The Role of Regional Environmental Networks for Sustainable Development in the Lake Victoria Region

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Our optimism is the DRC Government that is increasingly looking at FDLR and other groups as negative forces that are undermining its stability and security. We came on time when DRC Government was ambivalent and was not acting against the issue of the negative forces operating within its own territory. This Government is now realizing the threat represented by these forces on its own stability and the security of Congolese people.

People of DRC are strongly expressing the opinion of seeing the negative forces leave their territory and it has been highlighted during the recent talks and debates. Furthermore, the international community is showing much attention to the issue of ending actions of negative forces in the DRC. This is the reason why an idea of settling a credible military force to fight against military groups. This fight includes disarm and repatriate FDLR and the other groups voluntary or with force as it is stipulated in the recent Nairobi joint Communiqué between Rwanda and DRC Governments. This Communiqué stipulates that by March 19th, 2008, if FDLR are not disarmed, next steps will be undertaken including a military threat against them.

Now we have seen some new signs of actions undertaken by DRC Government against FDLR. The other optimism for Rwanda is that the MONUC is shifting FDLR attention and their foreign sources of arms towards ending of their threats. MONUC have started movement of more aggressive DDR Program (Disarment, Demobilization and Repatriation) against FDLR. MONUC moved their forces towards FDLR fighting fields. They moved from Kisangani to Goma.

Finally, the International community, through the Resolution 1804 and trough other actions is on the same page with Rwanda's vision on the issue of FDLR. A strong call is made upon Countries to cease that host the leaders of the negatives forces operating in the DRC to make sure that they do not continue to cause insecurity in that country. These Countries are invited to take another look on people like Murwanashyaka in Germany, Higiro in United States of America and Mbarushimana in France and others elsewhere, not because they committed genocide, but because they head genocidal groups.

Therefore, regarding the fact that the main source of insecurity and instability within the Great Lakes Region is the negatives forces above highlighted, given the fact that the ICGLR Pact on peace and stability tried to address this issue, also given the fact that the international community is changing its look over the issue of the negative forces and considering that the internal socio-political dimensions of conflicts within ICGLR members states are addressed, we strongly believe that the issue of genocidal movements like FDLR and other negative groups will be sooner ended.

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Many of the development challenges facing the Lake Victoria region (LVR) in East Africa are cross-border and regional in nature and must therefore be solved through regional strategies besides national and local. In fact, there is an emerging "new regionalism" in the LVR, which is created not only by inter-governmental organizations, like the East African Cooperation (EAC), but also by regional civil society environmental networks like EcoVic and Osienala. However, there is a knowledge gap about the role of the latter in sustainable development.

Therefore, the aim of this project is to study in what ways regional environmental networks are contributing to sustainable development as well as the obstacles for that.

More specifically, the project will try to answer the following research questions in terms of how they affect the ability of networks to contribute to sustainable development in LVR:

(1)   How are the networks governed in terms of transparency, coordination, decision making, accountability etc. including their relation to state-led regional governance?
(2)   What are the mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion in terms of participation of local and national actors and social representation (gender, ethnicity, class) in networks?
(3)   What is the role of identities and ideas in constituting environmental networks in terms of complementing/opposing visions of as well as strategies for developing the LVR?

The definition of regional network is quite eclectic. All civil society networks with some sort of regional dimension fit in the study, as well as national and local organizations being part of or somehow connected to these networks. Furthermore, departing from a rather extensive conceptualization of the latter implies that a broad range of actors, dealing with specific environmental issues, poverty reduction as well as social and economic justice in more general terms, are important. What is of most importance is to reach a greater empirical understanding of the regional dynamic of civil society contribution to various aspects of sustainable development in the LVR, which will be the main result of this study.

The civil society organizations that work in the field of environment in the region offer the opportunity to improve networks of organizational structures. They make possible the participation of the population and insure durable development. To become more efficient, such organizations need to be democratic, improve its performance and have a solid leadership.

In such condition, their role in development should be more efficient if they speak for marginalized people, include population in decision making process, become inclusive and include women, create its own resources, improve services, threat the real cause of problem instead of handling the only problems of the moment.