

2013

REPORT

8th CUTS 30th Anniversary
Public Lecture on

Regional Integration as a Tool for Poverty Reduction in West Africa

Accra, Ghana, August 26, 2013



INTRODUCTION

The 8th public lecture commemorating CUTS 30th Anniversary was held at the University of Ghana in Accra, Ghana on August 26, 2013. The theme for the lecture dubbed ***Regional Integration as a Tool for Poverty Reduction in West Africa*** had Honourable Hanna S. Tetteh, Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration as the keynote speaker.

The event was chaired by Professor Ernest Aryeetey, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana; and welcome address was delivered by Pradeep Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International. The discussants included Ishmael E. Yamson, Chairman, Standard Chartered Bank, Ghana; and Toga Gayewea McIntosh, Vice President, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The event was held in association with the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), a partner of CUTS in Ghana. More than 150 participants from the policy community including many diplomats, academia, private sector, civil society and media participated.

WELCOME REMARKS

Pradeep S Mehta welcomed all participants to the event after the screening of a ten-minute documentary entitled: **30 Years of Social Change**. He briefed the audience about the history of CUTS from its humble beginning in Jaipur, India in 1983 to its current prominent presence in Asia and Africa, championing for consumer sovereignty in the framework of social justice and economic equity within and across borders. CUTS established its Centre for International Trade Economics & Environment (CITEE) in 1996, at a time where there was a lot of confusion and expectation about the World Trade Organisation as a successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) following the Uruguay Round of the GATT with far reaching impacts particularly in developing countries.

Mehta said that CUTS has done a study on the costs of economic non-cooperation in South Asia two years ago which showed gain of US\$2bn to consumers if tariffs were rationalised. This could result in 20 million new jobs and substantial lowering of costs for consumers. He stated that we will be happy to do a similar study for the ECOWAS region, where we have many research partners.

Through establishing its Centre in Accra, CUTS aims to strengthen its approach of promoting South-South cooperation in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, other than sharing its knowledge and skills in Ghana and the West Africa region.

OPENING REMARKS

Professor Ernest Aryeetey in his welcome remarks praised CUTS on the giant feats it has achieved over the last 30 years and was optimistic that by the establishment of CUTS Centre in Accra, it would help deepen CUTS approach of promoting South-South cooperation on trade, regulation, consumer protection and governance issues; and strengthen long-term capacity of both non-state and state actors in West Africa.

Speaking on regional integration, he underscored the need for intra-regional approach to ensure wide-spread economic growth in the ECOWAS region.

He added that regional integration is the wave of the future. It will not solve all of our problems, but the gains to winners far exceed the losses to losers. He was emphatic that regional integration will lead to competition, which in turn, will drive down prices resulting in new jobs and additional incomes for consumers.

On the benefits of integration in the West Africa region, the chair reiterated that it allows for high degree of specialisation of products and services. He was hopeful that the possibility of specialisation for regional trade would encourage the flow of investment into countries which have a comparative cost advantage, so that gains from international trade would rise. It would not only be capital movement across borders, but labour as well. This will cause nations to identify where their competitive advantage lies and allocate optimal resources in maximising gains from there.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Hanna S Tetteh commenced her speech by praising CUTS International decision to set up CUTS Centre in Ghana to closely collaborate with stakeholder of this country; this she said is a welcome development. It should lead to stronger relationship between CUTS and Ghana. Ghana can learn from CUTS expertise and experience. She eulogized that CUTS since its inception has been addressing contemporary development issues from grassroots development approach. She was happy to have worked with CUTS to develop Ghana's consumer protection bill.



Speaking on the theme, Honourable Tetteh admitted vision for regional integration in West Africa region exists but there have been problems with implementation. For regional integration: we are either in or out. Countries in the region almost produce same raw materials and there are no incentives for countries to trade among themselves. This could be averted if each country is to identify where it has the competitive advantage.

The short-term pain that we have to bear in our bid to overcome the challenges of regional integration would lead to long-term gain for everyone. She catalogued achievements that the regional body has achieved since its inception but urged ECOWAS to show greater commitment, instead of lip service to regional integration.

She asserted that regional integration in West Africa has contributed somewhat to poverty reduction though the data to support this position is not easily available. She applauded ECOWAS for being celebrated within and outside Africa as one of the most innovative and advanced among the continent's regional economic communities.

She mentioned that the establishment of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) is another critical project in the community's drive to promote and consolidate economic integration in West Africa, and thus reduce poverty among its people. The ETLS is anchored on the complete removal of all trade barriers in the region, and the standardisation of all custom duties and taxes of equivalent effect, with the view to enhancing intra-regional trade. Again the implementation of the joint border port arrangements which should make it less cumbersome to deal with the administrative bureaucracies at the borders, agreeing on the Common External Tariff which will hopefully take place in Dakar, October 2013 should make it easier to do business with the region and the world.

COMMENTS BY PANELLISTS

Toga Gaywea McIntosh sees regional integration as a tool, not just a strategy for fixing problems and challenges of the region. It should become ECOWAS of the people of West Africa. The ECOWAS as a vehicle is being fixed with a tool box. Tools are not only used to solve problems, but are used to add value to a product or process, such should be our approach to adding value to ECOWAS. We need to study costs of non-integration for which we will establish a working group

Ishmael Yamson, contributing on the subject, said we must have vision and ambition for the ECOWAS sub region. We must look at the larger 300 million markets of people. Investments will pursue such large market opportunities. Private sector must be encouraged to actively participate in the regional integration efforts. He added that more needs to be done to harmonise the legal and regulatory framework for the ECOWAS region especially the two divergent systems derived from Britain and France that exists in the region.

FLOOR DISCUSSIONS

Comments and suggestions dominated the floor discussions. One participant was of the view that one key albatross on the neck of the ECOWAS towards achieving full integration status is the Anglo-Franco divisions which makes some countries seeing themselves from this prism. Another participant was also of the view that Ghanaians would benefit from the tree of integration should they take the learning of the French language seriously. To this end, she suggested Ghana becoming a bilingual nation something which Hanna S Tetteh supported the idea.



Another participant also raised the issue of road safety in the area of free movement goods and services. Since plans are far advanced for the construction of a six-lane highway to link the ECOWAS region, road safety issues should be taken seriously by various governments since in Ghana there is a statistical correlation between good roads and road accidents.

The panellists in their responses lauded suggestions and contributions and pledged further deepening of the well of integration.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF CUTS ACCRA

Honourable Hanna Tetteh officially opened CUTS Accra office. In her remarks, she encouraged CUTS and ISSER to conduct more research on formal and informal trade, movements of people and goods to provide evidential support for integration efforts in ECOWAS. She believed that the CUTS Accra Centre would deepen the South-South cooperation. She was assisted by the panel members and the chair.



CLOSING REMARKS

In his closing remarks, Mehta said that India is cooperating with most countries in Africa, and its cooperation will continue in the areas of skill building and soft infrastructure. He opined that at CUTS, we are working with the Government of India in the Indo-Africa Cooperation Framework. Furthermore, through the framework of trilateral development cooperation, we are also working with several western bilateral donors.

The Chair in his closing remarks said that regional integration has come to stay and we must embrace it. He charged on the politicians across the region not to pay lip services to integration but rather make sure that the benefits are seen at the grassroots.

VOTE OF THANKS

Kshitiz Sharma, Assistant Director, CUTS proposed the vote of thanks and said that our work is complimentary to governments and intergovernmental organisations and CUTS brings in the critical dimension of civil society participation in policy making and immersion which leads to sustainable solutions.