

Regional Integration and Globalization: a Justification from the Perspective of ECOWAS

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Abstract

As a concept, globalization has been viewed from varying perspectives. However, a consensus is seemingly discernible to the point of pruning the global community into one village. A very interesting poser may suffice as to the justification for the various compartmentalizations within this global metamorphosis occasioned by technological innovations in the areas of telecommunications, transportation, etc. This paper conducted an investigation into the rationale and benefits of regional integration within the context of the global village. Data was obtained from secondary sources which include books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, research papers, the internet, etc. It is a descriptive analysis in which content analysis was employed as the major tool of its methodology. The result of the analysis shows that regional cooperation facilitates whatever benefits of globalizations. Hence, the paper recommended the improvement and sustenance of the regional cooperation. The study adopts as its theoretical framework, the systems theory. The analysis reveals that a global village as presently constituted still requires the sub units to function which makes the systems theory which is the most suitable to be adopted as our theoretical framework.

Keywords: *Globalization, Regional integration, Regional cooperation, Technological innovations metamorphosis.*

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Background to the Study

There is a lot of confusion about the term, and about the rhetoric of the 'new world order' following the end of the cold war. Globalization may be conceived as a myth, a rhetorical device, a phenomenon, an ideology, a reality, orthodoxy, rationality. As a matter of fact, globalization is a short form for a cluster of related changes: economic, ideological, technological, and cultural. Economic changes include the internalization of production, the greatly increased mobility of capital and of transnational corporations as well as the deepening and intensification of economic interdependence. "The economic manifestations of globalization include the spatial reorganization of production, the interpenetration of industries across borders, the spread of financial markets, the diffusion of identical consumer goods across distant countries, and massive transfers of population" (Mittelman, 1996b). Whereas the ideological changes include investment and trade liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and the adoption of political democracy in the institutional realm, the technological changes include information and communications technologies that have shrunk the globe and the shift from goods to services. Lastly, "cultural changes involve trends toward harmonization of tastes and standards, a universal world culture that transcends the nation-state" (Li, 1997:5).

According to Holm and Sorensen (1995); globalization may be defined as "the intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relation across borders". In this sense, it involves more than the geographical extension of a range of phenomena and issues. It implies "not only a significant intensification of global connectedness but also a consciousness of that intensification, with a concomitant diminution in the significance of territorial boundaries" (Bretherton, 1963). Globalization is pushed by several factors, the most important among which is technological change.

An international region can be broadly defined as a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence/ "For each state in the region, the activities of other members of the region (be they cooperative or antagonistic), are significant determinants of its foreign policy" (Nye, 1968; Cantori and Spiegel, 1970). "Regional subsystems are characterized by clusters of states coexisting in geographical propinquity as interrelated units that sustain significant security, economic, and political relations" (Wriggins, 1992, Kaiser, 1958; Buzan, 1991). Regions can therefore, be conceived as an "intermediate form of community", between the national community of the state and the global community of humanland" as clearly evident in the cases of pluralistic security communities. Regionalization can be conceived as "the growth of societal integration within a given region, including the undirected processes of social and economic interaction among the units, such as nation – states" (Hurrell, 1995a). As a dynamic process, it may be viewed as a continuing process of forming regions as geopolitical units, as organized political cooperation within a particular group of states, and/or as regional communities such as pluralistic security communities" (Whiting, 1993).

Regionalization may be viewed as a component of globalization. This is because, regionalism is emerging in recent times, as a patent force in the process of globalization. Mittelman

(1996a), shares the view that, “if globalization is regarded as the compression of the temporal and spatial aspects of social relations, then regionalism may be understood as one component, or 'chapter of globalization'. This view implies that, by helping national economies become more competitive in the world market, regional integration will lead to multilateral cooperation on a global scale, the adoption of liberal premises about cooperation, and the opening of liberal economies.

However, the concept of globalization is explained, it should be understood from the bottom-line of one standpoint which underscores the metamorphosis that has reduced the world into a global village. The question needs to be asked as to the rationale behind the division of this single village into further units. This is the issue before this study.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study seeks to ascertain the justification for regionalization within the context of globalization. Specifically, it seeks to:

- 1) Examine the rationale for regional integration in a world that is already encapsulated in a single village.
- 2) Find out where to locate such justification in the context of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Research Questions

Two questions will be answered in this study, they include:

- 1) What is the justification for regional integration in a world that has metamorphosed in one village?
- 2) To what extent does such justification hold within the context of ECOWAS?

Literature Review

Conceptual Literature

Globalization: The latest advancement in information technology has reduced the contemporary world to a kind of global village in the sense that policies and programs that are made at a distance from us have direct bearing or relatively catastrophic effect on all humankind. The central feature of globalization is the fact that geographical distance is of declining relevance, and that territorial boundaries, such as that of the nation-states are becoming less significant. Thus globalization is “a shift from a world of distinct national economies to a global economy in which production is internationalized and financial capital flows freely and instantly between countries” (Joshua and Jon, 2012). For Ake (1995), “the whole issue of globalization stresses, growing structural differentiation and functional integration in the world economy, growing interdependence across the globe; it is about nation-state coming under pressure from the surge of transnational phenomenon”.

Integration: Scholars are sharply divided on the definition of integration. However, Akinboye and Otto (2005), observed that “to integrate, in general, denotes making a whole out of parts”.

Regional Integration: This is a process by which two or more nation-state agree to cooperate and work closely together to achieve peace, stability and wealth. Usually, it involves one or more written agreements that describe the areas of cooperation in detail as well as some coordinating bodies representing the countries involve. This cooperation usually begins with economic integration and as it continues, comes to include political integration. Regional integration may therefore, be defined as a process in which neighbouring states enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules. Wengrzyn (n.d), defines regional integration as “a process in which countries enter into a regional agreement in order to enhance regional cooperation through regional structure and rules.

Theoretical Framework

General systems theory by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1930). Systems theory was proposed to better understand the systems of the world around us. Bertalanffy's idea behind systems theory is that nothing can be explained by isolating a component of system. His “though on scientific reductionism could not accurately explain a whole system because that pattern broke everything up into pieces instead of studying things as a whole”. (Connors, 2007). His idea was that if a system was going to be examined or understood, it had to be what he referred to as an open system. An open system is one in which the system has both inputs and outputs. To demonstrate this example, we can look at the human body as an open system. In order for life to be sustained, we must have oxygen, food and water to keep us alive. All of these are what Bertalanffy labeled as inputs. However, he also explained that a system must have outputs or ways of excreting waste or unused portions from the input. An example of a closed system is the planet earth.

Empirical Literature

There are several empirical justification for regional integration within the context of globalization.

Kacowicz (1998), in a working paper at the Kellogg Institute for International studies, examined the interaction among three forces that shape world politics in the contemporary system: globalization, regionalization and nationalism. The main thesis suggested in this study is that these three forces cannot be assessed in isolation, independently from one another, nor from a perspective of either convergence or divergence among them. Rather, globalization, regionalization and nationalism should be captured and studied as forces relative to and overlapping one another, sometimes antagonistic and sometimes cooperative toward each other but never harmonizes.

Drecher (2005), using his composite globalization indication finds strong evidence of a positive effect of international integration on growth, less convincingly, Kearney, used simple correlation coefficients to claim that there are positive effects of globalization on environmental performance (2003).

Sandro (1997), examined the impact of globalization on the nation-state, the emergence of regionalism, and the complications created by the rising demands of devolution at sub-national

level. A review of regional integration shows that whilst regionalism protects against the worst effects of globalization and unites countries, it also encourages sub-national movements, thus heightening the dangers of national divisiveness. Yet, the alternative to globalization mitigated by regionalism and devolution is either unfettered 'global neoclassicism' or feuding trading blocs, both of which mean further marginalization for the developing world as well as for some economic sectors and social groups in the developed countries.

Methodology

Our methodology involves the use of content analysis. Thus, data obtained from secondary materials – books, journals, periodical, the internet, etc are synthesized as we also integrate vital elements of our theoretical framework. The analysis gives in the sequence of research questions one (1) and two (2):

Research Question one (1): what is the justification for a regional integration within a global framework?

Abinitio, the statement may be valid that given the situation where the world has turned a single global village, there would be no rationale for regionalizing into smaller arrangement.

Further still, in a situation whereby global arrangements like the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, etc exist, there would be no justification for the introduction of regional and sub-regional bodies like the African Union, ECOWAS, EU, etc. The systems theory explains that the whole must be made up of parts just as the parts constitute parts of the whole in an interdependent/interrelationship whereby no part or whole renders the system non-existent. Thus, globalization still requires regionalization just as regionalization cannot take place in the absence of globalization. This justifies the evolution and existence of regional arrangements within the global system.

Research Question two (2): To what extent can the ECOWAS arrangement be justified within the context of globalization? Again, the systems theory explains it all. The West African sub-region is a part of the African continent, which is also part of the world. Going by simple syllogism, if ECOWAS is a part of the African Union, which is also an integral part of the world, it stands to reason that the West African sub-region is an integral part of the globe. The sub-region cannot function without the global union just as the global union cannot also function without the sub-region. Therefore, the ECOWAS is a part of the United Nations and both cannot do without each. ECOWAS has also benefited from the UN just as the UN also benefits. It is a global system of interrelatedness, interconnectivity, and interdependence. To this extent therefore, there is every justification in the formation of ECOWAS in the context of the global system.

Findings

Our analysis reveals the following:

1. The global system is one in which there is interconnectivity, interrelatedness and interdependence.
2. This global arrangement consists of the globe as the whole while regions as the parts.

3. Neither the global nor regional systems is possible without the other.
4. The world as an arrangement is impossible without the parts. This is why none can function without the other.
5. There is every justification in regionalization within the context of globalization.

Conclusion

Globalization is an important force in determining the future of the planet. It covers areas and as political, economic, security, environmental, health, social, cultural and others. Globalization of the world economy, especially in the areas of trade, production and finance, has made the world more interconnected and integrated. This has reduced the autonomy of states since financial markets are volatile in nature and affect national economics. States tend to join regional economic because to resist the pressures occasioned by such volatility. Thus, the small, vulnerable countries in Africa, regional integration has become more fashionable; The result is the formation. This has resulted in the formation of several regional groups like the Economic community of West African Countries(ECOWAS). This is why regional grouping are also necessary in the context of globalization.

Suggestions

1. Globalization as it exists currently can be improved through the very research in science and technology which brought it about.
2. Regional integration should be encouraged and supported from the global arrangements like UN.
3. Nothing should ever be done to disrupt the interconnectivity of the regions from the global arrangements.

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