

Management of ethnocultural diversity in Africa: challenges and socio-economic consequences

Dieu Ne Dort Talla Fokam¹⁺, Paul Ningaye² and Fourier Prevost Fotso Koyeu³

^{1, 2, 3} Dschang School of Economics and Management, University of Dschang, Cameroon

Abstract. *This paper analyzes the challenges and socio-economic consequences of managing ethnocultural diversity in Africa. Results show that the challenges of managing ethnocultural diversity in Africa are primarily historical and political. The economic implications of managing ethnocultural diversity are positive when government policies are participatory and inclusive. However, when the management of diversity leads to identitarian closure, the consequences are negative and range from popular uprisings to conflicts. As a recommendation, the governments of African countries should study the nature of their diversity and develop inclusive and equitable public policies that take into account the interests of all identity groups. Respect for the Constitution and democratic rules is also an asset for effective management of ethnocultural diversity.*

Keywords: ethnic diversity, linguistic diversity, religious diversity, economic development

JEL Codes: Z10, Z13, O10

1. Introduction

The trilogy "ethnocultural diversity," "identity conflicts" and "underdevelopment" is one of the main hallmarks of the African continent, which gradually preoccupies governments, international institutions, and researchers. The 2006 African Union Summit in Banjul outlined the extent of the problem of cultural and ethnic diversity in Africa and emphasized the need to integrate sociocultural pluralism into democratic governance processes. In 2013, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in its third report on governance in Africa, analyzed the evolution of identity conflicts and its socio-economic consequences (deaths, non-voluntary migration flows, productivity losses, increased poverty). She then questioned the role of elections in managing this diversity. In effect, the last decades have been marked in many African countries by security crises and conflicts, mostly born of clashes between groups that are distinguished by their identities. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the conflicts in Darfur, the post-electoral conflicts in Ivory Coast, the secession phenomena in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, the conflicts in the Central African Republic and the violent aftermath of the controversial elections in Kenya are some illustrations.

Research on this topic contradicts on the socio-economic impact of ethnocultural diversity. For some studies, diversity in itself is not an obstacle, and on the contrary, can be an asset for development (Ager and Brückner, 2013; Bleaney and Dimico, 2017). For other studies, ethnocultural diversity does not promote development because of identitarian closure and conflict (Barron and al. 2009; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005; Wimmer, 1997). The relevance of the contradictory conclusions of these studies sets the issue of the impact of managing diversity that the authors raise. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the challenges and socio-economic consequences of managing ethnocultural diversity in Africa. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents ethnocultural diversity in Africa,

⁺ Corresponding author. E-mail address: dtallafokam@yahoo.fr, Tel.: +237 695 156 248, Address: P.O. Box. 110 Dschang, Cameroon

section 3 presents the literature on the socio-economic and political role of diversity, section 4 presents diversity management policies, section 5 analyzes the challenges of diversity management in Africa, section 6 presents the economic and social costs of ethnocultural conflict, and section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Diversity in Africa

According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA, 2013), diversity refers to the plurality of identity markers based on which individuals are classified in society, maintain relations with each other and are different from others. These markers can be organized into two groups: primordial markers and social markers (ECA, 2011). Primordial markers may be exclusive or non-exclusive. They are exclusive when referring to innate identities such as race, ethnicity, kinship, and clan. They are non-exclusive when they can be exchanged; it is the example of religion and language. Social markers are those acquired during the evolution of the individual, such as political affiliation or belonging to a professional association.

Considering the most common identity markers, the ethnocultural diversity of African countries can be analyzed at three levels: linguistically, ethnically and religiously. At the linguistic level, the African continent has about 2,000 local languages, to which are added the so-called “official languages”, inherited from colonization. (Lewis, 2009) states that Cameroon is at the top of the ranking of countries with 279 languages spoken, plus French and English, which are the two official languages. It is followed by Sudan (134 languages), Chad (132), Tanzania (127), Ivory Coast and Ghana (79 languages each), respectively. Language, more than any other markers of diversity, is the main factor that favors identitarian closure in Africa. Two people who share the same language have a strong chance of having the same ancestors, or even common history.

At the ethnic level, Africa is the most diverse continent, with more than 2,000 ethnic groups. Nigeria is at the top of the list with about 250 ethnic groups. It is followed by Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana and Ivory Coast. One of the peculiarities of African ethnic diversity is the presence of certain ethnic groups in several countries. This is the case of Oromos who are present in Ethiopia and Kenya, Hausas who are in Nigeria, Niger, Ghana, Chad, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, and Sudan, Ibos in Cameroon and in Nigeria, Fulani in Guinea, Nigeria, Niger and Senegal (Lewis, 2009). This situation is presented as a consequence of colonization, which was marked by the geographical delimitation of national territories, independently of the local populations and the ethnic affiliations.

At the religious level, Africa is characterized by a religious pluralism that varies from one country to another. The two dominant religious groups are Muslims and Christians (Bayart, 2015). To this religious pluralism, we have traditional African belief systems.

3. Ethnocultural Diversity: Asset or Obstacle to Development?

Identity groups exist in almost every country in the world. However, problems related to the coexistence of different homogeneous groups within the same territory, differ from one country to another and are not related to the number of existing groups.

In effect, diversity in itself should represent a source of wealth and development for society because of the multiplicity of points of view that it permits to have when a problem is posed and also because of the complementarity that can arise from the plurality of work approaches (Ottaviano and Peri, 2006). In this

perspective, several studies have presented the economic benefits of diversity (Ager and Brückner, 2013; Bleaney and Dimico, 2017). Ager and Brückner, 2013 in the context of the United States indicate that the increase in cultural diversity positively affects national production, but that a cultural polarization generates rather a contrary effect on this production. In the African context, some countries bear witness to the significant gains made by the dynamism and creativity born of interactions between different cultural, social and ethnic groups. This is the case of Ghana, Mauritius, Tanzania and Zambia, which after identity crises have made diversity a lever for development (United Nations Development Programme, 2004).

Overall, the literature that discusses the socio-economic implications of ethnocultural diversity generally concludes that diversity is a development issue in the contexts of countries lacking democracy, poor governance political and inequitable allocation of public resources among different groups (Alesina et al. 2003; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005). Wimmer and al. 2009 and Barron et al. 2009 explain that ethnocultural diversity harms development when it is accompanied by practices that increase the risk of social and political conflict. These are polarization-generating practices that are linked to government inefficiency, state diversion, corruption, unbalanced economic growth, and unequal income distribution. It is with this in mind that the UN Secretary-General said in 2011 that "while diversity can be a source of creativity and growth, the fact remains that it often gives rise to unhealthy competition, conflict, and instability, due to the lack of appropriate management". Examples of these adverse situations are numerous in African countries. However, no study has yet revealed an intrinsic hatred in ethnocultural conflicts recorded on the African continent. On the contrary, several studies argue that group conflicts emerge in diverse African societies when the state appears to be dominated by a particular group or when communities feel threatened with marginalization (Deng, 2009). The genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the conflicts in Darfur, the post-electoral conflicts in Ivory Coast, the secession phenomena in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, the conflicts in the Central African Republic and the violent aftermath of the controversial elections in Kenya, constitute some cases among other examples. The interests pursued in the different cases of conflict are different and the claims aim at political change, equitable distribution of public resources or political and economic independence of the communities.

4. Diversity Management Policies

According to Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005, diversity management refers to the consideration of the specificities of different identity groups and subgroups by public authorities and various institutions. For equitable management in a diversified context, the proposed answers must be specific to the needs of the groups. In this section, we will present the legal and institutional arrangements for managing diversity, the forms of state influence on diversity, and the ethnocultural diversity management model.

4.1. Legal and Institutional Mechanisms for Managing Diversity

Legal and institutional arrangements for managing ethnocultural diversity have been operating in some African countries for several decades. Depending on the context, these are non-discrimination and equal opportunity agreements. In effect, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms, as defined by the United Nations, affirms the principle of non-discrimination and proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone can take advantage of all rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind.

Although in practice the principle of equal opportunity and non-discrimination is not effectively adopted, almost all African countries have ratified the United Nations conventions on equality and non-discrimination. These conventions are part of the march towards democracy and the management of diversity.

4.2. Forms of State Influence on Diversity

Several models attempt to explain how the state can affect diversity in a territory. They range from the most democratic models to the least democratic models. These are individual liberal democracy, republican liberal democracy, multicultural democracy, the Herrenvolk democracy model and the control model (Smootha, 2002).

- **Individual Liberal Democracy:** In this model, the State is primarily interested in the application of non-discrimination measures through its capacity to act as an instrument guaranteeing the individual rights of citizens. The individual is at the center of the model and is perceived as an autonomous and free person. This model remained purely theoretical. One of its main limitations is that it reduces the state to a monolithic and static entity whose agents would be devoid of all emotion.
- **Republican liberal democracy:** in this model, the state is built on historical, linguistic, political elements that make it adopt one or more societal cultures. Republican liberal democracy favors in the majority of cases, the promotion of societal culture and a language that every citizen must adopt and which are the bases of the acquisition of citizenship. The main limitation of this model is related to the propensity to favor a unique model of a societal culture that tends to be considered as a problem rather than a benefit in societies, where different identities coexist despite the attachment to the republic. This model is widely used to characterize Western European societies.
- **Multicultural democracy:** Multiculturalism refers to the institutional recognition of multiple cultural, ethnic and social identities carried by specific groups within the same country. It is based on the recognition and granting of collective rights, based on the principle of the right to be different. The representation of different groups in state affairs is seen as a promotion of socio-cultural and ethnic inclusion. It is the subject of much criticism because of the promotion of communitarianism and its propensity to reduce the social cohesion of the State. These main limitations relate to the exercise of democracy and are mostly linked to the accentuation of particularisms because of the difficulties involved in the simultaneous integration of the individual approach and the collective approach in the management of diversity. This model is used in Canada. Cameroon, in line with its policy of managing national diversity, created in 2017 the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism.
- **The Herrenvolk Democracy Model:** This is a very radical model since it essentially excludes non-majority groups. This model was used for the first time by the anthropologist Pierre Van Den Berghe to describe South Africa during his years of apartheid (Berghe, 1967). Apartheid in South Africa was a special case of racial diversity marked by internal colonization and dictatorship, based on racial segregation and domination institutionalized by the whites.
- **The control model:** Developed by Lustick, the control model is based on the idea of domination (in an ethnically divided society) of an ethnic group that overtly and officially takes control of the state, imposes its culture and assumes the fact that minority groups are not able to take part in the political game. According to (Smootha, 2002), a control system requires the existence of three key conditions: a high degree of isolation of minority groups from the dominant group, the economic dependence of

the minority on the majority and the ability to co-opt minority elites to maintain control over their potential claims.

4.3. Model of Governance and Management of Ethnocultural Diversity

The model of governance or political organization is often presented as one of the ways of managing diversity in different countries of the world. The challenge is that of the mode of territorial or administrative organization that is most likely to satisfy the majority and the minorities. The choice of a model depends on several factors. It concerns the size of the minorities, their concentration on a specific territory, the level of inter-identity tension, a conflictual past or not, but also a past autonomy (Malloy, 2005). Three models of governance are presented in this work: the model of participatory politics, the federalist model and the model of multicultural politics.

- **Participatory Politics:** Participatory politics tends to institutionalize the political representation of communities through formal mechanisms such as quotas, proportional representation in public affairs, the inclusion of ethnic parties. It is also based on the principle of the autonomy of the different groups for the management of a certain number of policies (Commercio, 2011). It allows the type of networks of modern associations such as political parties, trade unions, professional associations, and other non-governmental organizations at the community and national level. As a result, it tends to fail if it is imposed from outside without the consent of the elite.

Participatory policies may, in some countries, initially contribute to political instability or to various forms of demagoguery. Leaders of rival groups may engage in small power struggles. However, in the medium or long term, only a responsible democratic policy will prevail. In countries where relatively large groups are concentrated in a geographical area, “separatist tendencies” can be anticipated when the political system opens up to free expression and free voting.

There are a number of factors that favor the implementation of this participatory policy, namely the absence of a single majority group, a balance of power between groups, a lack of strong economic disparities between groups (Snyder, 2000). In a context of democratization, such a model is unlikely to be favored. Thus, the participatory model has emerged as a way of restoring confidence in post-conflict situations, with relatively limited success.

- **Federalism:** Federalism promotes unity in diversity within states (intra-state dimension) and allows established states to build a privileged relationship between them (inter-state dimension). The promotion of federalism is based on a balance of ethnic power, ethnic autonomy and the rejection of laws dictated by a single identity. One of the essential factors that determine this mode of governance is that of the ethnic distribution, the concentration of minorities and the existing balance of power. Typically, the federal idea is used to resolve tensions related to unity and diversity (Cornell 2002). However, the federal solution is rejected in many cases because it reinforces ethnic identities (Dembinska and al. 2014). Moreover, it would help increase the resources of those who question the sovereignty of nations (Anderson, 2013).
- **The policy of multiculturalism:** It consists of including all identity groups by granting general rights (linguistic, political, social and cultural) without granting a territorial prerogative or legally determining the rules of balance within the institutions. This model is based inter alia on major international texts of the United Nations setting the main principles of non-discrimination, but especially the establishment of national legislation guaranteeing a certain number of rights to minorities within the framework of a republican system or multiculturalism. This is the least

burdensome approach for the central state. Such an approach has the merit of not contributing to an intensification of identity differences or to the communitarisation of groups.

5. The Challenges of Managing Diversity in Africa

The main foundation of the problems of African diversity has its origins in the era of colonization when the colonists in their demarcation of the geographical borders of the countries forced groups of population with different cultures and ways of life to live together (Besley and Reynal-Querol, 2014).

In the aftermath of independence, the successors of the colonial regime developed projects for nation-building. These projects were based on totalitarian policies with values such as a common identity, a single nation, and a single political party. This quasi-dictatorial mode of management has not favored the inclusion of ethnocultural diversity in national policies (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996). These measures have led to numerous conflicts, the most significant of which have been recorded in Burundi, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Chad.

From the 1990s, some African countries adopted the process of democratic transition. In the majority of countries, this led to a change from one-party to multi-party. But this phase of entering into democratic governance has not remained flawless. The management of diversity remains unfortunate in some contexts because of the absence of political change characterized by the longevity of some heads of state in power, the non-respect of certain clauses of the constitution and electoral fraud. The consequences of these measures are numerous and range from simple popular uprisings to conflicts, resulting in enormous loss of life and material damage. However, some countries have succeeded in taking diversity into account in administrative, political and economic management (Laitin, 1994). This is the case of Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Ghana.

6. Cost of conflict over socio-economic and political development in Africa

Peace and security issues have become priorities in Africa. Caused largely by poor governance and exclusion, conflicts are real generators of underdevelopment (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005; Easterly and Levine, 1997). They lead to the destruction or devaluation of physical capital (infrastructure, equipment), human capital and social capital. They cause deaths, involuntary migrations, refugees. The human cost is also very high in terms of the disabled, the development of transmissible diseases, malnutrition and famine. Financial spending on conflict management is also important. Beyond human costs, the economic impact of conflict also includes reduced capital expenditures and increased government spending related to conflict management (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998).

7. Conclusion

Africa is a continent with strong ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. It is also a continent marked by many tensions between identity groups. As the management of this diversity is different from one country to another, this paper study the issue of diversity management. After analyzing the context of diversity in Africa, we focused on presenting diversity management policies and then analyzing the challenges and

consequences of managing diversity in Africa. The study presents two main challenges: the first is of a historical nature and has its origins in the era of colonization, when colonists, in their efforts to delimit the borders of countries forced several ethnic groups with different cultures to live together. The second challenge is related to political governance and concerns the non-respect of the constitution, the absence of political change and the unfair management of public resources.

The consequences of managing ethnocultural diversity in Africa are twofold: they are positive and conducive to economic, political and social development when diversity management takes into account the interests of all groups or when it is practiced in a context marked by democratic governance. On the contrary, it generates polarization and gives rise to tensions and internal conflicts with negative repercussions on economic and social development.

As a recommendation, the governments of African countries should study the nature of their diversity and develop inclusive and equitable public policies that take into account the interests of all identity groups. Respect for the Constitution and democratic rules is also an asset for effective management of ethnocultural diversity.

8. References:

- [1] Ager, Philipp and Markus Brückner. 2013. "Cultural Diversity and Economic Growth: Evidence from the US during the Age of Mass Migration." *European Economic Review* **64**:76–97.
- [2] Alesina, Alberto, Arnaud Devleeschauwer, William Easterly, Sergio Kurlat, and Romain Wacziarg. 2003. "Fractionalization." *Journal of Economic Growth* **8**(2):155–94.
- [3] Alesina, Alberto and Eliana La Ferrara. 2005. "Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance." *Journal of Economic Literature* **43**(3):762–800.
- [4] Anderson, Liam D. 2013. *Federal Solutions to Ethnic Problems: Accommodating Diversity*. New York: Routledge.
- [5] Barron, Patrick, Kai Kaiser, and Menno Pradhan. 2009. "Understanding Variations in Local Conflict: Evidence and Implications from Indonesia." *World Development* **37**(3):698–713.
- [6] Bayart, Jean-François. 2015. "Religion et Politique En Afrique." In: *Etudes Africaines Comparées. - No 1(2015)*, p. 1-23.
- [7] Berghe, Pierre L. Van den. 1967. *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective*. Wiley.
- [8] Besley, Timothy and Marta Reynal-Querol. 2014. "The Legacy of Historical Conflict: Evidence from Africa." *American Political Science Review* **108**(2):319–36.
- [9] Bleaney, Michael and Arcangelo Dimico. 2017. "Ethnic Diversity and Conflict." *Journal of Institutional Economics* **13**(2):357–78.
- [10] Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler. 1998. "On Economic Causes of Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* **50**(4):563–73.
- [11] Commercio, Michele E. 2011. *Russian Minority Politics in Post-Soviet Latvia and Kyrgyzstan, The Transformative Power of Informal Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [12] Cornell, Svante E. 2002. "Autonomy as a Source of Conflict: Caucasian Conflicts in Theoretical Perspective." *World Politics* **54**(2):245–76.
- [13] Dembinska, Magdalena, László Máracz, and Márton Tonk. 2014. "Introduction to the Special Section: Minority Politics and the Territoriality Principle in Europe." *Nationalities Papers* **42**(3):355–75.
- [14] Deng, Francis. 2009. *Identity, Diversity, and Constitutionalism in Africa*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- [15] Easterly, William and Ross Levine. 1997. "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* **112**(4):1203–50.
- [16] ECA. 2011. "Diversity Management in Africa: Findings from the African Peer Review Mechanism and a Framework for Analysis and Policy-Making": Report. report. UN. ECA. Addis Ababa: ECA.

-
- [17] ECA. 2013. *African Governance Report III: Elections and the Management of Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [18] Laitin, David D. 1994. "The Tower of Babel as a Coordination Game: Political Linguistics in Ghana." *The American Political Science Review* 88(3):622–34.
- [19] Lewis, M. Paul, ed. 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 16th Edition*. 16th edition. Dallas, Tex: SIL International.
- [20] Malloy, Tove H. 2005. *National Minority Rights in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- [21] Montalvo, José G. and Marta Reynal-Querol. 2005. "Ethnic Polarization, Potential Conflict, and Civil Wars." *American Economic Review* 95(3):796–816.
- [22] Olukoshi, Abedayo and Liisa Laakso, eds. 1996. *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.
- [23] Ottaviano, Gianmarco I. P., and Giovanni Peri. 2006. "The Economic Value of Cultural Diversity: Evidence from US Cities." *Journal of Economic Geography* 6(1):9–44.
- [24] Smooha, Sammy. 2002. "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State." *Nations and Nationalism* 8(4):475–503.
- [25] Snyder, Jack L. 2000. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- [26] United Nations Development Programme. 2004. *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [27] Wimmer, A., L. E. Cederman, and B. Min. 2009. "Ethnic Politics and Armed Conflict: A Configurational Analysis of a New Global Data Set." *American Sociological Review* 74(2):316–37.
- [28] Wimmer, Andreas. 1997. "Who Owns the State? Understanding Ethnic Conflict in Post-Colonial Societies." *Nations and Nationalism* 3(4):631–66.
-

Manuscript received: 21 March 2019

Manuscript accepted: 21 June 2019