

Political and Economic Integration in Africa: A Case of Marking Time?

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Abstract

This paper looks at some of the reasons for the existence of the phenomena of political and economic integration in Africa. The paper addresses what the concepts of integration mean. It also examines some of the theoretical frameworks and approaches to integration. The paper further tries to answer the question, why is integration important? This is examined from the point the challenges confronting African. The article however moves on to address the reality on the ground. It looks at some of the issues causing the contingent to keep 'marking time'. Since the days of the Organisation of African Unity; Unity has arguable eluded Africa. .These include the multiplicity of regional groups, sheer lack of Political and the division between the so-called 'gradualists' and 'radicals'. For integration to flourish and help address African's numerous problems, the ruling elites will have to recommit themselves to integration and not rely on rhetoric's. Ordinary Africans and the African Diaspora must as a matter of necessity is at the core of integration in Africa. These are some of the recommendations outlined to help get integration off its marks.

Key Words

Regional Economic Communities, the Organisation of African Unity / African Economic Community, the Lagos Plan of Action / Final Act of Lagos

Introduction

The writing this article was provoked by the creation by Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana a new regional body known as Co-Prosperity Alliance Zone (COPAZ) aimed at fast-tracking the integration of their economies in the region. Even though, their intentions are laudable, this looks like a duplication of other existing organization. The tendency of reinventing the wheel has been the bane of integration in Africa. Soori (2003:4-5) observes that, several strategies have been employed by governments and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) to address the problems of development in Africa. These have achieved varying degrees of success. Perhaps, the most interesting has been the use of Intra-African development co-operation and integration, as a development strategy, like

Regional Economic Communities (REC). Regional groupings are not new to Africa. Some of the earliest groupings, started during the colonial period and after the independence of some African states. Some of these groups include: The East African Community (EAC) formed in 1967,

Communaute Economique de L'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO)-1974 Ghana Guinea, Mail union-1958, L'union Douaniere et Economique de L'Afrique Central (UDEAC)-1966, Organization Comune Africaine et Mauricienne (OCAM)-1965.

The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos (FAL), attempted to stem the general decline in Africa. The Organisation of African Unity / African Economic Community (OAU/AEC), restated the commitment of African leaders to individually and collectively, promote the economic integration of Africa, in order to facilitate and reinforce social and economic intercourse. To this end, it was envisaged that national, regional and sub regional institutions should lead the charge in producing a dynamic and interdependent African economy. (Soori, 2003:6)The dislocation of most economies in Africa due to debt crisis in the 1980s only reduced these commitments to lip services.

The 1980s witnessed a major shift to the neoliberal orthodoxy of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). In fact by the end of the 1980s, 187 SAPs had been negotiated for 64 developing countries, with Africa having the highest concentration of World Bank and International Monetary Fund-inspired SAPs than any region in the world, with over 40 countries implementing economic reforms as of July 1996 (Muuka:1998:2).

But after over two decades of SAP, and later other poverty reduction/ mitigation programmes, not much had changed. Hellinger & Hammond (1994:2) remarked that in a series of public relations initiatives by the World Bank entitled, *Adjusting Africa: Reforms, Results, and the Road Ahead*, the bank claims that adjustment is working in Africa and that countries that have closely followed its guidelines have progressed. This contradicted its own internal 1992 draft study entitled: *Why Structural Adjustment Has Not Succeeded in Sub-Saharan Africa*. This document was quickly withdrawn when the World Bank realized the flaw. The move by Africa towards the Bretton Woods inspired Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative and Poverty Reduction Strategy has once again been met with a lot of skepticism.

Following the LPA/FAL, and the 'reforming' of the OAU, it was envisaged that co-operation and integration should be promoted. As such integration was to be intensified at the various regional levels. The AEC thus earmarked the following to serve as the main pillars for integration:

- AMU - Arab Maghreb Union,
- COMESA-Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
- ECCAS-Economic Community of Central African States
- ECOWAS-Economic Community of West African States,
- SADC- Southern African Development Community, for the Southern Region

- IGAD: International Authority Development
- CEN-SAD: Community of Sahel-Saharan State
- EAC: East African Community

But this does not mean in anyway that all these pillars are active.

What is integration suppose to mean?

Regional integration can be seen as the unification of neighbouring states working within a framework to promote free movement of goods, services and factors of production, co-ordinating and harmonizing their policies, increase their levels of welfare, reduce poverty and resolve economic issues. To Chime, (integration), in common parlance the term is not without its emotive overtones being now generally accepted in some quarters as an intrinsic goal of the modern world posited as part of the desideratum of international society... sometimes integration assumes the nature of an article of faith implying that the hand of history is slowly but inexorably molding the world into larger and rational entities. In the other half of the world integration is looked upon as the solution to a wide array of problems ranging from power to pollution posed by the terrors and lopsided advance of modern technology. The concept integration is sometimes used as a process and others see it as a condition. Yet still other use it as a condition and a process at the same time (Chime, 1977:30)

Chime, (1977:80-39), McCormick (1999:11-7) and Coffey,(1995: 60), identify Federalism, Pluralism, Functionalism and Neofunctionalism as some of the prominent approaches to the formation of RECs. Federalism – Refers to territorial units yielding a measure of authority to common, centralize institutions, but remain largely intact as units, retaining at least a measure of autonomy. But at times it is mixed, does not deliver what it intends and is not straightforward. Federation seem to mean a formula for achieving integration, it actually proved to be not but many designs what Tanganyika wanted, what the Kenyans were willing and able to accept, and what people in those countries understood, was not a federal government, but unification. (Rothchild, 1968:2)

The Pluralists/Transaction approach is concern with the attainment of peace and security in the international system. This is opposed to the construction of formal institution and subscribes heavily to the primacy of sovereign capacities of individual states to manage these situations by compromise and communication.

In North Africa, three models of intra- maghribi relations, are identified by Zartman and Habeeb (1993: 190-189), as the integrative, the pluralist, and the hegemonic. Integrative attempts, at unity were made at different times during the past, but were not very successful. The pluralist mode has been the longest lasting of the 3 models. The Algeria and Morocco have vied for power. And the smaller countries in the union have allied themselves in such a way as to keep a balance of power that endures their territorial sovereign and independence.

The functionalism emphasizes cooperation in areas of welfare, technology and economies. Chime (1977: 65), observes that it is a transition from a politico-legal system of relations between nation states based on utilitarian computations. In effect, Nnadozie (2003:481) sees it as a loose arrangement that requires joint action and very little bureaucratization, thus leaving sovereignty intact. This strategy is noncommittal and unlikely to yield let alone advance, any significant benefits from regional integration.

The Neofunctionalist approach is in direct response to the inadequacies of functionalism. It focuses on integration in terms of process rather those outcomes. The process comes from a complex interconnection of players pursuing their interest in a pluralist political environment-thus more powers are delegated to common organizations. They believe that a neat division between technical/functional issues and political/constitutional issues could be sustained. Increasingly political scientists argued that the division between technical, non-controversial, economic issues on the one hand and political issues, on the other, was untenable: economic integration, however defined, may be based on political motives and frequently begets political consequences (Richardson 2001:55)

African leaders in 1963 firmly committed themselves to the functionalist track to the development and integration of Africa, with the formation of the OAU, thus continental unity gave way to defence of sovereignty. 'At best the OAU was perceived as an embryonic compromise' (Mazzeo: 1984:29)

It is however deceptive to think RECs are formed principally on one approach. No one way can provide the balancing mechanism between the competing parochial claims of states. Deeb has argued that the Maghrib has closed ranks and opted for an integrationist model rather than a pluralist one when it has perceived itself, as a region threatened by external powers. (Zartman and Habeeb 1993:191)

Integration principles have always been modified to accommodate the varying interests of states Nye, Jnr (1969:131) notes 'What is good for the whole of East Africa is not necessarily good for each of the parts'. The AU applies various approaches to deal with integration. Africa's ruling elites have picked and discarded at will approaches that do not serve their narrow political/economic interests, with complete disregard for what the ordinary African thinks.

What should be at the core of integration?

The above question should seem obvious, but this is not the case when it comes to integration in African.

(Harsch, 2002: 10) notes that, on the edge of Porto Novo, (Benin), runs an unpaved, unnamed road. It is little used during the daytime, but at night large lorries weave around the potholes to bring in petrol and other commodities from just across the border in Nigeria. No customs officers check the goods, and they are not counted in Benin's official trade statistics. Yet their sale satisfies consumer needs and provides livelihoods to

thousands of small-scale traders in market-places across the country. Like Benin, each of Africa's states has its own flag, constitution, capital city and customs service, and each is separated by lines on the map. For many ordinary Africans, however, the things that divide them are less important than what unites them: an understanding that they are all Africans and that they have common interests in promoting the closest possible political, economic and human ties across national boundaries.

The above illustration is replicated through out the border zones in many African countries. Some people even live in one country and farm across in another country with complete disregard for these artificial creations of borders. This behaviour demonstrates a number of issues.

1. Integration is about ordinary People
2. The strong ties of kith and kinship
3. How artificial these boundaries are (they are more or less a source of impediment).
4. This type of interactions have going on for 1000s of years before any foreign interventions.
5. Integration of the continent cannot be achieved by relying strictly on very narrow political, cultural, social initiatives or economic perimeters.
6. There is a serious disconnect between the politicians and the general population.

Critical to the integration in Africa, is the 'ordinary' person. Integration should be for the 'ordinary people'. Integration by the top political elites at the top level has been very successful. They enjoy all the protocols that the ordinary people are yet to enjoy (free movement without harassments etc). At the heart of integration, should be the integration of the population. Integration should be more about the networking of the 'ordinary' citizenry, not the ruling political elite. In fact the ruling elite have always been integrated (for their greedy intentions) through the various institutions, notwithstanding the fact that these elites may not espouse the same ideology. People must initiate development, not political elites that are if development is to be entrenched.

The irony is that before the advent of colonialism and foreign intervention in Africa, Africa was integrated or connected at various levels/degrees- on social, cultural, political and economic levels. Trade routes crisscrossed the continent, north-south(Trans Saharan, even linked Europe) and east- west route (Eastern Africa coast) etc. Massive States/Empire/Kingdom(Ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Borno, The Mwenemutapa or Zimbabweans, Swahili etc.) rose and declined all over Africa, encompassing large populations with diverse-linguistic, social, cultural and ethnic groups yet under a common interests .

Why is integration important?

In the 1990s it was clear that much attention was not accorded to the RECs because the 'Old Regionalism', (1960s and 1970s), failed partly due to, the ideological divide and poor governance. The thawing of the cold war, thus gave a fresh impetus to 'new regionalism'. Soori (2003:38) notes that the rise of the EU, NAFTA and China, sends signals of an increasingly 'fortress world', which means single states or nations are bound to be marginalised further.

The challenge of responding to African's common problems; of civil conflict/strife, refugees, rising debt burden, unfavourable terms of trade, marginalization in the issues of world trade organisation (WTO) the pandemic of diseases and the persistent and long drawn -out economic problems in Africa, needs urgent attention. It by now that no single African nation could easily over come these problems, given their small, weak, mono cultural and largely primary based economies, were no match for giants economies in the west and Asia.

One of the biggest problems that hindered and continues to hinder integration has been the refusal of members to tamper with their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The present sphere of influence of most Africa states as we know it today is purely more or less the creation of the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 (colonialism). However, the rude reality should be hitting home now, that activities in one sovereign region have consequences in other sovereign regions. For instance refugees have rendered territorial integrity meaningless, by crossing into neighbouring countries. Refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia during the civil war in the late 1980s, and 1990s found their way into countries that were not at war (Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire etc.). Refugees from the Hutu/Tusti conflict sort safety in countries in around the Great lakes region (Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Uganda etc). The famine in Ethiopia led to the dispersal of large populations from the horn of Africa through out southern/eastern and western Africa.

There is a need to mobilise Africans and their resources for their own benefits. Africa is gradually becoming the new frontier of contestation between the west and China due to its vast resources. For instance, Africa is generally a major net minerals and energy exporter- almost all African states export one form a mineral or another- from oil, gold, diamond etc.

For the international community to take Africa serious, she must always present a solid and single front instead of her fractured performance in the world arena. For instance the AU could not maintained her demands in 2005 for veto power seats on the UN Security Council(SC) due disunity and wrangled among itself about numbers. Nigeria wanted the AU go with the accord with the Group of Four (G4)-Brazil, Germany, India and Japan), by abandoning veto power as a requirement for new permanent members and agreeing to a total of four instead of five African seats on the SC. Nigeria and South Africa suggested that it might be worthwhile for Africa to negotiate with the G4 countries now and earn two permanent seats on the SC and address the veto privileges later. Libya, Algeria and Egypt, rejected this, demanding that Africa must have

two new permanent members on the SC with the veto privilege. According to them, African must either gets all or nothing. It is embarrassing to say the least, for there is no point in getting on to the SC if one is not going to have veto privileges. These squabbles helped China and USA to postpone these reforms.

Some gains so far

The ideas of promoting better integration can be found in speeches of political leaders, official conferences and formal treaties, although with only limited results on the ground. The successes of integration have been very patchy but no less mean.

In spite of lackadaisical attitude towards integration, a few achievements have been made. The West African Gas Pipeline projects (WAGP), initiated by ECOWAS, to pipe natural gas all the way to Ghana, to provide cheap energy for the sub region's power pool is almost near completed. The WAGP is hoped will thus put an end to the flaring of poisonous gases into the atmosphere in Nigeria.

There is also the on going project of the inter-connections of electricity grids between Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Fasso, this when will go a long way in resolve the power problems in the region. There are several such similar schemes for generating power and sharing with neighbouring states in western, southern, eastern and central Africa

Integration helps trade facilitation and trade liberalization. Babarinde (2003:492), notes that intra - ECOWAS trade went from \$86 million (1970) to \$692 million (1980), \$1533 million (1990) to \$3331 million (2000). The figures for ECOWAS have been mixed. It increased in 1980, and then fell to 5.2% in 1985, and then it kept rising till 1998, when it recorded 10.8%. ECCAS and COMESA show a similar pattern of rise and fall. Starting with 2.2% (1970) and 9.1 % (1970) their percentages for ECCAS and COMESA fluctuated before they reach 2.0 % (1998) and 7.7 % (1998) respectively. Intra-COMESA trade has however grown steadily lately. Trade within COMESA has risen by over 300 per cent in the last six years i.e. from \$2 billion -Sh140 billion in 2000 to Sh420 billion in 2006.(Comesa). In spite of these ups and downs in intra-regional trade, the evidence suggest that if managed well, decent growth in trade can be achieved.

Some level of regional cooperation has enabled Morocco and Tunisia to serve as transit centres for Algerian gas exports across the Strait of Gibraltar to Spain and the Trans-Mediterranean to Sicily respectively. Tunisia is linked to Algeria's power grid, and worked to be linked with Libya as well. Intra-AMU trade grew from \$60 million (1970) to \$109 million (1980), \$958million (1990) to \$1081 million (2000), (Babarinde, 2003:49)

Visas are no longer required by citizens of ECOWAS by member states for less than 90 days. The ECOWAS treaty has been revised to enhance the formation of a common market and a single currency to facilitate trade between the Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone blocs. It also aims at promoting co-operation and integration in economic, social and cultural activities.

Problems with integration

A number of factors militate against effective integration. The most significant of these is the lack of Political will. This more or less has bred other problems connected with integration. Much of what is proposed is predicated on a substantial degree of political will. African Leaders have always been good at rhetorics, but have consistently failed to implement their lofty ideas. Many protocols are ratified but left to implement themselves. When an attempt is made, it is so half hearted that, the desired impact is not achieved. The AU summit (head of governments) of July 2007, in Ghana, once again failed to deliver Continental union due the division between the so-called 'gradualists' and 'radicals'.

Institutional structures/ bureaucracies of modern states/groups has ironical been an obstacle to better integration. The Free Trade Area in ECOWAS agreement took effect in 2000, but most states have literally continued business as if nothing has changed. Borders are closed at will by members at states. Reasons given include across-border crime, smuggling and human trafficking. Instead of dealing with the problem on a community base and reaching a solution-the easier option is chosen-(closures of borders). This defeats the agreements guaranteeing free movement of goods and people. The endorsement of the elimination of rigid border formalities in the RECs has seen little progress partly because of poor institutional coordination. For instance Antrak Airlines's first flight from Accra to Cotonou got on to a bad start in June 2007, it was turned back literally in the air. The minister of Transport in Benin, who ordered this, later remarked that he was not briefed about the said flight. Traveling within RECs can be a nightmare; poor/greedy officials and soldiers/Police at the entry points extort money and other favours from travellers with impunity.

Local political bickering has not helped the course of integration. For example Libya imposed visa requirements on nationals of all Arab countries, including those of the AMU, with special exemptions to Tunisians. The Morocco-Algeria dispute over the Western Sahara has prompted Algeria to close its border with Morocco at various times. Cape Verde has also opted to negotiate its own Economic Partnership Accord (EPA) - (a so call new free trade deal) rather than with the ECOWAS and the European Union. Cape Verde has even entered into negotiations with the EU (with plans to strictly limit Africans using the country as a stepping stone to Europe) in order for Cape Verdeans to gain easier access to Europe among other benefits. Cape Verde has thus suspended the ECOWAS free movement agreement with ECOWAS.

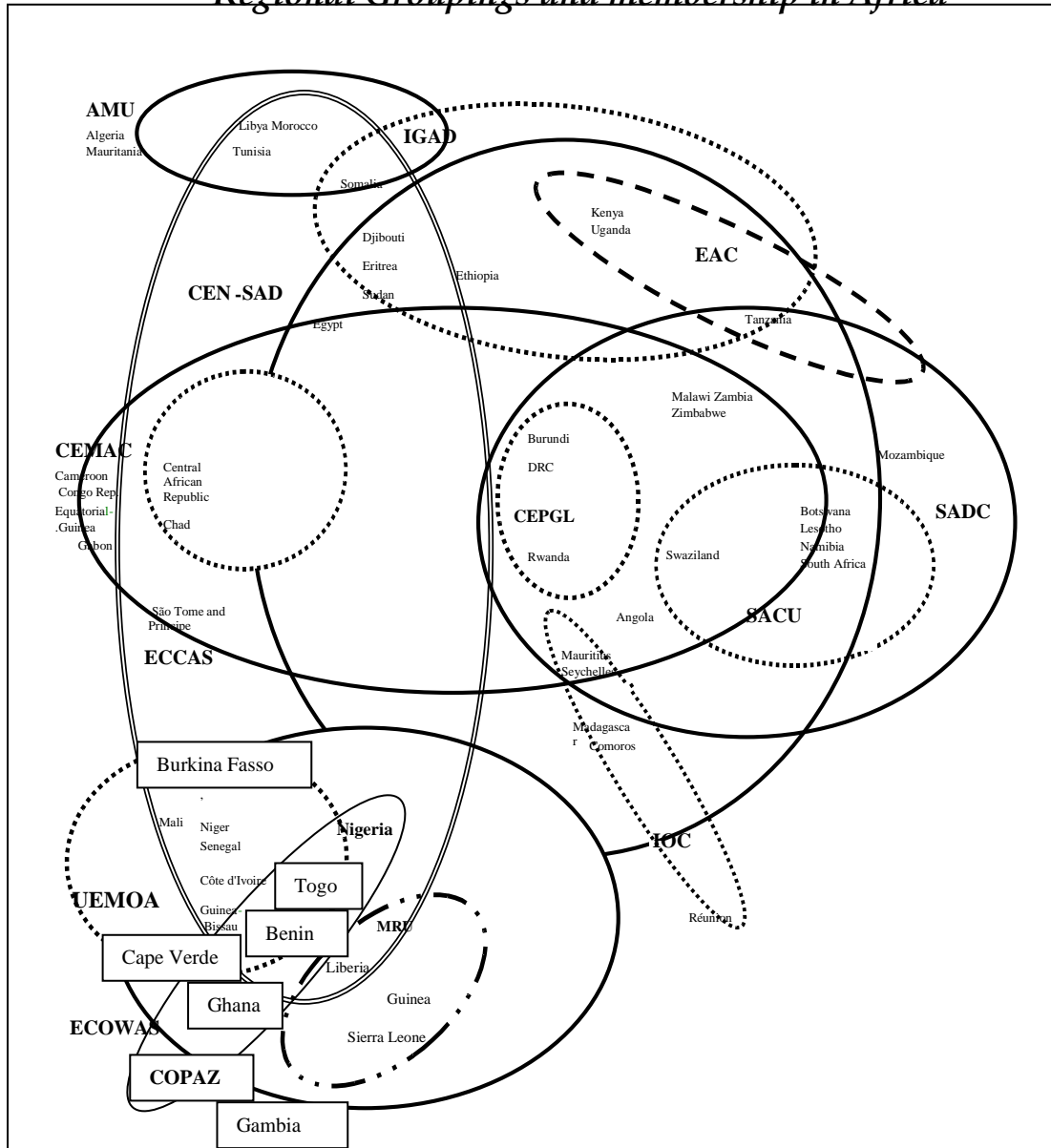
Closely linked to this is the troubling issue of Sovereignty, is the fact that, states have always retained total control over decision-making, and have resisted intrusions in their internal affairs. Integration is thus driven by the lowest common denominator approach, to recognise the wishes of the weakest, wrong doers and even 'undemocratic' governments. Sovereignty has become a fetish and even a religion in some cases. This unwillingness, leads to an unwillingness to incorporate international treaties into domestic law and give power to RECs.

Another hindrance to integration on the continent is the multiplicity of regional groups, bodies and organizations. Soori (2003:38) intimates that RECs have peculiar reasons for their formation, which at times are region specific, like in the case of the SADC, which started to counter the disruptive effects of apartheid South Africa on the front line states (Southern African countries) other include the tendency to cooperate on linguistic, security and shared resource lines.

The illustration below (diagram) highlights how membership overlaps in the various groups. For instance, the UEMOA, with eight members, also belonging to ECOWAS. The Mano River Union (MRU), with three members, also belonging to ECOWAS. The Community of Sahel-Saharan States, formed in 1998 with 23 states has 13 ECOWAS, 4 AMU, 2 ECCAS and 5 COMESA members. The COPAZ within ECOWAS has Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Ghana. The Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), has six members, who are all members of the ECCAS. The Economic Community of Great Lake Countries (CEPGL), also belongs to the ECCAS. The EAC has three members, with two belonging to COMESA and one to SADC. The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) has five members. Four belong to the COMESA and one to the SADC. The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) has five members; all belong to the SADC and two to COMESA. The map below is by no way conclusive because there are still movements in and out of the regional blocs. This has been an obstacle to integration. For instance In 2002 Mauritania withdrew from ECOWAS following its disagreement with the integration of armies and the removal of borders and tariffs. Tanzania ceased to be a member of COMESA in 2000, Lesotho left in 1997, Mozambique quit in 1997, Namibia withdrew in 2004. The Seychelles joined the SADC in 1997 left in 2004 and is thinking of coming back in 2007. Financial problems and the process of economic restructuring were cited for her leaving. On the other hand the following countries have joined COMESA Egypt, in 1999, Seychelles 2001, Libya 2006. While Angola joined the ECCAS in 1999. Rwanda and Burundi are scheduled to join the EAC in 2007. Such movements tend to upset smooth planning, the implementation of programmes.

The significance of this duplication, lies in the fact that, the choice of the above five RECs has not in any way led to rationalization or efficiency of the multitude of the multitude of intergovernmental organizations, nor for that matter stopped the starting of new ones. This means that a large number of states hold multiple membership -some belonging to as many as 20 to 25 of such bodies or organisations. This leads to a burden of paying subscription fees. Many countries have been delinquent in settling their dues. The AU has always had a problem with member settling their dues. It has even threatened to sanction defaulters.

Regional Groupings and membership in Africa



Adapted from- (CAMEI:2006:14)

KEY

AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
SADC	Southern African Development Community
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IGAD	International Authority Development
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States

UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
MRU	Mano River Union
CEMAC	Central African Economic and Monetary Community
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
SACU	Southern African Customs Union
EAC	East African Community
CEPGL	Economic Community of Great Lake Countries
COPAZ	Co-Prosperty Alliance Zone

DRC-Democratic Republic of Congo

Also, lack of political will, in supporting supranational institutions, and to implement agreed treaties, protocols, pacts and mandates have led consequently to a proclivity to create inter-governmental institutions with multiple and overlapping protocols and mandates and little enforceable mechanisms. In effect, this does not subject politicians to domestic political and economic interests to any supranational institutions or to default in implementation of protocols. (Soori 2003:41)

The large number of these grouping in Africa makes it impossible not to believe that they are reinventing the wheel. Even though, these groups have different objectives. The common refrain is that, these bodies aim at the promotion, fast tracking, enhancing regional co-operation and integration and they are neither in competition nor duplicating the work of the other bodies-which is false.

Conclusion

It is oblivious that RECs are not yet addressing the substantive issues they were set up to resolve. This is due to a variety of issues ranging from lack of political will, the different monetary zones, parochial interests of some members, perceived colonial ties and duplicity of REC activities among others.

For integration to flourish, politician will have to recommit themselves to integration and not rely on rhetoric's. Exchanges between citizens of regional and inter-regional groups in Africa should be encouraged to renew and forge fresh bonds for cooperation and networking. In other words integration should be brought to the level of the general public, instead of being the exclusive club for political leaders.

Different ways must be adopted to integrate the African Diaspora (world). The important role played by the Diasporas (Jewish, Pakistani and Chinese etc) in the development of their respective countries is very vital.

A vital psychological hurdle can be bridged, if a common currency is adopted. But if that proofs too much for states, then national currencies should be made convertible with other community members at once. Whereas de jure and de facto currency zones exist in parts of western, central and southern Africa, there are still currency convertibility problems between these zones and non-zone members. This makes it difficult for business transactions.

There is the need for the elimination of rigid border procedures, removal of numerous road blocks and security check-points on international highways and other points of entry to a country- stop the harassments and extortions of Africans; the abolition of the residence permit requirement for community citizens. The adopting of common passports for the various regions must be implemented fast. Africa stands to gain a lot if integration is done properly.

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