The Importance of Maritime Security Governance in East African Community’s Blue Economy Initiatives.

Abstract

Background:
The East African Community (EAC) is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) on the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. Currently, the EAC comprises of the States of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda and it has a land area of 2.5 million square kilometers and a market base of about 160 million people. Through Kenya and Tanzania, the only two coastal States of the Community, the EAC has a coastline of 1,950 kilometres and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) stretches over an area of 383,541 square kilometres. In its very simplified form, the term blue economy is ‘sustainable use of the sea to meet human needs’ (Michel, 2016). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in alignment with the 2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIMS) recognises inland and underground waters as parts of Africa’s version of blue economy (ECA, 2016 & 2050 AIMS). In that case, the EAC has, for blue economy purposes, 113,608 square kilometres of inland waters in addition to its maritime waters. Those waters (marine and inland waters of about half a million square kilometres) and resources therein, together with bustling coastal regions, greatly support social-economic developments of the Community. The EAC seaports, mostly the Port of Mombasa (Kenya) and the Port of Dar-Es-Salaam (Tanzania), provide necessary gateway for over 95 per cent of EAC’s international seaborne trade by volume. Additionally, these ports facilitate international seaborne trade for a number of other African landlocked States. Nonetheless, insecurity in the EAC’s maritime domain weakens the regional blue economy initiatives. It’s worth noting that through Kenya, the EAC shares both land and sea borders with Somalia. This increases security vulnerability of the Community, mostly at sea where there is no physical boarder to be observed or policed. For many years, following escalation of Somali-based piracy, the EAC maritime domain was marked as among the High Risk Areas (HRA) for maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean. Although from 2015, much of the EAC’s maritime Domain has been scaled down from HRA to risk area, sailing in these waters attracts some additional costs through improved maritime security measures taken by shipping companies, hence increases the shipping costs to the EAC region. Huge oil and gas reserves found in the EAC’s maritime domain, open doors for the world superpowers to compete for energy supply. However, that would need a close supervision of the EAC. This study examines as to why the EAC, unlike other IGOs of the same nature, does not take a leading role in governance of its maritime domain in order to promote blue economy in the region.

Method:
The study mainly uses descriptive analysis of previous studies and analysis of the current maritime security situations in the entire WIO region.

Results:
The study reveals that despite that facts that the EAC’s maritime domain is prone for piracy, maritime terrorism, armed robbery against ships at sea, illegal fishing, drugs and human trafficking, there are neither strong harmonised efforts among member States nor at the EAC level to collectively address the security threats. The ongoing Kenya-Somali maritime border dispute is further hampering some of regional oil and
gas and fisheries investments, hence weakening the blue economy initiatives. With ongoing massive exploration and discovery of off-shore oil and gas, superpower such as the US, and hard powers such as China, India and the EU, see the EAC region potential as a reliable future source of energy supply. However, their race for the EAC’s energy resources could potentially turn the EAC into a complex security region.

Conclusion:
Maritime security is a necessary component in any blue economy strategy of a national or regional body. The EAC is no exceptional to that notion. Inability of the EAC to take a leading role in maritime security governance and promotion of the ongoing blue economy initiatives is partly influenced by structural inbuilt flaws of its Secretariat. The EAC’s Secretariat does not have enforcement capabilities on member States in the areas of maritime security. Lack of Community’s maritime policy and strategy is also matter of concern. Despite the fact that the EAC’s maritime industry greatly supports regional social and economic developments, there is, currently, no detailed study suggesting the extent of contributions of and challenges facing the EAC’s marine-based economy (blue economy), including the maritime security threats.

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Submission theme:
Human dimension of coastal communities