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Strengthening African Union for African Integration: An African Scholars Perspective

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Abstract

The transformation of the Organization of African Unity to African Union is a historical landmark of African Leaders' intention towards integration, project her continental interest in the international state system and seek for African initiative in solving African problems. This paper seeks to strengthen the operations of the African Union by examining the efforts of African Leaders towards African integration, obstacles confronting or militating against the integration, and seeking ways to strengthen the integration of the Union. The paper is aimed at protecting the continental interest of Africa in the International State System as well as seeks for ways on how to achieve African integration. Creating a philosophy that will drive the African integration concept, involve the private sectors and non-governmental organizations in the integration process, and create peace within the continent institute dispute settlement mechanisms. Internal insurgencies group need to be settled/arrested, and transparent democratic, electoral and leadership need to be strengthened. There should be a collective effort to combat terrorism,

ensure stability in the political system; and use a collective effort to combat pervasive corruption among African Countries. Corruption kills economic growth and demeans political legitimacy. These factors inhibit investment process hence, trading among African countries is very low.

Key words: Strengthening, African Union and African Integration

Introduction

The transformation of the Organization of African Unity to African Union is a progressive landmark in the protracted struggle for African integration; and a call for a new philosophy of African integration in the emerging challenge of globalization. The Organization of African Unity was guided by two major philosophies: sovereignty of individual States and the non-interference principle. While the African Union is challenged to protect the security of the Continent, it is important to mention that, to a large extent, OAU was a success because it was able to achieve her primary aims of social existence such as: acting as a collective voice for the African continent, eradication of all forms of colonialism and vouching remain neutral and non-aligned in the bi-polarization of nation states into Western and Eastern bloc (Thom-Otuya, 2011).

Now that African States have been liberated (decolonized), bi-polarism fizzled out, and there is a strong inevitable wave of globalization, there is strong need for African leaders to re-strategize a new world view of African role in African affairs and in the International State system. A view that will take into consideration her emerging challenges such as: threat to sustainable sovereignty, sustainable democracy, human right and development, Economy (creating an effective common market). African challenge to transform most of her raw materials to finished products. The great need to cope with the forces of globalization and her impact on national sovereignty and threat to local investors.

The integration of African States has been a lingering issue right from the birth of OAU. During her initial formation, African States

polarized into three different ideological groups: The Casablanca bloc made up of Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Egypt, Mali and Libya; Monrovia bloc made up of Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, Liberia, Tunisia and Togo; and the Brazzaville bloc which were made up of the French speaking countries. These tripartite divisions were later reduced to two blocs: the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs. The Casablanca bloc (Olukoshi, 2010) was led by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. They wanted a rapid movement by independent African countries towards a politically united and economically integrated framework. The Monrovia group was often times represented by Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria. They were for a much more gradualist approach by which unity and integration would be achieved through small and incremental steps.

The hope for African integration was rekindled by late Libyan leader Muammar el-Gaddafi during the transformation of OAU to AU in 2002. However, the death of Gaddafi will pose a challenge to the driver of the integration process in Africa. This theoretical paper will clarify the concept of African integration, discuss AU transformation efforts, African integration, obstacles to African integration; suggest ways that will strengthen the integration process of the African Union. This paper is aimed at facilitating African integration, unity, and enhancing her role in the International State system.

African integration is very necessary because it will consolidate democracy in Africa, strengthen peace and increase our military clout to secure African continent, speed up development process, and strengthen our survival in the world market. Therefore, every African and her leaders must be focused to work towards achieving African integration.

The concept: African integration

Regional integration generally involves a somewhat complex web of cooperation between countries within a given geographical area. It demands harmonization of policies in such sectors as trade, investment, infrastructural development, as well as monetary and

fiscal policies of member states. The overall objective is to ensure stability and sustainable economic growth and development within the integrating area (Anadi, 2005) Integration (Olukoshi, 2010), is understood and employed not just or exclusively in terms of economic process and the institutional mechanisms by which they find expression but also with reference to the associated political visions and actions with which they are Closely inter-twined. Economic integration projects are always incubated and operationalised within the framework of a political vision - an ideological mooring. Integration, according to Chingono and Nakana (2009), is the unification of a number of hitherto independent units into a larger whole, which is more than the some of its parts Integration can be conceived of as a process (dynamic), terminal condition (static) or combination of both. As a process (Bach, 2000) integration involves the establishment of common legal rules and legal systems for citizens.

African integration in this paper refers to a process and stages of regional unity and integration or fusing together different economies and removing all discriminatory trade, custom and immigration barriers between them. Regional integration allows for the creation of a common market, single currency and standardization of various government institutions. Integration here does not refer to political union where sovereign nations are merged to form a Federation. However, the process allows the formation of a common political Parliament where policies will be debated and harmonized; and networking of various government institutions to provide and shape the process and institutions of integration.

Transformation of African union

African Union was launched in Durban on July 9, 2002 by its first President Thabo Mbeki. It is a product or a successor of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). O.A.U. was a regional organization of African States. It was the initial effort of Africans to use a collective force and understanding to free themselves from colonial rule, cum self determination, create a common forum for

Africans to interact among themselves and seek Africans solution to African problems. O.A.U. was a successful regional organization whose goal were readily met even, their liberation struggles and campaign against apartheid policy was very successful.

Having achieved some of her major objectives, with the dismantling of bi-polarism, and the unavoidable forces of globalization, coupled with the challenges of nationhood and peace, there was great need for African leaders to re-ignite their desire for African integration and re-strategize her world view and her role in the international state system. Moreso, Africa is one of the most under developed continent in the world, her economy, research and developments. ICT and military preparedness are very weak. A new vision will be a strong force to re-ignite African vision of integration. African vision has to transcend the level of self-determination and poor governance to a new consciousness of threat to the sustainability of sovereignty, political power; development and security in our states. There is great need to broaden African co-operation and integration for a grater African approach to African problems.

The vision of integration will enable Africans to be more competitive in their international relation, and influence in the international community. The challenge of Africa to secure her democracies, human rights and a sustainable economy, especially by bringing to an end inter-African conflict, and creating an effective common market (Thom-Otuya, 2011).

The New vision of Africa is challenged to transform most of her raw materials endowed to her by nature, to finished products. Her integration in science and research need to be reinforced to facilitate African technology. Our ability to create and sustain our economy must be hinged on local breed technologies, our creative thoughts and our research consciousness. The first world depends on African continent's raw material to create, manufacture and maintain her technological empire. African countries are challenged by not being equipped scientifically to explore their national resources within her territorial jurisdiction. This is the "inescapability" of Africa from

foreign dominance, because we need the western technologies to identify the wealth in our soil and ocean.

African union is challenged with her ability to cope with the forces of globalization and her Impact on national sovereignty and threat to local investors. African Union tend to reform her policies to allow integration of inter-government agencies and centralization of national interest through policies integration.

African Effort towards Integration

The earliest significant experiments at African integration (Olukoshi, 2010) were directly connected to the history of state formation and the quest for the extension of political suzerainty on the continent, particularly with reference to the efforts that were made to bring various peoples and community together) under the same institutional administrative umbrella. African integration was also influenced by Africans in Diaspora those Africans that were forcefully bundled out of Africa to the Americas, Caribbean, Europe etc and used for slavery in the plantations. They laid the foundation for industrial revolution in the world. These Africans in Diaspora struggled to overcome the legacies of the slave trade, to re-establish the dignity of the black race. Marcus Garvey championed a return to Africa prospects. Booker T. Washington called for an investment in education. Education to him will serve as a tool or means of liberating the people. Education is a tool for acquiring consciousness and reacts to improve one's condition. These roles championed by these Africans in Diaspora re-enforced the liberation struggle in Africa.

The liberation struggle in Africa re-enforced the integration vision. It made African to look at themselves as having a common problem and a common enemy hence; there is need for understanding and cooperation among themselves in order for them to emancipate themselves. This vision led to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It should serve as a driver of the integration process.

From 1960 into the early 1970's vision, cooperation and integration schemes were launched in a bid to promote interstate economic interaction on the continent. The political unity project was essentially left at the level of the loose coordinating role which the OAU was given. The transformation of OAU to AU marks another level of African integration. An African parliament has been created, an organ that will be in charge of expediting policy and institutional stabilization and networking.

Obstacle to African integration

Africa been a continent whose manpower was used to till and stabilize Agriculture in Europe, America and the Caribbean to lay foundation for industrial revolution in Europe and America, was a hub of European scramble in the world. Africa was shared among various European countries and great adventurers. This act has indoctrinated the African countries into different European cultures and languages, which is an inhibition for their understanding, unity and integration. In his study on the challenges of regime integration in Southern Africa, Chingono and Nakana (2009) enumerated the following as major challenges of regional integration in Southern Africa: Nationalist rivalry, incompatible political and economic systems, mono-cultural agro based economies, unjust international economic structures, debt and dependency of the west, lack of infrastructural, financial and technical resources, the uneven distribution of the benefits of integration, multiple membership to regional organization, poor economic and political governance, institutional incapacity, lack of grassroots support, rapid population growth and socio-economic growth and lack of commitment and political will.

In a work on the Region Integration in Africa (HYPERLINK "<http://www.fao.org/docrep/004/y4793e/y4793e0a.htm>"_www.fao.org/docrep/004/y4793e/y4793e0a.htm_) the following reasons were adduced for lack of success of African Regional Grouping:

- The dependence of a few countries on their colonial powers tended to work against viable regional grouping because it distracts commitment from intra African groupings.
- Regionalism has been driven from above by public sector organization and has lacked the support and involvement of the private sector and the general public. Cooperation has been seen as involving expensive bureaucracies rather than opportunities for growth and development.
- Institutional weakness, including the existence of too many regional organizations, a tendency towards regional top-heavy structures with too many political appointments, failures by government to meet their financial obligation to regional organization, poor preparations before meetings and lack of follow up by sectorial ministries on decisions taken at regional meetings by Heads of states.
- Integration is hampered by the existence of weak states and political opposition. Integration arrangements are not characterized by strong supranational bodies and virtually all integration institutions are intergovernmental.
- Intra-regional trade in Africa as a share of total foreign trade has traditionally been low compared to other regions.
- Most African states have suffered from severe macro-economic disequilibria, foreign debt service burden, over-valued currencies, lack of trade finance and a narrow tax base, with custom duties a substantial source of revenue.

The obstacles to African Integration are rooted in her subordination of sovereignty to different European countries. Colonialism indoctrinated many African countries to be loyal to their colonial master for their rapid, development and protection in the international state system. It has distracted Africans from looking inwards. African burden is not only internal but external debt burden which they service with huge

amount. She lacks home grown industries that will expedite internal trading among them.

Strengthening African union for integration

Despite the challenges of African integration, Africa has a bright prospect for an economic union. African governments since 2011 are implementing policies that are changing the continent's investment climate for the better. Citizens are more informed about their rights and are demanding more accountability from their governments and the African private sectors is starting to look beyond national borders noted Kimenyi and Karingi (2012). Regional integration must be pursued because it is very essential to generating high rates of economic growth and development in Africa.

Kimenyi and Karingi (2012) are optimistic that the regional integration agenda will make crucial progress and bring a substantial boost to intra-African trade. This was based on three recent decisions such as; the tripartite free trade agreement (FTA) of the common market for East and Southern African (COMESA), the South African, Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC) each of which has entered its negotiation phase. This agreement lead to the creation of a common regional market covering 27 African countries, which include more than half of Africa's population and GDP. Second, in November 2010 AU trade Minister agreed to fast track the creation of a continental FTA demonstrating their seriousness towards creating an African common market. The Ministers in Dec. 2011 endorsed a framework, roadmap and architecture of the continental free trade area (CFTA)

Lastly, the decision by African Union Leaders to dedicate their January/February 2012 summit to the theme of boosting Intra- African trade will bring additional focus to the issue. During this meeting, A.U leaders considered and adopted an action plan for increasing intra-regional trade. Adoption of these proposals will be one of the most important events in determining the course of African development in 2012 and beyond noted Kimenyi and Karingi (2012).

In addition, strengthen African Union for integration the following options should be explored:

Creating a philosophy that will drive the African integration concept e.g. Pan Africanism. This concept will counter our colonial influences and loyalty to other regional and international organizations. It will be the pillar and rallying point of African integration.

Involving the private sectors and non-governmental organizations in the integration process

Create peace within the continent. The wars and conflict in a number of African regions like: Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ethiopia internal crisis and the failed state of Somalia have devastating transport networks, communication and other basic infrastructures need to be peacefully resolved.

Dispute settlement mechanisms and internal insurgencies group need to be settled/arrested, and transparent democratic, electoral and leadership need to be strengthened. There should be a collective effort to combat terrorism, ensure stability in the political system. This will allow foreign and local investors to find a conducive environment for investment. Pervasive corruption among African Countries should be collectively looked into. Corruption kills economic growth and political legitimacy.. These factors inhibit investment process hence, trading among African countries is very low.

Promotion of Peace: Peace building should be a deliberate security and peace option by every member of A.U. Early warning signs of conflict should be sufficient for continental intervention into a member territory in other to prevent conflagration. Instability of member states deligitimizes the Union and costs the AU, these conflicts greatly endanger African citizens. African Union mechanisms for the promotion of peace, security and political stability should embrace timely intervention in situation of emerging conflicts. In other words, conflicts should not be allowed to mature and

consume human beings before, mediation or intervention, early warning conflict signs should be sufficient for intervention. Peace promotion will strengthen the integration of African Union, Consequently, Article 4 (g) of the Constitutive Acts which provides for the principle of “non-interference” should be amended to accommodate timely international intervention in the event of an early warning conflict trigger signals.

Good Governance: Promotion of good governance by African Countries and African Union will strengthen the integration of African Union. Bad governance is instrumental to weak governance structure, corruption, poverty, civil wars, human right violation and most of the parameters which define a failed state. African Union cannot integrate when member states are not stable, at war, when they cannot contribute to the financial sustainability of the African Union and her activities. No African leader should be constitutionally allowed to remain in office for over eight years of two tenures. African Union should devise a mechanism that can identify governance failures and systematically address them. There should be genuine framework of brotherhood among African Countries, irrespective of their colonial experiences or religion.

A Common Monetary Union: Development of the use of a common currency among African Countries will go a long way to promote African integration. The use of common currency will bound together African States in an irreversible way. Though, this can be achieved by stimulating and boosting members’ economy.

Conclusion

African Union (AU) metamorphosed from the Organization of African Union (OAU). It is a new vision of Africa after achieving her OAU objectives of decolonizing Africa and dismantling apartheid in South Africa, to rise to her 21st century challenges. The African Union is a new vision of transforming most African raw materials to consumable products, seek for African solutions to African problems sustainable economy and asserting herself as a continent in the comity

of nations. Her vision is challenged by the forces of globalization and neo-colonialism, and bad governance, internal conflicts and political instability. Her quest for African integration is faced with the obstacles of: dependence of few countries on their colonial power, lack of private sector involvement, institutional weakness and existence of many regional organization, poor intra-regional trade, and severe macro-economic disequilibrium – foreign debt service burden, over-valued currencies etc. The paper also presented measures that will strengthen African integration.

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