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Is Interregional AU-ASEAN Diffusion in the South Barren?



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Abstract

In a field dominated by a discourse that paints the European Union (EU) as a change agent providing initial stimuli, it is refreshing that the transmission or diffusion of norms, values, processes and institutional design is now being reported (albeit inchoately) in the cooperation of regional entities in developing countries between themselves. The fact that South-South inter-regional diffusion has been low is trite. Pre-colonial and colonial patterns of international relations embedded an ethic of North to South flows of ideas, especially in the realm of knowledge transfer. It is easy to conclude that South-South interregional exchanges have so far been barren. In many cases, e.g. between Asia and Africa, this assessment is not far off. Taking account of inter-regional diffusion between the African Union (AU) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) within the broader context of Africa-Asia relations, the paper aspires to provoke further research interest in diffusion between regional entities of the Global South.

Key words: diffusion, institutions, interregionalism, African Union, ASEAN

Introduction

ASEAN and the African Union can forge closer cooperation and have exchanges of experience and best practices on many areas of our respective strengths such as regional economic integration, political and security cooperation, and development cooperation and addressing challenges faced by each organization (Pitsuwan 2012).

The mode of interaction between institutions matters: it matters for prosperity and peace. The paucity and dearth of interest in direct South-South institutional interregionalism is surprising. Literature on interregionalism so far is predicated on and even shaped by the pre-eminence of the European Union. In 2000 Hanggi intimated that: 'interregionalism appears to have become a lasting feature of the international system. It may be expected that a wide array of forms and types of interregionalism will continue to coexist, thereby further enriching (and complicating) the emerging multi-layered system of global governance' (Hanggi 2000: 13). Fawcett also expressed the view that the potential for interregional cooperation was considerable (Fawcett 2004: 441). While for a short period these views appeared over-stretched, in recent years interregionalism has garnered interest from many scholars. Nevertheless, the consideration of interregional diffusion is still in gestation; its focus only spans the last decade and it has hitherto been largely understudied (Jetschke and Lenz 2013: 2).

Diffusion has been widely studied in the context of the EU as the stimuli source or change agent for adopters (Börzel and Risse 2009: 5; Bradford 2012: 10-19). What is still understudied is the opposite phenomenon, whereby ideas and praxes are diffused to the EU from other international and regional organisations. Interregional diffusion between Southern regions is even more derelict as a field of study. An interregionalism scholar rightly argues that: '... although there is now a rich literature on processes of norm diffusion in international relations, there are only few analyses exploring interregional relations as conduits for norm diffusion' (Rüland 2014: 28). Attention has been placed in recent years on interregional diffusion from the EU to other regions, especially through its human rights predilection and joint institutional frameworks as integrated in EU interregional regulatory and free trade arrangements. However, it is appealing to look at interregional diffusion *within* the South because when models of regionalism from the North – especially the EU – have been applied in non-Western contexts the results have been mixed at best (Acharya 2012: 7). All the same, one may ask: why bother? Why should there be an interest in interregional diffusion in the South in particular? For Gilardi, international interdependence is a powerful driver for domestic change (Gilardi 2012: 453-454). This suggests that inter-institutional diffusion may determine outcomes

not only institutionally or procedurally, but also in terms of substance. This is not to suggest that diffusion always leads to beneficial results (Shipman and Volden 2012: 3).

There is rich potential for a better epistemological appreciation of the wealth of (non) interregional diffusion pathways that remains unexplored in the South. In Latin America and Africa, for instance, various regional constellations not only overlap but operate on diametrically competing premises that allow ample room for greater exploration in terms of how they interact and influence each other. In Latin America there appears to be a line as between the more free trade and liberal leaning Trans Pacific Alliance (composed of Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Peru) on the one hand, and the more cautious and post-liberal Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) on the other (Quiliconi, 2014: 243). In spite of these ideological cleavages there are clearly channels of diffusion between both groups; the attempt to forge a broader entity under the aegis of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) indicates that the transmission of ideas and trends are not bereft of conduits. In West Africa as well there are patent regional divisions dating back to colonial rule, such as between the majority French speaking countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) that has developed robust macroeconomic convergence disciplines, on the one hand, and the umbrella-like Nigeria-led Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that brings together English-speaking countries and WAEMU members within the same tent. On many occasions efforts have been made for WAEMU to be institutionally absorbed within ECOWAS, given that the latter's economic institutions are regarded as more robust, but this has been resisted. Within the South, the trend is towards the competitive overlapping of regional organisations. This situation presents an opportunity to better look at the nature of competition-driven diffusion that is unfolding between the regional constellations of the South.

This paper discusses the importance of interregionalism not as between the EU and other regions but as between the regions of the South themselves. It looks at the interregional ties between regional constellations of the South, focusing mainly on the relations between the African Union (AU) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). It explores the nature (including mechanisms) of such interregional ties; considers the rationale behind them; discusses the external backers of these arrangements; presents potential areas for future interregional diffusion in the South; and finally examines some of the challenges for such diffusion and a number of the ways of overcoming the problems associated with such formats of diffusion. The kernel of the paper is "pure inter-regionalism" or inter-regionalism as between clear and identifiable regional institutions (Baert, Scaramagli and Söderbaum 2014: 5).

Overview of the African Union and ASEAN

On 25 May 1963 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed in Ethiopia. This organisation brought together many African nations that had attained their independence. It made a commitment for, and supported, those African countries that were fighting to secure political independence from colonial metropolises. From 1999, when the Sirte Declaration was issued, until 2001 the OAU was replaced by the African Union (Busumtwi-Sam 2006: 73), largely because Africa's leaders believed that major reforms were needed if the OAU was to deal with newer challenges. In addition, the 1990s marked the height of the period of new regionalism as many regional entities were being renewed to better confront novel challenges that went beyond the logic of economic or political silos. As a consequence, the African Union was established to replace the OAU. The AU is an organisation based on the Constitutive Act of 2000 (African Union 2000) with provisions that are even more ambitious than those contained in the OAU Charter.

The AU is composed of 54 member states (South Sudan being the last member to join in 2011). While it is a largely government-led entity there are important supranational organs such as the AU Commission (AUC), the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) and the African Court of Justice and Human Rights amongst others. Innovative structures have also been developed under the unique African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) that includes, *inter alia*, a Panel of the Wise and a Peace and Security Council (PSC). Other important governance units associated with the AU include the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Melber 2002) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) (Kebonang and Fombad 2006; Melber 2006: 5). Important economic templates are also now in place and are closely linked to the planned African Economic Community – now fast-tracked by the creation of a Continental Free Trade Area. One of the most innovative elements to emerge from the functioning of the AU is the principle of non-indifference (Fombad 2006: 21). This principle is included in Article 4 of the 2000 Constitutive Act of the AU and represents a departure from the OAU, which came to be known for its astute defence of the sovereignty of its member states against external interference in their internal affairs (Kajee, 2004: 244). While the AU has attracted many strictures, both in its efforts to mimic the EU and to ensure stability in many of its member states (Siaroff 2007), it has nurtured important regional institutions and mechanisms that are now widely recognised by AU partners.

The Union has created important norms in many issue areas, including in those of human rights, electoral democracy and humanitarian intervention. Respecting human rights within the AU is closely linked to the implementation of the Banjul Charter on Human and

Peoples' Rights. The jurisdiction of the AU court is supposed to extend to human rights violations as well. In the area of electoral democracy the Union's predecessor organisation created useful minimum standards relating to the unconstitutional takeover of government, and the AU has continued in this direction. It has been very firm and has sanctioned (suspended) members falling short of the requisite standards as enshrined in the Union's 2007 Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections (Motitsoe 2009: 8; cf Mbapndah and Njungwe 2008: 62-63). What is more, the AU is now also involved in many countries in either a stabilisation or peacekeeping capacity. In this latter task AU forces have served mainly as service providers (bridging forces) for stability expected to hold the line and pass on the mantle to EU or UN peacekeeping forces.

Considered a leading regional bloc in the South (Ponte and Kingah 2012: 3-7; Krishnamra 2003: 85), ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. Member states include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Amongst its goals are the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability; the enhancement of regional resilience in social and economic spheres; building a people-oriented community and forging an ASEAN identity (ASEAN 2007: Article 1). An important objective of ASEAN is to reduce the economic gaps between some of the countries of the bloc. From the security perspective the goal of the ASEAN Security Community is 'enhancing peace, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region through comprehensive political and security cooperation' (ASEAN VAP 2004: 6). The US was a strong supporter of ASEAN's creation. It was keen to use the bloc as a device to resist communist influence in the region (Dent 2008: 88). Members also saw ASEAN as a forum through which territorial differences could be settled.

In the economic realm, ASEAN countries created a preferential trade area (PTA) in 1977. Results from this arrangement were mixed given the limited product coverage. The PTA remained inactive throughout the 1980s, a period particularly marked by the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam (Dent 2008: 89). In 1992 ASEAN members inaugurated the ASEAN free trade area (FTA), which was expected to be in place by 2007 (ibid). One of the motives for this move was a desire to foster regionalism at a time when other regional constellations were fine-tuning their regional disciplines. In addition, this development occurred in the post-Cold War era, when the states felt that the end of the East-West rivalry allowed them space to work towards deeper economic ties. Within three years in 1995 they had agreed on the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS), aimed at establishing an FTA in services in specific areas by 2020. In 1996 they also decided to endorse the ASEAN Industrial Cooperation (AICO) Scheme. The main target of the scheme has been to promote technological and industrial cooperation as

well as investment links between ASEAN corporations. Dent contends that AICO's main goal is 'to promote joint production ventures amongst firms from different ASEAN countries, thus cultivating further regionalisation linkages within Southeast Asia' (Dent 2008: 96).

An important watershed unfolded in 1997 when ASEAN heads of state and government adopted 'Vision 2020' in Kuala Lumpur with the goal of making ASEAN 'a concert of Southeast Asian Nations (that is) outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies' (Maher 2008: 185). Two years following the agreement on Vision 2020, the Hanoi 'Plan of Action' was put in place (1999-2004) as one of a litany of action plans for the implementation of the Vision. The adoption of the 'Initiative for ASEAN Integration' (IAI) in 2000 was aimed at mitigating centre-periphery differences arising from liberalisation in the context of AFTA. Following IAI, the next economic landmark was the 2003 Bali Concord II call for an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) as one of the main arms of the ASEAN Community (also composed of a cultural community and a political community). The goal of the AEC is to turn ASEAN into a single production base and a stronger segment of the global supply chain. The AEC was initially planned for 2020 but in 2006 economic ministers resolved to accelerate this process, bringing the target date for implementation forward to 2015 (Dent 2008: 105).

ASEAN is organised into the ASEAN Summit; ASEAN Coordinating Council; ASEAN Community Councils; ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies; ASEAN Committee of Permanent Representatives; National Secretariats and Committees Abroad. Of great importance is the role played by the Chair and the Secretariat. Member States of the organization deliberately developed a flexible architecture, eschewing the conventional European structure of supra-national organisations. That said, the uniqueness of ASEAN should not be overstretched: the Charter of ASEAN of 2007 envisages more compact and joint institutions. Also under the Charter ASEAN now has legal personality with the status of an inter-governmental organisation. The new Charter also contains references to human rights (ASEAN 2007: Article 1(7)).

ASEAN has been able to make important steps forward in the economic field. A notable example is the creation of the Chang Mai Initiative (CMI) that was forged between ASEAN states alongside China, Japan and South Korea as a bilateral currency swap arrangement following the Asian financial crisis of 1997 with a foreign exchange reserve pool worth \$120 billion. Following the global financial crisis of 2008 the swap system was expanded

into CMI Multilateral worth \$240 billion. It is monitored and closely managed by the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO).¹

From this description of both the AU and ASEAN, a number of elements are worth highlighting. First, ASEAN is clearly oriented towards economic activities. While its Charter of 2007 includes reference to a political community, its current form stands in contrast with the dense network of political and governance bodies created by the AU. Second, the AU has 54 members and is a continent-wide entity, while ASEAN is a sub-regional organisation composed of only ten members. However the aggregate wealth in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of ASEAN out pars that of the AU by an almost 2:1 margin. This says a lot about how ASEAN countries have strategically used their geography and history to their advantage in a deliberate and calculated manner especially in integrating into the global economy. It is true that there are disparities within ASEAN, especially between Singapore and Cambodia or Myanmar. However the trajectory of growth for the majority of ASEAN states that started from a low base like Vietnam indicates that economic convergence tends to be faster than within the AU. This all means that there is ample room for shared experiences and approaches between ASEAN and the AU. What has been the nature of the flow of ideas?

South-South Interregional diffusion

Diffusion occurs when ideas or processes move from one agent to the next. For Solingen and Börzel what is diffused can be technology, policies, ideas, services, values, institutions, power, people, emotions, and much more (Solingen and Börzel 2014: 173). Everett defines diffusion simply as 'the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system' (Rogers 1983: 5). For Börzel and Risse it is 'a process through which ideas, normative standards, or ... policies and institutions spread across time and space' (Börzel and Risse 2012: 5; Forsberg 2014: 189). What matters really is not downloaded institutional practices but behavioural change (Börzel and Risse 2012: 3-4). Börzel and Risse present two broad mechanisms for diffusion. Direct mechanisms of diffusion (direct influence by the emitter or change agent) include coercion; manipulating utility calculations through incentives and/or capacity building; socialisation; and persuasion. Indirect mechanisms for diffusion (indirect influence by the adopter) constitute competition (functional emulation); lesson drawing; and mimicry (normative emulation) (Börzel and Risse 2012: 14). But this does not mean that the concept is an easy one to pin down (Brinks and Coppedge 2006: 464; Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett 2006: 790-801). Horowitz's take on direct diffusion as happening when one group learns about the actions of another and models those actions

¹ See AMRO, <http://www.amro-asia.org/>.

(Horowitz 2010: 37) only helps to enhance the complexity of how the concept is articulated in the literature. What is more, further categorisation of adopters also makes the concept even more convoluted. Landolt notes that there are five classes of adopters: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards (Landolt 2004: 22).

In terms of outcomes, what is expected varies. What exactly determines convergence is hard to gauge. Everett evokes the importance of relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability (Rogers 1983: 15). However in a recent piece by Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer greater convergence is often a function of the diffusion model (single source); the diffusion item (of high specificity); diffusion mechanisms (more of competition and coercion and less of emulation and learning); and institutional context of receipt (Klingler-Vidra and Schleifer 2014).

For the most part non-EU entities such as the AU and ASEAN have been neglected in the diffusion literature (Acharya 2004: 241). The literature has largely considered the EU as the main emitter, change agent or stimulus (Börzel and Risse 2009) whereby others emulate the institutional design of EU institutions, in particular the Court of Justice of the European Union (Alter 2011; Lenz 2012; Tatham 2014) and Committee of Permanent Representatives (Jetschke and Murray 2012). Reasons for the spread of the EU model include the need for some regions to attract EU aid and the tendency of foreign direct investment to move to regional markets that operate according to functional institutions and on the rule of law (Alter 2009: 24). What is more, in certain cases the EU itself has promoted this mimicry through its approach of funding specific regional economic communities through its multi-annual regional indicative programs outlined in regional strategy papers.

The scope conditions necessary for diffusion have been extensively discussed in the literature. In diffusion literature pertaining to the EU, scope conditions for institutional change include: domestic incentives; degrees of statehood; democracy versus autocracy; and power asymmetries (Börzel and Risse 2012: 10-13). It cannot be taken for granted that the scope conditions that model the EU as emitter or change agent will also/ always apply in cases where both emitter and adopter are from the South. Such scope conditions will include perceived bilateral rather than unidimensional flows of ideas; patently marginal costs of innovation transfer for instance intermittent staff visits; and the existence of vibrant and passionate epistemic communities on both ends of the diffusion nodes.

Diffusion literature on the EU vis-a-vis other regions has mainly considered the EU as the provider of the stimuli and the adopters as passive recipients. In his own work one of the diffusion pioneers, Everett Rogers, highlights some of the weaknesses of this linear

model of diffusion that only focuses on the flows from source to receiver or from change agent to potential adopter (Rogers 1983: xvii). He adds that: 'how potential adopters view the change agent affects their willingness to adopt his or her ideas' (Rogers 1983: 4). For him, 'One reason why there is so much interest in the diffusion of innovations is because getting a new idea adopted, even when it has obvious advantages, is often very difficult' (Rogers 1983: 1). Also it should be recalled that unexpected consequences often make adopters reluctant (Rogers 1983: 13). The second scope condition in terms of diffusion in the South could be the marginal cost of innovation transfer. With the proliferation of new forms of information communication technology (ICT) – especially the internet – it is easy for officials in regional outfits to know, and if possible emulate, what is happening elsewhere. What is more challenging is the replication of the 'blueprints' or the immanent traits that are needed to generate clear behavioural rather than mere policy change. Finally there is need for a vibrant and conscious epistemic community that is keen to embrace new ideas and innovations. Epistemic communities are often led by agents either in the policy making, academic, or NGO circles who are keen to take up or share innovative ideas. Evidence that this may be happening between the AU and ASEAN is weak and largely unreported.

What about the outcomes? Even when institutional designs are copied, institutional change, and especially behavioural change, is hard to effect (Jetschke and Murray 2012: 176). Firewalls are always in place to obstruct profound changes (Solingen 2012: 632). As argued by Rosecrance, knowledge may diffuse fast but not implementation. This is because place still matters; after all, specialisations positively correlate with place (Rosecrance 2014: 201). He reminds us, contra Friedman, that: 'The world is not flat; it is clustered into separate pyramids of excellence. Others can buy into these pyramids and they trade mightily with one another. In the end, economic and power diffusion is partial – and the result is not at all that bad' (Rosecrance 2014: 205). Such is a strong call to avert the tyranny of silos and linearity in the understanding of diffusion.

Contemporary diffusion of ideas on values of political and economic autonomy between Africa and Asia can be traced back to the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955 that mainly brought together countries of the South that had attained independence or were still struggling to do so. One of the main features of the Bandung conference was the willingness of the 29 delegations to foster cooperation on economic, cultural and political aspects. In the economic realm they called for the creation of regional banks and the need for greater collaboration prior to international forums, while noting that this did not entail the creation of a regional bloc.² In the area of cultural cooperation they noted

² Clause 12, Final communiqué of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 24 April 1955, at http://www.ena.lu/final_communique_asian_african_conference_bandung_24_april_

the fact that colonialism had contributed to stifling the cultural emancipation of and exchanges between the developing countries and resolved to enhance cooperation through knowledge, cultural and information exchange. At the same time, they insisted on autonomy for countries in deciding how they wanted to pursue these goals. In the political realm they underscored the importance of human rights, non-discrimination and self-determination. They also resolved to work toward world peace and to fight all forms of subjugation.

Fifty years later, in 2005, both continents celebrated the 'Spirit of Bandung' by adopting a Declaration on the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), which was preceded by the Asian-African Sub-Regional Organizations Conference (AASROC) held in 2003 and 2004 in Bandung and Durban, respectively.³ This is particularly significant at a time when key Asian states including China and India have been keen to secure access to African raw materials and African countries have resolved to look more to the East for opportunities. Non-ASEAN Asian states like China and India have special relations with Africa and also place importance on formal regionalism in Africa in these bilateral ties.⁴ The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), in which the AU is represented, is China's main dialogue platform with its partners in Africa, and China has been a keen backer of the Union. Meanwhile, the India-Africa Forum was started in 2008 and was held again in 2011 and was attended by a select group of African leaders and heads of the AU. A third such meeting is now being planned, which will bring together all the 54 states of Africa according to the desires of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (*Economic Times* 22 August 2014). All these developments can be better appreciated in the context of the ambitious goals in the NAASP that can serve as the bases for interregional diffusion as between ASEAN and the AU. The NAASP of 2005 marks a move in the relations from the reactionary Bandung approach to a more programmatic cooperation based on progressive communication and dialogue. NAASP has eight focused areas for cooperation and specific pairs of countries are selected as Champion Countries to lead the areas. For instance Algeria and Indonesia have been the Champion Countries in the area of counter-terrorism.

What is so specific about the AU and ASEAN? Both organisations have had a troubled past with colonialism (Brown 2012); uphold robust standards of non-interference in internal affairs (although there are signs of shifts in the AU) (Ng, Lotze and Stensland, 2012); operate in a developing country context; and share many common problems.

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³ Declaration on the New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), 23 April 2005 available to <http://www.kemlu.go.id/Documents/NAASP/Hyperlink%201.pdf>

⁴ China for one has been a keen partner of the African Union and it funded the construction of the new offices of the AU in Addis Ababa.

Besides, there is an increasing drive globally to improve links amongst the countries of the Global South (Fagbayibo 2011). But what can they learn from each other? ASEAN's institutional approach to economic development contains many insights, which the AU could profit from.

When seeking ways in which the AU can help African corporations maximise value chains throughout the continent, African policy makers might look to the ASEAN model. ASEAN not only promotes such chains within the framework of the AFTA, but it also does so in the framework of its ASEAN Plus Three constellation with China, Japan and South Korea. Conversely, the deep engagement and effort made so far in the AU to develop governance peer review, and the various mistakes made over the years in the area of human rights, are some of the areas where ASEAN could benefit from AU insights (Fagbayibo 2011).

African regional organisations have for the most part been modelled on the institutional architecture of economic integration in Europe.⁵ However African leaders and senior officials in the African Union are keen to gain insights from Asian regionalism, especially from ASEAN. AU delegations have visited ASEAN headquarters to exchange experiences and explore further avenues for cooperation. This happened for instance in 2012, when the AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Maxwell Mkwezalamba, led a team to ASEAN (ASEAN 2012). The initiative for cooperation has been very much from the African rather than the ASEAN side, even though both the AU and ASEAN have voiced strong interest in joint cooperation (Interview: AU official, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2014). At the moment developments are at a relative standstill, despite the AU's drafting of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) (to which it is awaiting a response from ASEAN). Much more political force is needed to accelerate the process (Interview: AU official, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2014).

With the assumption of office of the current AU Commission team in 2012, political momentum for AU-ASEAN cooperation slowed. This was because of institutional changes and a lack of engagement and leadership to provide renewed impetus to the initiative. The process of joint cooperation at the level of the AU was pushed very much by the previous AU Commission Deputy Chair Erastus Mwencha. But the current team in Addis Ababa seems to show little interest in further engagement, partly because of the myriad

⁵ In terms of processes the First Asian-African Sub-regional Organizations Conference (AASROC) was held in 2003 in Indonesia. This was closely followed in 2004 in South Africa. Although the zeal to push forward the process has weakened there are many informal processes taking place between both continents through which specific institutional traits are being diffused especially in terms of Asia's looser institutional models.

of challenges confronting the African Union at the moment. In any event the role of particular agents or lack thereof in such endeavours is salient.

Another important issue to take into consideration is the institutional politics within the African Union. It is not clear which department (economic affairs or regional cooperation) should take the lead in the dialogue (Interview: AU official, Addis Ababa, 3 October 2014). It should be noted that until recently the economic department was leading the efforts but with the advent of the current Commission since 2012, things are unclear at best; there are tensions between the two departments regarding leadership of the process (ibid). In short, AU-ASEAN cooperation is at a standstill at the moment due to institutional, leadership and political constraints.

But why engage in South-South interregionalism?

There are many reasons why regional institutions in the South may decide to engage with one another. First, there is a strong desire to share experiences and best institutional practices across regional organisations. This is often due to the fact that leaders in regional secretariats often hope and believe that it is better to look to similar entities in order to address their own challenges, which are more akin to those of similar regions. The recent global financial and economic crises exposed many deficiencies in the organisation of global economic relations, and the economic challenges faced by the EU might have dampened the zeal of Southern partners to mimic the EU's model.

Another reason is that some of the regional political blocs of the South consider increased interregional interaction as a way of rationalising and harmonising regional disciplines amongst themselves, be it within the same region or continent – as in the case of Africa, where overlapping regional blocs are very common (UNECA 2006). In addressing some of the problems posed by overlaps, interregionalism is used as a medium to mitigate the negative externalities generated by multiple regional organisations and the accompanying diversity in membership. The ongoing tripartite effort to harmonise regional integration disciplines between the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) can be regarded as an effort in this respect (Njoroge and Omar 2012). The AU for one, with the assistance of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), has mapped out a plan to enhance links between regional economic communities that are regarded as building blocks for a future African Economic Community (UNECA 2006). This rationalisation effort may also inform ASEAN, given that regional organisations are also proliferating in the Asia-Pacific region.

Finally, there is a more emotive or grandstanding motive. This was one of the driving forces that motivated leaders to meet in Bandung in 1955. The main goal of such leaders was to join forces to resist imperialist dictates from the colonial metropolises. Today such emotive expressions are now also manifest in the new voices of the South such as the BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Hurrell 2006; Bohler-Muller and Kornegay 2013: xxv; Lukyanov 2013: 108). South-South interregionalism provides a broader platform for charting alternatives to the dominant discourse and approaches to globalisation as crafted by and sold from the developed world. Such interregionalism is also more useful to the needs and more responsive to the realities of these countries, the majority of which were starting from comparably low bases of growth in the 1960s. The majority of the ASEAN states have experienced important changes over the past five decades. Their experiences could shed light on the challenges that African countries face.

External drivers for interregionalism in the South

Besides the internal (Southern) reasons that explain inter-regionalism, there are also important externally-oriented arguments as to why interregionalism is gaining traction. Interregionalism is supported by many external actors. The UN is a case in point. The UN Development Program (UNDP) has oversight of the UN Office for South-South Cooperation that has been supportive of such South-South ties. Another UN entity – the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – has also been active in efforts to ease cooperation between regions of the South. For instance UNCTAD runs the East Africa-South Asia Interregional Forum on Trade Facilitation. Another UN initiative for interregional cooperation is the UN Interregional Crime Research Institute, or UNICRI, initiative based in Turin, Italy. Above all, it is the UN Secretariat that has most sought to forge cooperation with and between regional organisations, especially those that have a mandate in the area of peace and security. In the retreats organised between the heads of the relevant regional secretariats and the UN Secretary General, efforts are made to ease communication and cooperation between the regional entities present. Finally, the UN Economic Commissions, especially those based in Africa, Latin America and Asia-Pacific, have been active in developing programmes that are tailored to enhancing interregionalism (UNECA 2006). Importantly there is the work that is conducted by UN University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), where there is an effort to foster interregionalism within the first programme of UNU-CRIS' work. UNU-CRIS is now also a partner institution in a project on poverty reduction and regional integration (PRARI) looking into the linkages, comparisons and indicators gauging pro-poor regional health norms, practices and standards in South America and Southern Africa (PRARI 2014).

Also important to mention are some of the non-UN institutions that have backed inter-regionalism, such as the African Development Bank. The Bank initiated the South-South Trust Fund that supports *inter alia* development in agriculture, the private sector, clean energy, governance, health and social policies (AfDB 2011). In addition, there exist targeted interregional initiatives such as the interregional dialogue on democracy promotion run by the Inter-regional Democracy Resource Centre of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).⁶ The dialogue is held periodically and brings together heads of all the major regional bodies to exchange ideas and share experiences on democracy promotion. While International IDEA serves as facilitator of the process, the real exchange of ideas takes place between the regional entities themselves. This is an important and cost-effective approach to sharing ideas (in this instance on democracy) on a wider scale.

In summary, there is a demand – and even more so, a supply – of interregional exchanges. However, there is a sense that these initiatives are rather embryonic or intermittent. For the most part their effectiveness is still to be tested, and they face considerable challenges. For one, between Asia and Africa, for instance, geographic distance and cultural differences have made interregional exchanges onerous and difficult. While both regions may find common ground as regards their troubled histories with colonialism, this has also helped to force a wedge between them as the respective regions have sought to maintain ties with the erstwhile colonial states of the North. Second, stereotypes of Africa as a backwater beset by perennial challenges of wars and diseases still dominate the narrative on Africa. What is needed here is an aggressive effort by AU leaders to engage with Asian partners to present alternative narratives on Africa. It could be useful for interregional processes and initiatives to be focused on concrete and substantive areas that can be tangibly felt and, importantly, measured.

Promising areas for future interregional diffusion

What is diffused (such as norms, values, processes and institutional design) take time to constitute and replicate if so needed. More often than not these are shaped by specific historical, geographic and demographic contexts and realities. Importantly, regional cultures are crafted by given actors or individuals whose ideals and motivations may help explain the success of a specific regional norm, value, process, model or practice. Taking these together it is arguable that interregional diffusion is possible. Its success could be greater where it is related to functional and targeted areas where there is a demand. It is less likely to succeed when it comes to vague themes and goals. Therefore AU-ASEAN

⁶ See: IDEA, The Inter-regional Democracy Resource Centre, <http://www.idea.int/democracydialog/>

South-South diffusion will likely succeed more in targeted areas such as: elements for a more inclusive growth, global health security, the environment and humanitarian intervention.

Notwithstanding the challenges faced in terms of cooperation, both organisations are increasingly aware of the potential opportunities. There are many promising areas where greater exchange would be beneficial for both parties. The first area is that of inclusive growth. While Africa has grown rapidly in the last decades, it has largely failed to translate this into a substantial reduction in poverty. When juxtaposed with the experiences of South East Asia, African growth has been largely jobless. With similar levels of growth, ASEAN countries were able to move many more people out of poverty than Africa has. What would really be of critical importance for the AU will be to better grasp how Africa can be better integrated into global value chains of production and distribution from which Southeast Asian countries have hugely benefited.

In light of the ravaging effects of Ebola, another area of cooperation is global health security, in particular pandemic preparedness and response. Africa could draw on ASEAN's experiences in dealing with SARS, in particular via insights into the management of secondary impacts driven by fear. The SARS cost the affected countries almost 60 billion US dollars as a result of irrational fear based actions, a mistake that Africa seems to be repeating. Critical health related spaces for engagement include benefit sharing from the use of viral materials. Indonesia has pushed hard for changing the intellectual property rights rules over sharing of viral materials and accessibility of commodities produced from them including vaccines. Both sides have much to share on this critical aspect of viral sovereignty.

The issue of environmental sustainability is critical. Communal and/or societal values, innovative processes, institutional practices and models developed within one regional bloc to address the depletion of flora and fauna in these vital environmental hotspots can inform the experiences of the other. ASEAN has had to grapple with environmental haze generated from Indonesia for instance and the AU has been dealing with the problems of climate change and droughts especially in the Horn and in the countries of the Sahel (African Union Peace and Security Council 2014: 20). There are mutual insights to be gleaned by addressing these environmental challenges.

Humanitarian intervention is an important area that presents enormous potential benefits in terms of interregionalism in the South. The threats posed by persistent conflicts in places such as South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Sahel, the Horn and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, as debilitating as they are, equally provide real opportunities for regional entities to even engage in out-of-area operations. Such

operations can also be envisaged in natural disaster stricken areas. Given that disaster relief efforts are often conducted within the framework of more experienced institutions such as the UN and disaster relief entities such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent, it is highly probable that international humanitarian norms and best practices would spillover and be scaled (inter) regionally. The Tsunamis that hit Southeast Asia in 2004 showed just how vital entities such as ASEAN are in disaster situations, especially in terms of coordinating responses. There are interregional insights to be shared in this regard, both in terms of technical knowledge and ICT tools to be used.

Challenges to Southern interregional diffusion

It is rather ambitious and pre-mature to suddenly claim that interregional ties and interregional diffusion can be the bases for an emerging mode of global governance. First, states still matter and they determine the fate of regional blocs in the first place. If they are lackadaisical about regionalism, their reticence on interregional matters would be even more conspicuous. The AU and ASEAN are two regional institutions with countries that remain for the most part very reluctant to defer control/ sovereignty to supranational institutions. In a way this is understandable given that it is not long ago that these countries gained independence.

The second problem is that of fragmentation. Local, national, sub-regional, regional and global poles of power and governance are seriously competing for position and visibility in terms of competence and mandate in dealing with common challenges. This problem is further complicated by adding yet another level of governance to an already crowded field of agents and institutions. Proliferating channels of communication can complicate responses to common problems. But multi-level governance is here to stay, and it would be better to enhance competition between the various poles of decision making to produce more efficient outcomes in terms of policy responses.

This is related to the third problem: cost. Adding an extra layer of governance means creating new joint committees and multiplying more meetings and travels for officials. This comes with huge costs at a time when budgets are tight and financing challenging. It could be argued that through interregionalism, certain sub-regional disciplines and outfits could be rationalised thereby reducing cost. However as history shows, once created, international institutions, whether they are sub-regional, regional or global are hard to kill or dissolve. That said interregional diffusion can also be effected at no cost. Improved information and communication technologies have eased the speed at which ideas travel and physical presence is not always a pre-requisite for the transmission of information and knowledge.

Then there are real logistical challenges. Moving from Africa to Asia is difficult with few direct flights that link the aviation transportation hubs of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Johannesburg. (Although this is mitigated by the important role of the Gulf emirates and Istanbul as transit poles). Poor telecommunication links also present a logistical obstacle, with the cost of linking the two regions surpassing the respective linkages with North America and Europe. It will be hard to fashion viable interregionalism if these kinds of issues continue to hamstring cooperation.

Finally, the South-South interregional processes, such as that between the AU and ASEAN as described in the previous sections, has been manned mainly by public or governmental agents. The processes still have the allure of top-down logics. The role that could be played by non-state actors, including non-governmental organisations such as the Solidarity for Asian Peoples' Advocacy (SAPA) and the Southern African Peoples' Solidarity Network (SAPSN), is significant but under-studied in the realm of interregionalism. The role of advocacy coalitions in the transfer and distribution of shared experiences is vital. This paper has hitherto focused very much on top-down region-to-region cooperation. However, people-to-people ties through e.g. NGOs are crucial. In the recent past there has been an African-ASEAN NGO forum. This people-to-people cooperation is, like cooperation at the intergovernmental level, still embryonic. From a conceptual point of view, effective transfer of experiences will require more than just epistemic communities and specific public/ formal/ official agents. An advocacy coalition between NGOs, epistemic communities, policy entrepreneurs and champions in both institutions will be needed to push forward the agenda for ASEAN-AU cooperation.

Conclusions

Determining the nature of diffusion is especially hard in the case of diffusion between continental regions. Yet there is room to go beyond anecdotal allusions to systematically structure analysis that better captures the diffusion dynamics between regional institutions. By expanding inquiries with many policy makers within the institutions, especially in outfits such as the AU and ASEAN, one could improve the assessment of whether the diffusion of norms, values, processes and institutional models is taking place inter-regionally. From the foregoing, diffusion of variables such as norms, processes and institutions between the AU and ASEAN is not yet taking place at a high rate either indirectly through NAASP or directly in institutional ties beyond isolated meetings of top officials.

The paper is undergirded by an instrumentalist assumption that interregional diffusion in the South could be a mechanism that allows citizens and officials to communicate between regions to surmount parochial regional proclivities. Interregionalism cannot be pushed for its own sake. Beyond the anodyne experiences of sharing ideas and banal cooperation, it is useful that when regional officials meet that they have planned concrete projects and programmes. As such, interregional diffusion could be regarded as a way of better attaining optimal compromises between entrenched regional predilections on the one hand and global processes on the other, in a bid to provide solutions to real global threats such as those related to the environment, health and disaster relief.

In this paper it was argued that there are some seminal unfolding diffusion trends within regions of the South. While focus was placed on (non-)diffusion between the African Union and ASEAN, there is ample room for further research into the process between other regional entities of the Global South. There are some forces and dynamics that are behind these new trends in interregionalism in the South. While it is hard to ensure diffusion in interregional cooperation due to issues such as cost and fragmentation, one cannot underestimate the utility of interregionalism as a means of mediating between specific insular approaches to find solutions to common problems that, although in certain instances may seem distant, are often very desirable.

In terms of future research strands, it would be useful for these preliminary considerations on interregional diffusion in the South to be taken forward. Moot elements remain. For example, there is a need to determine whether and how Southern interregionalism is different from that which involves Northern regional blocs such as the EU. Other questions include: is such interregional diffusion less linear and more emotive?

And, is reluctance or inertia for Southern interregional research driven by contempt of, for and by the previously colonised?

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