

Regional integration and development in Africa: Between the present realities and overcoming future challenges

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Abstract

Since independence in the late 50s and early 60s, regional integration in Africa has been identified as an important strategy for the acceleration of development in the continent. The reality of the post-Cold War international economic world order also stimulates the intensification and fine-tuning of existing regional arrangements leading to the establishment of a supra-national organisation and capacity building institutions to address the problems of underdevelopment in Africa. As a consequence, integration groupings have been reorganised and created but their achievements have largely been modest due to an inappropriate integration approach. It is against this background that this article examines the interlocking nexus between regional integration and development in Africa, and maintains that Africans need to adjust their orientation as well as take a major shift towards economic complementarity among member states of integration blocs for the actualisation of laudable development. It concludes that inward looking and the involvement of all Africans in regional integration processes would be the best approach for regional integration to foster development.

Keywords: Integration, regional organisation, development, growth, Africa.

Sumário

Desde a independência no final dos anos 50 e início dos 60, a integração regional em África tem sido identificada como uma estratégia importante para acelerar o desenvolvimento do continente. A realidade da ordem mundial econômica internacional pós-Guerra Fria também estimula a intensificação e aperfeiçoamento dos acordos regionais existentes, levando ao estabelecimento de organizações supranacional e instituições de capacitação para enfrentar os problemas do subdesenvolvimento em África. Consequentemente, blocos regionais foram reorganizados e criados, mas as suas realizações foram em grande medida modestas devido a uma abordagem de integração inadequada. É neste contexto que este artigo examina o nexo de interligação entre integração regional e desenvolvimento em África e afirma que os africanos precisam de ajustar sua orientação, bem como tomar uma grande mudança em direção à complementaridade econômica entre os estados membros dos blocos de integração para a realização de planos



desenvolvimentos, plausíveis. Conclui que o olhar para dentro e o envolvimento de todos os africanos nos processos de integração regional seria a melhor abordagem para a integração regional para promover o desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: Integração, Organização Regional, Desenvolvimento, Crescimento, África.

Introduction

Since independence, states in Africa have been involved in regional integration as a strategy for solving their development challenges. This is because regional integration has been identified as a pivotal factor in the promotion of economic development. As a result, regional integration arrangements have been established in the last forty years to promote regional cooperation accompanied by continental development. Accordingly, a series of integration initiatives aimed at addressing developmental problems in the continent has accounted for the proliferation of regional organisations. And against the background of Africa's economic recession in the late 1960s, regional integration was conceived as an inevitable mechanism toward economic recovery. Some of the regional integration organisations formed to enhance Africa's development, but not limited to the following, include: the East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the African Union (AU), just to mention but a few.

In fact, before independence in the 60s, the desire for integration was a prominent discourse among political leaders in Africa. As it should be recalled among the pioneering moves, the Nkrumah-led All African People Conference in 1958, canvassed for a continental integration as a strategy to solve the numerous challenges bedeviling Africa at the dawn of political independence (Osuntokun, 2006 pp. 108-121, Agubuzu, 2004, pp. 19-21). During the same year, the United Nations' Economic and Social Council on 29 April 1958 with Resolution 671A (xxv) established the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (Adeogun, 2013). Among other things, the ECA was saddled with the responsibility of promoting Africa's economic development through integration. Therefore, integration was pinpointed as a viable framework that would bring numerous benefits to Africa as well as enabling the continent to overcome the heterogeneous division, to which Africa had been divided. Thus, the defunct Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) – now African Union (AU) – which emerged in May 1963 as a compromise in this direction was established shortly after the debate between the Monrovia and the Casablanca blocs over which most Africans political leaders were divided in the early 60s (Falola, 1991).

Indeed, the continental body emerged with a caveat that regional economic bodies would serve as forerunners to continental integration and development. It was against this backdrop as well as the post-Cold War international economic order that the emergence of large trading blocs such as the European Union, the North America Free Trade Area, the Association of South-East Asian Nations, just to mention a few, were created (Okonkwo, 2006 pp. 162-63). This development



made it pertinent for African states to form similar regional bodies that would give them clout with other trading blocs in the international system and help them to overcome developmental problems.

The realisation of the above, therefore, necessitated the emergence of not less than two regional organisations in West Africa, southern Africa, East Africa and the North Africa subregions of the continent. The details of all these are discussed shortly after the analysis of the theoretical framework of the paper.

Theoretical framework

There are many theories and perspectives on regional economic cooperation and integration. Some of these theoretical approaches include functionalism, neo-functionalism, federalism, and pluralism, to mention a few. Most of these theories provide us with interesting debates and an understanding of what is thought to be the best way of organising integration blocs in such a way as to ensure their effectiveness and endurance. This is because the history of evolution and formation of integration bodies or international organisations is full of ups and downs. As a result, many ideas began to emerge on the best way to organise regional arrangements in such a way to guarantee their efficacy. Two of the earliest well-articulated ideas on the best way to effectively carry out integration and economic cooperation since the end of the Second World War have revolved around functionalism and neo-functionalism theories of integration. This paper is encapsulated in functionalism and neo-functionalism theories because the vast majority of regional integration efforts since the 50s have been based on functionalist ideas and some of them have recorded tremendous success. The most outstanding example is the European Union, which since 1957 has gradually transformed the continent from a Europe of states to a state of Europe.

David Mitrany (1943) first developed functionalism theory and perhaps was the most influential proponent of the perspective. In his book, *A Working Peace System* and other additional works, Mitrany opined that the greatest impediment to integration is the unwillingness of countries to surrender their sovereignty to a supra-national body. Mitrany also contends that while technology is making the world smaller and drawing people nearer, politics has persisted in fanning the ember of division among nations (Ogbeidi, 2003 pp. 372-75).

According to Mitrany, therefore, high politics has hindered efforts to establish an integration body whose decision would outweigh and be binding on member states. To overcome these challenges, Mitrany submits that integration arrangements should begin with incorporation on social, culture, economic, sport, trade, commerce and scientific exchanges. The arrangement should be global, not regional. And if all the member states benefit from cooperation and integration on these issues without any major loss by any one of them, then member states would enthusiastically support the integration arrangement. And when disagreement ensued in one issue, attention should be diverted to another issue.

Mitrany's perspective on regional integration through international organisation was taken to a higher level of refinement by integrationist scholars such as Ernest Haas, Phillip Schmitter (1970)



and Joseph Nye (1968, pp. 370-84) their perspective came to be called, neo-functionalism. As already noted, the neo-functionalism theory is an improved version of functionalism. Thus, the principles of both theories are essentially the same in many respects, though markedly different in their conclusions. First, neo-functionalism emanated from a critique and an attempted fine-tuning of functionalism. Second, the progress recorded by the European Union has served as an impetus for much interest in the approach. In addition, the neo-functionalists supported the original functionalists' argument that integration should begin with social, cultural, economic, trade and commerce aspects.

The neo-functionalists also provide us with different variables, which integration bodies must consider to be successful. These include: the background condition of the integration countries, the prevailing environment after an integration arrangement, and the general development as integration arrangements flourish. The last variable was the mechanism for conflict resolution within the integration arrangement. Thus, the main difference between functionalism and neo-functionalism is that while the former lays more emphasis on global integration process, the latter emphasises regional rather than global integration. Some scholars have criticised both functionalism and neo-functionalism theories. For example, J.S. Nye (1957) contends that there is the need for integration to be broken down into economic, political and legal components, which in turn can be divided into subtypes, each of which could be measured. Akinboye and Ottoh (2009) also argued that the variables are not arranged in any order of importance, giving the impression that they are all of equal importance. Also related to the above is that both theories are based on a European setting, which may not be suitable for Africa.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, however, functionalism and neo-functional have influenced economic integration arrangements in the world since the end of World War II. Of course, the most prominent and successful integration body is the European Union, which has ensured the transformation from the Europe of states to the state of Europe. On the whole, both theories helped in analysing the functioning of regional integration arrangement in Africa, particularly on issues of cooperation and the unwillingness of states in Africa to voluntarily give their powers to regional groupings.

Regional integration and Africa's development

Like most concept in the humanities, social and management sciences, regional integration does not enjoy a universally acceptable definition as many scholars, experts and generalists have defined the concept based on their intellectual orientations. Kehinde (2014, pp. 54-81) for example, defined regional integration as a global phenomenon of territorial groupings, which aimed at increasing interactions among component states as well as creating new forms of organisation that coexists with traditional forms of state-led institution at the national level.

It may equally be defined as a process, in which states enter into a regional agreement in order to enhance regional cooperation through regional organisations and rules (Aworawo, 2006, pp. 23-52). For Asante (2010), it is an association of states based upon location in a



given geographical area for the safeguarding or promotion of the participant's interests by a treaty or other arrangement. It is also considered as a process by which states within a particular region increase their interaction with regard to economic, social, cultural, political and security issues (Ginkel, 2010, p. 86). According to Karl Deutsch (1989, pp. 270-80) a strong regional integration advocate, regional integration refers to cooperation among political entities leading to the formation of a new centre and the creation of a sense of identity and integrated community. While to Ernest Haas (1968), regional integration is a tendency towards the voluntary creation of larger political units, each of which self-consciously eschews the use of force in the relation between the participating units.

A dispassionate appraisal of the above definitions reveals that regional integration involves turning previous units into a component of a coherent system, which would produce system properties that they separately lacked. It could also be argued that regional integration is a process by which involved states begin to voluntarily give up certain sovereign powers and evolve new strategies for addressing common challenges.

Notwithstanding the differences in definition on what regional integration is expected to address, the interests of states involved in such arrangements are the primary concern of any regional grouping. In specific terms, however, scholars have identified the following functions for any integration framework to fulfill. These include:

- The enabling of countries to enjoy economy of large scale by the pooling together of resources;
- The strengthening of regions' interaction with other regions of the world;
- The strengthening of trade integration in the region of operation;
- Contribution towards peace, conflict resolution and security in the region;
- The creation of an appropriate enabling environment for private sector development;
- The development of infrastructure programmes in support of economic growth and regional integration;
- The development of strong public sector institutions and good governance;
- The reduction of social exclusion and the development of an inclusive civil society;
- The building of environment programmes at the regional level; and
- Regional integration turns separate political units into a coherent system (de Lombaerde and Van, 2007, pp. 377-83).

As noted above, regional integration arrangements are therefore to promote socio-political and economic cooperation and development among participating members. And in view of the development dichotomy between the developed and the developing countries of the world, regional integration is a necessity for the promotion of intra-trade relations in Africa in order to reduce balance trade deficit, which currently exists between many African states and the advanced economies of the world.

The functioning of regional groupings and Africa's development since the 1960s. Since independence in the 60s, and particularly after the formation of the defunct OAU (now AU) as



a compromise to move Africa forward, regional integration or sub-regional arrangement has been seen, in many respects, as agents for continental development. As a result, numerous sub-regional organisations were established to foster integration and enhance development in Africa. Accordingly, many regional integration frameworks had been created in Africa to achieve economic emancipation and to address African underdevelopment challenges. Consequently, sub-regional organisations have proliferated in all the regions or sub-region of Africa.

There are over 16 sub-regional groupings in Africa, with at least two in each sub-region of the continent. In North Africa is the Union of Arab Magrebian Union (UMA), which was established in 1965, and consists of Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia (Aworawo, 2012, pp. 515-16). The region also hosts the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD). The southern Africa region hosts several integration blocs or groups such as the Rand Monetary Area, founded in 1974, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), created in 1980, as well as the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) in 2000. Other regional groups to be found in the region include: the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the Southern African Custom Union (SACU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (SADC, 2015).

Like other parts of Africa, the lure for regional integration as a mechanism to foster development equally necessitated the creation of regional grouping in West Africa. Some of the regional frameworks to be found in the region are: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), founded in 1975, and the Mano River Union (MRU), created in 1974 (Adejo, 2010, pp. 58-60).

Successful efforts have also been made in the quest for regional integration in Central Africa. The Economic Community of Central African states was formed in 1983 by the same countries that made up the Customs and Economic Union of Central African States. In fact, the Economic Community of the Great Lakes was founded in 1976 by what are today the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Angola. The East Africa sub-region also hosts the East African community, established in 1967 (Bolariwa, 2014). It should be noted that the East African Community is the reappeared East African Common Market (EACM).

Arising from the above, one can say that there are numerous regional integration groupings all over Africa created for the promotion of economic integration, intra and inter-trade relations as well as mechanisms for accelerating Africa's development.

Almost all the sub-regional organisations are formed to promote economic, social, political and cultural cooperation as well as to address issues of security and integration of member states. All these regional groupings equally have the goals of raising the living standard of the people, maintain economic stability and foster peaceful relations among member states with the hope of contributing to the progress of development of Africa.

Indeed, all of these aims and objectives emphasised a reasonable degree of hope to accelerate the process leading to Africa's development. In the political sphere, the regional arrangements are charged with the responsibility to give African states an influence among the committee of nations and oneness in relation to other trading blocs in the world. These regional integration



groupings are also expected to promote unrestricted inter-state or member state relations and the free movement of goods and services between member states.

An assessment of the general aims and specific objectives of the various regional groupings at different sub-regions of Africa demonstrates the similarities and overlaps objectives of integration bodies in the continent. For example, ECOWAS' aims of fostering development across West Africa are not markedly different from those of the SADC, just as the EAC equally emphasises the promotion of regional trade and unrestricted movement of peoples, goods and services as part of its specific objectives. To this end, therefore, the next section of this paper examines the extent to which these sub-region groupings have contributed to Africa's development against the backdrop of their attractive objectives.

Performances of regional groupings and Africa's development

The proliferation of regional integration groupings in Africa demonstrates the willingness of each of the continent's regions to promote economic cooperation and development among African states.

However, despite the numerous initiatives formed to address developmental challenges in the continent, Africa is still characterised as one of the most underdeveloped continents on earth. Indeed, a combination of factors such as the lack of real intra-trade interactions, poor infrastructure, restricted free movement of people as well as poor road networks, have been identified as fundamental to the slow or modest progress recorded by the regional organisations in Africa. Thus, the high hopes that necessitated a series of integration initiatives have not helped the continent to overcome its division and underdevelopment.

For example, despite the formation of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) for the Economic Development of Africa coupled with the transformation of the Organization of Africa Unity into the African Union, Africa is still experiencing economic challenges because regional groupings have not adequately addressed crucial elements for African development, such as building the capacity of domestic institutions, autonomy, corruption and clientism (Bolariwa, 2014). As pointed out by Akinyeye (2008, pp. 190-96), Africa's share of world trade remains low. It oscillates between 3 and 4 percent in successive years at the end of 2015 (UNCTAD). Although, the continent's population as at the end of 2015 is over 1.1 billion was about 16 percent of the total world population; the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Africa is the lowest in the world. In fact, the GDP of Africa with an estimated population of over one billion people is just little above that of Spain, a single country in Europe with an estimated population of about six million, 200 million people (UNDESA, 2015)).

Thus, the continental bodies have not been able to realise their desired objectives and functions. In fact, the African Union is only a union by name and wish as instability is still a major development on the Continent. This is because in spite of the establishment of multiple supra national bodies, organs and commission by the Union, Africa is still in a situation characteristic of the early 19th century Europe's unending conflict.



What about regional or sub-regional groupings across the continent? The newly disappeared and reappeared East African Community (EAC) was originally formed as a three-nation's integration bloc between Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. But by 1999, after constructive debate, Burundi and Rwanda were admitted into the community in 2007. Indeed, the EAC has undergone some fundamental improvements in social economic and political areas of cooperation. And as observed by Kehinde (2014), the total intra EAC trade and the organisation's trade with the rest of the world have increased between 20 to 30% annually. There appears to be renewed commitment and optimism among the leaders of the regional groupings.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned progress by the EAC, the arrangement is still confronted with a number of challenges. For example, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have dominated the affairs of the EAC. And because this pattern of influence continued unabated, the attaining of a federation system aimed at the end of 2015 is now a joke because 2015 has come and gone without the federation system. As Mills (1957) has warned, for any society to operate a federal system, no single component unit should be large enough to dictate the tone and theme of that federation. By implication, there must be equilibrium in the distribution of power in order to avoid a tyrannical in intra-governmental cooperation.

Closely related to the above is the uneasy fear and concern that the commitment of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who has been the major proponent for the realisation of the federation system, is purely motivated by his desire to become the president of the expected federal system. And if these suspicions are not well managed, the EAC may experience a similar scenario that bedevilled its predecessor, the EACM.

In West Africa, the sub-regional organisation ECOWAS has also struggled to fulfill its objectives of transforming the region. There is no doubt that the regional grouping has in many respects contributed toward the political stability of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau through military and diplomatic interventions. The organisation has also succeeded in promoting free movement of people, goods and services between member states through the ECOWAS passport. However, a major challenge to regional integration accompanied by development is the large disparity in the economics of member states. Indeed, besides Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, the remaining thirteen countries of ECOWAS have too weak an industrial and general economic base to benefit from an expanded market.

Intra-regional trade in ECOWAS is also worrisome. Recent findings from the World Bank, IMF and evidences within reveal that about 91% of the total reported exports from ECOWAS go to destinations outside the sub-region, while only about 9% stay within. The major exporters of ECOWAS are Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. These two ECOWAS member states account for 70% of the region trade to the outside world. Although Nigeria is the most dominant economy in the sub-region, only 5% of its exports go to ECOWAS (Nwokoma, 2009, pp. 225-38). Intra-regional trade that was expected to foster development is between 5-9 percent. Ghana comes a distant third, with major exports only to Nigeria. Thus, apart from recorded trade involving these three countries and other undocumented trade in the sub region, the environment is not conducive and



vibrant intra ECOWAS trade is yet to be put in place despite all the various protocols of ECOWAS.

The implication of this is that many member states of ECOWAS are not actively involved intra-sub-regional trade. A major result of this is that after a period of 40 years, the objectives of ECOWAS largely remained unachieved. In many respects, ECOWAS has been more successful in conflict resolution than regional economic integration, as a substantial part of its existence has been spent in the resolution of conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire.

Like other regions in Africa, SADC spearheads regional integration in southern Africa. The aims of the organisation include promoting the collective interest and interdependence of member states, improving the living standard of the people, to mention a few. SADC enjoyed a major boost shortly after South Africa joined the organisation in 1994. As a way of demonstrating and providing leadership, South Africa promised to reduce customs barriers and the free movement of people, goods and services. By 2000, SADC also started the implementation of the 'Protocol on Trade' to increase intra-trade without much impediment.

However, not much has been recorded in the intra-trade issues, which is the panacea for development. Intra-trade in SADC is placed at 13.5% and 14.3% respectively. Even under this modest success in intra-trade, South Africa's contribution is about 8%, leaving the remaining member states with 5% of the intra-trade (Lipede, 2008, pp186-99). Despite considerable gains in health sciences, the region has the highest rates of people with HIV/Aids.

COMESA, which is the largest single sub-regional body in Africa, had also been dominated by the biggest economies. Intra-trade analysis between 1985 and 1993 reveals that COMESA export trade totaled \$460.31 million, rising to \$757.4 million in 1991. During this period, Kenya alone accounted for \$213.15 million of exports in 1991 (News African Magazine, 2014). Zimbabwe's share for the same period was \$212.90 million. The imports of both countries for the same period stood at \$66.57 million for Kenya, while Zimbabwe had \$50.76 million. Burundi's exports were 6.66 million and imported goods worth \$35.94 million from COMESA. As at 2014, South Africa's exports in COMESA stood at \$380.77 million and just \$0.66 million worth of goods were imported from the bloc. These examples are the microcosm of regional groupings in Africa. Furthermore, the local hegemon, South Africa, still classifies some countries' COMESA nationalists as illegal and are prevented from entering the country.

Other problems, which have served as obstacles to regional groupings to foster development in Africa include inadequate infrastructure, undemocratic regimes, multiplicity of membership of regional groupings, to mention a few. In fact, the infrastructural supports for regional integration in different regions in Africa are grossly inadequate and lack the capacity to promote intra-trade. For example, as a result of inadequate transportation systems, the cost of moving a vehicle from the port in Mombasa in Tanzania to Kigali in Rwanda is twice the cost of shipping a car from Malaysia and Singapore. It is also easier to connect Accra-Ghana and London or Abidjan and Paris by air than it is to connect, say Accra with neighbouring Abidjan (Kehinde, 2014). Thus, inadequate infrastructure has accounted for a disjointed transfer network.

Political instability is also a common development as many countries of various regions



continue to grapple with basic issues of democracy. ECOWAS has devoted most of its resources to conflict resolution by intervening in Liberia, Sierra Leone and most recently in Cote d'Ivoire instead of focusing on its primary objectives of economic integration. Kenya exploded in 2008 with many extra-judicial killings. In Uganda, the last election in 2011 was mired by rigging, owing to logistical problems, and the recently concluded presidential elections in July 2015 in Burundi has been described as one of the worst elections in Africa. Zimbabwe is also a source of political instability to member states of the SADC.

Overlapping membership within sub-regional groupings has become diversionary and wasteful of resources. In some instances, it breeds unnecessary antagonism. The UEMOA remains in an unending rivalry with ECOWAS in West Africa. The fear of Nigeria's hegemonic influence caused France to prop up UEMOA to counterbalance Nigeria.

Many African countries' economies are still structured along the monoculture colonial pattern. Nigeria, Libya, Angola, just to mention a few, depend largely on the exportation of crude oil. Yet, a country like Nigeria, which is a major exporter of crude oil, does not have enough refineries to guarantee domestic consumption. Thus, most countries in the continent produce raw materials for which they do not have industrial capacity to convert to finish goods for export. Hence, they depend on their formal colonial masters, who often exploit and dictate the price of such commodities. The development has, over the years, contributed to the subjection of African economies to external fluctuations.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has attempted to map the trajectory of regional integration and Africa's development. Indeed, a combination of things can be done to undo the challenges of regional integration in Africa. One area we can change in order to promote regional integration is to fine-tune our orientation; particularly, political leaders and statesmen should see sub-regional groupings as a veritable framework for economic transformation. And yet another is that regional groupings must look inward for economic complementarity in Africa. This requires the diversification of African economies so as to move away from the mono-cultural colonial pattern. By so doing, states will produce goods and services needed by their immediate neighbours. A situation whereby all countries within regional groupings produce the same raw materials and goods cannot encourage intra-regional trade needed for development.

To reward weak economics and small states in regional blocs, a fixed profit sharing strategy should also be put in place, especially on custom tariffs so that smaller economics can benefit maximally.

The involvement of the general public in regional integration participation will also help and there is a need to de-emphasise the overlapping membership of regional organisations, which has, in many instances, served as a major impediment to cooperation and, in some instances, created more divisions than solutions in Africa.

Democratisation and the deepening of the democratic process and culture will help to avoid



unending political instability, which has become a major hallmark of different regions of the continent. This is critical because, for regional groupings to foster development, individual states must democratise and promote democratic ideals, which will serve as a solid foundation for African states to achieve their desired objectives on African integration combined with development. This will also make it possible for individual states in regional groupings to begin to surrender part of their political sovereignty to the supra-national body, whose decisions are greater than each member state. There must also be a deliberate effort among member states of regional blocs to end all intra and inter-state conflicts, which often retard economic integration.

On the whole, there is no doubt that regional integration is desirable and necessary, coupled with the fact that globalisation has stimulated regional groupings such that a third of the world's trade presently takes place within regional organisations dedicated to economic cooperation and integration. African states would benefit from regional integration through looking inward and shifting toward economic complementarity among member states within regional blocs, de-emphasising total dependence on the export of primary goods, and establishing the essential political will to accelerate development.

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