
Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation: a case study for South-South Cooperation



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The Commission between Niger and Nigeria has laid the foundation for cooperation between the two countries, with a mutual understanding towards achieving common goals.

Introduction

Today the world is more interconnected given an increased interaction in all aspects of life, especially towards cooperation, entailing policy coordination, transfer of technology and trade. Complementing this interconnectedness, South-South Cooperation (SSC) aims towards promoting self-sufficiency among Southern nations and in strengthening economic ties among states whose markets are more equally matched. One of the modalities of SSC works towards the exchange of expertise among governments, organisations and individuals of developing nations. Through SSC the developing countries help and support one another with sharing of knowledge, providing technical and humanitarian assistance and increasing trade and investments.

Such cooperation necessitates a coordinated effort, first and foremost at the governmental level that seeps into the importance of having bilateral organisations. Taking the case of Niger and Nigeria, this paper brings forth a case study that highlights a common vision for development shared by both the countries. Through a partnership agreement, a Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission had been created for solving common problems and fostering common solutions. The Commission aims towards strengthening SSC to foster an alliance of unity, building upon the shared interests among developing countries and ensuring economic linkages keeping in mind a common development trajectory.

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This article focuses on understanding SSC through an analysis of the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission (hereinafter, Commission). The Commission has made tremendous efforts and progress to promote mutual understanding and bilateral trade. The article is structured as follows: first, it gives background to the establishment of the Commission; second, it highlights the targets of the Commission; third, it analyses the structure of the organisation; and fourth, it gives examples of sectors where the Commission has been successful in promoting cooperation as well as highlights an example of triangular cooperation that emerged from an initiative of the Commission.

Historical Background

Since time immemorial, Niger and Nigeria have been intimately linked by their history and geography which shapes their present and further directs them towards a common future. The two countries share a 1500 km border covering twelve regions. These regions share commonalities in the demographics of people, who speak the same language and have similar cultural and religious practices. However, the vast space of Sahara, which groups together Niger and Nigeria, is threatened by desertification highlighting a mutual challenge to be addressed.

Despite shared values, the effort to address common challenges requires a framework built methodologically and guided by mutual determination. Thus, 10 years after their independence, Niger and Nigeria, felt the need to create a legal framework to organise and govern multiform relations. The convention establishing the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation¹

was an outcome following the official Government visit of the President of the Niger Republic to Nigeria in November 1970. His Excellency President Diori Hamani and the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency General Yakubu Gowon in March 1971 signed the convention establishing the Commission. It was amended by a Protocol of 22 December 1973 and set-up on 23 December 1973, which took place at Niamey, Niger. Thus resulting in the establishment of the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for Cooperation. Its premises of the Commission are located at the Boulevard des Ambassades (Route de Goudel) since 1982. The Commission is a bilateral body under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the two member-states. Its executive body is run by both Nigeriens and Nigerians reflecting joint working at both the organisational level as well as the project level. Its staff works in a hierarchical structure and in close collaboration for smooth running of the institution. The vision and organisational structure of the Commission highlights a true mutually beneficial institution created with joint resources to enhance cooperation to meet common goals and challenges.

Targets of the Commission

The Commission has set targets to fight against desertification, against violent extremism along the borders of the two countries; moving towards women empowerment; strengthening economic ties; building dams (Kandadji, Sabke, KafinZaki); controlling the spread of diseases; and promoting tourism as well as solidarity through sports and cultural engagements. It has general and exclusive

competence to seek in all fields the means of coordinating and harmonising the economy of two countries aiming at increased effective cooperation.

Furthermore, the Commission is empowered to make proposals to both the governments of Niger and Nigeria, regarding, in particular, the measures to be taken and the projects to be carried out with for rational, harmonious and balanced cooperation. These proposals should be capable of ensuring maximum development of two countries while being cost effective. Overcoming the desire to assert particular nations sovereignty and the principle of equality, a core principle of SSC, directs this mutually beneficial cooperation. Further, the founding fathers of the Commission have provided in the statutes equality in contributions by the two States. The financial charges for the operation of the Commission shall also be borne equally by the Governments of Niger and Nigeria.

Structure of the Organisation

The structure of the organisation is laid in such a manner so as to reflect the harmonisation of targets, mutual understanding about working of the organisation as well as in jointly achieving the vision of the Commission. It has been organised in such a manner where the governance is by the High Authority, which is the supreme body of the Commission, made up of the two heads of the State. The structure then moves in a downward hierarchical manner with the Council of Ministers which is second in command, responsible to the High Authority. The Council meets once a year and it is composed of representatives of the two governments

of coming from an equivalent level in their individual countries. The third in row is the Permanent Secretariat, which is responsible for day-to-day functioning of the Commission and the execution of the decisions of the High Authority and the Council of Ministers. The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary General, appointed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria and assisted by a Deputy Secretary General, appointed by the Republic of Niger, jointly approved by the two Governments. This reflects an inclusive and representative organisation, that can undertake activities that are of mutual concern and driven by the demands for development by both Niger and Nigeria.

Joint committees of experts are also set up to deal with the various areas of cooperation, which meet regularly and make recommendations to the Council of Ministers. These joint committees are the important levers of this institution as they are the designers of the measures and actions and at the same time responsible for the follow-up processes that are an outcome of decisions taken by the Council of Ministers. They make a decisive contribution to the effectiveness of the Secretariat of the Commission, which aims to retain a lean structure in terms of its workforce.

Areas of Engagement

The Convention establishing the Commission has Statutes and Rules of Procedure which constitute the general legal framework for bilateral relations between Niger and Nigeria. Special agreements and programmes of cooperation are concluded to govern activities of the different sectors of the economic, social and cultural engagements

of the two countries. These agreements and programmes are: Agreement on the Supply of Electric Power to the Republic of Niger by the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Trade Agreements Cultural and Technical Cooperation Agreement; Air Transport Agreement; Agreement on combating desertification; Road Transport Agreement; Agreement on the fight against pests; Memorandum of Understanding on information; Agreement concerning the equitable sharing of the development, conservation and use of shared water resources; Cooperation Agreement on Health; Agreement on the establishment of local bilateral committees; Judicial Cooperation Agreement; Programme of cooperation and cultural and educational exchanges; and Agreement on the sports' exchange programme.

The areas of intervention focus on economic integration; transport and connectivity through air, road and rail; safety through the establishment and support towards a border security surveillance system; human development with a focus on health, agriculture, education, supply of energy and sharing of water resources; addressing climate change through combating desertification and ecosystem management; and clear demarcation of borders in respect of territorial sovereignty, amongst others.

This bilateral SSC has also opened avenues for Triangular Cooperation through engagements with traditional donors and international organisations. An example of this engagement is between the Joint Commission and the World Bank, which led to the launch of the Kano-Katsia-Maradi (K2M) initiative for food security and trade, including livestock and agricultural products. This takes

SSC between Niger and Nigeria to a level of triangulation with the World Bank. The main objective of this initiative is to promote economic integration through people-to-people and contacts across the border of both Niger and Nigeria. The initiative also aims to ensure free movement of people, capital, goods and services in both the countries without any unjustified barriers. The effort seeks to provide a great opportunity to record the volume of border trade thereby establishing reliable commercial information for the purpose of generating revenue for both the governments.

The trade corridors under this initiative cover the Kebbi-Sokoto-Zamfara, Jigawa-Daura and Borno-Yobe in Nigeria, and Dosso-Tahoua, Magaria-Zinder and Diffa in Niger. These corridors mutually organise trade fairs in both Nigeria and Niger. The Commission has succeeded in setting up a Niger-Nigerian Consular Chamber (NCCN), whose headquarters is in Kano. To ensure the proper functioning, the commission has focus on human, material and financial resources to be contributed by both the countries and supported by the World Bank. This initiative is a step towards ensuring sustainable trade engagements between the two countries, maintaining a flow of goods and people at the borders and sets a framework that can spill into other areas of cooperation under the ambit of the Commission.

Conclusion

The Commission between Niger and Nigeria has laid the foundation for cooperation between the two countries, with a mutual understanding towards achieving common goals. Without

cooperation, there can be no development. This is what makes the Niger-Nigeria Joint Commission for cooperation a unique bilateral tool and a best practice initiative in the region. The joint commission is a key example of a SSC towards developmental projects that aim to strengthen security, address environmental concerns, enhance trade and economic ties, and ensure diseases control.

Through its institutional structure, the commission establishes legitimacy in providing expertise and identifying common interests between the two countries. Further, the institutional setup acknowledges the principles of equality, demand driven cooperation and respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty that are key to SSC engagements. The

efforts initiated by the Commission, including the triangular cooperation with the World Bank, aim towards making Niger and Nigeria the protagonists in their own stories towards development.

Endnote

¹ The Commission Mixte Nigero-Nigeriane, acronym CMNN in French

References

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FIRST EDITION OF AFRICAN FORUM ON VOCATIONAL TRAINING

The city of Dakhla in Western Sahara, administered by Morocco, hosted the first African Forum on Vocational Training from 21-22 December, 2018. The Forum took place under the theme, 'the Governance of vocational training systems for employability and competitiveness in Africa'.

The event was in line with Morocco's strategy to enhance South-South Cooperation and saw the participation of the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI). The aim of the event was to provide a platform for the exchange of expertise, create models for partnership and provide the youth access to vocational training.

The first African initiative of its kind, the Forum led to the signing of six cooperation agreements to strengthen the cooperation between Morocco and other African countries in the field of vocational training.

All participants called for the creation of an African committee to brainstorm on vocational training, developing digital exchange and sharing platforms, twinning vocational training centers, working towards a regional/continental certification framework for African countries in order to favour youth and worker mobility, amongst others. The event stressed the importance of establishing a common African vision and integrated vocational training systems.

Source: All Africa. (2018). Africa: 1st African Vocational Training Forum in Dakhla, 'Resounding Success'. All Africa. Maghreb Arabe Presse (Rabat). Retrieved from: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201812270221.html>