Hausa Kasar*, so reinforced by its population (although several peoples inhabit the territory, the Hausa are in the very large majority) and by Islam has a population of 50 million spread over an area of 1,500 km along the border between Niger and Nigeria makes the Maradi region an interesting case for micro-regionalisation. Hausa, which has very few dialectal variations, is the most commonly spoken language in black Africa. Here, more than in most other areas, the border is a flexible concept, or rather promotes a highly functioning cross-border dynamic. The complementarity of production systems between the north – most suited to livestock farming- and the arable south of the *Hausa Kasar* has long spurred considerable trade flows between the two regions.

⁴ The Caliph was the head of the Caliphate, and was regarded as the Commander of the Believers.

⁵ Trémolières (2007) argues that it was during this period that Hausa territory was divided between the French and the British. The former colonised Niger and the latter, Nigeria. In spite of this division, Peul-Hausa solidarity remained constant. In fact, it was to do away with the strong influence of the Hausa community in Zinder and to weaken the influence of the prosperous and highly populated northern Nigeria that the French administration chose to relocate the colony's headquarters from Zinder to Niamey in 1921. By doing so, it believed it would restore the balance of economic and, above all, local political power. For further discussion, see Trémolière (2007) and Abdoul and Trémolières (2007).

The Kano-Katsina-Maradi Cross-Border Framework

Border zones are the *front lines* of regional economic goal. There are numerous day-to-day obstacles and constraints which still hinder West African cooperation and integration despite existing community texts on free movement of goods and persons and the right to establishment. These zones also suffer the consequences of the disparities between national economic policies and are often marginalised in the implementation of sectoral policies concerning transportation, electricity, access to education and health services. They are subject to a purely national notion of how economic sectors should be managed. While these sectors have enormous potential, the development of this potential is hindered due to this cross-border situation. The discrepancies of national systems manifest themselves in border areas. Achieving local integration, based for example on community homogeneity and economic complementarities, constitutes the first step of regional integration (Cross-border Initiative in the area of Kano-Katsina-Maradi, 2007).

According to the Cross-border Initiative in the area of Kano-Katsina-Maradi (2007:7-8), border zones are particularly vulnerable in periods of instability. Conflicts are not initiated in these areas but their consequences often manifest there: refugee flows, circulation of armed groups, illicit trafficking of merchandise and resources. As trade zones, they are also havens where fleeing populations are protected and economies of war develop.

The role played by local initiatives (NGOs and civil society) in conflict prevention for stability and socio-economic development of cross-border areas is presently commonly accepted. Organised nationally and lacking human, financial and logistical resources, law enforcement agencies see their intervention capacity restricted by the limitation of their prerogatives within national boundaries. The initiatives taken within the framework of peace committees or other traditional or associative types of organisations are mostly favourably perceived by the authorities. Far from being in competition with the authorities, these initiatives in fact broaden and complement their intervention. In addition to their essential peace-keeping function in border areas, these initiatives are genuine drivers of regional integration from the “bottom up”. By bringing together citizens of neighbouring countries on security issues, the initiative provides a framework conducive to the development of economic, social, and cultural cooperation among communities.

The ECOWAS Heads of State Conference held in Accra on 15 June 2007 had a strategic objective “*to move from an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of people by 2020*”. Similarly, the ECOWAS Commission’s 2007-2010 Strategic Plan highlights the following objective: *for borders to be secure and fluid, to implement numerous cross-border cooperation projects between border populations*. The ECOWAS Commission has started pursuing this goal through the Cross-border Initiatives Programme (C.I.P.). It should be emphasised that the development of cross-border cooperation is one of the major areas of concentration in the “Migration and Development Action Plan” defined within the framework of an ECOWAS common approach on migration adopted at the Ministerial meeting on 14 June 2007 in Abuja. This Action Plan was submitted to the ECOWAS Heads of State Summit at the end of 2007. It stresses that:

Free movement within the ECOWAS zone is an essential component of regional integration which in itself is one of the conditions for better integration of the West African economy into globalisation. Furthermore, there is a correlation between the fluidity of circular migration and migratory pressure. In effect, this fluidity helps reduce migratory pressure on external ECOWAS zone borders.

To this end, the Action Plan highlights the need “*to be attentive to borders and cross-border areas and to create a Regional Cross-border Cooperation Fund to: 1) facilitate free movement through concrete actions such as setting up joint border posts, border markets, shared health centres and schools, etc.; 2) support border populations through local development actions aimed at the poorest and most marginalised populations; 3) to develop good neighbour relations anchored in realities on the ground between ECOWAS member States and between the ECOWAS zone and its neighbours.*”

The Maradi Region is one of the most intense West African trade corridors, the cross-border corridor from Kano in Northern Nigeria to Maradi in Southern Niger passing through Katsina (Northern Nigeria). The K²M initiative - as it is called - falls within the macro-regional framework as requested by ECOWAS member States. It is also in line with a specific local framework. The region is at the heart of the “*Kasar Hausa*” which covers an area of over 83 000 Km² with more than 50 million inhabitants, between Nigeria and Niger. The three towns make up one of the oldest trade corridors, open for centuries to the Gulf of Guinea, North Africa and the Middle East. Linked by age-old social and cultural links, very densely populated and having a compact urban network organised around the urban area of Kano, this area illustrates Nigeria’s influence on Niger’s economy along the 1500 km common border.

History, geography and strong demographic growth have created an urban canvas at the heart of the Hausa lands with no equivalent in the hinterland of West Africa. Urbanisation in this region, centred around the town of Kano, is testament to the genuine and significant process of change in the West African economy. Because of its historic status as a trading town, Kano has long been a dynamic place. But its population, as in other cities in West Africa, expanded most rapidly after 1960 [at an annual average of 6%] (Border Chronicles, October, 2004: 9).

As Nigeria's third city after Lagos and Ibadan, Kano covered an area of just 17km², at the beginning of the 20th century but has now spilled beyond the walls of the old town to cover 60 km², of which 48 km² are built up. The state of Kano, ranking 20th in the Nigerian federation in terms of area, is the second most populated state with more than six million inhabitants in 1996, a density of 500 inhabitants per square kilometer. The development of a network of secondary towns along the border between Niger and Nigeria has been supported by the existence of this large metropolis, the only inland city that can be compared to cities like Accra, Abidjan, etc. Half-way between Maradi and Kano, Katsina today is a medium-sized town of around 400,000 inhabitants. It is the capital of a state of six million people which, when added to the population of Kano state, forms a populated area of almost 15 million souls.

A little further north, Maradi, in Niger, is smaller but rapidly growing. Located at the heart of a much less densely populated area (around 60 inhabitants per km²), it has become a satellite of Kano. This hierarchical arrangement of rapidly expanding towns creates new production networks, even around relatively small towns like Maradi. Self-sufficient agriculture was the main agropastoral activity (apart from cash-crop production, especially cashew) in the Sahelian part of Niger, until the new type of a regional exchange economy did develop. Agricultural land has gradually been bought up by traders or urban economic actors and a new class of agricultural workers has emerged, made up of rural dwellers who no longer had the means to develop their land. The peasant economy is being monetised and in spite of the lack of a dense network of banking and financial institutions, integration of the peasant environment is speeding up thanks to the dynamism of Hausa traders and their

networks of brokers and the intra- and extra-regional ramifications which embrace all the regions circuits of economic activity.

Maradi's economy is focused on trade; processing industries are hardly developed and the old agro-food industrial units have closed. Today, industry is concentrated in the larger towns of Nigeria, Katsina and above all Kano are veritable clusters with food processing businesses, tanneries, textile, metallurgical, plastics and packaging factories and sugar refineries. Maradi's position within Niger is similar to that of Katsina in Nigeria – part of an urban system and a local economy absorbed by the mighty city of Kano. Transactions which take place along the border, and the hierarchy of urban economies within this local economy, are testament to *de facto* regional integration based upon the exploitation of economic opportunities and specialisation within a community - the Hausa community being the case in point.

Commercial trade in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region is very intense. While cattle are brought from Niger, Nigerian cereals and manufactured products or indeed re-exported products to Nigeria abound. The development of trade relations between southern Niger and northern Nigeria stems from two major activities: trade in local products and transit. The flow of goods from Niger to Nigeria includes a type of string beans (*niébé*), Zulu nuts (*chufu*), gum arabic, cattle, leather and skins, commodities and manufactured goods from Lomé and Cotonou. Goods flowing in the other direction include cereals, other food products (pasta, corn meal, sugar, salt, yams, fruits, etc.), hydrocarbons, building materials and plastic products, both from Nigerian as well as international sources.

In keeping with a very old tradition, livestock trade occupies a very important position in trade relations between Niger and Nigeria. Nigeria's several million head of cattle constitute one of its biggest assets. The livestock sold in Nigeria is highly taxed, with animals taxed at 40 per cent of their market value, which tends to encourage the parallel market. Statistics refer to exports of 115,000 head of cattle, a figure that appears to be far below the actual numbers which are, in fact, traded. About 70 per cent of the Nigerian herd can be found in the northern part of the country, mostly in the Sahelian areas. The statistics for 2001 state there were 24.3 million goats, 20.5 million sheep and 19.8 million cattle (Atlas of Nigeria, 2002). In the savannah areas, where the vast majority of animals graze, cereal cultivation is of equal importance.

Nigeria produces 8,000,000 and 6,000,000 tons of sorghum and millet respectively. Niger's structural deficits in millet and sorghum are overcome by the surplus produced in northern Nigeria, which further binds the micro-region together. Endowed with a large cereal market, Kano is the hub for redistribution to households or other industries within the country, as well as in Niger. As compared to other regions in West Africa, it constitutes one of the main cereal reserves, combining the local potential of Maradi and Nigeria's scale of production and taking advantage of existing complementarities and seasonal differences.

The Maradi–Katsina–Kano route is distinguished by the development of a network of relatively dense secondary cities. Their population growth rates are high enough to stimulate agricultural production in the surrounding rural areas, including the Nigerian coast. The urban–rural network operates under the guidance of perfectly coordinated networks of economic players, from producers to wholesalers, and this has enabled cross-border trade to develop economically well beyond its limits, placing the micro-region in a regional and even international framework based on ancient, well-organised trade networks.

The concentration of trade around a dense network of markets goes back to the era of trans-Saharan trade in certain trading hubs, such as Zinder and Konni in Niger and Madaou, Illéla and Kamba in Nigeria. These focal markets attracted merchants from considerable distances as well as from surrounding areas, thanks to their links with a host of periodic markets, each covering a vast radius of several hundred sq km and forming supply centres and import–export hubs. In fact the entire Hausa territory is crisscrossed by a road network linking the main market and warehousing cities with transshipment points or villages where weekly markets are held. A market typology has been established, based on the specific functions of each market in the system as a whole.

- a. Harvest or pick-up markets located in the northern Nigerian production zones, i.e.: Bakori, Dandume, Danja, Tsiga, Sheme in Katsina State; Giwa, and Makarfi in Kaduna State; Sundu and Dawanu in Kano State.
- b. Grouping or consolidation markets: Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Funtua, Gusau and Maiduguri.
- c. Transit or border markets, such as Jibia, Illela, Kamba, Maiadua, Maigatari Mubi, Kerawa, Baga and Malanville, which are the main markets of this type.
- d. End consumer markets such as Lagos, Cotonou, Niamey, Maradi, Zinder and N'Djamena and those in northern Cameroon (Trémolières, 2007).

Trémolières (2007) argues that over a hundred border markets can be found along the entire 1,500 km long border between Niger and Nigeria. Moreover, the recognised functions of a market do not preclude it from playing other roles. Jibia, for instance, is a transit market, but also a grouping market. It shares this dual role with other cereal markets in Katsina state, namely Dandume, Dutsinma, Charanchi, Yarganshi and Batsari. Customers come from Niamey to stock up at the border markets, whilst Guribi, Matameye and Madaou are harvest markets and markets for transit to other large urban centres in Nigeria.

The market and warehousing cities are connected with transshipment points or villages where weekly markets are held through three main routes, from west to east, such as the Konni–Illéla–Sokoto–Gusau–Zaria road, which continues toward southern Nigeria via Jos; the Maradi–Jibiya–Katsina route, which stretches as far as Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, Abuja and Lagos; and the Zinder–Matameye–Daura–Kazaure–Kano road. These main roads are in turn interconnected by secondary roads and several link roads, leading to villages in northern Nigeria and the agricultural areas. Thus, the road infrastructure favours the supply of food to urban centres, whilst the return journeys are used to bring manufactured goods to the most remote corners of Nigeria and Niger.

Irregular and low levels of rainfall have been responsible for the food crises in the region, the 2005 lean season in Niger being an extreme case. As a result, a joint field mission was carried out in May 2006 and strategic thinking was undertaken by the CILSS, FEWS NET, OCHA, SWAC, UNDP, UNICEF, WAMIS-Net, and WFP and an enlarged study on Niger-Nigeria-Chad-Cameroon by CILSS, FEWS NET, WFP and the University of California Berkeley. The May 2006 Summary Report examines the potential and issues of a cross-border cooperation initiative supported by local actors. The zone's circumstances have geared the CIP towards initiatives likely to:

- i. Contribute to the regional integration process by strengthening solidarities and economic and social cross-border activities;
- ii. Set up systems and integrated, concerted cross-border tools for the free movement of people, goods and capital;

- iii. Establish systems and concerted, integrated cross-border tools to monitor and manage food crises. For this initiative to succeed, at the workshop it was decided to proceed in stages starting off with “Phase 1” which would include:
- iv. Conceiving and implementing, through coordination and consultation, a harmonised food crop market information collection and dissemination system;
- v. Establishing a mechanism to improve, through coordination, the cross-border movement of goods and capital

On the other hand, local actors meeting in Katsina in September 2007 asked the Workshop organisers to draft components of a proposal for the implementation of Phase 1. This reference document should:

- i. Situate the K²M initiative within the overall issue of West African cross-border cooperation;
- ii. Recall the initiative’s technical and organisational structure;
- iii. Supplement this structure with implementation proposals and identify outstanding issues;
- iv. Put forward components of a technical, organisational and financial feasibility study of the K²M initiative.

The Maradi Micro Region: A Neo-liberal Agenda?

The making of the Maradi Region as a formal project is closely linked to attempts by state-business elites in Nigeria and Niger to tie into what they perceive as economic globalisation. The Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation as well as the ECOWAS is convinced that the Kano-Katsina-Maradi regional project remains among others, key micro-regional initiatives aimed at ensuring the ‘strategic global repositioning (SGR)’ of this sub-region, a formula coined by Richard Bernal, Jamaican ambassador to the USA during most of the 1990s. He advanced this concept in a series of presentations from 1996 onwards, defining it as:

a process of repositioning a country in the global economy and world affairs by implementing a strategic medium to long term plan formulated from continuous dialogue of the public service, private sector, academic community and the social sector. It involves proactive structural and institutional transformation (not adjustment) focussed on improvement and diversification of exports and international economic and political relations. Achieving SGR requires changes in both internal and external relations. (Bernal, 2000: 311).

How the developing world “fits” with globalisation, and how or in what way the non-core can benefit from globalisation is an intense area of debate. Thus far, it has been regional elites, with their own particular understanding of what globalisation is, that have largely set the agenda in response to perceived pressures. In Africa, the debate has been advanced by specific African leaders who have sought to craft a relationship with the North and promote a developmental agenda which is based largely along neo-liberal lines. The leaders of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa have been at the forefront of this and their agenda was crystallised in Abuja, Nigeria on October 23, 2001, when the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was launched (NEPAD, 2001). The message communicated by the NEPAD fits within the orthodox neo-liberal discourse and avoids blaming particular policies or global trade structures on Africa’s marginalisation but rather, if pushed, simply passes off the blame on “globalisation”. But even here, the document sees globalisation as providing glowing opportunities, with a statement arguing that:

The world has entered a new millennium in the midst of an economic revolution. This revolution could provide the context and means for Africa’s rejuvenation. While globalisation

has increased the cost of Africa's ability to compete, we hold that the advantages of an effectively managed integration present the best prospects for future economic prosperity and poverty reduction. (ibid,8).

Indeed, the policy options currently being pursued, as crystallised in the NEPAD seeks to press for increased access to the global market in a very similar fashion as the ECOWAS in general and the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation in particular. Far from critically engaging with globalisation or even remotely interrogating it, the African elites promoting the NEPAD and ECOWAS projects are actually pushing for greater integration into the global capitalist order, but on renegotiated terms that favour externally oriented West African elites. The actual neo-liberal underpinnings of the global market are presumed to be sacrosanct. As Trevor Manuel, South Africa's finance minister asserted, *'there is a new resilience and a new will to succeed in the African continent. We in South Africa have called it a renaissance, a new vision of political and economic renewal. It takes the global competitive marketplace as point of departure'* (Manuel, 1998).

The point being made in this paper is that the form of macro-regionalisation as well as micro-regionalisation being currently promoted in West Africa is premised on an unquestioning belief that integration of their territories into the global economy is absolutely crucial and inevitable. The structural limitations of this are never probed as, it is apparent, "there is no alternative". However, as Cerny remarks, *'globalisation is driven not primarily by some inexorable economic process, but rather by politics: by ideology, by the actions, interactions and decisions of state actors, their private sector interlocutors and wider publics'* (Cerny, 1999: 159). Regarding such perceptions, the functions of the national scale both as a discrete unit of socioeconomic relations and as an organisational interface mediating between sub- and supra-national scales, has been eroded in the eyes of the national units' own elites. The desire amongst regional elites to locate a regional connectivity and regional identity appears of profound significance in citing tactical responses to globalisation. But, regionalisation should not be seen as a counter-reaction in the direction of regional autarkies. Instead, it delineates a consolidation of politico-economic spaces contesting with one another within the capitalist global economy. It is clear that there are no "natural" regions, and that regions have to be constructed.

That existing regionalist projects reflect the impulses of a neo-liberal world order is of a consequence of the environment within which regional elites find themselves *and perceive themselves to be in*. Although the proponents of the transnational ideology of globalisation seek to cast the world as having to adjust to a totalising tendency from which no one can escape globalisation is obviously asymmetrical and variegated and its impact upon different spatial entities varies. As such it takes advantage of, indeed exacerbates differences as much as, if not more than, it produces a uniform new world. In doing so, counter-reactions to, and space opened up by, such contradictions are generated.

Broadening Participation in the Maradi Regional Project: Local versus State Actors

Cross-border cooperation between Niger and Nigeria in the Maradi Region is placed within the confines of three levels of geographic development and consequently three types of actors. The first refers to local actors— those who promote local initiatives – are at the same time local representatives of the State, locally-elected officials and civil society in general (private operators, associations, etc.). The local actors have the responsibility to initiate cross-border cooperation projects as well as promote and implement proposals.

The second level of actors are the national actors, i.e., Central Government, which have a cardinal role (this involves notably the Ministries in charge of the National Boundary

Commission of Nigeria, the *Commission Nationale des Frontières* of Niger as well as the services dealing with food security in both countries) in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region. In addition to facilitating local initiatives, these actors are providing the essential legitimacy to cross-border cooperation so that local actors can dialogue and cooperate. It is important that the States involved give their approval: thus the State is at the centre of the mechanism as well as being the political driver. Local cross-border cooperation initiatives strengthen the State's legitimacy with regard to regional construction by bringing together the populations in the regional integration process spurred on by State actors. The last type of actor is the Regional, multilateral (such as ECOWAS and the CILSS) and bilateral (such as the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation). These actors are given a mandate by the States to build cooperation and regional integration (Cross-Border Diaries, 2008).

The implementation of a cross-border cooperation project should involve all of these actors. Within the regional cooperation framework, the State should provide political leadership while local actors guide the initiative.

The Maradi Micro Region: Formidable Constraints

The development of the *Hausa Kasar* as a formal micro-region has been compromised today by extensive smuggling activities, which are strengthened by the differences between Nigeria and its neighbours with regard to economic policy. While Togo, Benin and Niger have liberal import systems, since their tax revenues depend on re-exports to Nigeria, the latter tries to protect the development of its own production infrastructure. It has been extremely difficult to enforce ECOWAS rules which clarify that the free movement of goods is an asset. In 2005 for example, this rule was not respected by Nigeria which would not allow its cereals to be exported, while at the same time importing cereals from Niger. Informer cross-border trade has also played a central role in weakening fiscal capacity and monetary control of the states of the sub-region. Informal regional trade flows have contributed significantly to undermining the legitimacy and probity of the states. By providing lucrative incentives for corruption and rent seeking activities on the part of state officials, cross-border trading activities have encouraged policy distortions and the arbitrary use of state power. Trade between the two countries is primarily in agro-pastoral products such as grains, legumes and livestock (Collins, 1976), but "unofficial traders" also bring petroleum and farm-chemical products into Niger (Charlick, 1991). These activities, as Lewis (1999) and Boone (1994) suggest have played a central role in weakening incentives for productive investment within the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region.

Another challenge relates to the non-convertibility or partial convertibility of the naira. There are several levels on which the Naira's partial convertibility affects the movement of capital. Generally non-convertibility of a currency implies that this currency has no value outside its home country and thereby considerably reduces trade incentives and this in turn reduces capital movements. In theory that means with restricted convertibility, as is the case in Nigeria, there are less cross-border currency movements. However, based on emerging indications, there is considerable cross-border trade in the area and there are many good reasons to facilitate this trade. Problems regarding the movement of capital are very constraining in this respect. The problems cited are most often security issues. It is considerably risky for traders to go back to their country carrying cash money made by selling livestock because there is no system that allows them to easily transfer this money. Another issue is the dependence on the parallel market, first, the rate they get will surely be below the official exchange rate and second, they will have few possibilities to hedge against exchange rate fluctuations. Based on the evidence on the ground, it is correct to argue following Hashim and Meagher (1999:111-112) that, a development approach would not seek to eliminate the parallel currency market but to integrate it with the formal market. As WAPA

has shown, in any integration the parallel currency markets will be bringing with them experience and knowledge of customer service, flexibility, speed, ease, convenience and a knowledge of financial needs of ordinary people. Related to these two, is the problem of counterfeit money on the markets and the confidence crises that is engenders. To another extent but equally important is the ease at which you can do your business.

The Kano-Katsina-Maradi region shows a high degree of social and economic interconnectedness, be it formal/informal, legal/illegal. There however exist a massive trade imbalance, reflecting the overall imbalance between Nigeria and Niger. As Swatuk and Vale remark, 'the fiction of the Westphalian state system in [West] Africa contrasts with the lived reality on the ground: goods, people, resources, animals, and so forth continue to ignore these borders and to get along in spite of them' (Swatuk and Vale, 1999: 366).

Tremoliers (2007:30) has also identified the dodging of customs duties as a hinderance to regional integration in Maradi regional project. This practice goes back to the time before when borders were drawn and in which several specialized professions are involved- sponsors, informers and other couriers. Many traders began transporting goods across the border on foot. From taking a few jerry cans of petrol from Jibia to Dan Issa, on the Cotonou-Kano crossing, there has been a continuum of more or less lawful activities. However, as Tremoliers argued, the reality of small-time smuggling and its repression by customs departments should not minimize the existence of institutionalised smuggling, which involves much larger volumes and in which state officials are complicit. This is even more complicated as the fluidity and porous borders in addition to lean custom officials and infrastructure frustrate efforts at plugging the holes at the border.

Another distinctive challenge of this region relates to its low level of industrialisation, an albatross hanging on this region's neck. While the population of the *Hausa Kasar* provides it with considerable potential, the question of its regional future depends on its capacity to consolidate its industrial development in the face of competition from the world market. Another key impediment of the region stems from the fact that it is far from being competitive and actively participating in the global economy. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines competitiveness as "the degree to which a country can, under free and fair market conditions, produce goods and services which meet the test of international markets, while simultaneously maintaining and expanding the real incomes of its people over the long term" (<http://www.oecd.org>). How can this large and populous region survive the onslaught of globalisation without industrial development, with competitive goods, remains a serious question?

There is also the problem of the diverse ways the State manifest itself in this region. The state is perceived differently depending on whether one talks of the central administration or local representatives. As Tremoliers (2007:31) notes, "the latter often express themselves as local actors and perceive problems in the same way as other border actors, including traders and smugglers. They are often involved in dialogue and *de facto* cooperation with their counterparts working on the other side of the border. However, it is evidence that the local actors must be actively involved for the cross border cooperation to reach all its potential.

The Maradi Micro Region: A Window of Hope

The key prospects of the Kano-Katsina-Maradi region relates to the involvement of local actors, which have begun to build regional civil groups. A key initiative here has been the activities of the Economic Interest Group (EIG). Since 2001, with the urging of livestock breeders in Dakoro (Maradi region), an economic interest group (EIG) was established to

market livestock in Nigeria. Aware of the value added of their production created in Nigeria, the livestock breeders decided to organise a grouped marketing campaign aimed at Nigeria. The potential of a grassroots movement such as the EIG has been incredible. Livestock breeders were able to bring together more than 400 heads of cattle for the first transaction. They faced several problems very much linked to the three platforms developed at the Katsina workshop. First, they were not as capable in negotiations as the Nigerian traders, notably due to inexperience and lack of information on prices and quality. Secondly, the border crossing, where taxes are paid and sanitary controls carried out, was long and harassing. Finally, the movement of capital and the fluctuation of the exchange rate between the CFA Franc and the Naira was a problem. Nevertheless, with their first experience on the Jibya market in Nigeria under their belt, the livestock breeders agreed on a sales technique by seeking advice from their Nigerian partners (farmer platform) and obtaining information on prices. Through their intermediary, they met with customs services and Maradi *Governorat* in order to cut border crossing time as well as reduce taxes. Finally they negotiated with Ecobank Maradi and Ecobank Jibya to facilitate the transaction from one country to the other so as to avoid travelling with cash.

The Kano-Katsina-Maradi initiative is already emerging as a platform to address the food security challenges that pervade this region. The 2005 food crisis in the Sahel, and more particularly in Niger, highlighted the existing link between food security and the cross-border trade of food crop products. While Sahel zone production systems and thus ways of life have remained very traditional for the most part, the environment in general has radically evolved over the last three decades:

- i. The climate in the Sahel has become drier and the average isohyets have moved 100-150 km further south.
- ii. The Sahel is no longer “isolated” from the rest of the West African region. Over the last decades, southern Sahelian countries and northern coastal countries have become highly populated where towns and road networks are rapidly developing.

Given the increasing connectedness with large urban areas, traditional Sahelian ways of life are now greatly affected by the market of which fluctuations can heighten the effects of natural hazards (desert locusts and insufficient rains). Henceforth, the regional market, with its obvious cross-border characteristics, must be taken into account by any strategy aiming to improve prevention and management of food crises.

Another positive nod for micro-regionalism in this area is the institutional policy and commitment of the ECOWAS to cross-border cooperation for accelerating the regional integration process. The ECOWAS Commission has officially added cross-border cooperation to its organisational chart. Cross-border cooperation is included in the mandate of its Free Movement of Persons Department which is under the responsibility of the Office of the Commissioner of Trade, Customs, Industry, Mines and Free Movement of Persons. The Department’s mandates involving cross-border cooperation are as follows:

- a. To implement a regional cross-border cooperation strategy in support of free movement, good neighbour relations, peace and development through the Cross-border Initiatives Programme;
- b. To set up and implement a regional fund for cross-border cooperation in order to provide financial resources needed for rapid development of cross-border cooperation projects within all of the community border and cross-border areas;
- c. Monitoring the ratification, implementation and follow-up of the cross-border cooperation convention.
- d. Integrating border cooperation into one of the ECOWAS Departments is a decisive step in the Community’s involvement. It sanctions a clear political approach that

officially links cross-border cooperation to the Community goal of building an economically integrated regional zone based on free movement. It also establishes cross-border cooperation as a medium- and long-term response to West African migratory issues. The Free Movement of Persons Department is indeed also responsible for migration. In particular, it encourages the development of member countries' common approach to migration.

The proposed Regional Cross-border Cooperation Fund of the member states of ECOWAS is intended to take care of numerous challenges of migration by (1) facilitating free movement through concrete actions such as the setting up of joint border posts, border markets, joint health centres, shared schools, etc., (2) supporting border populations through development activities geared towards the poorest, most marginalised populations; (3) developing good neighbourly relations rooted in realities on the ground among ECOWAS member countries and between the ECOWAS zone and its neighbours.”

Conclusion

West African state-led macro regional integration schemes have yet to benefit the citizens, and to integrate the sub-region. According to Kaplan (2006:81), the reason is not far fetched: pint-sized, expensive markets keep most states isolated from the dynamic changes globalisation is bringing elsewhere. The region's aggregate GDP is less than half that of Norway (UNDP, 2003: 278–281). Although infrastructure costs are among the highest in the world- electricity averages 4.5 times and international telephone calls four times the charges in countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (World Bank, 2001:2) -the systems are woefully inadequate and unreliable. The regulatory burden forces all but the largest businesses underground. In Niger, for example, it takes 11 steps and costs four times the average income just to register a business (World Bank, 2001: 58–60; UNDP, 2003:278–281, 291–294). With the continuous marginalisation of Africa in the global system, exacerbated by the advent of globalisation, and structural adjustments, micro-regional initiatives, have taken the centre stage of regional integration in West Africa, and indeed, Africa. These initiatives are informed by the 'new regionalism' impulses which has reconceptualised cross-border cooperation to include the activities of the local actors, and the informal areas, often neglected in the literature on cross-border cooperation.

This paper has analysed the development of the Kano-Katsina-Maradi regional initiative, and the prospects and challenges of this micro-region. Most scholars and policy makers have argued that regional integration in Africa remains the most viable alternative to wade the negative consequences of globalisation. However, it is imperative to stress that such efforts must primarily be geared towards the good of the citizens. As the ECA Executive Secretary, K. Y. Amoako, argued:

I want to see intra-African integration not because we will garner some utopian share of world commerce, but first and foremost because it will improve our lives here. It will free up the time of African businesspeople to do business here. It will lower costs. It will make the African consumer's plight so much more hopeful. We must build for ourselves. If we do that, others will come (Harsch, 2002: 2-3).

The paper highlights the role of local actors in deepening the cross-border cooperation between Niger and Nigeria. While acknowledging their role, it also highlights the importance of two other actors: national and regional/multilateral and bilateral. Indeed, the winners of the ongoing processes within the micro-region appear to be restricted to a small fraction of the population. But, outside the parameters of the official are the informal trading networks that have been established along the Kano-Katsina-Maradi Corridor to take advantage of the

increase in the flow of traffic through the micro-region. This goes to the heart of issues surrounding gender equity and accessibility to any developmental spin-offs that may accrue from the initiative. There are however formidable obstacles such as smuggling, corruption, non-convertible of the naira, famine in the region, desertification, the partial implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of people and the absence of competitive trade in the region.

On the other hand, this regional initiative has received a lot of support from both the 'state' and private sector. The Kano-Katsina-Maradi initiative is not only driven by state elites, who have their own agenda, but also communities and peoples who utilise the micro-region for a heterogeneous set of reasons and motives. These two sets of processes -the formal/top-down and the informal/bottom-up- frequently clash and are in confrontation at a multiple and quite complex set of levels. Such processes and outcomes of region-building and region destruction, in all their multiple activities and levels characterise the micro-region (Söderbaum and Taylor, 2007).

Interestingly, and this is a big plus for the Kano-Katsina-Maradi initiative, the regional project is strongly supported by the local populations and is showing visible signs of deepening. The role of ECOWAS and the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation in actualising the potential of cross-border cooperation between the two countries need not be over emphasised. However, these organisations must ensure that the regional development initiative here adopts a 'bottom-up' approach. In the final analysis, the macro-regional perspectives, as reflected in the Cross-border Initiatives Programme (C.I.P.) must converge with micro-regional ones in order for the citizens to reap the benefits of this initiative and for the region to assert its competitiveness in the global economy.

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