

Research article

REGIONAL INTEGRATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF AFRICAN UNION

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Abstract

The inauguration of the African Union was a remarkable event that has the potential of changing the course of history and finding solution to the elusive search for African development since it came at a time when many analysts, writers and observers interested in African politics and development increased the tempo of their criticisms of the Organization of African Unity in the face of its seemingly endemic inefficiency and ineffectiveness to cope with the demands of contemporary international relations. What does the African Union stand for, and how does it intend to improve the African situation better than the Organization of African Unity? What new organs and constitutional provisions are contained in the African Union Charter over that of the OAU? What are the objectives and challenges of the African Union? In accomplishing stipulated, objectives and programmes, will the African Union face the same old similar problems encountered by the OAU? Will it not be the situation of an old wine in a new bottle? This article therefore examines the events that led to the transformation of the Organization of African Unity to the African Union. The visions, ideas, prospects and challenges facing the current effort at African integration through the AU are also interrogated.

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Keywords:

Introduction

African Integration from the Colonial Era

Africa is a continent that is blessed with vast natural, material and human resources that could have transformed it to one of the largest regions in terms of sustainable growth and development. However, the situation of affairs in the continent has been contrary to the point that Africa has been labeled the least developed continent of the world, harboring most of the poorest and underdeveloped countries. Some observers see the continent as being plagued with myriad of troubles including crisis of development, HIV/AIDS, economic underdevelopment, marginalization, poverty, environmental depletion and degradation, political instability, food shortage, cultural, religious and ethnic crises. These problems have defied solutions that almost every item of developmental news from Africa has been disturbing and increasingly so with each passing day.

Scholars have provided different explanations for the crises in Africa. But, most emphasize that colonialism constitutes an epochal event in Africa (Ekeh 1983:60). Its legacies and consequences are well known, and developmental problems are often analyzed in the light of these legacies. Therefore, most studies on African politics have as a point of departure, colonial rule in Africa. Principally, Africa moved away from its own development trajectory to that of the ex-colonial rulers, and it was during the colonial period that Africa got initiated into the world capitalist economy.' This is not to say, however, that pre-colonial African society was a perfect setting. But before the incursion of colonial rule in Africa, traditional African society had its political, social and economic structures, religion, customs, values etc. The values, beliefs and practices of the people were not uniform; yet, they were closely-knit societies at different levels of socio-economic and political development. They were not static homogeneous societies and like other societies outside Africa, African societies fundamentally responded to ecological, technological and historical changes around them: forces occasioned by indigenous events and patterns of behaviour. Africa was developing in accordance with her own inner logic and dynamics. These developments were to be altered with the advent of colonialism. Imperialism brought along colonialism and they destroyed Africa's stable and progressive system and "things fell apart and the center could no longer hold". Such agents of destruction and de-stability were the European slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism (Awa, 1996:2).

Colonialism took different forms depending on the colonizing state itself, the reasons for which it sought to extend itself overseas, and especially on the social organization and response of the colonial people. The ultimate basis was technological, and its principal motive was economic. The imperial countries invested in the colonized countries at prohibitive high profit rates primarily because of cheap labour supply and enforced lack of competition (Field House, 1982:). Capital was invested mainly in extractive industry. After the cheap raw materials had been profitably turned into manufactured goods partly to be sold in the imperial countries, part were exported (tariff free) to the colonized country for large profits which generally completed the destruction of the manufacturing industries of the colonies.

The economic development of the colonized area was thus, held back by the imperial country while the development of the imperial countries was greatly speeded by the flow of profits from the colonies.' The state of affairs however continued even with the attainment of independence by some African countries in the late forties

and fifties. The African states themselves are products of long period of colonial administration. They have been economically exploited, politically subjected and culturally invaded. Soon after independence, therefore, African leaders were faced with the task of development and survival especially considering their countries' membership of the internal community. They were to realize, especially from the operations of the United Nations, the need for cooperation and integration if African states were to make impact in the international system and work for the transformation of the African continent. Besides, they were determined to be non-aligned actors in the international system to avert any entanglement in the cold war rivalry that prevailed at that period while speaking with one voice on international issues (Romesh and Stone, 1979:92-93).

This was to become a reality if only on the surface, with the formation of the Organization of African Union (OAU), which existed for thirty-seven years before it got transformed into the African Union despite its successes in various fields, it failed to accomplish most of the objectives for which it was formed. In making assessment, however, many scholars and observers attribute the underperformance of the OAU to several factors and the circumstances under which the organization was formed. Thus, the need to restructure the OAU appears to find fulfillment with the establishment of the African Union (AU).

Integration is a very important concept in international relations as it has to do with sub-regional cooperation and the formation of political and economic union between neighboring countries. Nomvete asserts that the narrowness of different countries' individual markets condemns them to join forces if they are to develop their industries and reap the benefits of economies of scale, attract foreign investors by organizing a -frontier free market with a critical mass of potential consumers and create the jobs that their constantly expanding populations demand has provided. Integration is a strengthening of ties reflected through a process in which national-political actors shift their expectations, loyalties and political activities from the nation state level to a large center with institutions possessing or demanding authority over the nation state (Adeniyi, 1984).

Integration can also be viewed as a phenomenon reflected by transactions coupled with cooperative decision-making among states. It could, therefore, be Likened as a process as well as an outcome. This implies a process of linking an existing system with a future system. If the present international scene represents a series of different nations with their different political environments, the future of these nations, if involved in integration, would be the type that would lead to greater interaction and cooperation. The nation states, through integration, are brought together for common purposes within the same institutional structures (Etzioni, 1965:45).

Etzioni considers integration to be a condition. To him, a political entity which possesses effective control over the use of the means of violence is integrated. In other words according to him, such a community has a centre for decision-making with the power for allocating resources and rewards throughout the community. The community also becomes the dominant focus of political identification for the large majority of the politically aware citizens and logically, political unification is produced through political integration.

Conceptualizing Integration

However, for Lindberg, integration is the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independent of each other. Instead, of doing them independently, they seek to make Joint decisions or to delegate the decision- making process to a new central option. He contends that integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct settings are persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new centre (Linberg, 1963:50).

For Deutsch, and others who share his views on this subject, integration is a condition. It is a situation which a people have attained within a territory. It is manifested by a sense of community and the growth of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough among the people involved to assure for a longtime dependable expectations of peaceful change. By this definition, integration is a matter of fact and not of time: i.e. what it is, rather than what it would be looking at the position taken by Deutsch, Adeniran. Deutsch, (1997) states that this approach tends to watch and measure integration by the flow of international transactions, the movement of people, the movement of trade etc, among the people trying to be integrated. For scholars such as Haas and Lindberg, they are concerned with the formal institutions that we established for the purpose of integration. It is through these institutions that they determine the extent to which certain functions are carried out so as to determine the extent of integration. Taking a cue from Okeke therefore the major approaches to integration theory are identified as:

- The transactions approach, which emphasizes the role of transactions between people as both an indicator of their attitude, to towards each other and as the begetters of interdependence within the community. The major exponent of this approach is Karl Deutsch; and
- The neo-functional approach, which stresses the way in which institutions possessing binding decision-making power emerge from a convergence of self-interest on the part of various significant groups in society. The major proponents of this approach include Ernest Haas, Inis Claude, Joseph Nye, and among others (Okeke, 2002:17).

Mitrany observes that integration by any means is a long and arduous process. Although, some observers have predicted integration through federation, most hold that integration is a testing process tied to compiled successes. This functional model of integration rejects rapid constitutional consolidation and looks instead to progress in specific sectors.

The Functionalist view holds that even compatible societies cannot integrate all public functions simultaneously. Collectivization may be based on economics, on politics or on security. Gradual and parallel progress in several sectors may converge into general, cross sectoral integration. Without this convergence, integration is encapsulated or isolated having no carry over effects in other sectors. It is Mitrany's theory that the felt need in one particular sector, generates a felt need for functional collaboration in another sector. He therefore, felt and concluded that functional activity could change international activity and give it a new orientation in such a way that people think more and more of working together rather than getting engaged in activities that conflict and lead to confrontation (Mitrany, 1965:23).

The Functionalist thesis like Oyewunmi, lays much emphasis on an apolitical approach to integration. The argument of the functionalist thesis according to Oyewunmi therefore, is that integration is best achieved through a gradual and incremental process which will gain a momentum of its own as the interests of member states converge and as they become more and more independent, in other words, integration by stealth, a case of one thing leading inexorably to the other. Neo-functionalism which is regarded as off-shoot of functionalism (though there are contestations on whether functionalism preceded integration or functionalism is part of integration theory) relies on organization by functions but it brings about new functions, consequences and relations, as the spill-over effect. "Spill-over" refers to demonstration effects and to aspects of sector integration. People go through a learning process and the experience on one endeavour leads to task expansion and diversification or spill-over so as to bring about greater collaboration and peace. A leading Neo-Functionalist, Haas has especially used the "spillover" to show how functions can eventually lead to the demise of the nation-state. By this, he meant a situation whereby, through peace and non-coercive means, people are brought together from different nation-states and they begin to work and do things together. However, several criticisms have been leveled against functionalism showing its limitations in explaining what actually goes on in the international system, it would be wise to agree with scholars like Adeniran that integration is an outgrowth of functionalism. It is the coming together at a high level, within the international system of certain units in a lower level. Integration implies the shift of allegiance from, one's state or ethnic group to the nation or from one's nation to an international unity or regional association. This occurs mostly in expectation of joint rewards or for fear of likely penalties (Adeniran, 1983).

The Significance of Integration

Integration has long been identified by statesmen and leaders around the world as a strategy for development, the evidence, being the different regional groups that have been formed especially since the wake of the 1970s. Even the largest world economic power, the United States of America and other industrialized nations of the world find it necessary to integrate and have different groups formed for this purpose. It then means that the benefits of integration cannot be over-emphasized. Tokuta, particularly states that integration has been proposed with much fervour, particularly in developing countries, as a major response to the problems of underdevelopment. As the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped countries increases, integration is conceived as a defensive reaction by the developing countries to harness their limited resources for development purposes as well as a source of bargaining power in their relations with the developed world. This gap has become more widened with intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries and especially the current economic dominance in form of globalization (Akinyemi, 1984:13).

Regional integration is an issue that has occupied a great deal of attention of political scientists as well as policy makers in African Regionalism, which describes an array of activities: from state-led efforts to develop and economic, political or security region; to the organic creation of regional cooperation through intensified economic or political interdependence. Region has been divided into three different types: functional; region reflects the development of political and economic interdependence; an identity-base region refers to an underlying consciousness of region; and geo-political weight accounts for the global position of the region in question.

Nomvete asserted that post-colonial Africa was and still is a disintegrated continent with fragmented national markets, more so, than any other region in the world. Post-colonial African leaders were thus, faced with the task of generating sustainable economic development in restricted uneconomic development domestic markets of several mini-states that were desperately short of capital and skills, and which before independence had survived through direct links with, and financial and technical assistance from the metropolitan countries. These countries had no alternative but to forge inter-African economic links to replace links with ex-colonial powers.

However, there has been deep disagreement on the way forward on regional integration. For instance, Martin^o writes that ever since the days of independence, African scholars and politicians have been deeply divided on the issue of African unity. A first group (the Pan-Africanists) favoured political integration as a pre-requisite to economic integration and advocated the immediate and total integration of the African continent, and the setting up of a single continental government with common institutions. Another group (the Gradualists or Functionalists) anxious to preserve the African states acquired sovereignty favoured a more gradual approach to African integration. This group held that economic integration should precede political integration. Its members favoured a loose cooperation in non-controversial (technical and economic areas and viewed regional institutions as a stepping stone for the progressive political and economic unification of the continent. However, with the passing away of the Pan-Africanists from the political scene in Africa, neo-functionalism has become the dominant approach and serves as the model to most, if not all, current regional integration schemes in Africa.

Like Asante has noted, over the past two decades, more than half a dozen customs and monetary unions', common markets, free trade zones and other regional arrangements have been proposed or established in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Yet, not all these initiatives have worked. The search for integration, Nyong'o, (1993), notes however that more attempts to create new regional institutions are not hard to come by. It is against this backdrop that this work examines the transformation of the Organization of African Unity into African Union (Nyong'o, 1993:).

The Organization of African Unity in Perspective

The OAU emerged as a symbol and embodiment of age-old Pan African yearnings that found remarkable expression in the 19th century epics of scattered African communities, the world over. A movement of self assertion in its early days, Pan-Africanism evolved progressively into an organized force with cultural and political claims especially after World War II when it took a continental dimension. Numerous attempts were made to channel African aspirations for freedom, equality, justice and progress which culminated in the creation of the Organization of African Unity on May 25th, 1963 in Addis Ababa, with the signing of its Charter by thirty-two African Heads of State and Government.

The OAU as a regional organization had its membership geographically defined, and its philosophy deeply rooted in the philosophy of the UN. The OAU was set up to promote the unity and solidarity of the African States; to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa; to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence; to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; to promote international co-operation from Africa; to promote international co-operation, having due regard to the

Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Four main institutions were set up to perform the functions of the organization: the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the council of Ministers; the General Secretariat and the Commission on Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration, while Article XX of the Charter created six specialized Commissions reduced to three pursuant to an amendment in 1969, namely the Economic and Social (transport and communication), Defense; Scientific, Cultural, The early years of the OAU were years of enthusiasm and hope; a time to fire the imagination, bring forth ideas and every initiative to ensure at least, Educational and Health Commissions (Mezu, 1965).

The principles guiding intra-OAU relations were clearly stipulated in Articles III of the Charter-9 indeed, one could argue that the founding members of the OAU in proclaiming the OAU principles and objectives envisaged a Unity that transcended ethnic and national differences particularly as membership was open to all independent sovereign African states and neighbouring Islands. The viability of the most immediate objective while the different institutions and specialized commissions were put to work to perform the different tasks for which they were created. To be sure, African commitment to ending the remaining vestiges of colonialism in the continent led to the establishment of the OAU's liberation committee (ALC) which had responsibility for coordinating policy as well as maintaining and providing support for Liberation Movements which were officially recognized by the organization: South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO); Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF); National Front for the Liberation of Somali Coast (The FLCS); African National Congress of South Africa (ANA) and Pan African Congress of South Africa (PAC) and Djibouti Liberation Movement (LMD) and waged a protracted struggle against racist and colonial domination in Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, so-called French Somaliland (Djibouti) (Legun, 1987:69).

In the economic sphere, African leaders mapped out strategies on how to proceed, especially operating in a world environment. The first Conference of the Heads of State of Independent Africa in May 22-25, 1963, adopted a Resolution called Areas of Cooperation in Economic Problems. Other subsequent Resolutions and position papers were: Africa's strategy for Development in .the 1970s, adopted by the UNECA Conference of Ministers in Tunisia, February 1975; African Declaration on Cooperation, Development, and Economic Independence, i.e. the Addis Ababa Declaration, a document adopted by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 1973; the Revised Framework of Principles for the Implementation of the New International Economic Order in Africa, adopted at Kinshasa in December 1975 by the OAU Council of Ministers and in July 1977 by the OAU Head of States in Libreville; Monrovia Declaration of Commitment of the Heads of States and Government of the OAU on Guidelines and Measures for National and Collective Self-Reliance in Social and Economic Development for the Establishment of a NIEO adopted in July 1979. The foregoing underscored the OAUS thinking that culminated in the Lagos Plan of Action for the implementation of the Monrovia strategy for the Economic Development of Africa, the most comprehensive and systematic statement of the vision of Africa's Leaders on the development of Africa and on July 20, 1985 the Africa Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (APPER) was adopted by the 21st OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Some of these programmes had their good intentions and emphasis, however, basic instrument of policy did not contain any detailed and clearly defined mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of their objectives and goals, especially at the national sub-regional and regional (continental) level (Ake, 1996:21-22).

A Review of OAU Performance and Challenges

The OAU was bedeviled with several problems, which constrained its performance and the implementation of its tasks. African states have remained as poor and weak politically and economically, and are grappling with unbearable external debt and have become hostage to the ideologies of the I M F and World Bank due partly to the inability of the OAU to discharge its responsibilities.

The OAU failed significantly to accomplish its well-conceived programmes and projects. The principle of non-interference and respect for the sovereign integrity of member states constrained efforts and the intervention of the organization when the need arose, especially when some African leaders embarked on repressive measures against their compatriots and indulged in arbitrary violation of human rights of these people. Additionally, lack of commitment and political will on the part of the African leaders and all the people involved in the cooperation and integration process in many respects also accounts for OAU's underperformance. In spite of these difficulties and obstacles, the OAU's achievement in the area of decolonization and the liberation of African countries from colonial domination, promotion of unity and solidarity of the African states is commendable. To be sure Africa countries harmonized their policies with regard to international bodies such as United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, International Labour Organization (ILO), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Monetary Fund among others and claimed better terms of trade, and full participation in a New International Economic Order. Other achievements were recorded in the field of transport and communication, health and culture, conflict resolution, amongst others (Ake, 1996).

In 1991, the Summit of Heads of State and Government of member States adopted the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community while several regional and sub-regional economic groupings in Africa have emerged over the years reflecting an acceptance of trans-nation State led economic cooperation and integration involving the pooling of common resources in response to shared problems and opportunities. Because it is generally believed that OAU's underperformance could be linked to the unfavorable conditions under which it operated apart from obstacles and problems encountered, it was small wonder then efforts were earnestly made to restructure the Continental organization to meet the challenges of the 21st Century (Agbubu, 2002:11-15).

The Emergence of the African Union

The OAU transformed into the African Union as the continent entered the 21st century with clear understanding of a strong need to redirect and redesign its development landscape. The continuing crises in Africa reflected obviously that the OAU was deficient and ill equipped in responding to the demands and new challenges of globalization.⁹ The continent had joined the new millennium as one of the least developed regions of the world. Many had called for an amendment to the OAU Charter, which they regarded as a comprise "document"; As Adegunle Ajala noted, the OAU had not moved to the left nor too far to the right. The organization, Adegunle Ajala submitted, had been stagnant and "hardly moved at all". With the advent and emergence of democratic governance and new leaders, the need for the reengineering of development became inevitable. There was also a need for a complete and more engaging approach to institutionalization of sustainable developments. Indeed, the

continent needed a more structurally efficient and effective organization than the OAU to forge a more strategic common identification and political unity in Africa (Aderin and Ajayi).

It was against this background that African Leaders gathered in Sirte, Libya, and proclaimed the African Union as a replacement for the Organization of African Unity. In what has been referred to as the Sirte Declaration of 9/99, the Declaration embodies the firm commitment of African Leaders towards-the establishment of the African Union:

... The African Union was expected to make up for the inadequacies of the OAU and forge closer unity among African nations. Unlike the OAU, the African Union will not bolster political unity among its members; it will boost greater economic unity of the continent... (Raifu, 2001:10)

According to Said Djinnit, an Assistant OAU Secretary General, the negotiations preceding the decision to establish the African Union were complex, with African leaders favouring the status quo, while others wanted a "United States" of Africa. The 1999 Sirte Declaration to form the African Union therefore presented a compromise, with some elements reflecting the desire for a stronger "supranational entity", but others continuing to uphold key aspects of national sovereignty. The assumption is that, based on past experiences, Africa leaders would work at transforming the OAU into AU to create conditions for development and enhanced economic integration in Africa.

The African Union Visions, Ideas and the Constitutive Act

The African Union is a new political arrangement, which African Heads of State and Government established as a replacement for the organizations of African Unity. The transformation presupposes that emphasis will be shifted from politics to issues of African development. The Lusaka Summit of the OAU which was the 37th, Summit preparatory to the birth of the African Union (AU), endorsed concrete steps being taken by African leaders to ensure this metamorphosis. On Saturday, 26th May 2000, a Declaration which was made in Sirte, giving birth to the AU was made possible following the ratification of the Constitutive Act by forty of the fifty-three members' states of the African union (Adebambo, 2002:6).

On Tuesday, 9th July 2002, the OAU was disbanded and AU formally took off in Durban, South Africa with President Thabo Mbeki emerging as the AU's pioneer Chairman. The AU idea actually dated back to Africa's post-colonial years, when Pan- Africanists such as the late Dr. Kwame Nkrumah pushed for an immediate "Union" of all African States although credit for the AU idea should go to Libyan leader Muammar Ghadafi, who mooted it at the OAU's Summit in Lome, Togo. Promoters of the Pan African Movement say that the creation of the African Union will bring to reality the dream of a common policy on currency, foreign policy, defence, and economic development." The African Union is seen as the crescendo of Pan-Africanism, a new dawn that would improve the living standards of African peoples (New Nigeria, 2001).

The Constitutive Act of the Union, in principle, expresses interest in full cooperation and collaboration in socio-economic and technical matters and the collective self-defence of the continent Article 3 of the

Constitutive Act states its eighteen objectives, while Article 4 outlines the principles guiding the functioning of the new union and Article 5(1) enumerates various organs of the Union for the accomplishment of its functions and Articles 7,8,9 of the Act outlines the composition, rules, powers and functions of the organs: The Assembly of the Union; The Executive Council; The Pan African Parliament; The Court of Justice; The Commission; The Permanent Representatives Committee; The Specialized Technical Committees; The Economic, Social and Cultural Council; The Financial Institution (Eke, 2001:11).

Articles 14(1) makes provision for the establishment of specialized Technical Committees of the Union responsible to the Executive Council.

- (a) The Committee on Rural Economy and Agricultural Matters;
- (b) The Committee on Monetary and Financial Affairs;
- (c) The Committee on Trade, Customs and Immigration Matters;
- (d) The Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, Energy, Natural Resources and Environment;
- (e) The Committee on Transport, Communications and Tourism;
- (f) . The Committee on Health, Labour and Social Affairs, and
- (g) The Committee on Education.

The Union with its headquarters in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has as its working languages Arabic, English, French and Portuguese (if possible) while Article 29 of the Act states the conditions for membership and cessation of memberships Article 5(2) of the Constitutive Act provides for other organs that the Assembly may decide to establish. Thus, the period between the Lusaka Summit on July 2001 and the Launching of the Union in Durban on 9 July 2002 was also used for the preparation and elaboration of the draft Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union to replace the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

In terms of objectives, governance and administrative structure and responsibilities, the African Union is different and more comprehensive than the OAU. The AU will absorb almost all the major institutions, policy organs, protocol, legislations, programmes and projects of the OAU while regional economic communities are expected to play prominent roles in the overall realization of the objectives of the Union as shown in Article 3(1) of the Act (Egwu, 2001:14).

Expectations from the AU among Africans are indeed very high. The enthusiasm and warmth that African leaders and other dignitaries received at the stadium (where the African Union was launched in Durban, South Africa) represented the expectations of the masses of the African people. They are willing to be a party to the process of change in Africa with the hope that African leaders will take seriously their task of delivering peace, security and economic development of the continent. The Second Summit of the African Union was held on July 11-14, 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique with the host, President Joaquim Chissano remarking that with the African Union, Africans could have more cohesion and more solidarity. The Maputo Summit was a success and various decisions were reached on solutions to Africa's many problems.

However, it has been observed by various delegates at various meetings of the AU held so far that African leaders have displayed a great sense of urgency in bringing to reality some of the expressed vision and decisions of the African Union. Again the whole world is waiting to see how African leaders will handle this new opportunity in eliciting the much-needed development for Africans, which the AU represented. This expectation therefore underscores the comment of Chen Chimtengende that:

“...The greatest issue in Africa from now to 2010 will be the African Union's consolidation and development or its failure to do so...”

The African Union and Integration: Scope, Problems and Challenges

The African Union is a framework that is consistent with the new world order with emphasis on collective approach to development and resolution of problems. Dr. Ahmed Salim Ahmed, the former Secretary-General of the African Union (AU) speaking at the take off of the AU transition, described the Union as a "a new elevated framework for the cooperation and integration of Africa. The Union is seen as a new vista for the realization of African potentials and for overcoming tie many challenges confronting the continent (Ahmed, 2001:9).

The AU, as conceived, is supposed to spearhead Africa's rapid integration and socio-economic development in the new millennium. It is an idea modelled after strong regional blocs especially the European Union, itself a reincarnation of earlier organizations, EEU, EEC and ECSA. It is geared towards creating a loose political and economic union, which would ultimately lead to Africa's integration. African leaders claim that the initiative is capable of transforming the African continent into an El Dorado of our dreams. A dispassionate appraisal of the proposed venture would reveal that such optimism hinges on the expectation of substantial acceleration and enhancement of industrialization; thereby boosting the flow of wholly produced goods, services and communication within the continent, making the continent a more attractive proposition for investment. As in Europe, neighbouring states are unlikely to go to war if sufficient revenues are dependent on trade with their neighbours (Edodien, 2001:63).

The idea is first to build regional blocs in West, Central, North and Southern Africa and then ultimately merge these into one big economy on the basis that bringing four or five groups together is easier than negotiating with 53 countries at the same time. This will not only promote the welfare of member states, but will also present Africa as a key player in the world economy, as well as a counter-weight to other groups emerging in the current world political and economic structure. The main objective of the Union then is to lay a solid and lasting foundation for what Federic Mayor, the former Director-General of UNESCO, once described as the "interactive triangle," namely, "peace, development and democracy".

There is no doubt that Africa welcomes the onset of the AU and applauds the careful planning embodied in its Charter, some obvious obstacles, many observed, can impair its effective functioning if not properly managed. AU departs from the OAU's key, but controversial principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Specifically, it permits intervention by other member states in matters of genocide, war crimes and

crimes against humanity. This is clearly expressed in Article 4(h) of its Constitutive Act." Its members are also empowered by Article 4(J) to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security.

This means that some crucial decisions of the Union may affect the internal affairs of member states, and it is difficult to say if African leaders trust themselves enough to accept such decisions. The dreams of old Africa had ended in endless nightmares because of its leaders: These leaders are still much alive and sitting on the back of their people. The frameworks and building blocks of these new ideas are simply non-existent⁴ and like Kofi Anan disclosed, if the AU is to achieve anything, "it would need proper leadership, courage and a willingness to depart from the past".

Another key problem is finance. Eighty percent of the OAU's fund went into the payment of salaries and only twenty (20) percent to programmes. The AU needs much more than paltry funding and cannot commit such a high proportion of its budget to wages alone if it is to succeed. New methods of funding have to be worked out for the Union, since already, the new organization starts on a bankrupt note with 45 member states out of 54 owing the organization \$54.53 million. The OAU Secretariat, which the AU inherits, has been described as "dumping ground" for relatives of African's presidents. The challenge to the Union will be to bring about reform in this respect.

The African Union also has much to do in enforcing appropriate sanctions on member states that default in the payment of their contributions to the budget of the Union as clearly expressed by Article 23(i) of its Constitutive Act. The unending conflicts in Africa; mutual-distrust and suspicions that exist between Arab and Black Africans are issues of serious concern. These will hamper AU's ability to make meaningful use of external aid, and unless conflicts end, no amount of aid or trade will make the difference. Few analysts however expect the new African Union to fare better in resolving conflicts. The real challenge for the new organization, therefore, will be to bring peace to the most troubled of world's continents.

There is another fear as to whether an African Union could be beneficial to the vast majority of African countries, some of which can hardly produce a pin. Only a very few countries in Africa are positioned to exploit the Union for the benefit of their people. While some countries like Libya, South Africa, Egypt would be reaping the fruits of an African Union, other countries' development consequently would also be, permanently stunted, and they may never thereafter be able to industrialize, just as it has not been possible for African countries to be industrialized in the fashion of Europe and America. The African Union will also operate in a continent where there have not been high level technological and scientific developments which are necessary to enhance productivity and massive employment for the increasing population of Africa.

These are challenging issues for the African Union that raises fears in the minds of Africans as to the workability of the African Union. Dr. Sam Egwu however expresses an optimistic view that if continental unity can work for Europe and America, there is no reason why it should not work in Africa, provided that our leader have resolved to guide our nations on paradigms that are indigenous and in tandem with our ecosystem and physical inclination, rather than imposed values and ideas. It is high time African leaders experiment with home-grown technology, economic, political and social strictures that can kick-start the modern socio-economic growth

and development of the continent. Since the African Union is an integrative process with emphasis on a bottom-top strategy at achieving development, it has therefore become imperative that the various institutions outlined in its Constitutive Act should be created. The composition, mode of selection and powers and functions of its proposed Pan African Parliament, and the Economic, Social and Cultural council shall determine the extent of popular participation in the Union and the sincerity of African leaders. It will also reveal the extent to which many African governments are prepared to make sacrifices and embrace the implications of political unification in form of an African Union. The African Union also needs to monitor and ensure the enforcement of democratic principles in member states of the Union, and as Kathryn Strurman rightly noted: "the AU will have to prove itself different in practice".

The implications of the establishment of an AU are such that one cannot really conclude that it is about a new wine in an old bottle. The AU, as it is today, is an amalgamation of the former OAU structures assets and liabilities, but re-organized and redefined for the purpose of increased efficiency." The African Union will provide a more equipped framework for the realization of the objectives and cooperation of CS SDA in Africa which was the brain child of President Olusegun Obasanjo and has since been adopted as a programme of the OAU and now the AU. Thabo Mbeki's 'Millennium African Recovery Plan (MARP) and Senegal's President Abdullaye Omega Plan' which were merged at the OAU Summit of July 12, 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia as New African Initiative (NAI) and consequently replaced by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) will, it is hoped, be effectively Implemented under the African Union framework. At a meeting of the Implementation Committee of Heads of State, held on 23rd October 2001 in Abuja, Nigeria decided that the New Partnership for Africa's Development should replace NAI. The NEPAD document provides the vision for Africa, a statement of the problems facing the continent and a Programme of Action to resolve these problems in order to reach the vision. The establishment of the African Union and its different organs, and the institutionalization of its CSSDCA and NEPAD programmes, collectively herald Africa's wind of change.

African Union and the Future of African Continent

The responses to the emergence of African Union among scholars are varied. While some express pessimism over the functioning of an African Union based on the failures of past initiatives, others are optimistic as they point out that some of the conditions that-previously impeded prowess have since improved, if only partially. Under these new conditions, it is argued, the prospects for economic and political integration should be somewhat brighter than they were before. When African leaders gathered in Lusaka to proclaim the birth of the African Union, they had a mission: to drive Africa into the future with strength, vision and purpose using an apparatus trimmed of much of its fat and replaced with battle-ready muscle to meet the challenges of Africa in the 21st century. Its many organs will be set up and different commissions instituted as and when the need arises, and like President Muammar Ghaddafi of Libya stressed, the Constitutive Act would be amended as an-when necessary to take account of exigencies of the moment unlike the Bible or the Quran which are Holy Books and sacrosanct. The African Union holds many prospects for integration and development of the African continent considering the changes that have, and are taking place in international politics.

The OAU tried to function during the period that colonization or under apartheid held sway in the continent. Thus much attention had to be devoted to supporting the freedom struggles, and the OAU Liberation committee deserved credit for helping to bring them to fruition. However, with the focus of the AU on issue of poverty and underdevelopment, regional cooperation and integration, democratic rule, security and stability in the continent, it means that resources will be channeled towards accomplishing new objectives. There will be policies enunciated that will improve the living standards, freedom for the individuals to participate in governance and relative peace will be experienced in the continent.

The end of the cold war also marked a favourable condition for the operations of the African Union. Individual African countries during the period of the cold war were important global diplomatic players, courted by both East and West eager to expand their spheres of influence. Since 1989, their international influence has been greatly reduced and they have decided that Africa must be united if it is to make its voice heard in the global economy. African leaders have also decided to follow the European Union's path to peace, unity and prosperity.

The new wave of democratization of the African Union member states is worth mentioning. One cannot overemphasize the benefits that true democratic governance brings to the people. Until the 1990s, most African countries were under military rule with military leaders not accountable to anyone, so it was easy to make grand promises at regional conferences and then do nothing to implement them. Although, at present, democratic tenets remains fragile in most African countries, civil society organizations are in a much stronger position to demand that their leaders be accountable. They are already exploiting this opportunity as conferences are being held to explore the benefits derivable from an African Union.

There is also an improvement in economic performance of African countries. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, most of Africa was stricken by severe economic crises. Many governments were overwhelmed by the struggle for survival and could devote few resources towards regional infrastructure or other projects favouring integration. Since the mid-1990s, however, an increasing number of African countries has benefited from renewed economic growth, providing greater scope for new initiative. It was during the period of the crises that African governments unable to implement the Lagos Plan of Action were compelled to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programmes promoted by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and major donor countries. These programmes, focusing heartily on liberalization and market mechanisms, were almost exclusively national in scope. They obliged each African government to negotiate separately with its external financing institutions, and liberalization was implemented without regard to regional considerations. Donors were also very reluctant to fund regional cooperation projects. Although structural adjustment remains the underlying framework for most national economic programmes in Africa, the international financial institutions now appear more open to regional initiatives than they were in the past. The region also has improved prospects for the resolution of crippling conflicts and the achievement of regional security and stability. The establishment of sub regional and regional peace keeping forces (ECOMOG in West Africa), the revamping of the defunct OAU's Conflict Resolution Commission and the extended cooperation of UN's Peace Keeping Machinery, offer enhanced opportunities for durable peace across Africa. The improvement of economic and social conditions through pressures for greater debt relief, the termination of failed SAPS and the gradual arrest of economic decline and stagnation should also decrease hunger and poverty, and reduce the frustrations which have been provoking

conflicts and insecurity in the region. This period holds prospects for greater possibilities. Things have improved, and the challenge for African leaders is to tell the world that economic and political conditions have changed.

Conclusion

African countries are naturally blessed with potentials for economic greatness, and with the right mechanisms put in place, good programmes to harness these resources, the right political leadership to steer the affairs of the African Union, it will eventually become a reality. It may take many years, but it is certainly a right step in the right direction. The task of building a new Africa is complex and daunting, given the overwhelming odds confronting African continent and African people. This task is not impossible. A great revolutionary thinker, political leader and eminent world statesman, who have so much contributed to change our world, Mao Tse-Tong, said that there is nothing impossible in the universe, provided one dares to rise to the challenge, no matter the difficulties and obstacles.

This optimistic attitude should be the watchword of African leaders and guide African people in the struggle to meet the numerous and complex challenges that lie ahead in this age of globalization. The transformation of the OAU to AU constitutes a fundamental and qualitative change that opens a new phase in the history of Africa and the long-term benefits of the Union should trigger up hopes and commitments towards the realization of objectives.

African leaders should look inward by imbibing and practicing the philosophy of self-reliance and indigenous development. Africans should be masters of their own destiny. As such, the success of the African Union to lead the second liberation in Africa is dependent on the sacrifice that each member state will agree to make for the common good of the continent. However, whatever should be done to move Africa forward should be done within the norms and sanctity of participatory democracy as this represents the only road to sustainable development of the continent.

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