Interstate Border Conflicts and their Effects on Region-Building and Integration of the East African Community

PAUL MULINDWA

University of Johannesburg
paul.mulindwa@gmail.com

Abstract

East African countries continue to adhere to the colonial borders created by former masters. These boundaries have time and again been a source of conflicts between states, despite some initiatives agreed upon and put in place as a community with aspirations of building a regional block based on common principles. Some of these interstate border disputes have posed strategic challenges to the aspirations of region-building and integration of the community which could enhance integral and sustainable development. This paper examines how interstate border disputes continue to affect the objectives of the East African Community. It argues that natural resources across borderlines of each state have been a pull factor for territorial boundary extensions with disregard to the colonial borders. This paper contends that the protracted border disputes are catalysed by governance and leadership challenges disguised by African leaders under "colonial legacy". This paper highlights that to avoid an experience of community disintegration like that of 1977, resolving interstate border disputes must be prioritised, perhaps by putting in place special mechanisms to deal with such disputes, as well as decolonising and rethinking the purpose of these borders.

Key Words: Border disputes, Interstate conflicts, Region-building, Regional integration, East African Community

Introduction

Border disputes on the African continent remain a trigger factor for many interstate disputes. Following waves of independence across Africa, the borders poorly and selfishly established by colonialists were accepted by African leaders without changes that would facilitate the aspirations of their respective communities. The subsequent negative effects have been conflicts and political instability due to poor border management, leading to contestations and discourses as to whether national borders are necessary and can contribute to the development and cohesion of the African continent.

The border skirmishes have not spared the East African Community (EAC) member states, which have been entangled in various interstate disputes for over five decades. The notion of border management in East Africa presents a distinct pattern due to the peculiar socioeconomic characteristics of the communities alongside these demarcations. Rather than states being unifying entities that facilitate region-building and development, national borders, which continue to be perceived as part of colonial expansionist policies, have resulted in far-reaching adverse implications for interstate relations (Kornprobst, 2002: 375). Such adverse effects include hindering the socioeconomic development and political and security stability of the region.

Against this background, this paper examines the question of East Africa's international borders as key factors in interstate relations, and how the management of these borders causes interstate disputes that affect the aspirations of region-building and integration. I argue that although interstate relations continue to be dominated by governance-related issues in East African countries, poorly established borders remain the key factor in shaping how states relate to one another, as well as determine which state to relate with and when, based on strategic interests. I further argue that proper border management in East African states will not only enhance regional peace and security but will also facilitate region-building and integration. In light of this, I conclude that national mechanisms need to be strengthened to give rise to national governance and stability, which have direct bearing on how states relate to one another.

This article is divided into six sections. First, the background of the study and an overview of the EAC and border management by member states are provided. The third section addresses the linkages between region-building and integration and development in the context of EAC states. Section four examines interstate relations and their effects on region-building and integration, followed by how effective border management reduces interstate disputes and facilitates regional integration of the EAC. The final section concludes the article.

Background of the Study

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation comprising of six countries: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. With a population of about 195 million, which surpasses the entire population of the nine Western European countries Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Luxemburg, Monaco, and Liechtenstein, four of the six EAC states are landlocked, and intra-area trade is still far below its potential compared with the Western European block. Although income growth appears to be steadily improving, with poverty reduction in EAC member states due to rigorous measures across countries (Fosu, 2018: 95), a lot is still lacking, with many resources untapped and potentials not utilised optimally. One of the major factors responsible for the slow utilisation of massive resources is the presence of inherited borders and national demarcations that were left by imperial colonialists.

All six EAC member states have maintained the borders and demarcations left by their respective former colonial masters, which continue to be a source of tensions and unrest (Wafula, 2010: 282). The EAC is an initiative to cooperate in ways that build member states' political, economic, social, security, and cultural integration. By its design and conceptualisation, the Community would, under normal circumstances, supersede or resolve obstructions of colonial borders. The EAC was established on the objective of enhancing the lives and wellbeing of the population through sustainable development (EAC, 1999). The current EAC is a reincarnation of the 1977 dissolved integration that existed between Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Learning from past mistakes, Kadhiagala (2016: 175) argues that the revival of the EAC has been dominated by questions of how to overcome previous challenges and construct viable institutions for a strong region. It should be noted that the collapse of the EAC in 1977 was based on political issues that dominated the economic questions of the day, which were the founding objectives of the Community (Kasaija, 2004: 27). Although the EAC continues to achieve some milestones, particularly in socioeconomic spheres, tensions and conflicts continue to create rifts between the states, and to some extent derail the realisation of the Community's ultimate objective which is region-building and integration: to improve the standard of living of the population through increased trade and competitive, value-added production, trade, and investment, aimed at promoting sustainable development of the region and creating a prosperous, secure, stable, and politically united region (EAC, 2011: 13).

It has been argued that the collapse of the EAC in 1977 was a result of inadequate commitment and political will from leadership to remain devoted to the principles of the EAC, exclusion of strong actors such as private sector and civil society from the Community's activities, disproportionate sharing of benefits among the member states

due to differences in their levels of development, and lack of appropriate regional policies and mechanisms to address tensions (Kasaija, 2004: 1). The current Community seems focused and the milestones achieved point to a bright future for the Community, if all actions are focused in one direction by all stakeholders. The timeline of the EAC helps us locate its milestones concerning region-building and integration.

Brief history and timeline of the current East African regional integration
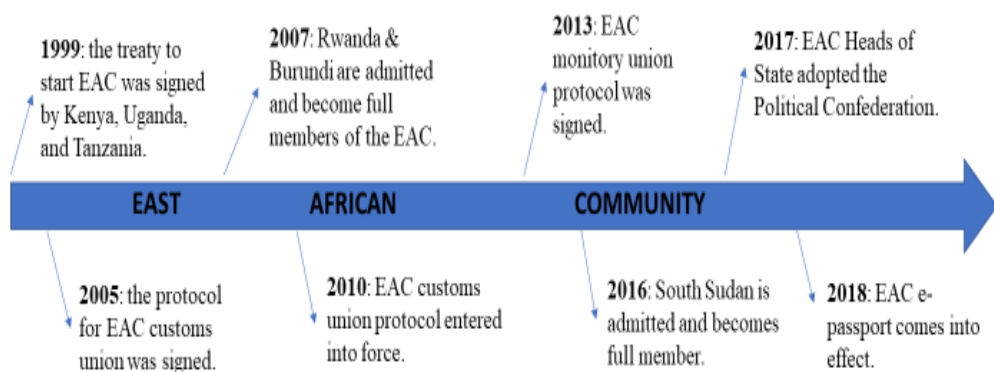
Despite these milestones there are many hurdles, including political and governance issues (as will be discussed later in this paper) that continue to hinder the smooth implementation of EAC strategies. The elephant in the room remains the underlying inter- and intra-state conflicts.

Colonial Legacy Maintained in Colonial Borders

Following the attainment of their independence, most of the national borders of EAC countries were left as they were, although it was indicated at the time that the nature of those borders would be a source of conflict and instability (Adebajo, 2010: 16), and as observed by Lord Curzon in 1907, that "frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war and peace, of life or death to nations" (Broek, 1941: 3). In this vein, one school of thought argues that for any meaningful and successful region-building and integration to happen in East African states, colonial borders must be reviewed and redefined, rather than act as the barriers to the cause of integration (Oloruntoba, 2020a). Eastern Africa is a region whose borders remain porous due to lack of proper delineation. This continues to be a source of conflict between states in the process of implementing the legal principle of *uti possidetis*, which should facilitate region-building and integration rather than hinder it.

The colonial borders have always been contentious on the continent, to the extent that some Pan-Africanists have argued that borders played a major role in fragmentation and disunity in Africa (Nkrumah, 1969: 24), and thus moved to form the then Organisation of African Unity. In support of the idea, many scholars and development actors have supported Julius Nyerere's idea that unless strong structures within individual states are established and inculcate contextual values and identities, Africa would become further subdivided and a more easily manipulated political entity based on ethnic identities (Asante, 1993; Khadiagala, 2013; Oloruntoba, 2020b). It should be noted that Nyerere's counsel was based on his earlier quest for building strong nation states and urging African leaders to be open and transparent with one another for the benefit of national and regional development. In other words, Nyerere was calling for good governance in individual states. While this idea has been established by an individual EAC country, this paper will examine the same notion regarding the causes of border conflicts.

Despite challenges posed by colonial borders, there is strong evidence to suggest that regions and some countries have gone beyond the national model of integration, with some failing and others continue fledgling, while others have laid down principles that have been deemed instrumental for regional integration, with the EAC being one of them (African Development Bank, 2020). The critical issue, however, remains the unresolved border disputes. Perhaps as it has been in the last seven decades of post-independence, and probably for the near future, African colonial borders may continue to challenge many African countries if the new world order of regionalism, and specifically region-building and integration, is not prioritised.

Region-Building and Integration: A Panacea for Sustainable Development of the EAC?

Regional integration is one of the strategies where states, through their governments, agree and commit to working together with a common interest in specific focus areas, including development, governance, peace, and security. This process is suggested, designed, implemented, and overseen by governments involved in the region, in this context heads of EAC member states. The nature of cooperation takes different forms, based on the context and depending on the objectives respective states envisage to achieve (Mwithiga, 2015).

The conceptual question remains why countries should integrate, and to what extent do regional arrangements achieve the goal of integration. According to Venables (2000) and the World Bank (2000), the benefits of regional integration can be realised through new opportunities in trade, larger markets, increased competition, and access to new services. Venables further argues that regional integration can compel governments to commit to good governance, bring new development reforms, enhance cooperation, and improve

security. Although these benefits may seem automatic, they require commitment from the respective governments. To this end, regional integration must be seen as a means to improve the welfare of people in participating countries, and not as an end in itself.

In the context of the EAC, like elsewhere on the continent, regional integration processes seem to promise magical transformation, including economic growth and increased regional markets, leading to continental and global opportunities. However, national and regional division continues to work against integration aspirations, leaving countries economically weak, divided, and institutionally unstable.

There is a school of thought that argues that effective regional integration should be preceded by region-building, thus raising the "chicken or the egg" dilemma. Khadiagala (2016: 176) notes that some functionalists think that economic integration will lead to region-building faster than politics. Khadiagala further observes that as much as economic questions are vital to region-building, the past legacies of political conflicts remain strong hindrances for EAC integration, and the EAC's region-building and integration still operate in countries with weak states, civil wars, and governance deficits. In this paper, I argue that region-building should not be taken as a technical scheme based on the personal interests and political will of some individuals and their ability to make it work, but rather as a project embedded in economic and political struggles that require unified efforts. Region-building and integration go hand in hand, and prioritising one over the other will not take the EAC far; rather, as history has shown, it will be a case of one step forward, two steps back. Effective region-building and integration for East African countries would strategically benefit small landlocked countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and recently South Sudan, and help them negotiate their interests as well as access wider markets with ease.

Adebayo (1993: 2) argues that the slothful economic growth in most African states can be attributed to the continued use of frameworks inherited from colonial legacy to transform African contexts. In this regard, region-building and integration of East African states would provide alternative economies and markets, which the six countries of the Community need for national and regional growth and sustainable development. This argument supports the idea that had been previously advanced by strong Pan-Africanists, including Kwameh-Nkrumah, that colonial political and economic borders between African states be demolished, because they act as barriers to a unified Africa with a common vision (Griffiths, 1995: 84).

It is a fact that EAC countries are not equally endowed with resources, including personnel and extractives. For example, South Sudan has, so far, the largest oil wells and gold deposits, with Uganda and Kenya in the exploration process, and Burundi and Rwanda with scarce natural resources to be utilised. There is also more expertise and personnel to

employ across the border (of each country), as well as available market for locally produced items. Removing colonial borders (political barriers) and allowing free movement of goods, services, and factors of production will allow resources to be equally and efficiently utilised, thus increasing economies of scale. Moreover, a unified and integrated region provides conducive markets, making foreign trade and investment more attractive.

As Khadiagala (2016: 178) notes, the EAC's leadership continues to suggest a political federation. However, critical ideologies about political-economic reorganisation, be it at a national or regional level, are mainly left out of relevant EAC discussions. These ideologies are relegated to intellectual discourses rather than to EAC policymakers and strategic thinkers who would shape the integration and building of the region. Despite the benefits and strategic opportunities region-building and integration of the EAC would bring to the 195 million people of its six member states, interstate relations continue to pose challenges that hinder the smooth implementation of relevant protocols and treaties of the block.

At the regional security front, EAC states adopted a peace and security protocol in 2013, which outlines cooperation in combating terrorism and piracy, genocide prevention, disaster management and crisis response, trans-border crimes, and stopping the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This was followed by the 2014 regional strategy for counter-terrorism endorsed by heads of states seeking to jointly coordinate initiatives against terrorism in the region. While these initiatives included all six member states, the subsequent security mechanism excluded Burundi and Tanzania (this was before the admission of South Sudan in 2016). For instance, in 2014, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda signed a mutual pact on defence, peace, and security (Khadiagala, 2016: 182). This sought to establish a solo defence territory to secure the trio. The tripartite pact was named the "coalition of the willing", and went ahead to secure deeper economic and security ties (Dira, 2013). The exclusion of Tanzania and Burundi was not taken well, with Tanzania threatening to quit the EAC. In his speech to the parliament, Jakaya Kikwete, the then president of Tanzania, lamented:

> We are being sidelined because we insist that we should not jump key
> integration steps such as the monetary union for the political federation.
> But in this and all other issues we have the EAC Protocol to back us. They
> call the tripartite "the coalition of the willing." My question is "who, then
> is not willing in the EAC integration process?" Why don't they invite us
> and see if we are willing or not? (Nyanje and Mugarula, 2013)

Whether this was payback time or not, Tanzania should not have complained because it was doing the same together with Burundi and excluding the four (Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and South Sudan) when it discussed with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the prospect of constructing an oil pipeline, which was supposed to be an EAC issue. The

underlying fact here is that the EAC is still trapped in rope-pulling by its leadership, due to either personal or national interests as opposed to regional interests.

Interstate Border Relations: An Asset or a Liability for Regional Integration of East Africa?

Interstate boundaries in East Africa have existed for over a century, with states continuing to follow the border marks left by colonial masters in the 1960s, when most East African countries gained independence. Following the independence euphoria, the region began to witness interstate tensions and disputes partly caused by border-related claims. These disputes are a result of what I call "Bismackian" artificial boundaries, created by colonisers in the process of sharing their spoils from Africa in the Berlin Conference at the invitation of German Chancellor Otto von Bismack to divide Africa. It has always been argued by scholars such as Mazrui (2010: 8) and Adekeye (2010: 12) that the colonisers' intentions were to enclose people with no shared traditional, cultural, or leadership systems. As a result, the relationships between these countries have always been of competition and conflict, with difficulties to agree on and commit to development issues.

Despite being creatures of human machinations, Kadhiagala (2010: 1) observes that interstate boundaries in the East Africa region have become natural establishments that delineate the external interactions of power and authorities, but more so demarcate citizenships. These boundaries were a result of negotiated political processes among those people who sought to reconcile human habitation with territorial spaces. Kadhiagala notes that the processes of creating those boundaries were defined on maps, delimited by treaties, and demarcated on the ground by colonial officials without participation and/or consideration of the local communities. Colonialists structured most of those boundaries based on loose structures of identities and allegiance (Anebo, 2016; Kadhiagala, 2010). It is no wonder that for over six decades, East Africa, like many regions in Africa, has experienced interstate border conflicts that continue to hinder its unity.

Before the colonialists came to Africa, borders existed, though not limited to political and economic issues, but as social phenomena that guided inter-communal and human relationships. Mukisa (1997: 7) and Munge-Sone (2017: 327) argue that colonial borders were imposed on Africans and attempted to balkanise different communities into numerous territories of varying sizes under the European concept of nation states with clearly defined and demarcated borders. Colonisers did this without studying and/or understanding the community setup, characteristics, and relationships, but rather on the assumption that African communities were homogeneous. The statement by Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister (1895–1902), attests to this when he noted that

> We [the British and the French] have been engaged in drawing lines upon maps whereno white man's foot ever trod: we have been giving away mountains and rivers and lakes to each other, only hindered by the small impediments that we never knew exactly where the mountains and rivers and lakes were (Ganster & Lorey, 2005: 100).

This statement underscores that colonisers crafted artificial African boundaries without knowledge of the land and the local communities.

It is also important to note that after their independence, all African states continued to recognise and defend the borders left by colonisers, to the extent that an article had to be included in the charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (Article 3 to "respect the frontiers of member states existing on their achievement of national independence"). This was the time when the forefathers of the OAU could have revisited the issue of borders on the continent and addressed what colonisers had distorted. Here I argue that the opportunity to integrate Africa was missed at that point, when leaders of the time had a way of reversing what colonialists have messed.

Some scholars have argued that the imposed East African boundaries are arbitrary and that the states operating within them have attained only "juridical" as opposed to "empirical" sovereignty (Jackson & Rosberg, 1986: 6). Juridical sovereignty, in the sense that states have no other authority over those boundaries except that given and acknowledged by international law. In the case of East African states' borders, we consider both the international community and the rulers of other African states, as opposed to acceptance and perhaps by practical integration of the populations. It is here that the East African states have embraced the principle of *uti possidetis*, which is attributed to the interstate disputes among East African states. I argue that the borders left by colonialists have not laid down a foundation for harmonised states, and neither did they lay a base for regional integration, but instead have become a point of contention between states.

The important point to note here is that colonial regimes established boundaries for their interests and not for those of local communities (Herbst, 2000: 95). To the extent that local communities were not peacefully and effectively involved, but rather forced either through divide and conquer tactics or through promises based on collaborators against resistors, it can be said that the whole project of demarcating Africa was to benefit colonisers. It has been argued that mapping the territories marked the beginning of complete control over any place they seized. Bassett (1998: 30) acknowledges that borders were created to ease internal communication between colonisers who were already in the colonised territories and outsiders. This creation and its structures cannot, therefore, facilitate the integration of the region.

Furthermore, within the framework of colonisation, European powers tactically worked with communities and local leaders in Africa to acquire land. Using underhand mechanisms, colonial powers acquired territories and demarcated them using deceit, fraud, intimidation, and bribery. The Berlin 1884–1885 Conference and the events that followed legitimised the partition of Africa; colonisers designed regional maps without providing any notification to the local African rulers, and signed treaties among colonial powers to avoid resource competition. As a result, several errors were made due to their superficial knowledge of the continent and undeveloped maps in existence. The effects of these errors have remained causes of interstate disputes, as well as intra-state conflicts within East African states. This has not only destabilised a region and communities that once lived in social harmony, but also posed threats to the economic, developmental, and political strength of the region, hindering region-building and integration.

Furthermore, the effect of artificial borders on the continent has been the growth of different governance systems — divergent political systems — which continue to be a major barrier to the political will needed to manage integration challenges and ultimately consolidate region-building processes. For instance, in the context of the EAC, its draft protocol on good governance has remained on the shelf and little is being done to bring it to its final adoption and implementation by EAC member states, simply because the protocol touches on some governance gaps or challenges prevailing in some of the member states. Khadiagala (2016: 181) observes that the broad governance challenges are worsened by a weak EAC Secretariat in Arusha, Tanzania, characterised by weak technical capacity and inadequate funding, coupled with member states' failure to pay their contributions, leading to fledgling institutions.

Moreover, there has been a tendency to place much, if not all, attention on prioritising economic and fiscal integration, as opposed to political or governance integration of the region. I argue that economic and/or fiscal integration is facilitated by political (governance) integration. It is easier for a country to integrate and relate with another if they have similar governance systems and political stability (Mulindwa, 2020). This is based on democratic peace theory, whose discourse is that democracies tend not to fight each other but relate well in a more developmental and peaceful way. Khadiagala (2017: 138) observes that EAC states have not adequately defined clear frameworks to secure democratic governance at national levels, considering that their respective national institutions remain crippling for many years, before they come to the table of regional integration. In my view, as long as governance issues at national levels, which sometimes incarnate in the form of interstate disputes, are not managed, the aspirations of regional integration and building will remain on paper.

Democratic peace theory suggests that states which exercise the rule of law, practice constitutionalism, and promote and protect human rights tend to have good foreign relations — democracies do not fight each other (Rear, 2013: 2). Democratic peace theory is based on Kant's theory of perpetual peace, in which Kant (1917: 122) notes that "if the world was populated only by constitutional republics, war would become a thing of the past".

This has been supported by a school of thought which argues that a culture of democratic values and good governance best explains good relationships between states. According to this understanding, democracy not only enables good interstate relations; it also encourages peaceful means of resolving conflicts that may exist between states. Proponents of this idea, including McGlinchey et al. (2017), Hagan (1994: 183), and Haynes et al. (2017: 13), hold that domestic political systems and governance trajectories determine interstate relationships. When domestic principles of governance are democratic and institutionalised, interstate relations should be smooth. Under such conditions, neighbouring states would find it easy to cooperate, thus enabling regional integration.

I further argue that states will not give one another at a regional forum what they do not have at the national level. For instance, none of the EAC states is democratic, according to the 2019 democracy index ranking. Rather, these states are categorised as either hybrid regimes (Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania), or authoritarian regimes (Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan) (The Economist, 2019). How then can we expect integration at the regional level, when there is no "integration" at the national level? It is interesting to learn that during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the leaders of the EAC member states could not agree on a unified approach to managing the pandemic (Lamony, 2020), with each state going in a different direction, thus having some countries implement robust and effective approaches to curb the pandemic, while Burundi and Tanzania completely failed to do so. Such a situation and many similar catastrophes that affect the region are litmus tests for regional integration. In this light, it is not surprising to see the EAC being appraised as a relatively well-integrated region, having the highest score and rated as Africa's leader in integration (African Union, 2020), while it continues to have interstate disputes, including closed borders between Uganda and Rwanda and trading accusations between Kigali and Kampala, as well as borders between Rwanda and Burundi remaining hot-beds for bad relations. It is my considered argument that inadequate governance institutional frameworks at national levels result in undemocratic situations, which eventually spill-over to neighbouring countries. This might explain why political integration has taken so long to take shape, and commonly has monetary frameworks. If such hurdles are not managed, the integration narrative remains a wishful adventure.

Managing Interstate Disputes for Effective Regional Integration of EAC States

East Africa is a region endowed with strategic renewable and non-renewable natural resources, which are not effectively developed and utilised to benefit the EAC population. There is a potential for the region to become a high-income region if the available resources are optimally utilised. This would be possible if all six EAC countries commit to working together with a common goal, regardless of border challenges. This would immensely contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction in the region, thus fast-tracking regional integration. Inversely, in many instances, some of these natural resources have been a cause for interstate disputes in the region, and in some cases, violent conflicts (Kornprobst, 2002: 382; Wafula, 2010: 279). These include the Sudan and South Sudan dispute over the oil-rich Abyei region, the dispute between Somalia and Kenya over oil and gas resources in the maritime border, and others as will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Management of such disputes has not been effective, largely due to politics and governance issues in these countries, coupled with unwillingness to address the root causes of such disputes.

Conflicts in general hinder the pace of development and cause long-lasting situations that may take longer to reverse for sustainable development (Rwigema, 2020: 4). Numerous scholars and practitioners, including Collier & Hoeffler (1998, 2004), Fearon & Laitin (2003), and Debraj & Esteban (2017), agree that there is a significant negative correlation between conflict and development, and that the negative consequences of conflict for development are profound. It has been consistently argued that economic growth and political stability are strongly related (Geda & Kibret, 2008: 6). Peace and security are key to sustainable development; it is problematic to build economic development, and more so regional integration, when people are in camps, either as internally displaced communities or as refugees (as is the case with many South Sudanese in Ugandan and Kenyan refugee camps), infrastructure is being demolished, and leaders keep trading accusations and blame games that threaten investor confidence. This idea is supported by Ghobarah, Huth, & Russett (2003: 191), who argue that the effects of conflicts on any community extend well beyond the period of active conflict to the time the community is supposed to recover and develop. In the context of the EAC, some border disputes have left affected communities disunited, countries disconnected, and infrastructure destabilised, leading to their economic interactions being stagnant and undeveloped. Below, I look at some of these disputes and the effects they've had on the communities involved.

The first and probably the oldest is the Ilemi Triangle case — a territory disputed by Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan — which forms one of the core frontiers of insecurity in the region (Collins, 2004). For over two decades, the Ilemi Triangle has been the scene of friction between neighbouring ethnic groups from Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan —

including Turkana, Toposa, Merille, and Donyiro — who have remained poorer and more vulnerable compared to other communities (Kiprono, 2019; Lopodo & Wakhungu, 2017). To the west of the Ilemi Triangle, the Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda frontier exhibits similar sociocultural features; the perennial cross-regional disputes between the Turkana, Sabiny, Pokot, and Karamojong have for many years turned this area into an enclave of insecurity. The interstate contestations have increased cross-border livestock rustling and economic marginalisation of pastoralists. To date, the region remains the poorest in Uganda, with the lowest economic growth, small labour force, the poorest performance in education (UBOS, 2018), and a poverty rate between 80 and 94 per cent (World Bank, 2018).

Similar disputes between states that have been characterised by border disputes include the border disagreements between Uganda and South Sudan over an economically strategic area. These disputes have often turned violent and resulted in a loss of lives and destruction of property and livelihoods. Additionally, Kenya and Uganda have been in deep disputes for over a decade now and a standoff over one hectare of rocks — Migingo Island in Lake Victoria. Both countries claim that Migingo Island is part of their territory based on colonial maps and boundaries. Kenya claims that apart from the colonial maps, people inhabiting this island are the Luo, one of Kenya's communities. However, Uganda went ahead and raised its national flag there, established a military police station on the island, and administers and collects taxes.

In addition, Kenya is entangled in the maritime boundary dispute with Somalia over a contested area in the Indian Ocean, alleged to have oil deposits. Kenya and Somalia both claim about 100,000 square kilometres off the coast of East Africa in the Indian Ocean. Kenya, which claims the area as part of its border demarcation for the past 100 years, has already given oil and gas contracts for the area to a company for development. The dispute worsened the bilateral relations between the two nations, resulting in Kenya expelling Somalia's ambassador and recalling its envoy to Mogadishu in February 2019 (although Nairobi establishments refuted the allegations). The dispute between Kenya and Somalia is currently being arbitrated in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Although Somalia is not a member of the EAC, such conflict with a country that has played an important role in re-establishing the Community may not go well with the aspirations of Somalia, that has been courting the EAC to join.

While the African continent is consolidating initiatives to bring the continent together through Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA), one African passport, and free movement of persons across the continent, states in the Great Lakes region are entangled in disputes that have resulted in shutting down borders and stopping and crippling transportation of goods and services, which are detrimental to the economic, political, and social integration of the region. What is saddening, is that the tensions between Rwanda and Uganda are not

based on any clear policy variances, procedural implementation, or legal particulars concerning frameworks and standard procedures, but rather on personal issues and differences between two politicians — Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda's Paul Kagame (Kyeyune, 2020). These disputes contradict the values and main principle of the EAC — "One people, one destiny" — and thus pose challenges to the integration of the region, as well as hamper the harmonious processes of other continental initiatives that are geared towards a unified region.

While an immediate solution must be sought to deal with the Rwanda–Uganda dispute, a regional approach to managing such tensions must be sought with urgency, before the region is overwhelmed with and weakened by disputes that may tear the efforts towards building the regional block. However, the Rwanda–Uganda border dispute that has led to border closures is taking its toll on initiatives to integrate the region for more than 18 months, disrupting regional trade, affecting Burundi, the DRC, and the internationally facing seaports in Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Despite the dispute being arbitrated by a non-member state of the EAC (Angola), the borders remain closed. This is at a time when region-building and integration on the continent are most needed, with the development of CFTA and free movement of people, and a cautiously optimistic outlook for the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa, the region cannot afford to disintegrate or engage in actions that tend to delay or disrupt regional integration. In my view, the last thing the EAC region should face right now is such egocentric and personalised disputes that stutter economic growth, destroy jobs, and exacerbate poverty in East Africa.

The key to a prosperous future of the region lies in the creation and development of efficient infrastructure linkages — transport and information and communication technology — shared by all states. For instance, the initiative to revitalise the previous EAC railway lines that served Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and extend them to Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan is a viable path to integration. This will facilitate the exchange of goods and services, including speedy human mobility, thus consolidating intra-regional trade. But as noted, these ideas do not lack challenges that hinder them, which revolve around border disputes. For instance, in 2017, the construction of a 66km road by the Ugandan government from Madi-Opei to the South Sudan border was halted due to a border dispute; this involved confrontations and military attacks by both Uganda's and South Sudan's security agencies (Lifang, 2018). This conflict left many local communities on both sides displaced, their properties ruined, and lives lost. It is therefore imperative that such disputes and attitudes be dealt with first, if the infrastructural opportunities, a conduit for sustainable regional integration, are to reach and benefit all.

It is cross-border tensions coupled with counter-accusations and mistrust in regional leaders that bring back memories of the 1977 collapse of the East African Community, and suggest that history repeats itself. With regard to counter-accusations between states, the

rift between Burundi and Rwanda may leave the two countries more deeply fractured than they are now if the tensions are not properly managed. Bujumbura establishments have referred to Kigali as the main "destabiliser and enemy of the country" (BBC, 2016; Diaby & Hajayandi, 2018). The Rwandan government has reciprocated accusations against Burundi, claiming that Burundian authorities have given support to a Rwandan rebel group which operates along the border, in the Nyungwe Forest, and has attacked and killed a number of Rwandese three times in June and July 2019 (Leegwater, 2019: 348; Mhandara, 2020: 17). It has been argued that such attitudes and behaviours, particularly among leaders, remain a major challenge to full and effective integration as envisaged in 1999 (at the re-establishment of the Community) and as enshrined in the EAC treaty, namely, a Community that should widen and deepen cooperation among the people in the region in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, which could enhance peace and security for all states' mutual benefit (Aworawo, 2016; Nshimbi & Moyo, 2020; Oloruntoba, 2020a).

Conclusion

It is arguably a fact that natural resources have been the cause of many interstate disputes in Africa. However, another school of thought argues that a lack of democratic governance in some of these states remains a major underlying factor. This, to some extent, explains why these disputes take so long to be resolved, resulting in violent conflicts, and remaining major challenges for all stakeholders. Another related governance challenge has been that the EAC's regional integration is mainly leader-led and less about involving people. This has been a common practice on the continent also with other regional blocks like the SADC, and as it was with the Organisation of African Unity and is now with the African Union; perhaps people at the grassroots will continue to play no role in establishing and consolidating regional integration in future. The question, therefore, becomes: Do existing conditions in the region advance the project of an East African federation?

For regional integration to be achieved, leaders will have to tell one another the truth, reassess their priorities, and agree to refocus their actions in directions that aid integration. According to Adongo (2020), leaders of EAC member states are still thinking and working on regional issues in silos instead of moving together as a regional block. He argues that unless leaders commit to their promises and fulfil their responsibilities, regional integration will remain on paper and in boardrooms.

The EAC region has fast-tracked regional integration and continues to see considerable progress, including institutional reforms. Moreover, member states boast much greater political stability, save for South Sudan which is still trapped in civil war contexts (Rwigema, 2020: 11). However, interstate squabbles and tensions emanating from colonial borders on the one hand, and failure to harmonise and manage such disputes constructively on the

other hand, continue to stifle cohesion among member states and hence derail region-building and integration processes of the EAC. Given the political contestations and colonial contexts that underpinned the creation and sustenance of these borders, for regional integration to be effectively enhanced, there is a need to decolonise the mindset about the role (and perhaps the impediments) of borders that foster sociocultural and economic diffusion among the 195 million people of the EAC states.

It is important to note that the East African Community was founded on strong grounds of geopolitical proximity, with common contexts including history, economic, social, and infrastructural linkages. Nonetheless, as the EAC continues to rebuild and strengthen itself, derailing challenges such as governance, insecurity, and contested leadership squabbles are emerging from within states. It is therefore evident that strong institutions and mechanisms within the EAC must be established to deal with such disputes internally, before they become disruptive. For example, if there were an internal mechanism and will within the EAC, the arbitration of the Rwanda–Uganda 2019–2020 impasse would have been managed internally rather than being taken to a non-member state.

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