

## **THE IMPACT OF LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALISM ON THE ACTIVITIES OF ECOWAS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Liberal Institutionalism started to gain prominence after the World War II and the establishment of the United Nations as an agency to promote co-operation and invariably set the catalyst for scholarly work to be done on Liberal Institutionalism and Modern Interdependency theory. This paper attempts to understand Liberal Institutionalism and international system and what they entail in the political world. It goes further to elaborate on the role of the Economic Community of West African State as an important model of Liberal Institutionalism. The paper opined that even though a lot of research has not really been done on ECOWAS, it has been encouraging strong economic integration within the West African region. The paper recommends more research to be carried out on the activities of ECOWAS.

### **Historical Background**

Liberal Institutionalism and modern interdependency theory to Scot Burchill (2001:57) encourages trade relations as way of fostering unity between states and not war as a means of dispute settlement. Liberal institutionalism discourages against the narrow pursuit of individual self-interest but rather encourages co-operation. Liberal institutionalism encourages membership of international institution because it would lead to a wider view of self-interest for the sole purpose of encouraging co-operation. They encourage trade relations among states because it would lead to the elimination of war. Liberal institutionalism sees war as a cancer and democracy and free trade as the cure.

Modern interdependency and liberal institutionalism also preach free trade and removal of barriers to commerce. The rise of Economic Community of West African States, a regional economic integration in West Africa was inspired by the belief that the promotion of economic co-operation and integration with the sole purpose of raising the living standards of members and to maintain and enhance the economic stability and smoothen relations among ECOWAS members is required for development of the African Continent. The Liberal Institutionalism agrees that co-operation among states should be promoted by a formal institution.

### **Literature Review**

Liberalism a subset of international relations opines that law, morality and international organization can indeed set the basis for relations between states (Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon. I. Pevehouse: 2007;101) they assert that co-operation among states is possible and there is a possibility of states acting as a community rather than acting as an autonomous unit. Neo-liberalism was a new critique that emerged in the 1980s to debunk the realist view. One of the arguments of realism is the anarchical international system and the pursuit of self-interest by states. Neoliberalism however laid emphasis on international institutions as a means of reducing conflict as opposed to realism. They believe that it is rational to seek mutual gains rather than maximizing short term gains; they termed it “Liberal institutionalism” (J.S Goldstein and J.I Pevehouse 2007:101)

J.S Goldstein (2001:13) opines that the prisoner dilemma (PD) game is used as a focal example for neo-liberalism because it goes far to elaborate the importance of co-operation. Seankay (2005:62) is of the view that formal institutions can lead to international co-operation as a result of neo-liberalism. To her, international institutions consists of rules, regulations, norms and the procedures of decision making where states with the objectives of maximizing their interest would lead to a convergence. She went further to elaborate that one of the objectives of neo-liberalism is to analyze the behaviors of state and international institutions. One of the traditional tenets of neo-liberalism is to enhance economic and environmental co-operation.

Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane (1993:85) share this view, they assert that it is difficult to achieve co-operation in a world where politics is difficult. They acknowledge the nonexistence

of a common government charged with the responsibility of enforcing the rules, and recognize the weak nature of the international system. However, that is where it ends. Axelrod and Keohane elaborate on the meaning of co-operation which avers that anarchy and co-operation can occur when conflicting interest arises. They see the possibility of co-operation when actors behave according to a certain preference of others.

Joseph M.Grieco (1993:116) acknowledges that states' main objective is to maximize their individual absolute gains. However, the neo-liberal theory according to Grieco(1993:116) goes far to show that “international institutions can overcome this barrier through a joint action”.

One of the objectives of Liberal Institutionalism is to debunk the realist understanding of World politics. Liberalism institutionalism however focuses on specialized international agencies as the main actor in International politics. The functionalists opine that modern states have increased in the characteristics of having multiple channel of access which has increased the foreign policy level central to decision making.

Liberal Institutionalism according to Joseph Grieco (1993:119) argues that an increase in economic contacts between states have led to a dependence among them in order to achieve the national objective of growth, full employment and a price stability. For institutionalism, they view states as equal partners with the purpose of securing the wellbeing of the public.

Another point raised by Liberal Institutionalism is the issue of international institutions. They agree that specialized agency can enhance the co-operation between states. Economic Community of West African State from the neo-functional perspective can act as a strong regional ally of states towards meeting their economic objectives within a particular region.

Arthur A. Stein (2008:202) agrees that the end of the World War 1 and the emergence of the League of Nations led to the overemphasis on the roles of international organizations. The start of the World War II led to realists critiquing international organization and their inability to create peace as a result of international co-operation. The establishment of the United Nations Organization, and the creation of European Economic Integration, laid emphasis on the importance of institutional development. Scholars like Reus-Smit saw international organization and regional integration as a sub field of International politics.

On the other hand, James L. Richardson (2008:223) ascribes to the view that the main aim of Liberal Institutionalism was the establishment of peace, little wonder the creation of the defunct League of Nations, even though it did not produce the desired result.

But John J. Mearsheimer (1994:6) takes a different perspective. To him ... “no other region of the World has institutions as extensive and as well developed as those in Europe”. The region of Africa had the African Union and in West African region, the Economic Community of West African State, fashioned in the pattern of Liberal Institutionalism with the sole purpose of economic integration of West African State. It is a strong example of Liberal Institutionalism within the West African Region.

Having done a thorough review of available literature, it is important to state categorically that Liberal Institutionalism promotes economic co-operation and integration among states and also the removal of trade barriers because it would reduce conflicts among member states. Because Economic Community of West African States fits into the description of Liberal Institutionalism because they encourage economic integration and co-operation among ECOWAS member states, they have been effective since its inception in 1975.

With the available materials at my disposal, an attempt would be made on the activities of ECOWAS that is similar to Liberal Institutionalism. It is hoped therefore, to provide solutions that will be of benefits to the Economic Community of West African Region as a whole and the international community at large.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Evidence abounds from the existing literature that goes a long way to show that Liberal Institutionalism promotes co-operation, economic integration, and the removal of trade barriers and the existence of an international organization as the main actor in international politics. Also the increased relations between states in the international system have created dependency among them. It goes to show the importance of international institution in World politics, because the establishment of the United Nations Organization as an international institution and the establishment of other regional Economic Co-operation for the purpose of integration have gone a long way in reducing conflicts among states as a result of trade relations with one another.

The Economic Community of West African States is modeled on the Liberal Institutionalism and dependency model, it has gone a long way to show that regional integration can lead to peaceful coexistence among member states because ECOWAS is charged with the responsibility of ensuring smooth trade relationship among member States. Also it has encouraged the free movement of peoples and goods within the ECOWAS region. Members of ECOWAS states have access to any ECOWAS state for 90days without visa. Trading within this ECOWAS region is done without trade tariffs and barriers which is one of the tenets of Liberal Institutionalism. Progress has been made in West African to promote co-operation especially economic co-operation. Not only that, ECOWAS is also charged with maintaining peace and security within the West African Region.

To access the impacts of Liberal Institutionalism on ECOWAS, we use the economic unit of analysis that lays emphasis on exchanges done by individuals and firms. The purpose of economics was built using the logic of numbers of producers and consumers as well in strong market. The firms' size can only be explained by the scale of economics before drawing conclusions. With the availability of existing literature we notice a loophole in ECOWAS because a lot of study has not really be done on ECOWAS as a strong example for Liberal Institutionalism, but instead, a lot of emphasis on Liberal Institutionalism and United Nations Organization as a strong model for Institutionalism

## **Analysis**

### **Activities of Economic Community of West African States**

The Economic Community of West African States was established in 1975 with sixteen member states from West Africa as signatories. They include; Benin Republic, Burkina-Faso, Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone, Togolese Republic. These countries consist of Francophone as well as Anglophone speaking member countries. One of the objectives of ECOWAS was the establishment of a customs union and monetary harmonization and integration.

-Under ECOWAS, there would be an elimination of tariffs and non-tariffs barriers to trade among member states.

- ECOWAS members would establish a common external tariff
- Free movement of persons among ECOWAS States
- Economic promotion and monetary industrial agriculture and industrial harmonization.

The actual roots of ECOWAS could be traced to an earlier attempt at Economic Integration among ECOWAS countries in 1967. The draft for the formation of ECOWAS was signed however at a conference on regional and economic co-operation at Monrovia in Liberia. 11 members were signatory to that article draft.

### **Objectives of ECOWAS similar to Liberal Institutionalism**

One of the Objectives of ECOWAS that is similar to Liberal Institutionalism focuses on the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was agreed that it will be the only Economic Community in the region of West Africa and its sole goal is for economic integration and to realize the objectives of the African Economic Community. John J. Mearsheimer (1994:7) agrees that Institutionalism is an organized pattern of recognized behavior that leads to convergence. It entails a regularized pattern of relationship between states, including tariffs that are binding on states negotiated on the general agreement on trade and tariffs. He opines that International Institutions defines ways of co-operation and competition between states.

Another objective of ECOWAS similar to Liberal Institutionalism is the establishment of a common market for the sole purpose of liberalizing trade that would lead to the abolition of customs duties levied on the importation or exportation of goods, and the removal of trade tariff barriers among member states for the sole purpose of creating free trade area within the economic community. Modern Interdependency theory acknowledges the importance as trade because it forms the basis for fostering unity and not war as the settlement of disputes, it encourages co-operation and discourages against a narrow pursuit of self-interest.

ECOWAS also encourages the harmonization of investment codes in order to create a single community investment code. It also accepts the strengthening of relations that would promote the

flow of information within the rural population, including women and youths. They also adopted measures that would be useful for the private sectors in order to create an enabling environment for the promotion of small and medium scale enterprises.

International Institutions not only encourage international co-operation and integration, but also recognize the role of the individuals in the pursuit of economic integration. Liberalism sees the individual as the main actor in international politics and ECOWAS also recognizes the role of the individual in the aims and objectives of ECOWAS.

The Economic Community of West African State is a good model of Liberal Institutionalism because it recognizes the economic fragility of West African States that was why the ECOWAS was formed, and since its inception it has not only contributed to the economic growth of West African Member states, it has also encouraged security integration of ECOWAS members. The Economic Community of West African state is a strong model for Liberal Institutionalism.

Using the example of Nigeria and Benin Republic both ECOWAS members states, they encourage smooth border and trading relations with each other, and goods in Benin is practically cheap. Most Nigerians go to Benin to buy affordable and quality goods to sell back in Nigeria. The goods to a great extent are very cheap as a result of the removal of trade barriers and tariffs.

Ghana a member of ECOWAS also enjoys a smooth relationship with Nigeria. Citizens from Nigeria can enter in Ghana via the border for trading without interruption, and they can stay in Ghana for ninety days without harassment from customs officials. Most Nigerians travel to Ghana to get the Kente cloth, which is a rich display of the Ghana cultural heritage showcased on the material and take it down to Nigeria to be sold. Liberal Institutionalism promotes and encourages co-operation and trade among countries in order to reduce the possibility of conflict.

Also using the example of Gambia known for its rich cultural heritage and hospitality, ECOWAS members can visit Gambia without interruption for ninety days, this goes to show the impact of Liberal Institutions on the Economic Community of West African States.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Having fully identified the impact of Liberal Institutionalism on the Economic Community of West African States it is seen that Liberal Institutions a tenet of Liberalism promotes cooperation and trade relations between states ECOWAS to a large extent. It has actually fostered relations between ECOWAS member states since its inception, the ECOWAS bank of Africa is a lasting legacy of this fact, ECOWAS members also have passport that is recognized within the West African Region. However, the need for more study on the activities of ECOWAS should be done in order to create lasting awareness.

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