Peacekeeping Economies in a Sub-regional Context: The Case of the Mano River Union.

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Abstract

One of the key issues arising from international interventions in conflict and post-conflict situations is the phenomenon of peacekeeping economies. A conflict zone that has experienced such multiple but differentiated impacts of peacekeeping-related economies is the Mano River Union (MRU) area. The Union’s member states comprising Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire have provided the empirical evidence for our analyses, following long years of civil and post-election related conflicts. We argue that, peacekeeping operations have inherent impacts on the socio-economic systems of host countries and its populations. In this article, we provide an empirically-based historical analysis of the peacekeeping economies that emerged in each of these states which we argue created new hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, we examine how the drawdown program in the different states also impact on these economies. We posit that, to appreciate the complexities of the impact of such peacekeeping operations on dissimilar economies, a comparative historical approach provides an appropriate path to understanding such developments.

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INTRODUCTION

West Africa is a region that has been significantly exposed to the activities of global peacekeeping in the past three decades following periods of incessant wars, civil strife and post-election violence. From Liberia in 1989 to Sierra Leone in 2000, and recently Côte d’Ivoire (2002, 2010) and Mali (2012) the sub region has been saddled with international interventions as a response to the growing incidence of conflict within the sub region. The increasing use of peacekeepers to resolve these conflicts has introduced the phenomenon of “peacekeeping economies” in those post conflict countries and within the global discourse of peace support operations.¹

In spite of the renewed academic interest in the unintended consequences of peacekeeping operations, most analyses have overlooked the emerging significance of peacekeeping economies in post-conflict countries. As numerous experiences have shown, peacekeeping economies emerge whenever a peacekeeping operation is deployed into a conflict theater. We use the term “peacekeeping economies” to connote an array of possible employment opportunities that become available to skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled locals as a result of the presence of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, as well as the industries and services that emerge to absorb the needs of peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, international and local business interest.² But beyond the conceptual fuzziness, and as our empirical evidence will show, such economies also develop in peace enforcement missions as well as peace building mission although they are in different sizes and magnitudes. Besides, to request that experiences of ‘peacekeeping economies’ are added to the analyses of peace operations is to tackle directly the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion expressed in the ‘dual economies’ created in host countries as a results of the heavy presence of international staff.

¹ Kathleen Jennings and Vesna Nikolic’-Ristanovic´, ‘UN Peacekeeping Economies and Local Sex Industries: Connections and Implications’, working paper 17, Brighton: MICROCON, 2009, pp.1–33

² See Kwesi Aning & Fiifi Edu-Afful Unintended Impacts and the Gendered Consequences of Peacekeeping Economies in Liberia, International Peacekeeping, 2013, Vol. 20, No.1, pp.17-32; ibid (See n.1 above)
While the literature on peacekeeping economies is generally growing, literature that is specific to the MRU as a body is scarce even though the union has been exposed to long years of peacekeeping operations. Thus, by examining empirical evidences of peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, we argue that peacekeeping economies in each of these three identified states produced new hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion. Particularly in the case of Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, where there is still a sizeable presence of peacekeepers, such peacekeeping economies have assumed new and larger dimensions, attracting populations from other member countries and the sub-region as a whole.

Drawing from an open analytical and comparative analysis of the three paradigmatic cases, this article is organized into three sections. First, we examine briefly the origination of the MRU and the nature of conflict in the three identified states with the view of contextualizing the evolution of “peacekeeping economies fact” within the MRU. Subsequently, we document the multiple but differentiated impacts, dilemmas, tensions and hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion that such economies collectively created for those host countries and on their populations. Lastly, building on the dominant arguments by Richard Clapham on transitions and exit strategies, we evaluate the effects and complexities of peacekeeping drawdowns and transitions on dissimilar economies such as the case of states within the MRU.

THE MANO RIVER UNION

Started in 1973 as a symbol of economic cooperation between Liberia and Sierra Leone⁵ the Mano River Union (MRU) has grown subsequently to admit other countries such as the Republic of Guinea in 1980 and La Cote d’Ivoire in 2008.⁶ The interconnectedness of all these neighboring states ought to be seen in the context of the historical and cultural ties that bind the people of this region. Historically speaking, the MRU a sub regional grouping within the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), has been replete with series of conflicts. It is estimated that the conflicts within the MRU has resulted in over 300,000 fatalities with millions of people internally displaced.⁷ Additionally, the conflict has contributed to an extensive economic underdevelopment in the region.⁸ Due to the unstable nature of the region as shown in the numerous conflicts, civil strife and election related violence, very little economic cooperation has been achieved, although there are some levels of trade between the nations.⁹ Moreover, conflicts within the Unions have remained largely intertwined; armed groups, conflict finance, ammunitions and refugees have all crisscrossed along the long and porous borders of member states.


⁶ The 1973 Declaration calls for the establishment of a customs union, to be termed the Mano River Union, whose stated aims and objectives are (i) to expand trade by the elimination of all barriers to mutual trade, and by the creation of conditions favourable to an expansion of mutual productive capacity, existing as well as new; and (2) to secure a fair distribution of the benefits from economic co-operation.

⁷ Conciliation Resources, Mano River Union n.d. (at:www.c-r.org/our-work/west-africa)

⁸ Ibid.

Moreover, members within the Union, apart from sharing common borders, also share important cultural, political and ethnic similarities.\textsuperscript{10} Currently, between them, they represent a total population of approximately 41 million with country estimates standing at Côte d’Ivoire 20.2 million, Guinea with 10.2 million, Sierra Leone with 5.9 million and Liberia with 4.1 million.\textsuperscript{11} Within the past three decades, there has been an increasing intensity of instability, and insecurity, in at least one of the nations of the Union. Figure 1 shows the geographical map of the Mano River Union.

\textbf{Figure 1: Geographical Map of the Mano River Union.}

![Geographical Map of the Mano River Union](image)

Although countries within the Union are individually well endowed with natural resources such as arable agricultural lands, oil, timber, iron ore, diamonds, cocoa, bauxite, good fishing resources and collectively possess extensive forests, yet communities within the Union are excluded from the politics, development and economic advancement of their various countries. Additionally, the commonalities also extend to years of bad leadership and


\textsuperscript{11} World Bank, World Development Indicators database, 1 July 2011, (at: www.siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/POP.pdf)
governance, unemployment, mass illiteracy, corruption, unjust wealth distribution and political and social exclusion. Although there has been an end to combating, generally, instability still remains.

**Differentiated Impacts of Peacekeeping Economies on MRU**

In probing the differentiated but multiple impacts of peacekeeping economies on host countries, we opine that collectively the outcome of such economies could have either positive consequence or negative effect. Peacekeeping missions sustain trade and industry, political and communal transformation of the countries to which they are deployed as well as providing skills training, employment opportunities/jobs for the skilled, semi-skilled and the unskilled.\(^\text{12}\) The visibility and outward impact of the peacekeeping economy either within or among countries are based on the host countries economic context, the size of the intervention, proximity to borders and trade network. Moreover, the impact also depends on the relationship that develops between local inhabitants and peacekeepers. Although the most important economic impact of the entire missions in the three countries relates to ensuring peace and security as stipulated in their respective mandates, by delivering safe and secure atmosphere the mission lays down the basis for economic growth and expansion.\(^\text{13}\) Invariably, the “invented” security brings about the growth in business enterprises as people who ordinarily would not spend in a post conflict country are investing of resources with the confidence of gaining some generous profits. The example of the Lebanese and Chinese merchants in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and lately Côte d’Ivoire, provides some point of reference.

Understandably, much as the peacekeeping missions have become the leading players in the labour market, unofficially, individual peacekeepers, as a result of their seemingly economic wealth, have become employers offering jobs to populations within host countries.

\(^{12}\) Aning and Edu-Afful(See n.3 above)

Consequently, jobs are provided for both the skilled, semi skilled and unskilled local inhabitants. As extrapolated, the spending by international staff on hotels, clubs, pubs, restaurants and supermarkets appears to have established the foundation for the growth of other local economic industries or services (such as corner shops, taxi businesses and retailing of many commodities). Besides, an excessive circulation of ‘peacekeepers money’ in the case of Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire has stimulated price increases in goods and services, import duties and pressures on the local currency (in the case of Liberia). Furthermore, women have been empowered economically, politically and socially through the many skills training and initiatives spearheaded by the peacekeeping missions.\textsuperscript{14} The Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) has been active in sensitizing women to take advantage of the opportunities that peacekeeping missions presents. The impact of peacekeeping economies on these countries has gone beyond the economic to encompass changes in the normative societal values concerning gender roles and relations.\textsuperscript{15}

In terms of negative unintended consequences of peacekeeping operations, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) still remains high in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire\textsuperscript{16} although in the case of Sierra Leone there are still remnants of what used to be the phenomenon when peacekeepers were around. What appears to exist now in Sierra Leone is the transformation of a once solid peacekeeping economy to a money-spinning post-peacekeeping sex economy.\textsuperscript{17} The local sex

\textsuperscript{14} Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, ‘Gender and Conflict in Africa: The Case of Liberia and Sierra Leone,’ \textit{The Journal Of Civil Wars}, 1998, Vol.1 No.4 pp.1-26


\textsuperscript{16} In 2007, a 730-strong battalion of peacekeepers from Morocco was asked to suspend its activities in the northern Ivorian city of Bouake after the U.N. received allegations of sexual misconduct involving local girls. In 2010, 16 Beninese peacekeepers were repatriated to Benin and are barred from serving in the U.N. following a yearlong investigation into exchanging sex for food with underage girls in the western town of Toulepleu.

\textsuperscript{17} In Aberdeen- Freetown, there are Chinese and Lebanese brothels which masquerade as casinos, pubs, restaurants and sports bars parading women from Sierra Leone (mainly), China, Nigeria, Guinea and Liberia.
industry has grown into such an unimaginable enterprise and the situation has become so fluid that locals from Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone move from one country to the other depending on the going market rate and the lucrative nature of a particular market. Currently, there are reported incidences of trafficking and transit in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, especially to peacekeeping base communities (such as Monrovia, Tubmanburg, River Gee, Buchanan, Abidjan, Toulepleu, Bondoukou, Sandeque etc.) with a concentrated presence of peacekeepers.

**Peacekeeping Economies as Hierarchies of Inclusion and Exclusion**

Beyond the impact of peacekeeping economies on the MRU, two developments- hierarchies of “inclusion” and “exclusion”- galvanize the growth of such economies making them function as “dual economies”. These social, economic and political hierarchies can be considered in several ways. These hierarchies could either be measured as women’s work against men’s work; minority ruling elites against vast majority of ordinary people; foreign businesses versus local businesses; international staff versus locals, or skilled /semi skilled against unskilled etc.

The first is the hierarchy of inclusion. This covers all those who have benefited immensely from the peacekeeping economic project, usually the ruling elites (status quo ante) whose greed caused the conflict in the first place and who owns a bulk of all properties that the mission as a whole and individual peacekeepers rent. Additionally, the skilled, semi skilled and the marginally unskilled whose pockets have been swelled by peacekeepers’ money and employment are certainly beneficiaries’ of the ‘peacekeeping project’. Furthermore, foreign businesses (such as restaurants, pubs, supermarkets, hotels, mobile telecommunication, waste management and banks) from China, Middle East, Ghana and Nigeria have raked in lots of profit from their participation in both the peacekeeping economic sector and the post peacekeeping economic sectors. In reality, the impact of peacekeeping economies on women’s livelihoods is enormous. Women are known to be the greatest beneficiary of peacekeeping economies as many of the jobs; services, enterprise support, training and infrastructure regeneration that constitute
the structure of such economies are generally considered as the primary preserve of women.\textsuperscript{18} A greater percentage of the economic benefits that accrue to the people are mostly felt in the capital cities and they are mostly gained by the well-educated, some of who are already wealthy. The UN jobs are mostly available to those who have college diploma whereas others with properties mainly land and houses could rent it out for profit.

Second is the hierarchy of exclusion. The vast majority of the people are excluded from benefiting from the peacekeeping economies. For example, they cannot afford the high rent charges on decent accommodation and so they are crowded-out. Moreover, they do not have the purchasing power to meet the growing and escalating prices of goods and services and so in a way, they are excluded from benefiting or enjoying some goods and services. Besides, because peacekeepers pay market prices for social amenities like water and electricity the greater majority of the people are deprived of these basic commodities; producers of these facilities rather channel their products to residences that house these peacekeepers to the disadvantage of locals. For example, driving through Monrovia, one realizes that the greater part of the town is in darkness but not surprisingly the UN designated compounds are alight with electricity. Related to this, while there is scarcity of potable drinking water and locals have to travel long distances for it, UN compounds have it in large quantities and are sometimes used for other supplementary activities such as washing vehicles. To survive and be able to participate in the emerged economy, anecdotal evidence suggest that some locals borrow from peacekeepers and some new commercial banks that have come in ostensibly to support the mission at ridiculously high interest rates. Men are mostly at a disadvantage because most of the jobs that the peacekeeping economies provide are traditionally the preserve of women.\textsuperscript{19} There are also claims that the peacekeeping world which is largely male dominated is mainly predisposed and welcoming to women.

\textsuperscript{18} Aning and Edu-Afful(See n.3 above); Kathleen M. Jennings, The political economy of DDR in Liberia: a gendered critique’, \textit{Conflict, Security and Development}, 2009, Vol.9. No. 4 pp.475-494

\textsuperscript{19} The assertion is that women are prepared to engage in any menial job as compared to their male counterparts.
Politically, because majority of the people (the ordinary people on the street) are not able to marshal the needed resources to take advantage of the peacekeeping economy, they are constantly at the losing side. The rich have exploited it to their advantage and this is clearly exhibited in both peacekeeping economies (Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire) and post peacekeeping economies (Sierra Leone) where the rich and perhaps those whose complicity resulted in the conflict in the first place are still entrenched as the ruling class.\(^\text{20}\) This situation has indeed created a deep sense of resentment and tension among the larger population. Socially, certain places that peacekeepers patronize have become a no go area for local population mainly because they are priced out. Examples of these are the restaurants, pubs and supermarkets.

**Drawdown and transition of Peacekeeping economies**

While peacekeeping drawdown and transition may lead to downsizing and eventual withdrawal of particular international staff (such as peacekeepers), it does not represent the end of international involvement in peacekeeping economies. For countries that have depended solely on the largesse of peacekeepers for over two decades the transition and eventual exit present some serious challenges to their individual local economies. In the case of Sierra Leone, there is a large deficit in viable employment opportunities that the locals can exploit. As such young men and women have been migrating to other parts of the MRU that boast of a sizeable presence of international staff (Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire) and a lot of money to spend. Then again, one of the critical side-effect of the post peacekeeping economy is the insatiable demand and expansion of the local sex industry. This is so because of the serious shortfall in employment opportunities, coupled with a number of socio-economic factors and increased criminality. Clearly, in the case of Liberia, people’s livelihoods have begun to suffer after United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) started its downsizing of non-essential staff. Côte d’Ivoire on the other hand is currently at the receiving end as a good number of people from Liberia and Sierra Leone, in addition to Guinea, continue to flood their country in search for greener pastures. Meanwhile,

\(^\text{20}\) For example, Prince Johnson a former war Lord in Liberia had benefited immensely from the UN because the UN rents a fleet of his houses and indirectly the global body has been funding and advancing his newly found political career.
family support systems, civil society/faith based organizations as well as remittances continue to be the safety nets for the bottom masses of people who have been affected by the transition or exit of peacekeeping missions.

**Conclusion**

In this article, the significance of some of the key debates in peacekeeping economies and their links to the overall peacekeeping operations project reveal that peacekeeping economies have both positive and negative consequences. The peacekeeping economy in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire and the post peacekeeping economy in Sierra Leone, all in the Manu River Union, provide a case study of reflection on the complexities that the impact of such peacekeeping operations have on dissimilar economies. The impact of the peacekeeping economy on the local economies of these countries has been destructive. While the underlying drivers of conflict in the sub region still persist, the nature and scope of peacekeeping economies has transformed into trafficking and transiting of locals within the sub-region to provide the services that are needed to fuel the growth of such economies. This has deprived these post conflict countries under review the needed manpower and strength to rebuild and generate growth. To overcome this challenge there is the need to stimulate growth in the local economy by providing jobs, training and enhancing the skills of the majority of the people. Additionally, their governments must initiate projects that will absorb a greater majority of its people and also move people off the streets. Essentially, the economies of these three countries and their just place in the global future would be better served if the phenomenon of peacekeeping economies is greatly controlled and eventually eliminated.