



Revisiting Regional Integration in Africa: Towards a Pan-African Developmental Regional Integration

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Introduction

Leading up to the political independence of many African countries and immediately thereafter, there were those who argued for the federal union of African states (e.g. Awolowo and Nkrumah) while others (e.g. Nyerere and Balewa) preferred a gradual approach to the integration of post-colonial African states (Gumede and Oloruntoba, 2017)¹. It would seem that the gradualist approach to integration in Africa that has been given prominence has not worked. Many important issues have not been given proper attention. Also, as many have argued, Africa has wrongly adapted the European Union approach to regional integration; an approach that is economic in a sense that it prioritizes markets etc. It is in this context that Thandika Mkandawire and others talk of a 'developmentalist' regional integration (Mkandawire, 2014).²

This paper makes a case for a pan-African developmental regional integration agenda which has to do with regional integration for the political unification of Africa than just developmental regional integration which is about ensuring access to markets and associated factors. The central argument of the paper is that the regional integration approach in Africa has to be more than what many have called 'developmental regional integration'. For Africa to successfully integrate, culturally and otherwise, it is important that the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African nationalism guide the processes for regional integration. Africa, in this paper, is a geographical entity south of the Sahara, but the envisaged pan-African unity is the unity of all Africans wherever they are.

Background

Adejumobi and Olukoshi (2008)³ argue that “the transformation of the defunct Organization for African Unity to African Union through the Constitutive Act of the African Union of 2000 was to give effect to the realization of the United States of Africa. Just as in 1963 when African leaders could not agree on the best approach to achieve this objective, they were again divided at the Ghana Summit of African Heads of States and Government in 2007. Nigeria and South Africa differed from the vision of Libya on the best approach. For instance, while late Muammar Qaddafi of Libya preferred the creation of the United States of Africa, both Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa opted for a gradualist approach.”⁴

With the commencement of the African Union in 2002, the continental body has initiated various strategies towards the full integration of the continent in line with previous arrangements as was contained in the Abuja Treaty for African Economic Community. Indeed, the Heads of States and Governments of the African Union have adopted regional integration as an overarching continental development strategy. In line with the gradualist philosophy, which underpin its strategy, the AU has a ‘vision to achieve an African Economic Community (AEC) as the last of six successive stages that involve the strengthening of sectoral cooperation and establishment of regional free trade areas’.⁵ This would be achieved through the traditional process of having a continental customs union, a common market and a monetary and economic union.⁶ Hence the envisaged continental free trade area in Africa.

The strategy was also based on using the regional economic communities as building blocks towards the realization of the African Economic Community. In this regard, the AU recognized eight regional economic communities which include: Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCA) and Arab Maghreb Union (UMA).⁷ This has led to what others have called a “spaghetti bowl” in a sense that many countries belong to more than one regional economic communities.⁸

African countries have also agreed on a Minimum Integration Programme (MIP), which comprises of activities, projects and programmes identified by regional economic communities as deserving urgent attention in order to realize the objectives of regional and continental integration processes. The MIP provides a framework which allows the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to proceed at different paces in their integration processes. It also provides for monitoring and assessment mechanism within the AU’s Strategic Plan (2009-2012).⁹ As indicated earlier, part of the indicative strategy of the African Union in fast-tracking the realization of the African Continental Free-Trade Area (ACFTA) including reduction in barriers to trade and investment, free movement of persons and labor, right of establishment, free movement of goods and services, and free movement of investment and capital. At the sub-

regional level, a Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA) involving SADC, EAC and COMESA was also proposed.

The African Union Commission (AUC) also came up with 'Agenda 2063'. Agenda 2063 is conceived of as,

an approach to how the continent should effectively learn from the lessons of the past, build on the progress underway and strategically exploit all possible opportunities available in the immediate and medium term, so as to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years.¹⁰

In addition, Agenda 2063 also "emphasizes the importance to success of rekindling the passion for Pan-Africanism, a sense of unity, self-reliance, integration and solidarity that was a highlight of the triumphs of the 20th century."¹¹ It is very clear that regional integration is a critical goal of the African continent.

As indicated in the introduction, there have been or there were different schools of thought regarding approaches to uniting Africa. There was a Casablanca group/bloc (made up of Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali and Morocco) which was influenced by pan-Africanism as the 'driven force' in building a 'post-colonial' united African state in the early 1960s.¹² Some of the prominent leaders were: Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and King Mohammed V.

The Brazzaville group comprised mainly of former French colonies (i.e. Central African Republic, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, People's Republic of Congo, Dahomey, Mauritania, Gabon, Upper Volta, Senegal, Niger, Chad and Madagascar) and advocated for a gradualist approach, starting with regional economic and cultural cooperation¹³.

The Monrovia group; Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Senegal, Dahomey, Madagascar, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, People's Republic of Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Tunisia. This group brought together the Casablanca and Brazzaville groups. But it was closer to the Brazzaville group. It was also the group which paved the way for the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 in the presence of state men like; Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali, Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, Sekou Touré of Guinea, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Ben Bella of Algeria, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, William Tubman of Liberia, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and others.¹⁴

The non-achievement of a commendable regional integration made late Muammar Gaddafi of Libya to push for a political federation in the form of a United States of Africa. Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria played big roles in the transition from OAU to AU, as well as the establishment of New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Paul Kagame of Rwanda has been championing reforms in the AU and there are proposed changes even regarding NEPAD.

Processes Towards Regional Integration

Although the various attempts at regional integration in Africa seem laudable, the various strategies outlined above are not materially different from the paths that have been taken towards integration of the continent in the past fifty years or so. Both in philosophy and approaches, the challenges remain the same. The focus on economic integration as the first step towards advancing the unity of the continent may not go far because the continent is still bedeviled with various economic constraints in form of lack of sufficient cross-continental integration, dependency on single sector and usually raw commodities, absence of economic agglomeration and so on. There is also the danger that the various free trade areas could be locked-in into the globalization processes, represented by the new emphasis on regional trade agreements.¹⁵ Consequently, developed economies and emerging ones in Asia and Latin America can be the main beneficiaries of the free trade areas on the African continent.

It is concerning that, as per Agenda 2063, the urgency of continental unity as a precondition for African development and renaissance is not recognized. By postponing the full integration of the continent to the next fifty years, the AUC has more or less signified that the continent can continue to be exploited through divide and rule strategy of the West and easy manipulation by other parts of the world. The current trend, in which developed and emerging economic blocs are forging various forms of partnerships both across the Atlantic and Pacific levels, leaves no room for Africa to postpone its integration until 2063.¹⁶

The need for integration in Africa has both historical and empirical justifications. Given the limitations of the previous efforts and attempts at achieving integration in Africa, it is imperative to deploy other methodologies and philosophical framings toward this objective. Despite the many travails of Pan-Africanism as a movement, it holds great potential for the realization of the full integration of the continent, including the sixth region. The same can be said with regards to African nationalism. To achieve full integration, it must be properly contextualized, bearing in mind the nuances of history, psychological distortions and subjugation – products of colonialism and imperialism and the state of mind of an average African. Perhaps the first step towards this reconceptualization is raising the critical consciousness of Africans to the reality of their situation in terms of continued deprivation, weakness of the current state structures, economic dependency and common destiny.¹⁷ In addition, thought leadership and thought liberation are critical as argued.¹⁸

Pan-Africanism is inextricably linked to the unity of the people of Africa – Pan-Africanism is essentially about the unity of Africans and peoples of African descent, as many have described it. Given the complexities that surround the notion of unity, Chinweizu (2011: 68)¹⁹ identifies various dimensions of the unity that post-independent African leaders of different hues have pursued. Chinweizu²⁰ identifies unity as state integration of political federation of all black people of the world; unity as solidarity of people based on distinctive racial, cultural, linguistic and historical identity; unity through a shared ideology or religion; unity through a hierarchy of organizations; unity through joint activity, unity as a functional bloc or league and unity through

one mass organization with one voice. Chinweizu advocates for an African unity that is premised on 'popular solidary organs' among others in a way that distinguishes the blacks from the others. Kwesi Kwaa Prah, on the other hand, has been arguing for people-to-people integration as opposed to continentalism (see, for instance, Prah, 2016).

It is worth noting that Chinweizu cautions that in order to ensure that the unity of the continent is meaningful, it must be backed-up with a programme of power and collective security. In this regard, Chinweizu laments that 'it is absolutely amazing, quite tragic and a great sin of omission, that collective security has not been a concern of Pan-Africanism since 1958.'²¹ It would appear that the African Union has started to address this gap with the setting up of the Peace and Security Council. The United Nations-African Union Joint Task Force on Security could also be a step in right direction in ensuring that the continent is secured against both internal and external aggressors. However, the limitations of this unit manifest squarely in its dependence on foreign donors. For instance, the Task Force could not intervene in the Mali crisis in 2012 until France came into the picture.

Beyond the issue of power and security, Pan-Africanism must include a programme of capital mobilization and accumulation if it is to achieve the objective of African renaissance. Although past African leaders such as Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo, among others recently, came up with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a framework for ensuring both economic and political renaissance in Africa, the programme was criticized for beholding excessively to the West and as a caricature of a blueprint for renaissance on the continent (see, for instance, Olukoshi 2007).²² The pursuit of African renaissance must be rooted in the collective aspiration of the people of the continent to rediscover their self-hood, personality and worth. As Nabudere (2001)²³ argues, "for African renaissance to be of any political significance on the African continent, it has to address and motivate the very people it is supposed to re-awaken and re-energise, namely the African masses". Therefore, the proper pursuit of regional integration in Africa must involve the mobilization of the peoples of Africa to understanding that the ties that bind them in terms of color and history of deprivation should make them discountenance the artificial barriers and psychological dissonance imposed by the imperialists and fight collectively for true freedoms. This will require sharing experiences, resources, talents and opportunities, among other things. It will also involve active involvement of the AU in further forging a sense of cultural, social and economic solidarity among the peoples of Africa.

Revisiting Regional Integration

Given the various attempts at regional integration so far, the question arises: what could be a better approach to regional integration in Africa? To start with, Steve Kayizzi-Mugerwa et al. (2014)²⁴ make a point that "regional economic integration — allowing the free movement of goods, services, people and capital between national markets — has been a key aspiration of

African countries since the achievement of [political] independence”. Patrick Kimunguyi (2006)²⁵ on the other hand, says; political willingness and commitment to regional integration need to be fully reinforced by Africa’s leaders, who should not be ‘seduced’ by the success of regional initiatives elsewhere for example Europe. It is obvious that the integration process in Africa is different from those in Europe, America or Asia. Simon Mevel and Stephen Karingi (2012)²⁶ indicate that; results from a Computable General Equilibrium model analysis show that deepened regional integration in Africa through establishment of wider Free Trade Areas would benefit the African continent (through increases in exports, real income as well as real wages). Faizel Ismail (2017)²⁷ makes a point that “African countries have embarked upon a process of regional integration based on an approach of developmental integration that is far more appropriate and responsive to Africa’s current development requirements. African countries have in the past few years been putting in place the building blocks of a development integration approach to regional integration that requires a combination of trade liberalization, industrial development and infrastructure development”. Gumede and Oloruntoba (2017: 246)²⁸ have also argued that; “Africa must move beyond rhetoric pertaining to the current approach to regional integration and take more concrete actions through which the well-being of Africa’s peoples becomes the focus in order to achieve African renaissance”. It is in this context that a case for a Pan-African developmental regional integration is made.

The following are among some factors that are said to be limiting regional integration in Africa: lack of political will, insufficient capacity of regional economic communities, domestic challenges that many countries face, overlapping memberships in Regional Economic Communities, influence of external powers and the conventional top-down approach to regional integration. Indeed, there are many other important issues that are not taken into account in the pursuit of regional integration (e.g. language, culture, etc). It is in this context that some activists and scholars call for a developmentalist regional integration agenda.

Over and above what others have been recommending (e.g. increasing capacities of RECs), for regional integration to be successful and of benefit to the people in Africa, it is important that – first and foremost – it is driven from below. In fact, regional integration seems to be already happening from below, with various peoples in Africa moving to different parts of the continent, cross-border trade and marriages among other factors. This is actually not new. As discussed in Gumede (2015), African peoples have always traversed different parts of the African continent for various reasons²⁹. The works of Cheikh Anta Diop with Theophile Obenga demonstrated that there were many similarities among African peoples. Kwesi Kwaa Prah’s work also confirm that indigenous languages in Africa are similar (see Gumede and Leshoele, 2017 for instance).³⁰ Similar indigenous peoples, culturally and otherwise, are spread all over the African continent. In Southern Africa, for instance, the original inhabitants of the southern tip of the African continent can be found in the different countries (e.g. Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa). Sadly, these peoples are being suppressed and their languages suffocated.

In addition, the developmental, contextual and political aspects of integration should be taken into account if not as guiding principles for regional integration in Africa. As indicated earlier, part of the challenge is that Africa has largely pursued a market-driven regional integration agenda. The focus has largely been on the economic benefits of regional integration. This has not worked, even for regions that Africa has been trying to copy (e.g. the European Union). The significant preoccupation with economic factors has resulted to countries that can lead regional integration not doing so. South Africa, for instance, has not invested in the road infrastructure of the Southern African sub region as Germany did during the early days of regional integration in Europe. That is why we may need to redefine what is now popularly termed ‘developmental regional integration’ – or ‘developmental regionalism’. Building infrastructures, improving capacities and ensuring market access are economic issues that do not deal with challenges faced by the African continent, although these factors can assist in dealing with unemployment to some extent.

It is important for Africa to be context specific because, among other factors, the lopsided global economic and political system is ensuring that Africa does not advance.³¹ The approach to regional integration in Africa must take global realities that peripheralizes Africa into account. It is in this context that I argue that ‘developmental regional integration’ as currently defined/characterized is problematic. It should be ‘developmental regional integration’ in a development sense that regional integration should advance wellbeing in Africa. One critical aspect of this is the empowerment of communities in the various parts of Africa. People should be in a position to shape their own affairs in a manner that works for their communities – development should happen in the terms of communities as it is the communities that must progress, not the markets or the economy. With regard to political aspects, it is important that there is a political agenda (for the benefit of Africa and Africans) for the pursuit of regional integration.

As argued elsewhere, Pan-Africanism and African nationalism should be guiding ideals for regional integration in Africa – perhaps the Casablanca approach in which Pan-Africanism was the ‘driven force’ with a view of a united and prosperous one Africa should be revisited. As argued in Gumede and Leshoele (2017),³² “African nationalism and pan-Africanism are ideals that underpin the pursuit of the advancement of wellbeing of Africans (and that is not aimed at oppressing other nationalities or races).” Pan-Africanism should be central to all the endeavour in Africa, especially initiatives aimed at regional integration. This political and philosophical consideration is important because ultimately the concern has to be about uniting Africa and Africans. The centrality of nationalism in Africa is important because the push has to be for an ‘African nation’ (as captured in the works of Kwesi Kwaa Prah). As Prah (2017)³³ explains, nationalism is dialectic and that it is premised on the “class, historical, social, economic and political context in which it is manifested.”

Lastly, thought leadership and critical consciousness are critical. Onditi (2017)³⁴, for instance, argues that “thought leadership is essentially what the African ‘soil’ is lacking in the twenty-first

century; [it] has the potential of incubating progressive ideologies, beliefs and movements being championed by women and other gender advocates that would, in turn, create the 'Africa we want'." I have made a point that "thought leadership without a liberated mind is futile. Higher levels of consciousness, based on comprehensive understanding of phenomena, make for a better thought leader. It is also argued that African thought leadership must be able to produce not only a critical but also a conscious African citizenry that is grounded in pan-Africanist philosophies and driven to implement the African renaissance agenda..."³⁵ Critical consciousness and thought leadership also imply that the citizenry in Africa can hold leaders accountable and can shape their affairs.

It is in this context that people-to-people relations become critical and that communities across Africa can determine their own destinies. Indigenous languages are paramount, in this context, both because it is through languages that people can better relate and also it is in the language of the people through which development can take place, as Prah has been arguing. The similarities in indigenous languages in Africa make this possible. People are pushing forward for the regional integration agenda, for it is Pan-African unity that can take Africa forward. Whatever approach to regional integration, it should take this into account. It is the political unification of the African continent that can genuinely take Africa forward. The compromise brought about the Monrovia bloc/group needs revisiting. The challenge with compromises is that even those who are pursuing Pan-Arabism are also involved in regional integration efforts in Africa.

Not only those involved in Pan-Arabism are shaping Africa's regional integration efforts but all manner of imperial agendas is allowed to shape Africa's regional integration agenda. In the name of capacitating technocrats in Africa, including those in RECs, training is offered by those whose interests are not for Africa. African technocrats (Afro-crats as Thandika Mkandawire refers to them) involved in trade negotiations, for instance, travel to the bellies of the beasts to receive training from those that they are supposed to negotiate trade deals with. Regional integration in Africa cannot be successful when important political issues like this one are not addressed. There needs to be recognition that there are various imperialisms that are against advancement of wellbeing in Africa.

Conclusion

Even though African countries have contributed to the proliferation of regional trade agreements in terms of the free market economic approach, trade agreements have not been able to translate into tangible regional integration. The reason is because the free market approach ignores the disconnect existing among Africans due to the perpetration of (neo-) colonialism. And despite the many previous ambitious integration initiatives and the new integration programme, only a Pan-African based regional integration model that prioritizes

people-to-people relations in Africa can work and ensure that Africans benefit from regional integration.

Acknowledging all the good attempts toward the regional integration agenda so far, the paper has problematized the efforts undertaken. Essentially, the paper has made a case for pan-African developmental regional integration as a political agenda grounded on African nationalism, not an economic endeavor that is about increasing market access and such. The Pan-African developmental regional integration agenda has to do with regional integration for the political unification of Africa. At the center of any approach to what pertains to Africa, the global political and socio-economic system that limits possibilities for further advancement of wellbeing in Africa has to be taken into account. Not until Africa and Africans unite, all efforts for the betterment of the African condition will not gain much traction. Regional integration has to be within the context of the political unification of the African continent and the unity of Africans wherever they are.

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