

Chapter 4  
**Micro-Regionalisms in Africa:  
Dynamics, Opportunities and Challenges**

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**Introduction**

*Development and Micro-Regionalism*

A great deal of attention is currently placed on the examination of globalization and the costs and benefits of this process to nations, states, peoples, communities, villages and individuals. One important component of globalization, thought to provide significant developmental potential, is regionalization at various scales. This document examines the potential of micro-regionalism to contribute to development in Africa. A number of researchers note that micro-regionalism on the continent has reached a significant scale and presents unparalleled opportunities that are not present in other domains in Africa (Torre and Kelly 1992; Trémolières 2007; Tache 2000; Söderbaum 2004). Bach (2008) argues that an important part of this potential lies in the fact that micro-regionalism in Africa often involves a powerful cognitive component wherein boundaries defined through geo-ethnic or religious bonds have greater meaning than state boundaries. Highlighting the potential of micro-regions on the continent, Torre and Kelly (1992) state that Africa has the highest number of such regional groupings in the world, together with the largest number of dormant and ineffective arrangements that would facilitate their contribution to development. Such a mix of ingredients provides a potential that very likely does not exist elsewhere in the world. Thus, the value of providing capacity building assistance to micro-regional development in order to take advantage of what already exists on the ground would seem to be quite large. Examples of approaches for the successful development of micro-regions can be instructive. In Europe there exist very specific technical approaches for the realization of micro-regional goals and objectives (Schmidt-Kallert 2005).

Paradoxically, some of the more problematic aspects of Africa's history have contributed to the large number of existing and latent micro-regions and the great potential for their development. Colonialism and the drawing of state boundaries through ethnic, cultural, religious and language groups has not in reality meant in most cases that such groups became completely divided. Instead, such groups have continued to function and thrive as cross-border micro-regions throughout the colonial and independence periods. Such cross-border micro-regionalism can often center on local actors' capacity to escape the state's control over territory (Bach 2008). Similarly, the way personal rule has occurred in Africa has resulted in an erosion of a sense of broad public accountability. Such a problematic aspect of governance has favored narrower networks of influence and informal politics; in other words, effectively governed micro-regions (Hyden 2000). In addition, micro-regions of trade, migration and resistance have emerged as an alternative to neglect or persecution by the state or as a way to get around or avoid the state. Micro-regions also have emerged as a product of natural and human-made disasters that result in displacement, migration, residence in new areas and return or partial return to areas of origin. The resulting livelihoods can encompass new rural-urban, rural-rural and urban-urban linkages.

This chapter reviews the primary definitions of micro-regionalism; a brief typology of micro-regions and micro-regionalism in Africa; the theoretical foundations of micro-regionalism

as they pertain to the continent; and patterns of micro-regionalism (with a focus on patterns of opportunity and constraints). It further examines development and capacity building with regard to micro-regionalism in Africa and then, connecting micro-regions to macro-regions, looks at the local, the center and areas that require capacity building.

### *Definitions of Micro-Regionalism*

The variations in the definition of micro-regionalism in the African context depend primarily on whether the definition refers to internal sub-national forms or cross-border forms (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). Generally, a micro-region is defined as a bounded area possessing some kind of organizing principle(s) that distinguish it from other regions (Johnston et al. 2002). However, because of the variation in types of micro-regionalism, this document will adopt the more general definition of “flows or potential flows of goods, people, and services within cohesive sub-national and cross-national areas,” along the lines of what Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) describe. This definition allows for the inclusion of a variety of forms of micro-regions that have emerged due to diverse historical circumstances—economy, ethnicity, culture, administration and geography, among others—and encompasses “potential” micro-regions. These areas are cohesive with regard to specific characteristics but are at present constrained from operating as effective micro-regions due to policy, political, economic, legal, or corruption constraints. The definition also includes micro-regions started or supported by governments, NGOs, and the international community and those that contain flows of goods and people regarded as illegal (smuggled goods and illegal movement of non-citizens). With regard to the latter, the laws defining what is legal and illegal can have a variety of purposes, including attempts to stem the flow of harmful goods (weapons, narcotics) or goods that fuel harmful processes (such as movement of certain natural resources that spark wars) but also laws that unduly constrain robust prosperity by providing legitimate goods and people as a matter of accepted commerce.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

### *Emergence of Micro-Regionalism*

There are several theories regarding how micro-regions emerge. Shaw et al. (2012) relate the emergence of micro-regions to the development of civil society in parallel to decolonization and globalization, such that micro-regions emerge “in response” to a process or “state of being.” Such processes can include alienation, migration, and economic aspiration and ambition; “states of being” can include ethnicities, diasporas, genders, and religions. In this regard, the authors note that micro-regions can emerge as a function of diasporas, ethnicities, alienation, migration, religions, genders and economic opportunities and ambitions (Shaw et al. 2012).

Neumann (2003) postulates that the emergence of micro-regions is preceded by the presence and activities of specific “region builders.” In other words, micro-regions do not come about naturally; rather, the geographical space is perceived, thought about and treated as an entity via the repetitive and iterative activities of such actors who then generate the idea of the space as a “natural” micro-region. Certainly among the more important actors are those involved in the private sector, be they individual or commercial interests. The activities of such interests can lead to cross-border employment, migrations and various shadow economies, and draw in the in-

volvement of the state, NGOs, and macro-regional actors. At the same time, the ongoing development of civil society—formal and informal—is thought to serve as a significant catalyst for the emergence of micro-regions (Yeates 2007). This occurs as civil society associations emerge, become organized, and engage in dispute resolution, the provision of health and educational services, cooperation in agriculture and herding, and economic opportunities such as markets (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007).

Shaw et al. (2012) discuss the rise of transnational gangs operating both within and as their own micro-region. Such gangs emerge in the interstices of the formal processes of state regulation and policing on one hand, and on the other by the informal economic spaces that are created by the low capacity of the state. These gangs then traverse sub-national regions and can therefore influence larger regional dynamics in a number of ways.

#### *How Micro-Regions are Shaped over Time*

Micro-regions are perhaps much more easily influenced than are regions at other scales by a variety of variables that can shape how they function over time. This is perhaps one of their greatest assets, for it allows them to adapt to new circumstances, possibly more quickly and more adeptly than can regions at other scales. Slocum-Bradley (2008) even postulates that micro-regions should not be seen as “natural” entities, but rather are more subjective phenomena that are constantly being shaped through discourses by a number of actors across regions.

There are a number of processes by which micro-regions are shaped. Jessop (2003) describes the processes of “re-localization” and “re-regionalization,” along with the “re-valorization” of local and regional economies in response to: 1) the emergence of new industrial districts, corridors, and triangles; 2) innovations that can advantage some micro-regions and disadvantage others; 3) the emergence of or change in “gateway cities;” 4) as the formation of “bridges” between regions (for example between Europe and northern Africa); and 5) the variable effects (positive and negative) on micro-regions due to a national economy in decline or recession, economic crisis, civil war, state failure or other disruptive events and processes.

In addition, the processes of “inter-localization” and “inter-regionalization” are thought to shape how micro-regions function and change over time. These processes focus on the emergence of horizontal linkages between neighboring localities that exist on the same scale but in different countries (cross-border micro-regions, trans-local alliances), and the reorientation of sub-national regions on different sides of an international border that come to have shared or complementary political or economic interests (Joess 2003). Such linkages can bypass the national scale but can be supported or sponsored by one or more local or sub-national authorities and interests due to the development or prospective development of binational production zones, or cross-border metropolises (Albert and Brock 1996). Such shaping can follow international development corridors along transportation arteries. Such micro-regions can be regarded as “glocal” (globalized locations) (Joess 2003).

While this variety of theories beyond the new regionalism theory do resonate with different micro-regional processes, they do not offer a cohesive explanation of the unofficial reality of what is perhaps the majority of micro-regions, why they have emerged, and the economic role they play. This chapter argues that what is still needed theoretically is a way to explain the fundamental issue of the fact that Africa has the highest number of such micro-regions and potential

micro-regions in the world, together with the most lacking institutional, legal and other state support arrangements that would facilitate their contribution to development.

### **Typology of Drivers of Micro-Regionalism in Africa**

This section attempts a broad and brief typology of micro-regions that focuses on their drivers, dynamics, origin, and particular characteristics of movement of goods, services and people. Due to the fluid and informal nature of many African micro-regions and how they came about, what they do and what they comprise, a good deal of overlap between categories is unavoidable; thus, categories are not mutually exclusive. Typologies already exist for micro-regions in Europe along the lines of “mapping space” consisting of proximity, likeness, and linkage, but also along historical lines, resilience, historical characteristics, and by their place in networks (Jonsson et al. 2000). However, attempting to apply these to the African context has proved difficult; thus the present typology attempts to reflect the African reality.

#### *Economic Micro-Regions*

There exists a broad spectrum of economic micro-regions, and in one sense almost all micro-regions are economic or have an economic aspect. For our purposes this category will cover those micro-regions that are explicitly economic as their central originating purpose.

Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) describe the development of “spatial development initiatives” (SDIs) along corridors and “triangles” in southern Africa and how they are derived (Figure 4.1).

### **INSERT FIGURE 4.1**

Such corridors are the most distinctive forms of policy-driven micro-regionalism in Eastern and Southern Africa. In this case, existing networks developed by migration and trade have become purposefully economically formalized and supported with national and supra-national policies and incentives. What has appeared to play a large role in the development of such corridors is the regional domination by South Africa, such that its comparative institutional strength related to region-building has an ongoing legacy (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). The greater strength of Southern Africa’s formal institutions and policy-driven processes lends a comparative advantage to the type of economic micro-region (corridors, development triangles) that sees formal and informal processes working together. This type of micro-region would appear to hold significant potential. The approach uses existing informal micro-regions and then engages in “formalizing the informal” or taking advantage of what already exists. Söderbaum and Taylor (2008) describe examples in Mozambique (Maputo Development Corridor and the Zambezi Valley), Namibia (Walvis Bay-Swakopmund Corridor), and the Zambia-Malawi-Mozambique growth triangle.

The Maputo Development Corridor merits particular attention. In this case, a combination of the formal and informal, operating in specific ways, has benefited a set of actors in the micro-region. Thus, while the state plays active roles in the corridor, it does so only in certain directions and by attending to specific agendas. This occurs by business and state elites constructing a specific model for growth promotion based on neoliberalism and state-private part-

nerships. What occurs then is an entrenchment of certain forms of patronage and corruption, while privatizing certain aspects of state power. In this variant of micro-regionalism, the well-placed business and state elites benefit considerably, with the common citizen much less so (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008).

Apart from corridors and triangles, there exists a variety of spatial configurations of economic micro-regions. Often, they reflect the economic aspects (primarily infrastructure) of the landscape they are situated in: along transportation routes; around and between markets, towns, cities or ports; and aligned along commodity sources and commodity market destinations. Such economic micro-regions can be cross-border or reside entirely within specific countries.

While migration for economic reasons is not new, it does appear to be occurring at increased rates as labor markets in Africa and beyond respond to new opportunities. The microeconomics of such markets and the migrations that influence them extend well beyond urban centers, back to areas of origin as people and goods move back and forth (Sabot 1979). The determinants of such economic migration are varied, from colonial era wage labor market functioning, to structural change and its effects on migration and labor markets, to the economic background and regional origin of migrants, along with the age of migrants. As an example, Manger and Ahmed (2000) describe the micro-regions of eastern Africa as they pertain to livestock marketing. In this context, they consider specific aspects of marketing and how these contribute to micro-regional functioning—livestock price, the cost or attraction of crossing borders, market organization, the linkages between pastoralists and exporters and the resulting marketing chain, and the policies of cross-border livestock trade, along with pastoralist coping strategies in emergencies.

#### *Natural Resource-Based Micro-Regions*

A number of micro-regions are derived along the lines of natural-resource locations and their movement. The numerous cross-border conservation examples and “peace parks” in Africa are a variant of natural resource based micro-regions that might best be termed “resource pooling.” Notable examples are the Kenyan-Tanzanian borderlands (Massai-Mara-Serengeti) for wildlife, and the South Africa-Mozambique (Kruger-Limpopo) conservation areas and parks micro-region. Natural resource conservation-based micro-regions appear to need considerable state and international support (Peace Parks Foundation 2013), but their cross-border character and sub-national interaction acknowledges the specific location of such resources (Linde et al. 2001). In addition, conservation efforts initiated by the international community along with host country governments can focus on specific cross-border areas due to their biodiversity content. Such efforts can seek to work with local communities, including those that span international borders, in terms of development, marketing of agricultural products, communication, education and health, in order to engage in conservation and preservation objectives. Such attention can support and even create micro-regional development in a wide variety of situations (Linde et al. 2001).

For example, the existence of elephant herds and their migration patterns have focused international development attention on the areas included in and along these migration routes as well as subsequent forms of interaction between elephants and local communities (Linde et al. 2001). Such development support is often aligned with the objectives of conservation as they

pertain to local communities—land tenure, micro-enterprise formation, capacity building, and income.

Other types of natural resources can create a separate kind of micro-region. Tache (2000) describes how micro-regions are shaped by changing patterns of resource control in the Southern Ethiopia–northern Kenya micro-region. And, in an overlap with the economic category, several authors highlight the importance of how informal linkages operate across borders in Côte d’Ivoire’s cocoa sector, Sierra Leone’s diamond sector, and Ghana’s gold sector, and the relationship of these sectors to migration and violent conflict (Shaw et al. 2012). And as mentioned above, river systems that cross or comprise international borders can have a significant influence on micro-regions.

### *Smuggling*

Certain micro-regions are able to take advantage of porous borders to engage in forms of smuggling. These micro-regions often contain both the locations of the resource and the cross-border corridors and characteristics that facilitate the movement of the resource as a commodity. An example of this is the “Parrot’s Beak” micro-region in the area of southern Guinea and the border regions of Liberia and Sierra Leone (Grant 2008). While the Parrot’s Beak has been active in trading since pre-colonial times, a significant reason for its current functioning as a micro-region is the largely illicit extraction and movement of diamonds, gold, timber, rubber and palm oil (Grant 2008).

### *Migration and Displacement-Based Micro-Regions*

A number of micro-regions have emerged as a result of forced population displacement and then a subsequent return or partial return to areas of origin. Subsequent to forced dislocation, the presence of refugees and IDPs (internally dislocated persons) in new locations can continue for years. In the meantime, dislocated persons keep their connections to home areas and often travel back and forth. But they also pursue economic opportunities, connections and alternative livelihood arrangements in their new locations. These can persist long after the initial reasons for dislocation have subsided and they seek to return to areas of origin—but often with ongoing interests in and obligations to maintaining ties to areas in which they sought refuge.

Darfur is such an example, with the hundreds of thousands of IDPs in and around towns now having been there long enough to have established considerable connections of economy, education, and livelihood, to the extent that many are unlikely to return to the exclusively rural lifestyle they pursued prior to dislocation. Instead, they will operate a mixed-livelihood approach that makes use of the new micro-region created by the combination of opportunities in areas of origin, and areas of displacement, and the connecting corridors. In Darfur, for most IDPs and refugees, postwar livelihoods will be a mix of options. As in other conflicts (and natural disasters) among populations with extended kin networks and tribal and lineage affiliations, dislocation leads to a diversification of livelihood strategies not experienced prior to conflict and dislocation (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2012). As a result, dislocated persons’ return to lands and properties frequently occur only with some family members who pursue some rural activities while other family members remain in camps or move to urban or peri-urban areas to engage in a vari-

ety of income generating activities and educational opportunities. Family members who do return to rural lands will often come and go (creating micro-regional corridors), given the timing of the agricultural calendar, the degree of tenure security and personal security, and the presence of other economic opportunities. In part, this is due to the lack of and damage to livelihood assets in areas of origin—including houses, food, water sources and water facilities, seeds, plows and other tools, livestock, economic trees, fuel wood, and field condition—with such damage in Darfur quite pronounced (Vanrooyen et al. 2008). Many dislocated persons intend to regain control and use of rural lands incrementally over time, while they concurrently seek to gain tenure security for urban or peri-urban residences that would allow the pursuit of a variety of economic, health and educational opportunities. Such a mixed livelihood approach engages the reality in rural areas of origin—security that will improve over time and the need to rebuild and reacquire over years the household, economic and agricultural assets necessary for rural livelihoods (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2012).

In West Africa, the societal disruption associated with the Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast civil wars resulted in large-scale displacement for a significant period of time. The resulting populations of IDPs and refugees and their connections to home areas have lent considerable economic and human activity to the Parrot's Beak micro-region (Grant 2008). Similarly, chronically refugee producing regions, such as the Horn of Africa, can see a great deal of migration across landscapes over time, followed by the pursuit of a wide variety of livelihood options in a micro-regionalism context. Thiollet (2007) describes such an example of how dislocation in Eritrea has led to micro-regional development based on refugee movements that continue today, as diaspora communities and migrants move to and from Sudan, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Until, 2002, the UNHCR provided Eritreans refugee status in these countries, but this has since been withdrawn. However, as a consequence of the connections, opportunities, and obligations gained during their period as refugees, Eritreans have continued to cross borders in the ongoing exploitation and establishment of significant networks of mutual assistance, employment and movement of goods.

### *Self-Determination in Micro-Regions*

A number of micro-regions contain movements that push for self-determination. As such, they can be largely political while having economic aspects. The Cabinda enclave in Angola is such an example, having agitated for independence for some 40 years (Grant 2003). Zanzibar and Somaliland are other examples of a micro-region with a secessionist aspect; the Somaliland case is perhaps best described as a successful self-determination example. In addition, there are self-determination movements that seek greater autonomy, whether that means wanting to replace the government or wanting greater autonomy within the present state construct. Examples of self-determination movements that participate fully in micro-regional functioning are the Oromo of Ethiopia and the Tuaregs in Mali and Western Sahara, but the examples are numerous. Thus, the dynamics of self-determination can operate in a range of types, all of which can have significant influence on the development and operation of different micro-regions.

### *Conflict-Related Micro-Regions*

Armed conflicts can have a significant effect on the emergence of micro-regions. And in reality, considerable micro-regionalization comes about through the “exploitation of the dividends of violence within and among states” (Bach 2008, p. 171). The movements of people, the networks of supply, revenue-generating activities, and areas of control, can leave a lasting form of micro-region in place subsequent to armed conflict. In West Africa, the exploitation of conflict diamonds by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) depended on the informal patterns of cross-border and international commercial linkages to move and market diamonds and exchange these for weapons, which then require logistical networks to get them into the field where they can be used (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). The networks of small arms flows in and around a number of current and past conflicts are well known (UNOCHA 2004).

There is a significant overlap between conflict and natural resources in a micro-regional context. Indeed, the politics relating to the management and exploitation of Africa’s natural resources have drawn out the extremes in the complexities of African security and conflict (Alao 2007). It is important to acknowledge that the negative aspects of the natural resource–conflict mix can have a significant micro-region building effect. Processes of interaction take place between certain natural resources and ethno-nationalism, intergroup relations in alliance making and breaking, small arms trafficking, corruption, money laundering, cross-border mercenary activities and even alleged links with global terrorism (Alao 2007). As an example, the Great Lakes area comprises several “micro-regions of conflict” that have at various times included Uganda, Rwanda, Angola and Zimbabwe (Boas and Jennings 2008).

### *Ethnically-Based Micro-Regions*

Long regarded as a constraint to trade and development, ethnic groups in Africa can also facilitate trade within micro-regions, largely among members and their confidants. When such groups span international boundaries, ethnic micro-regions can facilitate movement of goods and people between states. Such micro-regions hold considerable potential if capacity can be built among both local inhabitants and state authorities so as to align these with relevant local to international institutions. As an example, Abdoul and Trémolières (2007) describe the robust functioning of the Hausa trading network in the Benin–Niger–Nigeria border-zone micro-region and highlight the long history of this network and how this history has served as a foundation for the micro-region today. And certainly the Somali occupied areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, in addition to Somalia itself, constitute an ethno-trading zone in which livestock movement, cell phone service, and currency strength and circulation constitute a micro-region that in many regards is able to function quite well in the absence of state institutions for governance.

## **Opportunities and Constraints**

### *An Enabling Environment*

One of the more pervasive patterns of opportunity in the development of micro-regions in Africa is that of the socio-economic, socio-political and cultural elements joining an existing micro-region or potential micro-region where one or more elements already exist (Albert and Brock 1996; Bach 2008). An example perhaps best describes this phenomenon. The micro-region that



occupies the borderlands of Mali and Burkina Faso connecting the cities of Mopti and Ouahigouya (Figure 4.2) currently comprises a significantly wide number of functional cross-border elements that interact (Trémolières 2007).

## INSERT FIGURE 4.2

These elements did not come about all at once, but instead have joined the micro-region over time, with the pre-existing elements in a very real sense facilitating the entry of later elements. This borderlands area has a long history of transportation—the comings and goings of people, livestock and goods—which then laid the cross-border trading foundation for subsequent elements of the micro-region to join.

Another pre-existing element in the Mali–Burkina Faso case is that the Fulbe, Mossi and other ethnic groups can be found on both sides of the border. This has led to customary chiefs living on one side of the border being approached by the local population to resolve issues in their group’s cultural area on either side of the border. Interestingly, Malian government authorities now seek and comply with decisions by such elders. With transportation and cross-border ethnicity as a foundation, other cross-border elements have then joined. In the education sector, children from Mali regularly are admitted to schools on the Burkina Faso side of the border, with no formality and no issues raised by school authorities. In the health sector, there is considerable cross-border interaction, with citizens of one country crossing the border to use the health clinics and hospitals of the neighboring country depending on distance, ailment, and how well equipped the various health centers are. Hospitals themselves also regularly transfer patients back and forth across the border in the micro-region depending on the medical problem and the expertise resident at the different institutions. In addition, the continuity of the expanding agro-pastoral farming systems across the border area and the ease with which fertilizer, pesticides, and other farming and pastoral practices can cross the border has led to a significant increase in production that is then traded to the larger urban centers of both countries. Building on this, a broader strategy for micro-regional agro-pastoral development is seen as quite likely (apart from the application of national policies). For example, an arrangement for the balanced management of livestock utilization of different lands on both sides of the border according to the capacities of the lands in question has been developed, with cattle-breeders, herders and animals of both countries being able to use water resources and lands with no restrictions, irrespective of whether they are in Mali or Burkina Faso (Trémolières 2007).

The development of land rights in this micro-region has followed the cross-border attributes of other elements. Farmers from Burkina Faso farm land in the Sobangoma, Tongourou, Gourty and Yorou villages on the Malian side, and the inhabitants and authorities of these villages to not oppose the farming of this land by citizens from the villages of Bani, Miyeti and Sabéré in Burkina Faso (figure 4.2). Likewise, the local governments on either side of the border, recognizing the micro-region as a robust functioning area on its own, have come to engage in land dispute resolution along international border that gives rights to specific pieces of land to one country or another, depending on the details of the dispute—in essence, altering the international border to suit the needs of the micro-region. In one case, the Malian village of Ombo transferred land to the neighboring village of Kain in Burkina Faso (figure 2). More broadly, the

dynamics of the micro-region are such that the agricultural hinterland of Ouagadougou is in Mali, with Mopti closer to Ouagadougou than Bamako. As such, the micro-region's actors have robustly made the most of this hinterland-to-urban center trade induced by the elements of transportation and cross-border ethnicity, as opposed to emphasizing divisiveness of the international border (Trémolières 2007).

The Burkina Faso–Mali micro-region now has numerous actors that have joined to pursue many different social and economic cross-border initiatives and ideas: border markets, conflict prevention, mediation structures, health centers, a system of micro-regional cross-border transportation routes and joint management of grazing areas and transhumance trails. Such initiatives are strongly supported by the population of the micro-region and, as a result, these are able to develop over time (Trémolières 2007). Such bottom-up micro-regional development would benefit from supportive national and regional policies that could reinforce opportunities and minimize constraints (Torero 2011; Söderbaum 2004; Neumann 2003).

#### *Patterns of Constraints—Challenges Faced*

Overcoming constraints to micro-regional development should become a priority for local-to-national development efforts. Several authors have looked at a variety of constraints operating at different scales and how these can be dealt with (Kenfack 2013; Tavares and Tang 2013). Significant constraints include national policies aimed at strengthening international borders, thus making more problematic the flow of people and goods across borders. For reasons of security, economy, revenue generation, disease, agricultural pests, and migration flows and labor, a state can create a “thick” border, thereby making it difficult to cross for people, goods, and livestock and for the establishment and building of economic relationships that span borders. In addition, certain revenue generating systems can use such border constraints to favor a subset of actors who are in positions to variably enforce these policies. As an example, in the Kenya–Ethiopia borderland region there are significant cross-border trade opportunities involving the movement of livestock from Ethiopia to Kenya. However, policies that seek to regulate the movement of livestock across the border, combined with attempts by herders to circumvent such policies, and the actions of a subset of actors purporting to engage in questionable forms of enforcement, result in a significant deterrent to the development of cross-border trade. Attempts by herders to cross the border from Ethiopia to Kenya so as to sell livestock on the Kenyan side frequently result in capricious confiscation of herds, fines and imprisonment—all with the objective of revenue seeking. In this case, the absence of effective local governance and customs infrastructure, together with problematic enforcement, significantly deters the realization of micro-regional opportunities.

Micro-regions’ development can also be constrained due to disparities between economic policies on either side of a border. These can have undue focus regarding the pursuit of purely national goals for economic sectors and their management. Such a focus can act to deter local cross-border activities (Trémolières 2007). For example, such a focus can result in burdensome custom constraints, poorly regulated traffic, and high tariffs. However, these conditions are not uniformly a constraint to the development of micro-regions; in certain circumstances, they can encourage the development of specific micro-regional trade opportunities. The existence of

cross-border disparities in prices and differences in the availability of commodities can lead to economic opportunities to exploit such disparities. In such a context, the prospect of engaging in forms of smuggling can also become attractive, particularly if customs tariffs and policing are seen to be unreasonable.

Also within the policy domain, the gap between official regional integration policies and the local informal realities can act as a constraint. This can result in the lack of a genuine relationship between local, national, and larger regional scales. For example, as Trémolières (2007) notes, in West Africa a juridical framework that encourages cross-border cooperation does not exist, but could. This could be the role of a larger regional body such as ECOWAS: encouraging member states and their sub-national micro-regions to engage in effective cross-border interaction, thereby allowing greater convergence between micro- and macro-regions. Notably, however, certain international NGOs such as The Africa Progress Panel (APP) and macro-regional organizations such as the African Development Bank (ADB) are putting significant effort into establishing coalitions and cooperation at a number of levels, and this certainly has great potential (APP 2013; AfDB 2013). In addition, the UN has a research and training unit specifically dedicated to regionalism and its development called The United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS). This organization brings together scholars and practitioners to share knowledge on regionalism, among other topics (UNU-CRIS 2013). Particularly noteworthy within this effort is the Regional Integration Knowledge System (RIKS), which is a joint initiative between UNU-CRIS and a variety of organizations and networks.

However, the lack of institutions that can facilitate micro-regional development is also important. In this context North (1990) argues that the presence of such institutions is important because they include the structure of market relations, which contain actors involving producers, consumers and the state, as well as sets of rules—among them the more common definition of institutions in a development context (Ostrom 2001). Institutions can play five roles in terms of interacting with markets: 1) reducing transactions costs; 2) building social capital; 3) redressing missing markets; 4) managing risk; and, 5) enabling collective action (North 1990; Torero 2011).

Political and economic antagonism between central and local elites, as well as poorly implemented decentralization, can obstruct the development of micro-regionalism (Karim 2013). Likewise, if economic centers are seen by more peripheral local actors as a threat, instead of an opportunity, then this can create a significant hindrance to the development or deepening of cross-border or other sub-national forms of cooperation (Karim 2013). This can be the case when sub-national regions and national centers have inferiority–superiority perceptions of one another.

## **Development and Capacity Building in Support of Micro-Regionalism**

### *Connecting Micro-Regions to Macro-Regions*

The new regionalism theories (Lombaerde 2010; Söderbaum 2002) have promoted the value of the interaction between micro- and macro-regions nested as they are within one another and frequently crossing borders. Of particular significance in pursuing greater connectivity between micro- and macro-regions is the international nature of many micro-regions. In this regard, it is thought that micro-regions would be able to operate on a certain international plane alongside

macro-regions. Such international relations include region-to-state relations, inter-regional relations, and interactions between micro-regions and global institutions such as UN agencies, bilateral donors, and G-20 initiatives (Lombaerde 2010). For micro-regions, these interactions can take various forms: financing programs and projects, partnering, coordinating voting, attempts at formal representation and, increasingly, in sub-national diplomacy (Lombaerde 2010). In what Duran et al. (2009) describe as an evolution toward more international “actorness” by micro-regions, two phases of development can be articulated. The first period began in the, 1980s, as certain micro-regions in Africa and elsewhere began to get involved in the promotion of foreign direct investment schemes and tourism. The second period began in the, 1990s, when some micro-regions came to possess certain legal and diplomatic instruments that enabled them to conduct their own relations across borders and at different scales. Thus, with regard to the connections between micro and macro-regions, the coinciding objectives such as political goals, commercial interests, and identity issues, along with the challenges and other common problems faced in pursuit of these common interests, become important linking mechanisms (Lombaerde 2010). In this regard, micro-regions and macro-regions can be seen as emerging international actors operating in a similar and connected way (Lombaerde 2010).

Three additional ways that micro- and macro-regions are connected can be described. The first has to do with complementarity, where certain processes underway in specific micro- and macro-regions occur in concurrent fashion. The second relates to “top-down” efforts in which macro-regions pursue cross-border micro-regionalism through specific incentives and approaches that target border areas. In a similar vein, macro-regional efforts can lead to more trust at the cross-border micro-level so that cross-border cooperation to address common challenges or pursue common opportunities becomes increasingly likely (Schiff and Winters 2002). Macro-regions can also enhance or create micro-regionalism when border zones become less peripheral and more central in a new macro-regional context (Schiff and Winters 2003). The third is “bottom-up” complementarity, such as when intense micro-regional cross-border interaction reaches a point where a certain regulatory framework (formal or informal) is needed, thus inducing a demand for specific macro-institutional arrangements (Lombaerde 2010). Abdoul and Trémolières (2007) note that the Benin–Niger–Nigeria border micro-region serves as an engine for the development of broader macro-regional development. In this regard, robust cross-border cooperation at the micro-regional level serves as a catalyst for a wide variety of macro-regional integrative processes.

In still a different type of connection, both micro and macro-regionalism can move in the same direction due to a systemic relationship affected by a larger set of variables: cultural, historical, institutional, political or economic. The growth corridors and growth triangles noted earlier are examples of this type of connection (Lombaerde 2010). A further type of connection or relationship between the micro- and the macro-regional levels occurs as the two become substitutes of or competitors with one another along certain lines. One regionalism, for example, can fill a governance or other institutional gap left by the other, or the two can end up pursuing opposed, incompatible, or competing development models, encouraged by different political agendas or interests. Overall, however, it is acknowledged that the two regionalisms respond to similar sets of variables and logics that are related to globalization; hence the systemic framework that both are thought to reside within (Lombaerde 2010).

### *The Local and the Center*

There appear to be four broad types of relationship between sub-national regions and the economic centers of countries that can contribute to the success of micro-regions. The first is the nature of the overall relationship between local and central governments. One of the most supportive relationships is decentralization—depending, of course, on how such decentralization is experienced by sub-national groups and regions.

Positive experiences can occur as local governments take on a greater role in managing cross-border cooperation with counterparts. At the same time, the increase in private sector activity that can come about with decentralization can support the development and functioning of micro-regions (Karim 2013).

The second type of relationship occurs when the center initiates or supports specific projects in certain sub-national regions to enhance micro-regional development in that location. This can come about at the behest of development agendas, or in response to the activities of local actors, or as an outcome of the desire to gain the support of a local population, or even to make the micro-region more competitive, prosperous, or politically active in comparison with a neighboring population. The third type is geographical and exists when a peripheral area of one country is closer to the national capital of a neighboring country than it is to its own capital. This can foster significant cross-border activity (Trémolières 2007). The fourth type of relationship is simply neglect. Often this is a negative relationship. But while neglect is not seen as overtly supportive, if the relationship is otherwise antagonistic, confrontational, experiences corruption, or has a problematic history, then neglect of sub-national regions by the center, and the reverse, can be the best relationship that can be hoped for in the near- to mid-term.

### **Areas that Require Capacity Building**

#### *Local Actors*

There are several forms that capacity building for local (non-state) participants can take in support of micro-regions. In examining how innovative micro-regionalism begins, certainly an important aspect is local actors' degree of confidence not only in their ability to carry out certain activities, but in estimations that the state(s) will not (or cannot effectively) deter their efforts through neglect, incompetence or support. This confidence is an important form of capacity, particularly in new non-state initiatives and innovations. While there can be specific approaches to supporting and building this form of capacity, certainly one of the most important factors is simply the experience of local actors in (and knowledge of) previous successes and failures at building micro-regions, or attempting to engage in or initiate micro-regional processes or relationships. One approach that would be of considerable utility in building this "confidence capacity" would be for local actors to see successes elsewhere and learn how these came about. Thus, visits to locations where viable micro-regions exist would be valuable in sharing ideas, exploring how common challenges were overcome, and seeing how opportunities were realized. Such visits could be organized by the state, subnational governments, NGOs, donors, or even the micro-regions themselves.

A second capacity building component useful to local actors wishing to initiate, develop, or become more aware of the potential of micro-regions is simply knowledge of any existing supporting financial, legal, logistical, institutional, or organizational constructs that would apply to their situation. If NGOs, the state, or donors offer micro-grants for cross border activities; if the state (including neighboring states) has facilitating laws, policies, and legal incentives, that may be supportive; if there are infrastructure plans, transportation facilities, or unused logistical arrangements that can be exploited; if there exist institutional, organizational, or legal assistance—all of these can be very useful in helping actors to engage in micro-region development, but only if they know of them. Thus radio, traveling workshops, printed matter, and other forms of information dissemination can all be useful in building this kind of capacity among local actors.

Of course, smugglers comprise one set of local actors who already have significantly high capacity at operating within micro-regions. Often, however, smuggling activity takes place with commodities that could be regarded as not harmful, dangerous or otherwise detrimental to society at large, but rather exist to protect certain economic or political sectors. Relaxing prohibitions against trading such commodities would contribute to the development of micro-regional economies and potentially bring a certain element of “smuggling talent” into the legal domain. Apart from this, accessing the talents of small-scale smugglers in order to tap into networks and approaches for enhancing cross-border micro-regional activity would likely be difficult, especially when the commodities traded are detrimental to society, as with weapons or drugs.

#### *Sub-national Government*

Enhancing the capacity of sub-national governments so that they are able to operate for the benefit of micro-regional development—particularly local governments that sit across international borders from one another—would be particularly worthwhile. Such governments are at the forefront of local service provision, policy, and law enforcement and are central to the way micro-regional commerce occurs. Decentralization policies and processes would greatly assist local governments in developing micro-regions, but additional capacity building needs to accompany decentralization so that the negative trends of local corruption, heavy-handedness in policy and law enforcement, and the derivation of local policies that favor some groups and disadvantage others are avoided. In this regard, specific training, in the form of workshops conducted by government, macro-regional organizations, NGOs, or donors that focus on how to build micro-regions and micro-regional relationships, would be valuable, as would networking exercises that bring together actors from across borders, sectors, and needs in order establish relationships and explore opportunities.

#### *National Government*

Capacity building at the level of the central government would do well to focus on policies and processes of decentralization. Governments could ask specifically which policies would enhance micro-regional development and could review existing policies, laws and practices that are detrimental to micro-regions. Because national governments usually reside in national capitals, which operate as market destinations for many commodities involved in micro-regional trade,

finding ways to encourage this trade, or at a minimum not overtly discourage it, could contribute significantly to the center's connection to micro-regions.

While micro-regional initiatives can solidify peaceful relationships, construct economic and social interdependencies and contribute significantly to a regional civil society, in general they do not possess the organizational capacity that would enable them to have entry into the policy-making level of the countries in which they operate (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007). This reveals two capacity needs. One exists at the level of the local actors who attempt the construction of micro-regional relationships; the other is the capacity need of neighboring states at the national and sub-national levels of government to interact with and support micro-regional initiatives while managing apprehensions about porous borders, Customs controls, and micro-regional political aspirations that differ from those of the state. Such state capacity further needs to translate into macro-regional efforts to integrate micro-regional processes into macro-regional development.

While there are indications that some institutional and political leaders believe that micro-regional efforts should be encouraged, these are at present few. Significant capacity building is needed so that macro-regional and state policies become synchronized with the realities of micro-regional processes (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007). In this regard, the capacity needed is that which is able to facilitate linking formal state and macro-regional development with the dynamism of informal micro-regional development (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007).

#### *Macro-regional Organizations*

While macro-regional organizations are primarily concerned with functioning at their level, capacity building that seeks to coordinate or synchronize with existing or potential micro-regions within their area of influence would be quite valuable. At a minimum, the recognition of the role micro-regions play in the macro-region, and a consideration of the needs of micro-regions as macro-regional organizations conduct their activities and interact with heads of state, ministers, donors and other macro organizations and actors, would go a long way toward raising awareness of the value of micro-regions. One of the obstacles that capacity building could attend to at this level is how to deal with the informality of micro-regions given the highly formalized mode of operation of macro-regional organizations. This would require a different view of the need for and role of bureaucracies, leadership, laws, and borders.

#### **Conclusion**

Micro-regions in Africa contain myriad identities, peoples, and purposes that have evolved throughout history in a process that is ongoing (Grant 2003). The existence and success of a wide variety of “people-centered,” flexible, cross-border micro-regions in Africa has the potential to teach much in the way of micro-regional functioning, the prospects for their emergence and development, and the capacity needed to support this process. In a number of micro-regions, civil society associations resolve disputes, health clinics serve patients and coordinate resources, students attend schools, herders utilize transhumance corridors, and traders construct markets, all within an area that traverses state boundaries (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007). Such initiatives demonstrate the dynamism, fluidity, and innovation borne of a combination of the existence of

specific needs and a confidence and capacity to attend to such needs in a way that reflects and utilizes the local fabric of the human landscape to realize effective micro-regions (Abdoul and Trémolières 2007). The trick will be how to realize the full potential of this important vehicle for development.

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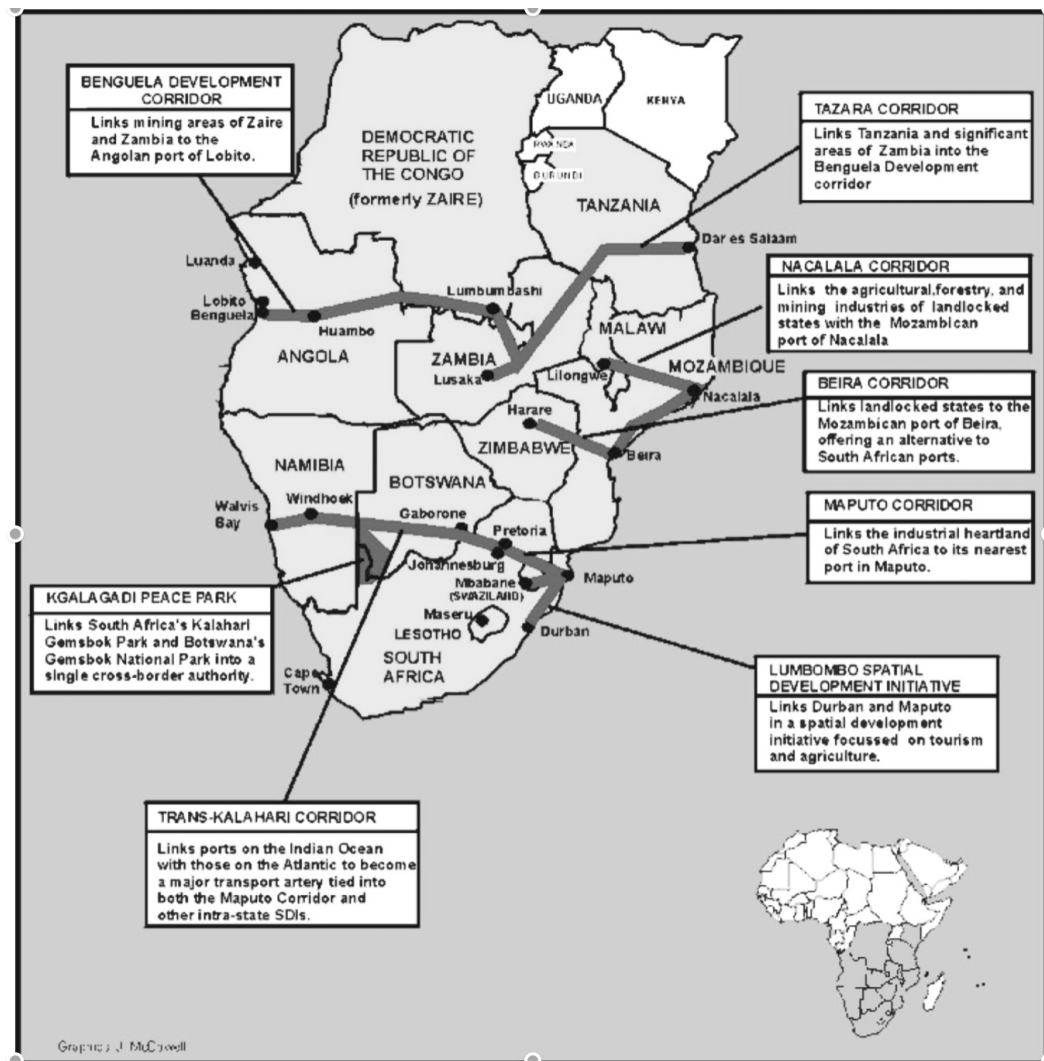


Figure 1. Spatial development corridors in Southern Africa.

Source: Richard A Griggs, International Boundaries Research Unit Durham, NC, USA.

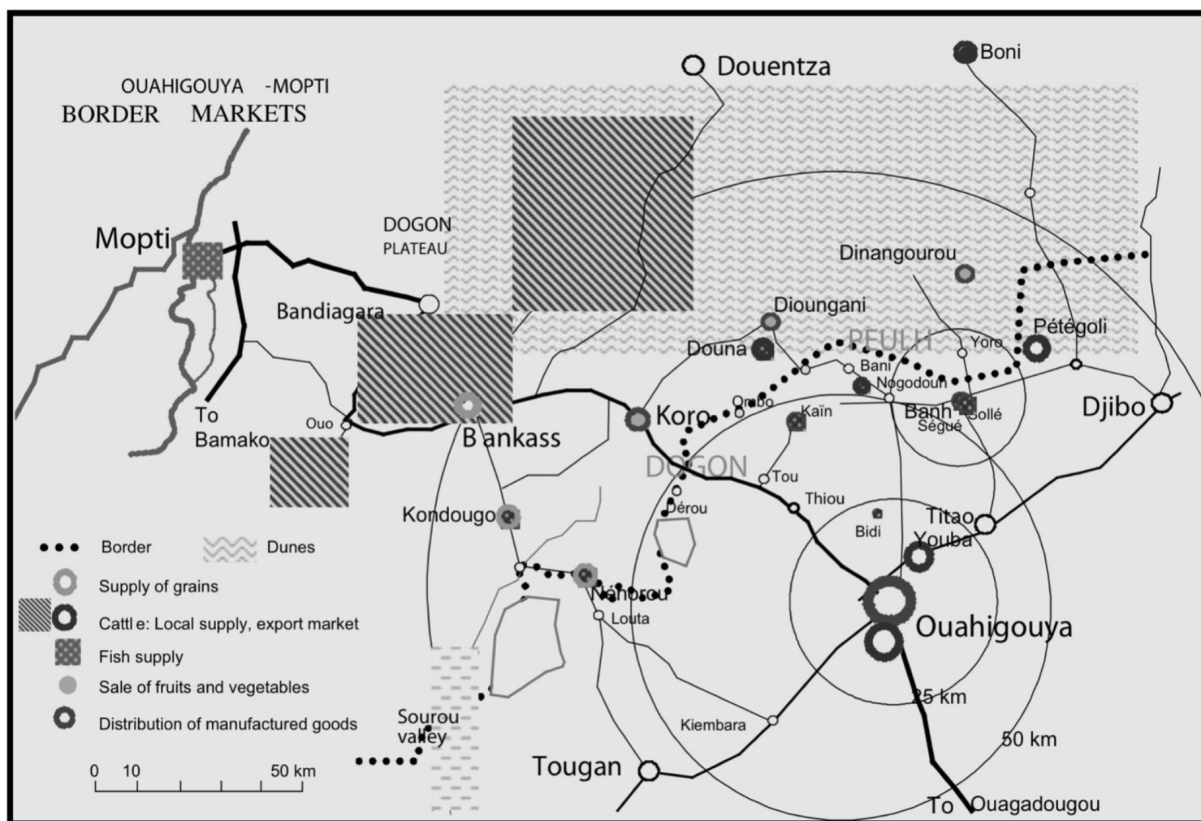


Figure 2. Case study Burkina Faso and Mali. Source: Tremolieres (2007).