

Norms in practice: people-centric governance in ASEAN and ECOWAS

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In December 2008, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the ASEAN Charter, in which it pledged to ‘promote a people-oriented ASEAN’.¹ One year later, this state-centric and insular regional organization outlined an ambitious ASEAN Community, proclaiming that ‘all sectors of society ... are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building’.² Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in its 2008 conflict prevention framework and Vision 2020 document, stressed a reorientation from an ‘ECOWAS of states’ to an ‘ECOWAS of people’.³ Within a two-year period, that is, both organizations expressed similar intentions to reorient their governance processes towards a norm of people-centric governance.

This norm is defined as a recognition of the appropriateness of direct participation by member states’ publics in, and their direct benefit from, regional governance processes. Its adoption by each organization is puzzling, with potentially transformative implications. Both ASEAN and ECOWAS have traditionally been elite-led, private and inward-looking—qualities many observers see as strengths.⁴ Similarly, each is composed of a diverse group of states, among which consensus is not a given and some existing regime types conflict with democratizing goals.⁵ Yet both organizations adopted this novel norm at similar times and for similar reasons. In the early 2000s, officials within each sought to ensure their respec-

¹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations*, ch. 1, art. 1.13 (Singapore, 2007).

² Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community 2009–2015*, ‘ASEAN political-security community blueprint’, ch. 2, art. 7 (Jakarta, 2009).

³ Economic Community of West African States, *ECOWAS conflict prevention framework*, section II (4) (Abuja, 2008); *ECOWAS vision 2020 document* (Abuja, 2010).

⁴ Fredrik Söderbaum, ‘With a little help from my friends’: *how regional organizations in Africa sustain clientelism, corruption and discrimination* (Gothenburg: School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, 2010); Jeffrey Herbst, ‘Crafting regional cooperation in Africa’, in Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston, eds, *Crafting cooperation: regional international institutions in comparative perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 129–44; Amitav Acharya, ‘Collective identity and conflict management in southeast Asia’, in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds, *Security communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 198–227.

⁵ Alice Ba, *[Re]negotiating east and southeast Asia: region, regionalism, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Thomas Tiekou, *Governing Africa: a 3D analysis of the African Union’s performance* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Habibu Bappah, ‘ECOWAS and the promotion of democratic governance in west Africa’, *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy* 2: 1, 2014, pp. 85–102.

tive organization's survival in the face of perceived recent challenges—the 1997 financial crisis in south-east Asia and the series of civil wars in west Africa.⁶ While neo-functional accounts of these developments may direct attention to the similar needs of states and technical changes within each organization, this article draws on insights from norm localization and subsidiarity literatures to elucidate *divergence*. In ASEAN, the norm of people-centric governance is understood and enacted in a limited and defensive way. For officials there, the norm necessitates only selective engagement with civil society and is seen as means to support rather than alter established modes of regional governance. In ECOWAS, however, the norm is understood and enacted as a means to render the organization more inclusive of civil society actors and has transformed the regional project in important ways, shaping the logic and form of regional intervention and conflict prevention.

Our analysis complements and builds on the growing study of norm localization and contestation,⁷ and the practice turn in International Relations (IR).⁸ Our central interest is not in explaining norm adoption or institutionalization, but in offering an empirically rich account of how and why a norm is understood and enacted in distinct ways by particular diplomatic communities. We contend that each case examined here is usefully conceptualized as a community of practice—a discrete group of officials bound together by common enterprise, dense interactions, and shared tools and resources with which they pursue their goals.⁹ Within each, distinctive norm localization processes occur as extra-community norms are confronted and constructed to fit within existing organizational characteristics, including established notions of efficacy and appropriateness.

Through semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence, we show that the same norm—people-centric governance—has been adopted and institutionalized within each organization as a collective expectation to guide governance behaviour. We show that the adoption of this norm is not merely window-dressing, but has had important, and varied, effects on the thinking and behaviour of each community of practice. We draw on interviews with 37 member-state and Secretariat officials from ASEAN, and with 39 ECOWAS and civil society officials in west Africa, as well as a smaller number of interviews with relevant foreign officials beyond the two communities of practice.¹⁰

⁶ See Adekeye Adebajo and Ismail Rashid, eds, *West Africa's security challenges: building peace in a troubled region* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004).

⁷ See e.g. Amitav Acharya, 'How ideas spread: whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism', *International Organization* 58: 1, 2004, pp. 239–75; Antje Wiener, *Contestation and constitution of norms in global international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁸ See e.g. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, eds, *International practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Nina Hall, 'Norm contestation in the digital era: campaigning for refugee rights', *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 575–96; Emily Paddon Rhoads and Jennifer Welsh, 'Close cousins in protection: the evolution of two norms', *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 597–628.

⁹ Christian Bueger, 'Security as practice', in Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Thierry Balzacq, eds, *Routledge handbook of security studies* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁰ Interviews were conducted in English, with the exception of two ECOWAS interviews conducted in English and French. Interviewees are unnamed to preserve anonymity except where consent was given to attribution. ASEAN interviews were conducted in June and July 2014 and June 2019 in Jakarta. Participants included 37 officials working within the ASEC and state missions and related institutions; among them were six permanent representatives, one foreign minister, nine ASEC officials at directorate level or above, and officials with relevant departmental experience in External Relations, Public Outreach and Civil Society, and Culture

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. In the first, we articulate a theoretical framework within which to explore the practice of a norm. In the second and third sections, we offer case-studies of people-centric governance in ASEAN and ECOWAS. In each, we explore why regional officials adopted the norm, how it was institutionalized, and how members of the respective communities of practice understand and enact it—and with what effect. The fourth section concludes by bringing the cases into comparison and underscoring how our analysis both complements and complicates the literatures on norm localization, subsidiarity and contestation.

Communities, norms and practice

There is growing attention in IR to the practices of communities of actors,¹¹ with a particular focus on diplomatic communities.¹² Practices are competent, socially meaningful performances that generate patterns of interaction.¹³ They derive from shared ‘background knowledge’—what actors think from, rather than what they think about. This includes inherent assumptions as to what is rational, effective or appropriate for a group of actors.¹⁴ This grouping is alternatively described as a social ‘field’,¹⁵ or a ‘community of practice’.¹⁶ Fields are relatively bounded ‘arenas’ wherein actors struggle over resources and their behaviour is informed by *doxic* understandings of formal and informal rules.¹⁷ Similarly, communities

and Information at the ASEC, as well as senior ASEC officials across the Political Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural pillars, and in Community and Corporate Affairs. An additional ten interviews with ASEAN dialogue partner officials and four local scholars helped to triangulate information and shed light on civil society dynamics. In ECOWAS, 39 interviews were conducted in September and October 2016 and August 2019. They included 26 interviews with members of the ECOWAS community of practice within the Commission and supporting bodies, including the Political and Peace and Security Commission, Social and Humanitarian Affairs and Gender Commission, and Macroeconomic Commission, the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF) and the Office of External Affairs. An additional 13 interviews with officials from the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Kofi Annan International Centre for Peacekeeping, and the West African Civil Society Institute shed light on civil society actors engaged with ECOWAS. In neither case do we claim these interviews provide exhaustive information. However, they offer a useful vantage-point from which to uncover the assumptions and behaviours of members of each community with direct experience of its operation. While our argument draws on the whole set of interviews, not all are cited. The passages quoted indicate widely held perspectives within each community. For a similar approach, see Aarie Glas, ‘Habits of peace: long-term regional cooperation in southeast Asia’, *European Journal of International Relations* 23: 4, 2017, pp. 833–56; Aarie Glas, ‘African Union security culture in practice: African problems and African solutions’, *International Affairs* 94: 5, 2018, pp. 1121–38; Dylan M. H. Loh, ‘Institutional habitus, state identity, and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, *International Studies Review*, publ. online 20 Sept. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vizo51>, p. 3.

¹¹ Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger, ‘The play of international practice’, *International Studies Quarterly* 59: 1, 2015, pp. 449–60.

¹² Vincent Pouliot and Jérémie Cornut, ‘Practice theory and the study of diplomacy: a research agenda’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 50: 3, 2015, pp. 297–315.

¹³ Adler and Pouliot, *International practices*.

¹⁴ Adler and Pouliot, *International practices*, p. 16; Louise Riis Andersen, ‘The HIPPO in the room: the pragmatic push-back from the UN peace bureaucracy against the militarization of UN peacekeeping’, *International Affairs* 94: 2, March 2018, pp. 343–62.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹⁶ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘Towards a practice turn in EU studies’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51: 1, 2016, p. 92; Adler and Pouliot, *International practices*, p. 17; Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Dylan M. H. Loh, ‘Diplomatic control, foreign policy, and change under Xi Jinping: a field-theoretic account’, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47: 3, 2018, p. 118; Vincent Pouliot and Frédéric Mérand, ‘Bourdieu’s concepts:

of practice are defined as relatively bounded groups of actors united (and observable) through their shared repertoires of action, common enterprise and dense interactions.¹⁸

Analytically, practices can be investigated along three related lines of enquiry: (1) collectively held background knowledge that informs (2) relatively automatic and socially meaningful behaviours within (3) particular field or community settings. Our cases are usefully conceptualized as communities of practice. In each, officials share common and institutionalized means of cooperation centred within the bounds of their respective organizations. They are united in their respective enterprises of regionalization and engaged in routine interactions. These communities are composed of officials working within each organizational headquarters, in, respectively, Jakarta and Abuja, and state and other officials operating within related institutional entities, organizational working groups and summits. Both the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) and ECOWAS Commission are community hubs within which norms are adopted by individuals, institutionalized within agreements and rendered meaningful in practice.

This is not to suggest that the ASEAN or ECOWAS community, or any other, is without variety in the interests and behaviours of its members. A community of practice is united by particular background knowledge and practices, but it is not monolithic in thinking, behaviour or membership. Adler and Pouliot underscore this point by noting that ‘background knowledge ... does “not create uniformity of a group or community, but organize[s] their differences around pervasive understandings of reality”’.¹⁹ ASEAN officials, for example, at times disagree over how to enact the norm of non-interference, even as they continue to recognize its centrality and agree on a particular understanding of it and the appropriateness of its enactment.²⁰ Furthermore, as Gänzle, Trondal and Kuhn suggest in the case of the ECOWAS Commission, the behavioural logics that exist within a community of practice often manifest themselves through a blending and balancing of supranational, departmental and epistemic dynamics.²¹ Community thinking and practice are maintained through consistent renegotiation in and through doing.²² Further, while discretely observable, membership in communities of practice and fields alike is often ‘fuzzy’ and overlapping.²³ Adler-Nissen notes, for example,

political sociology in international relations’, in Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ed., *Bourdieu in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 32–6; Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘Inter- and transnational field(s) of power: on a field trip with Bourdieu’, *International Political Sociology* 5: 1, 2011, pp. 327–30.

¹⁸ Christian Bueger, ‘Communities of security practice at work? The emerging African maritime security regime’, *African Security* 6: 1, 2013, pp. 297–316; Glas, ‘African Union security culture in practice’.

¹⁹ Adler and Pouliot, *International practices*, p. 16, quoting Emanuel Alder and Steven Bernstein, ‘Knowledge in power: the epistemic construction of global governance’, in Michael Barnett and Raymond D. Duvall, eds, *Power in global governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 296.

²⁰ Stéphanie Martel and Aarie Glas, ‘Debunking the “ASEAN Way”’: the contested meaning and practice of diplomatic norms in southeast Asia’, paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies in Asia Annual Convention, Bangkok, Thailand, June 2019.

²¹ Stefan Gänzle, Jarle Trondal and Nadja Sophia Bekkelund Kuhn, “Not so different after all”: governance and behavioral dynamics in the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)’, *Journal of International Organization Studies* 9: 1, 2018, pp. 81–98.

²² Adler and Pouliot, *International practices*, p. 17.

²³ Federica Bicchieri and Niklas Bremberg, ‘European diplomatic practices: contemporary challenges and innovative approaches’, *European Security* 25: 4, 2016, p. 396.

that the transnational ‘metafield’ of international diplomacy overlaps and interacts with regional, domestic and institutional fields of diplomatic practice.²⁴ Bueger similarly finds that communities of practice ‘might be nested, overlap, or in conflict with one another. An individual might participate in only one community or in several.’²⁵ Members of the ECOWAS community of practice, for example, are embedded within a ‘complex’ of overlapping fields and communities of security practice ranging from the UN to the African Union (AU) to other organizations and groups of states.²⁶ While not static or monolithic, communities of practice are important social settings. Therein a distinctive ‘practical sense’ shapes how actors define and pursue their interests, and informs how norms are adopted, institutionalized and practised.²⁷

Norms are collective expectations of appropriate behaviour that signal a perceived ‘oughtness’ for an actor or group of actors with a given identity and thereby prescribe particular actions.²⁸ Within regional organizations and their communities of practice, there exist codified and institutionalized norms—expectations as to what officials ought to do given their identity as members of a community. The so-called ‘ASEAN way’ is a well-documented example of a set of prescriptive norms that signal what regional states, or their representatives, *ought* to do given their ASEAN identity. These norms include respecting national sovereignty, non-interference in member-state domestic affairs, and using private and informal diplomacy to resolve regional disputes and pursue regional integration.²⁹ These norms have been central to the development of the region, making possible ASEAN’s ‘long peace’ and delimiting regional integration.³⁰ Similarly, the pan-African solidarity norm and the anti-coup norm are often observed as foundational to official and interstate relationships on the African continent. The former suggests that officials ought to think, act and speak as ‘Africans’ representing a common African interest and identity;³¹ the latter prescribes zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government.³²

²⁴ Adler-Nissen, ‘Inter- and transnational field(s)’; see also Vincent Pouliot, *International pecking orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Loh, ‘Diplomatic control’; Loh, ‘Institutional habitus’.

²⁵ Bueger, ‘Communities of security practice at work?’, p. 302.

²⁶ Malte Brosig, ‘Introduction: the African security regime complex—exploring converging actors and policies’, *African Security* 6: 3–4, 2013, pp. 171–90.

²⁷ Vincent Pouliot, ‘The logic of practicality: a theory of practice of security communities’, *International Organization* 62: 2, 2008, pp. 257–88.

²⁸ Michelle Jurkovich, ‘What isn’t a norm? Redefining the conceptual boundaries of “norms” in the human rights literature’, *International Studies Review*, publ. online 16 Aug. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vizo40>, pp. 2–3.

²⁹ Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a security community in southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (London: Routledge, 2014).

³⁰ Timo Kivimäki, ‘The long peace of ASEAN’, *Journal of Peace Research* 38: 1, 2001, pp. 5–25; David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, ‘Making process, not progress: ASEAN and the evolving east Asian regional order’, *International Security* 32: 1, 2007, pp. 148–84.

³¹ Gerald Bareebe, ‘The pan-African solidarity norm’, in Katharina P. Coleman and Thomas K. Tiekou, eds, *African actors in international security: shaping contemporary norms* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2018), pp. 73–93. Rita Edozie and Keith Gottschalk, *The African Union’s Africa: new pan-African initiatives in global governance* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014).

³² Issaka K. Souaré, ‘The anti-coup norm’, in Coleman and Tiekou, eds, *African actors in international security*, pp. 117–37.

Norms are both stable and fluid constructs.³³ They are stable in prescribing action to community members sharing a particular identity. However, they have ‘inherent dynamism’,³⁴ and are ‘inherently ambiguous’.³⁵ Norms remain open to interpretation across settings,³⁶ and subject to variation and contestation in practice.³⁷ Therefore, recognition of a norm tells us little about its effect. Despite the adoption and institutionalization of the norm of non-interference in ASEAN, for example, member states uphold, ignore or practise the norm differently across time and issue areas.³⁸ To appreciate the understanding and effect of a norm, attention must be directed to the analytical components of practice: the thinking, behaviour and contours of a community of practice. This may be done through interviews designed both to recognize the bounds of a community and to gain insight into the underlying assumptions and background knowledge of that community.³⁹

We contend that people-centric governance is one such norm. It prescribes the appropriateness of adopting governance decision-making processes to directly engage and reflect the voices of citizens, and the need for governance to provide for their benefit. As the following two case-studies show, officials in both ASEAN and ECOWAS recognize the norm’s ‘moral dimension’, accepting that it is appropriate and prescriptive of particular actions as a result of a shared identity within a regional community.⁴⁰ Officials in each organization recognize that they ought to amend the focus of their respective regional bodies to benefit wider populations, and that they ought to ensure that decision-making and governance processes reflect member-state publics. However, the particular means of doing so, and the limitations of this ‘oughtness’ vary between the two communities.

In the following sections we explore the adoption, institutionalization and practice of the norm of people-centric governance in each of these two regional communities, and examine how and why the norm varies in its meaning and expression across each.

³³ Antje Wiener, ‘Enacting meaning-in-use: qualitative research on norms and international relations’, *Review of International Studies* 35: 1, 2009, pp. 175–93.

³⁴ Nicole Deitelhoff and Lisbeth Zimmermann, ‘Norms under challenge: unpacking the dynamics of norm robustness’, *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4: 1, 2019, p. 5; Jacqui True and Antje Wiener, ‘Everyone wants (a) peace: the dynamics of rhetoric and practice on “Women, Peace and Security”’, *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 553–74.

³⁵ Ingvild Bode and John Karlsrud, ‘Implementation in practice: the use of force to protect civilians in United Nations peacekeeping’, *European Journal of International Affairs* 25: 2, 2019, p. 460.

³⁶ Acharya, ‘How ideas spread’; Amitav Acharya: ‘Norm subsidiarity and regional orders: sovereignty, regionalism, and rule-making in the Third World’, *International Studies Quarterly* 55: 1, 2011, pp. 95–123.

³⁷ Wiener, *Contestation and constitution*; Susanne Zwingel, ‘How do norms travel? Theorizing international women’s rights in transnational perspective’, *International Studies Quarterly* 56: 1, 2012, pp. 115–29; Carla Winston, ‘Norm structure, diffusion, and evolution: a conceptual approach’, *European Journal of International Relations* 24: 3, 2018, pp. 638–61; Anette Stimmer and Lea Wisken, ‘The dynamics of dissent: when actions are louder than words’, *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 515–33; Christian Kreuder-Sonnen, ‘China vs WHO: a behavioural norm conflict in the SARS crisis’, *International Affairs* 95: 3, May 2019, pp. 535–52.

³⁸ Lee Jones, ‘ASEAN’s unchanged melody? The theory and practice of “non-interference” in southeast Asia’, *Pacific Review* 23: 4, 2010, pp. 479–502; Hiro Katsumata, ‘Why is ASEAN diplomacy changing? From “non-interference” to “open and frank discussions”’, *Asian Survey* 44: 2, 2004, pp. 237–54.

³⁹ Glas, ‘Habits of peace’; Glas, ‘African Union security culture in practice’; Emmanuel Balogun, *Convergence and agency in West Africa: region-building in ECOWAS* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Jurkovich, ‘What isn’t a norm?’, p. 3.

People-centric governance in ASEAN

The norm of people-centric governance appears divergent from those that founded and have driven south-east Asian regionalism for more than 50 years. ASEAN was founded in 1967 to entrench the sovereignty of regional states.⁴¹ A central norm codified in its founding declaration is non-interference, allowing regional leaders a free hand domestically to buttress their power without fear of the regional confrontations that characterized the early 1960s. Moreover, the organization was designed by and for state elites, abjuring public and consultative policy-making and formal conflict resolution mechanisms in favour of norms of private and informal diplomacy.⁴² The original five members—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand—designed a shell of an organization, with a formal secretariat created in 1976. It was not until 2008 that a formal charter was adopted and the secretariat that exists today, with its Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), came into being, along with an expansion of the membership to ten regional states.⁴³

The ASEAN community of practice is composed of ASEC officials, member-state foreign ministry officials and staff in working groups, permanent representatives and a host of technocratic specialists working within the organization. All share the definitional qualities of a community of practice: dense interactions, common repertoires of action through ASEAN's institutions, and a collective enterprise in pursuing regionalism.⁴⁴ The hub or 'focal point'⁴⁵ of this community is the ASEC and its CPR, which coordinate and establish policy, particularly in the political and socio-cultural pillars. As one official emphasized, 'the SOM (Senior Officials' Meeting) is only one or maybe two days [long] because the work is already done ... The CPR and groups [within the Secretariat] have already done it all.'⁴⁶ Herein, ASEAN's founding norms are central to thinking and behaviour.⁴⁷

ASEAN norms have never centred on engaging, or indeed explicitly benefiting, member-state 'people'. As Beeson summarizes: 'The entire process [of ASEAN] is

⁴¹ Martel and Glas, 'Debunking the "ASEAN Way"'; Atena S. Feraru, 'Regime security and regional cooperation among weak states', *International Studies Review* 20: 1, 2018, pp. 101–26.

⁴² Alan Collins, 'A people-oriented ASEAN: a door ajar or closed for civil society organizations?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30: 2, 2008, pp. 313–31; Ravichandran Moorthy and Guido Benny, 'Is an "ASEAN Community" achievable? A public perception analysis in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore on the perceived obstacles to regional community', *Asian Survey* 52: 6, 2013, pp. 1043–66.

⁴³ Current members are divided between the so-called 'ASEAN 6'—the five founding members and Brunei—and the 'CLMV states'—Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. This latter group is often seen as distinctively underdeveloped and entrenched in authoritarianism, leading to variation in the organization's receptiveness to human rights and democracy promotion, among other developments. See Ba, *[Re]negotiating east and southeast Asia*; Deepak Nair, 'ASEAN's core norms in the context of the global financial crisis: is the crisis a catalyst for institutional development?', *Asian Survey* 51: 2, 2011, pp. 245–67; Mie Oba, 'ASEAN and the creation of a regional community', *Asia-Pacific Review* 21: 1, 2014, pp. 63–78; Avery Poole, "'The world is outraged': legitimacy in the making of the ASEAN human rights body', *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 37: 3, 2015, pp. 335–80; Jörn Dosch, 'ASEAN's reluctant liberal turn and the thorny road to democracy promotion', *Pacific Review* 21: 4, 2018, pp. 527–45. See also Dewi Fortuna Anwar, 'Indonesia and the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific', *International Affairs* 96: 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 111–30.

⁴⁴ See also Deepak Nair, 'Saving face in diplomacy: a political sociology of face-to-face interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations', *European Journal of International Relations* 25: 3, 2019, pp. 672–97.

⁴⁵ Interview, ASEC official, Jakarta, June 2019.

⁴⁶ Interview, ASEC official, Jakarta, June 2019.

⁴⁷ Interview, ASEAN permanent representative, Jakarta, June 2019.

generally non-transparent, unaccountable and, critics claim, a self-serving mechanism designed to underpin the legitimacy of regional elites who have often not been democratically elected.⁴⁸ This is not to suggest that the community has been entirely closed to views outside those of state elites.⁴⁹ Since the 1970s, ASEAN has consulted with business leaders through the ASEAN Chambers of Commerce and Industry; and since the 1980s, the ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies have brought scholars into dialogue with the organization.⁵⁰ However, engagement with these manifestations of ‘the people’ has been limited. A senior Indonesian official suggests that during the first 20 or more years of ASEAN there was a commonly held assumption that ‘the single most important objective at the time was to ensure that *Confrontasi* did not happen again ... the initial objective [of ASEAN] was not to transform regional politics so much as to enable the separate entities to exist.’⁵¹ This overriding priority began to weaken in the wake of the 1997–8 Asian financial crisis.

For regional officials, the crisis exposed the weaknesses of member-state economies and of the organization itself.⁵² For them, the crisis and the subsequent democratic *reformasi* in Indonesia demonstrated a need for change in both ASEAN’s decision-making processes and its organizational objectives. While a nebulous notion of engaging and benefiting regional peoples can indeed be traced to the organization’s foundation, and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) refers to the need to raise the standards of living and facilitate peace among ‘the peoples of the region’, this goal has never been adopted or institutionalized as a central norm, nor has it been recognized or practised by regional officials. In the years after the 1997 crisis, however, there was a shift in thinking. As the same Indonesian official continued:

Until 2003, you could leave everything to the governments. Decisions were left to the governments ... at the end of the day it was the government who decides ... But here [in ASEAN] we have an important paradigmatic shift [after 1997]. Because of the democratic transformation in Indonesia, there was a different way of looking at how policy should be made and how government should relate to the people. It was no longer sufficient for the government to decide and for the people to follow.⁵³

This point is underscored by the former Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa, who notes that the 1967 Declaration and the 2008 Charter

are a study in contrasts—reflecting ASEAN’s evolution ... While the Bangkok Declaration made scant reference to ‘peoples’, it is a constantly recurring theme in the latter ...

⁴⁸ Mark Beeson, *Institutions of the Asia Pacific: ASEAN, APEC and beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 22.

⁴⁹ Collins, ‘A people-oriented ASEAN’; Kelly Gerard, *ASEAN’s engagement of civil society: regulating dissent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁵⁰ One indication of the unease with this development within the ASEAN community of practice is that funding was twice denied (in 1999 and 2000) before it was ultimately accepted in 2000. See Mely Caballero-Anthony, ‘Non-state regional governance mechanism for economic security: the case of the ASEAN Peoples’ Assembly’, *Pacific Review* 17: 4, 2004, pp. 567–85.

⁵¹ Interview, Indonesian official, Jakarta, June 2014.

⁵² Shaun Narine, ‘ASEAN in the aftermath: the consequences of the east Asian economic crisis’, *Global Governance* 8: 1, 2002, pp. 179–94.

⁵³ Interview, Indonesian official, Jakarta, June 2014.

Today, promoting a ‘people-centred’ and ‘people-oriented’ ASEAN has become as much a part of ASEAN lexicon as the so-called ‘ASEAN way’.⁵⁴

This shift was emphasized in conversations with many members of the community who noted that the crisis sparked a need to change the region’s ‘centre of gravity’,⁵⁵ pursue ‘institutional transformation’,⁵⁶ and ‘draw in people for decision-making and [see] that the organization attempt to provide for issues that benefit the people’.⁵⁷ One interviewee explained this new thinking even more clearly: ‘We need to be an ASEAN that is a people-centred ASEAN. Otherwise, a true ASEAN community will not be fully achieved, and I think this view has now become widely shared.’⁵⁸ In all these statements, the norm’s prescriptive ‘oughtness’ is clear.⁵⁹ For regional practitioners, it is now appropriate and important to allow ‘the people’ to participate in and benefit from ASEAN regionalism.

The *institutionalization* of the norm is clear from both interviews and ASEAN documents—particularly the Charter, which outlines an aspiration to ‘promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building’ (article 35). This institutionalized assumption of what constitutes appropriate governance was further elaborated in the 2009 Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint, in which the ‘primary goal’ is identified as being ‘to contribute to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centered and socially responsible’ (II.4), and the ‘strategic objective’ as being to ‘build a people-oriented ASEAN where people are at the center of community building’ (E.4.46).⁶⁰ These aims were further cemented by the Post-2015 Vision and the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on a People-Oriented, People-Centred ASEAN. Given the organization’s founding norms, many observers see the adoption and institutionalization of this new norm as a ‘paradigm shift’ or ‘dramatic reorientation of the Association’s *raison d’être*’.⁶¹

However, the ASEAN community has a particular and limited understanding and practice of this norm. This distinctiveness stems from the defensive and reactionary rationale of its adoption, and the continued centrality of ASEAN norms of non-interference and respect for member-state sovereignty. This is clear from how ASEC officials have responded to the growing interest in the inclusion of civil society organizations (CSOs), the central means by which ‘the people’ may participate in governance processes. While attempts have been made to engage

⁵⁴ Marty Natalegawa, *Does ASEAN matter? A view from within* (Singapore: ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018), p. 164.

⁵⁵ Interview, ASEC official, Jakarta, July 2014.

⁵⁶ Interview, ASEAN member-state foreign minister, Jakarta, July 2014.

⁵⁷ Interview, ASEC official, Jakarta, June 2019.

⁵⁸ Interview, ASEAN member-state official, Jakarta, July 2014.

⁵⁹ Jurkovich, ‘What isn’t a norm?’, p. 3.

⁶⁰ The 9th ASEAN summit in 2003 planned for the development of the Community in 2020. This end-date was accelerated to 2015 at the 12th ASEAN summit in 2007. See also Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani and Abubakar Eby Hara, ‘ASEAN paradigm shift from a state to people-oriented organization: a neo-communitarian perspective’, *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14: 3, 2013, pp. 379–94; Chiam Heng Keng, ‘The three pillars of the ASEAN Community: commitment to the human rights process’, paper presented to 5th Roundtable Discussion on Human Rights in ASEAN, ‘Towards an ASEAN human rights system: role of institutions and related activities’, Bangkok, 15–16 Dec. 2009.

⁶¹ Sani and Hara, ‘ASEAN paradigm shift’; Collins, ‘A people-oriented ASEAN’, pp. 313–31, 318.

these voices in the past, with the adoption of the people-centric norm these appear to have become more ambitious and potentially transformative. However, in practice there has been little change in organizational processes. There remains no institutionalized role for CSOs within the Charter, and engagement with them has been limited and selective.⁶² CSOs seeking to give voice to ‘the people’ in ASEAN must gain accreditation. The accreditation process, established in 1988 and revised in 2006 and 2012 as the people-centric norm was institutionalized, now aspires to allow CSOs to ‘help promote the development of a people-oriented ASEAN Community’ (B.3.c).⁶³ This does not, however, envisage engagement with *all* people, but rather a selective engagement only; each participating organization is warned that it will be ‘held responsible for its actions, especially those found detrimental to ASEAN as a whole’ (E.8.c).⁶⁴

One means of engagement has been regular meetings between CSOs and the CPR. However, during the first meeting in 2012, the permanent representatives demanded a ‘minute-by-minute run-down of who would talk’ and queried where CSO officials would sit, in an attempt to avoid having ‘sensitive’ domestic political issues raised to particular member-state officials in such close quarters.⁶⁵ This rather restrictive approach is indicative of what the norm of people-centric governance means for this community, and of the relative importance of this norm *vis-à-vis* existing norms of non-interference and respect for sovereignty. As Gerard summarizes: ‘Given that these participatory structures [for CSOs] are established by ASEAN, it is not surprising that they structure civil society contributions in accordance with prevailing institutional objectives.’⁶⁶ Those objectives are the upholding of the norms of non-interference and sovereignty.⁶⁷ The centrality of these norms has had far-reaching impacts on the organization, including shaping its incorporation of the Responsibility to Protect,⁶⁸ and hampering regional search and rescue operations.⁶⁹ Thus, while there is indeed a new shared perception of the appropriateness of engaging with segments of ‘the people’, in *practice* ASEAN officials enact the norm in limited and selective ways.

This is not to suggest that the norm of people-centric governance has had no effect; rather, that the effect has been incremental. This is clear in the changing regional discourse on human rights. The drive for people-centric governance made possible the establishment of the 2009 ASEAN Intergovernmental Commis-

⁶² Gerard, *ASEAN’s engagement of civil society*, pp. 82–106.

⁶³ Collins, ‘A people-oriented ASEAN’, pp. 315–16.

⁶⁴ Gerard, *ASEAN engagement of civil society*.

⁶⁵ Interview, ASEAN member-state official, Jakarta, June 2014.

⁶⁶ Gerard, *ASEAN engagement of civil society*, pp. 103–104.

⁶⁷ See also Jürgen Rüländ, ‘The limits of democratizing interest representation: ASEAN’s regional corporatism and normative challenges’, *European Journal of International Relations* 20: 1, 2014, pp. 237–61.

⁶⁸ David Capie, ‘The Responsibility to Protect norm in southeast Asia: framing, resistance, and the localization myth’, *Pacific Review* 25: 1, 2012, pp. 75–93; Laura Dunn, Peter Nyers and Richard Stubbs, ‘Western interventionism versus east Asian non-interference: competing “global” norms in the Asian century’, *Pacific Review* 23: 3, 2010, pp. 295–312.

⁶⁹ Alan Chong and Jun Yan Chang, ‘The international politics of air disasters: lessons for aviation disaster governance from Asia, 2014–2015’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 31: 3–4, 2018, pp. 249–71; Dylan M. H. Loh, ‘ASEAN’s norm adherence and its unintended consequences in HADR and SAR operations’, *Pacific Review* 29: 4, 2016, pp. 549–72.

sion on Human Rights and the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration. As the first Indonesian permanent representative, Gede Ngurah Swajaya, explained:

Before 2003, of course human rights and democracy were things that were not supposed to be talked about in the ASEAN meetings. They would say that this is already internal matters and should not be interfered with. But now people are talking about human rights. We have the Human Rights Declaration. People are talking about how to promote democracy.⁷⁰

This shift in discourse has been made possible by the engagement with ASEAN ‘peoples’ through a limited outreach to CSOs that largely preserves rather than transforms the status quo.

The adoption of the norm of people-centric governance has also created pressure for the organization to benefit the wider populations of member states in visible ways. These efforts have been spearheaded by ASEC’s Community and Corporate Affairs division. Officials in this part of the organization understand people-centric governance as a kind of ownership of ASEAN by member-state publics. The then Deputy Secretary-General for Community and Corporate Affairs, Dr A. K. P. Mochtan, articulated this commonly held assumption in 2014:

Take the socio-cultural pillar: what exactly do you want to achieve and to give to the people? What are the strongest or the tangible manifestations of this to give to the people? I keep on asking this question. So, we have this one Community, one vision, one people. But to me, I would be happy that if people of Southeast Asia can feel proud about ASEAN, whatever it is. Achievement in sport is fine, achievement in trade is fine, but a sense of pride in ASEAN.⁷¹

He reiterated this view more recently: ‘This is essential for ASEAN—to show and develop its identity. To show to the people what is ASEAN and what it brings them.’⁷² This sentiment is echoed in conversations with community members who suggest that ASEAN must be brought ‘down to the community’,⁷³ and that ‘the people must see that there is value [in ASEAN] for them all’.⁷⁴ In the minds of these interviewees, the most important result of the adoption and institutionalization of the norm of people-centric governance is to reinforce the organization by making its benefits visible to ‘the people’.

In the ASEAN community, people-centric governance is understood as a means to support and strengthen the regional project, not to transform it. This narrow understanding of the norm and its limited effects in practice represent a divergent view from that of many within the region’s CSOs, who expected the people-oriented community to be a ‘people-empowering’ and transformative one.⁷⁵ Moreover, it contrasts sharply with how the norm has been understood and practised within ECOWAS.

⁷⁰ Interview, Gede Ngurah Swajaya, Jakarta, 30 July 2014.

⁷¹ Interview, A. K. P. Mochtan, Jakarta, 2 July 2014.

⁷² Interview, A. K. P. Mochtan, Jakarta, 19 June 2019.

⁷³ Interview, ASEAN Secretariat official, Jakarta, July 2014.

⁷⁴ Interview, ASEAN Secretariat official, Jakarta, June 2019.

⁷⁵ Collins, ‘A people-oriented ASEAN’.

People-centric governance in ECOWAS

ECOWAS was established in 1975 in a context similar to those in which the Organization of African Unity and ASEAN were formed, to limit the influence of former colonial powers, foster economic integration, and allow for the political and economic development of emergent states.⁷⁶ Notably absent at its foundation were any explicit statements or norms regarding the desire or need to engage directly with member-state populations. The foundation of ECOWAS, like that of ASEAN, was driven by leaders of newly independent states seeking to consolidate economic and political development through regional integration, while simultaneously preserving sovereignty through insular and elitist means.⁷⁷

Prior to the transformation from the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat to the ECOWAS Commission in 2007, the central actors within the ECOWAS community of practice were member heads of state, ministers and political appointees, all of whom were active in the day-to-day operations of the organization and shared common repertoires of action.⁷⁸ Following the transformation to the Commission, Commission President Mohammed Ibn Chambas increased the number and scope of action of regional professionals who, in contrast to the political appointees who had preceded them, were both further removed from the immediate interests of member-state governments and more actively interested in engaging with CSOs.⁷⁹ Building on previous institutional protocols and principles, members of the community of practice began to seek a transformative change in the organization's functioning to integrate CSOs as the central means of entrenching people-centric governance practices. Since 2007, it has been these ECOWAS practitioners, rather than state elites, who have shaped the strategic vision of ECOWAS, by drafting decisions and protocols, and by supporting particular networks and relationships outside the organization. ECOWAS practitioners act independently of heads of state, thereby making people-centric governance less hierarchical, more inclusive, and explicitly institutionalized to respond to regional challenges.⁸⁰

The adoption of the norm is particularly significant in view of the institutional trajectory of ECOWAS and its presence in overlapping regional contexts, particularly its relationship with the AU. Following nearly two decades of successive coups and ECOWAS' unprecedented intervention in the Liberian civil

⁷⁶ Olatunde J. B. Ojo, 'Nigeria and the formation of ECOWAS', *International Organization* 34: 4, 1980, pp. 571–604. The founding members were Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania (which withdrew in 2000), Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. With Cape Verde's accession in 1976, the membership reached its current total of 15.

⁷⁷ Jeffery Herbst, 'Crafting regional cooperation in Africa', in Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston, eds, *Crafting cooperation: regional international institutions in comparative perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 130. See also Peter M. Dennis and M. Leann Brown, 'The ECOWAS: from regional economic organization to regional peacekeeper', in Finn Lausen, ed., *Comparative regionalism: theoretical perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁸ The ECOWAS Commission was created in 2007, following a decision by the Authority Heads of State to reorganize and redefine the organization's governance structure. The commission is led by a president and vice-president, and encompasses seven sub-commissions, including Administration and Finance; Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources; Social Affairs and Gender; Infrastructure; Macroeconomic Policy; Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), and Trade, Customs and Free Movement.

⁷⁹ See Gänzle et al., "'Not so different after all'".

⁸⁰ See Tiekou, *Governing Africa*.

war in 1990, it began to prioritize democracy and good governance as means of preserving member-state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Specific formal statements, such as the 1991 Declaration of Political Principles, the 1993 Revised Treaty, the 1999 Protocol Regarding the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance,⁸¹ refer to democracy and good governance as means of institutionalizing and defining the scope of non-interference in the region, entrenching the idea that member states should insulate themselves from external threats.

However, these protocols and decisions did not explicitly call for the integration of CSOs into regional governance. One practitioner in the Social and Humanitarian Affairs Commission stated that these early institutional changes reflected a 're-negotiation and reflection' in how ECOWAS member states ought to deal with each other and with actors beyond the organization.⁸² Similarly, another practitioner noted how, before 2007, other institutions such as the Court of Justice and the Community Parliament were constrained by the politics involved in the tension between the authority of heads of states and their desire to insulate the region from external influence.⁸³ While these protocols represented a shift in the logic and goals of ECOWAS as an organization towards a greater emphasis on promoting democratic practices in the region, the norm itself had not been adopted or institutionalized in practice.

ECOWAS' adoption of the norm is also puzzling when considered in the light of its position as one of eight regional economic communities in the AU. Although the AU seems to be engaged in similar people-centric activities, and has issued a plethora of people-oriented protocols such as the Constitutive Act and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, these documents do not explicitly call for the integration of civilians in pursuit of democracy and good governance.⁸⁴ For the AU, these documents set the principles, normative standards and values to ensure a transparent and accountable democratic environment. However, officials in ECOWAS rely on the principle of subsidiarity, which allows them to privilege their own people-centric documents, as well as interpret and assert ownership of the regional project without overt contestation from their counterparts on the continental level.⁸⁵

ECOWAS practitioners describe the ECOWAS–AU relationship as one of 'hybrid paternalism', in which ECOWAS and the AU, being simultaneously engaged in serving similar constituents, are in a complex, negotiated, mutually dependent and yet competitive relationship for resources, support and legitimacy.⁸⁶ Officials cite ECOWAS' experiences of and responses to governance

⁸¹ See also Frederick Cowell, 'The impact of the ECOWAS Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy', *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 19: 2, 2011, pp. 331–42.

⁸² Interview, ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, Aug. 2018.

⁸³ Interview, ECOWAS PAPS official, Abuja, Aug. 2019.

⁸⁴ See Joseph M. Isanga, 'The Constitutive Act of the African Union, African courts and the protection of human rights: new dispensation?', *Santa Clara Journal of International Law* 11: 2, 2013, p. 267.

⁸⁵ Interview, ECOWAS PAPS official, Abuja, Sept. 2018.

⁸⁶ Tim Murithi, 'The United Nations: between paternalism and partnership', in Roger Southall and Henning Melber, eds, *A new scramble for Africa? Imperialism, investment and development* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-

challenges on the subregional level, and the ‘catalytic’ influence the organization has had on the AU, particularly in the areas of peace and security,⁸⁷ often alluding to its comparative advantage over the AU while also citing the need to work in concert with the AU to build the capacity of member states.

Given ECOWAS’ penchant for subsidiarity, its *adoption* of the norm has redefined the core objectives of the organization and reflects assumptions about the appropriate means to render the people central to the regional project, through the explicit integration of CSOs and other regional stakeholders in regional governance.⁸⁸ Whereas the organizational documents mentioned above focus on insulating member states from external actors by strengthening their democratic capacities, the adoption and institutionalization of the norm transforms how member states collectively understand existing norms (such as the anti-coup norm) and ECOWAS’ evolution as an organization.⁸⁹

Prior to adopting the norm of people-centric governance, ECOWAS often took a soft stance on unconstitutional changes in government. For instance, in 2006–2007, it did not overtly condemn President Obasanjo of Nigeria when he attempted to amend the constitution to enable him to run for a third term. The belief among officials was that intrusive scrutiny might limit the regional project and impede organizational transformation.⁹⁰ However, with the adoption of people-centric governance, practitioners have sought to introduce into the organization civically oriented actors who retain the ability to criticize governments without jeopardizing the political project of ECOWAS. To forestall such transgressions and to put the norm of people-centric governance into practice, ECOWAS practitioners collaborate with CSOs and integrate them into regional conflict prevention and resolution at a local level. Centrally, the ambition of ECOWAS officials is to improve the capacity of citizens in member states to hold state leaders accountable and to maintain regional principles of democracy and good governance.⁹¹

ECOWAS practitioners and CSOs often justify the adoption of this norm as a means to counteract an inherent tension between the state and civil society. According to the executive director of the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), Dr Chukwuemeka Eze, citizens in west Africa entrust the partnership between ECOWAS and WANEP with reversing the negative legacy of military rule in the region, which sets the state and civil society at odds.⁹² Eze further argues that the role of WANEP and other regionally oriented CSOs is to ‘accompany the state’ in developing regional peace and security policies as a means to win the trust

Natal Press, 2009), pp. 340–51; Thomas Kwesi Tiekue and Tanzeel F. Hakak, ‘A curious case of hybrid paternalism: conceptualizing the relationship between the UN and AU on peace and security’, *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 4: 2, 2014, pp. 129–56.

⁸⁷ Interview, ECOWAS practitioner, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre, Accra, Aug. 2018.

⁸⁸ See also Funmi Olanisakin, ‘ECOWAS and civil society movements in west Africa’ *IDS Bulletin* 40: 2, 2009, pp. 105–12; Ebenezer Obadare, ed., *The handbook of civil society in Africa* (New York: Springer, 2014).

⁸⁹ Thomas Tiekue, ‘The evolution of the African Union Commission and Africrats: drivers of African regionalism’, in Timothy M. Shaw, J. Andrew Grant and Scarlett Cornelissen, eds, *Ashgate research companion to regionalisms* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011); Tiekue, *Governing Africa*.

⁹⁰ Interview, ECOWAS External Affairs official, Abuja, Oct. 2016.

⁹¹ Interview, WACSOE Executive Committee member, Abuja, Aug. 2017.

⁹² Interview, Chukwuemeka Eze, WANEP Secretariat, Accra, Aug. 2018.

of citizens and state actors alike. Shaping these relationships are assumptions within the ECOWAS community of practice about the independent identity and capacity of regional CSOs.⁹³ The adoption of the norm allows civil society groups to retain their identity as independent actors able to act and speak freely, while also advising ECOWAS practitioners and exhorting them to take seriously the perspectives and practices of civil society. The logic underlying adoption of the norm is the shared belief by members of the ECOWAS community of practice that engagement with civil society can be a tool with which to exert pressure on ‘stubborn leaders’ who attempt to stay in power through unconstitutional means.⁹⁴ In adopting the norm, ECOWAS practitioners and their CSO counterparts believe it has the potential to serve ‘the benefit of the people, without any consideration of diplomacy’ by superseding actual or potential political rivalries that may exist between member states.⁹⁵

The *institutionalization* of the norm of people-centric governance is to be clearly seen in the 2008 ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) and the Vision 2020 Statement. The ECPF is a conflict prevention and management tool created by the ECOWAS Political Affairs, Peace and Security Commission, the West African Civil Society Institute and WANEP; it outlines the tactical and normative importance and appropriateness of making a transition from an ‘ECOWAS of states’ to an ‘ECOWAS of people’. The Vision 2020 document, while vague in terms of policy prescription, is clear on the need for ECOWAS to significantly reorient the ‘conduct of national and regional affairs’ around questions about what the unifying tenets of a west African shared vision can be, and how a west African shared vision can converge on a common understanding of an obvious and self-evident meaning of an ‘ECOWAS of people’.

While these documents are not founding documents of the organization, officials consistently invoke both when discussing how they understand and enact the norm of people-centric governance. Specifically, they note how the content and construction of the ‘ECOWAS of people’ framework clarify how the norm ought to be implemented and institutionalized in ways that are novel and divergent from earlier institutional changes in the organization—specifically placing governance in the hands of the people.⁹⁶

The norm is institutionalized in the ECPF by incorporating civilians into regional governance and mandating the ‘full participation of civil society organizations’ in assisting with the funding and mobilization efforts of national political parties, preventive diplomacy, and establishing public confidence in governance structures at all levels.⁹⁷ The ECPF provides benchmarks to ensure that the norm permeates all sectors in the organization. As a practitioner in the External Affairs

⁹³ Okechukwu C. Iheduru, ‘Regional integration and the private authority of banks in west Africa’, *International Studies Review* 14: 2, 2012, pp. 273–302.

⁹⁴ Interview, ECOWAS Human Development and Gender Commission Programme officer, Abuja, Oct. 2016.

⁹⁵ Interview, Nana Afadzinu, executive director, West African Civil Society Institute, Accra, Aug. 2018; interview, ECOWAS PAPS official, Abuja, Aug. 2017.

⁹⁶ For a conceptual approach to norm translation, see Lisbeth Zimmermann, ‘Same same or different? Norm diffusion between resistance, compliance, localization, in post-conflict states’, *International Studies Perspectives* 17: 1, 2016, pp. 98–115.

⁹⁷ ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, sec. VIII, 53(c).

directorate noted, there is an understanding that officials in the Commission, as well as the Community Parliament and Court of Justice, ought to take an active role in monitoring member states' compliance with the civil society stipulations in the ECPF.⁹⁸

In practice, this institutionalization of the norm has had transformative effects by necessitating the decentralization of, and incorporation of citizens into, regional conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms. Officials in the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Commission (PAPS), and in the office of the president, for example, cite how civilian information from a decentralized early warning strategy and inclusion of CSOs helped facilitate interventions in Mali in 2012, in Burkina Faso in 2014 and in the Gambia in 2017.⁹⁹ In each instance, while intervention in general is part of the *modus operandi* of the organization, the specific interventions were shaped by engagement with CSOs. The Head of Analysis in ECOWAS/WANEP Early Warning (ECOWARN) justified this approach by highlighting a gap between 'alert' and 'response' that had previously existed in the organization, and argued that improved coordination between ECOWAS and WANEP had transformed ECOWAS' ability to better serve and respond to the needs of local communities.¹⁰⁰ While the scope and effectiveness of interventions varied, officials in CSOs and in PAPS noted that the ECPF's mandate to include civil society, and to scale up conflict prevention mechanisms, had drastically transformed the way in which ECOWAS engages in peace and security matters. This represents a marked shift from earlier ECOWAS interventions in the 1990s and 2000s, which were frequently characterized as 'heroic failures' with significant institutional and operational shortcomings.¹⁰¹

Similarly, members of the ECOWAS community of practice also allude to decentralizing dynamics across the Commission with the adoption and institutionalization of the new norm. Officials speak of engaging in strategic networking with CSOs as a means to build more organic connections with stakeholders within member states. Specifically, practitioners in the External Affairs directorate have created national liaison positions within each member state, who are responsible for coordination with members of civil society across policy areas. These liaison officers meet every three months with members from the External Affairs directorate to coordinate how best to integrate member-state stakeholders into ECOWAS governance, improve existing partnerships and make the organization more accessible to local actors.¹⁰² Officials also highlight the transformative effects of the people-centred orientation on ECOWAS Sahel Strategy to combat terrorism and instability in the Sahel–Saharan areas of west Africa. As one practitioner notes, the strategy is 'owned and driven by the people—as it focuses on the

⁹⁸ Interview, ECOWAS External Affairs officer, Abuja, Aug. 2019.

⁹⁹ Interview, ECOWAS PAPS official, Abuja, Aug. 2018. See also Marie-Soleil Frère and Pierre Englebert, 'Briefing. Burkina Faso: the fall of Blaise Compaoré', *African Affairs* 114: 455, 2015, pp. 295–307; Christof Hartmann, 'ECOWAS and the restoration of democracy in the Gambia', *Africa Spectrum* 52: 1, 2017, pp. 85–99.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Onyiye Onwuka, Head of Analysis, ECOWARN, Abuja, Oct. 2016.

¹⁰¹ Cyril I. Obi, 'Economic Community of West African States on the ground: comparing peacekeeping in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire', *African Security*, 2: 2–3, 2009, pp. 119–35.

¹⁰² Interview, ECOWAS External Affairs officer, Abuja, Aug. 2019.

interconnection of infrastructure, resilience and food security, and education, in conjunction with Peace and Security measures'.¹⁰³ ECOWAS practitioners created this strategy in conjunction with a coordination platform that emphasizes subsidiarity and civilian integration across sectors to avoid duplication in response efforts by the G5 Sahel group, AU and UN.¹⁰⁴

In sum, there is a discrete community of practice within ECOWAS constituted by practitioners within the organization, civil society actors and other non-state regional stakeholders. Since the mid-2000s this community has adopted the norm of people-centric governance as a novel means to reorient the organization's governance processes and the benefits of regionalization. While individual perceptions of the norm may be informed by different departmental and epistemic logics,¹⁰⁵ officials within this community commonly recognize people-centric governance as an appropriate reorientation of the organization away from a narrow focus on the interests of state elites in order to better engage with and benefit member-state publics.¹⁰⁶ However, the effects of the shift towards a people-centred model should not mask the unevenness of the adoption, institutionalization and practice of the norm. For instance, practitioners in the Macroeconomic Commission advised unsuccessfully against Nigeria's closing of the Benin border in late 2019; and CSO capacity is often uneven, as many lack the necessary funding for sustainability and struggle to combat repressive national laws.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, since 2007 the norm has been adopted and institutionalized within the organization through a codified conflict prevention framework. In practice, the norm has empowered CSOs and other regional stakeholders, and now shapes both regional intervention and early warning in important ways.

Conclusion

The communities of practice in ASEAN and ECOWAS adopted and institutionalized the norm of people-centric governance at similar times for similar reasons. As we have shown, however, recognizing the existence of a norm within organizational settings offers little insight into outcomes. The meaning of a norm and its effects are shaped in and through practice. How the norm is understood and enacted—and with what effect—varies across each diplomatic community. As we have shown, this variability is explained in part by the composition of the respective communities of practice. ECOWAS' institutional development in the mid-2000s was more profound than the formalization of ASEAN's arrangements during the same period. As a result, while the ASEAN community upheld notions

¹⁰³ Memorandum on the ECOWAS Sahel Strategy, ECW/COM/LXXIV, 74th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, 15–16 May 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Interview, member of the ECOWAS Commission Sahel Strategy Technical Secretariat, Abuja, Sept. 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Ganzlé et al., "Not so different after all".

¹⁰⁶ See also Fredrik Söderbaum, 'Formal and informal regionalism', in Shaw et al., eds, *The Ashgate research companion to regionalisms*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Thelma Ekiyor, 'The role of civil society in conflict prevention: west African experiences', in United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Disarmament Forum no. 4, *The complex dynamics of small arms in West Africa* (Geneva, 2008), pp. 27–34.

of the appropriateness and efficacy of the 'ASEAN way', ECOWAS underwent a more substantial transformation, creating an autonomous institutional space wherein regional actors were empowered and freer to pursue a reorientation of the organization's priorities. The effects of the norm in ECOWAS, then, have been more transformative. This recognition highlights a further distinction between the two communities. Membership of the ASEAN community of practice extends beyond bureaucrats and technocrats at the ASEC and includes state officials acting within the CPR and more widely. This has reified ASEAN's insular understanding and practice of people-centric governance. The ECOWAS community of practice now consists of civil servants, autonomous from state elites, who have changed or sought to change the normative thinking towards adopting the norm of people-centric governance. The ECOWAS community of practice seeks to empower CSOs, civilians and regional stakeholders beyond state authority, and has been given the institutional space and capacity to do so.

This account is broadly consistent with the dynamics detailed in norm localization and subsidiarity frameworks. However, our analysis deviates from each in important ways and, in doing so, highlights the utility of adopting a practice-oriented approach to understanding community thinking and behaviour. As we have shown, there is little 'active construction' of the norm in either case examined here.¹⁰⁸ Rather, it is in and through practice that the norm is understood and enacted by each community. Similarly, in a complication to the subsidiarity approach, we see little evidence of explicit 'normative opposition' within either community to the external norm of people-centric governance.¹⁰⁹ Instead, as we have shown, each community was driven to adopt and institutionalize the norm for similar reasons. However, in each case, the community recognizes the appropriateness and effectiveness of a norm in practice in distinct ways. This core finding aligns with recent practice-based accounts of norms which note that communities of actors can 'hold different understandings of what particular norms mean without contesting them'.¹¹⁰ Our analysis complements and extends existing work on norm localization, subsidiarity and contestation by explicating the relationship between norms and practice and providing empirical description to exemplify these rarely glimpsed dynamics. In ASEAN the norm of people-centric governance has been largely reactionary and defensive, serving as a means to uphold an elite-led and insular organization. In ECOWAS, the norm is understood in more transformative ways and has had a wider impact, empowering civil society actors who are increasingly included in governance practices.

¹⁰⁸ Acharya, 'How ideas spread', p. 245.

¹⁰⁹ Acharya, 'Norm subsidiarity', p. 107.

¹¹⁰ Bode and Karlsrud, 'Implementation in practice', p. 460.