Energy Research & Social Science 5 (2015) 105–115

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Energy Research & Social Science

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/erss

Original research article

Energy regionalism and diffusion in Africa: How political actors created the ECOWAS Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 5 December 2014
Received in revised form
18 December 2014
Accepted 18 December 2014
Available online 4 February 2015

Keywords:
Renewable energy
ECOWAS
Africa
Regionalism
ECREEE

ABSTRACT

In 2010, the members of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) opened the ECOWAS Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). In this first academic study of ECREEE, I use the diffusion theoretical framework to analyze the organization's founding, with a focus on the actors who created the organization. I find that three extra-regional states – Austria, Brazil, and Spain – are the key players behind the creation and support of ECREEE. The states supporting the organization all have self-identities as leaders in renewable energy as well as, in the case of Austria and Spain, long-term commitments to provide development aid to West Africa. Finally, a political entrepreneur with a long-term interest in sustainable energy and connections to the UN, private industry, and the Global Forum on Sustainable Energy, an NGO she founded, had a critical role in creating ECREEE. I summarize several initiatives before concluding with suggestions for further research on this topic, including using in-field research to learn more about the diffusion mechanisms and how African actors have shaped the institutions to meet goals that might differ from the extra-regional players.

> "During the last five years, the renewable energy industry has seen tremendous growth, with capacity expanding, prices declining, and performance improving."
>
> – Ban Ki-moon, 2011.

1. Introduction

A new regional organization was formed in 2010, focused on renewable energy in West Africa: the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). (See Fig. 1 for a map of the ECOWAS members.) Using the diffusion of regional organizations framework, I analyze the forces behind ECREEE's creation and maintenance and find that several extra-regional actors, including one particularly active *political entrepreneur* have used direct influence to create this organization. This diffusion is spreading with several parallel centers for other African regions in the planning stages. While it is too early to conclude how effective the organization will be, several initiatives are on-going.

1.1. Rising regionalism and renewable energy

Over the last 15–20 years, driven by the deepening and widening of European integration via the European Union and the spread of integration movements around the world, scholars of international relations have been rediscovering the power of regional studies, broadly defined as interactions between two or more states, at the government, institutional, and/or individual levels.[1] Furthermore, there is increasing interest in the role of regionalism in the global south (developing states) along with continued research on the long-studied regionalism of the global north (Western high-income states), with a particular focus on the most advanced modern integration project, the European Union [13–16]. As evidence of this interest, a forthcoming handbook on comparative regionalism includes chapters on Asia, Africa, Europe, Eurasia, Latin America,

☆ The author wishes to thank Benjamin Sovacool and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, as well as Tanja Börzel, Thomas Risse, and scholars contributing to the Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism (expected 2016) who shared their views on the applicability of the diffusion framework for this case.

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[1] There are countless articles and books on regionalism. For a sample that includes a range of regions and years of research, see [1–13].

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2014.12.022
2214-6296/

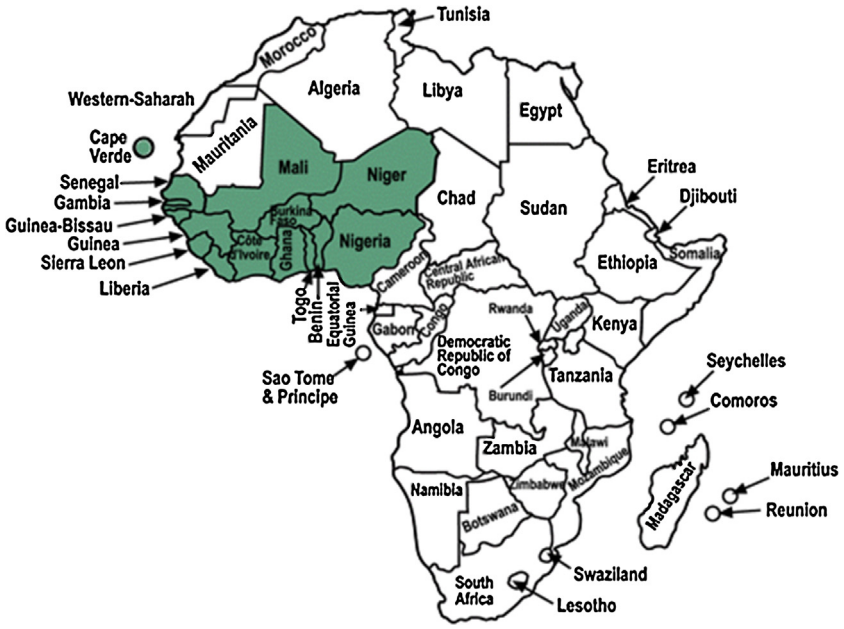

Fig. 1. ECOWAS member states.
Source: World Bank, Regional Institutions, http://web.worldbank.org.

Middle East and North Africa, and North America [17]. This interest coincides with political and economic discourse about the "Rise of the South," a phenomenon represented by the emerging BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and sometimes South Africa) states, including the formation of a BRICS development bank, BRICS Think Tanks Council, and BRICS Business Council [18,19]. In addition, the BRICS members that are democracies – Brazil, India, and South Africa – have formed a subgroup dubbed the IBSA Trilateral [20]. The increase in south–south trade is another marker of the rise of the south: in 1990, north–north trade accounted for nearly 60% of all global trade while south–south trade comprised only 8% of trade. By 2008, north–north trade had dropped to 40% of global trade, and south–south trade had increased to 20% of the total. Most of this comes from the dramatic ascent of China as a trading powerhouse and its demand for resources around the world. According to the OECD's 2010 report on development, China's overseas investments exceeded $1 trillion [21]. Still, other states, such as Brazil and South Africa, are increasing their levels of trade with other southern states. For example, Brazil's trade with the world has increased 9.92% between 1997 and 2012, whereas its trade with Africa has increased 14.41% during the same period; most of this trade was in the minerals sector (84%) with a large percentage of that being oil from Nigeria [22]. In addition, the emerging economies tend to see themselves as serving as role models and mentors for the less-wealthy developing states [23], a position China has increasing difficulty making, given that it is now the first or second largest global economy (depending on whether cost of living is taken into account).

As regionalism has grown, so too has the scientific consensus that the planet is going through significant climate changes due in part to human economic activity, notably the burning of fossil fuels. In 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a scientific body created in 1988, released its fifth assessment report summarizing the scientific knowledge on the issue [24]. The IPCC, which includes thousands of scientists from all over the world, concludes "Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems [25, p. 1]." They conclude that "continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems [25, p. 8]."

With increased scientific certainty that climate change is real and that burning fossil fuels is a major contributor, global and regional (governmental and non-governmental) organizations, states, provinces, cities, businesses, and individuals – in what political scientists call transnational advocacy networks – have increasingly focused on renewable and sustainable energy of all sources – solar, wind, biomass, ocean wave, hydro, and geothermal – as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and thus help mitigate climate change. In 1981, shortly before the IPCC's founding, an intergovernmental organization dedicated to renewable energy was proposed at the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in Nairobi. Major organizations working on renewable energy, notably Eurosolar, further developed the idea. It became a topic of discussion at the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development, the G-8 Gleneagles Dialogue, and the 2004 Bonn and 2005 Beijing International Renewable Energy Conferences. In 2009, ideas were realized with the founding of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Today, IRENA has 138 members [26]. Among its contributions, IRENA has become the standard bearer for documenting renewable energy development around the world.

Overall, the statistics show a significant growth in renewable energy installed capacity, consumption, and investments. Total investments in renewable energy totaled only $39.4 billion in 2004, compared to $214.4 billion in 2013, a 22% increase. This growth occurred despite declines in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 years, most likely due to falling solar costs and policy uncertainty. See Fig. 2 for an overview of investment growth by renewable energy source. Note that these figures do not include big hydropower plants.

I situate this article in the intersection of rising regionalism, climate change, and renewable energy, a combination that has not often been researched. While scholars have given substantial attention to the intergovernmental and non-governmental global and national organizations, summits, and treaties that have emerged