PAPER

Towards Continental Integration in Africa:
Examining the capacity of the African Union Commission (AUC) Institution as a facilitating Tool

Daniel Taye Medoye • Mark I. Rieker

Abstract   This paper is an exploratory attempt to determine the capacity of the African Union Commission (AUC) as an organ of the African Union (AU) in facilitating the integration aspirations of African leaders on the continent. Considered a strategic organ of the AU, this study sets to examine the integrative capacity of the AUC and its ability to sensitise not only African leaders, but also wealthy Africans, notably in the private sector, to pool resources to catalyze efforts towards integration of the continent. This paper proceeds from the premise that, in post-colonial Africa, leaders of newly independent countries became increasingly associated with the idea of integration, and believes that with it, the quest for development on the continent would be facilitated. The authors predicated this inquiry on available and accessed literature to determine a departure from previous studies on integration in Africa and also provides a theoretical framework. This paper notes that at independence, some visionary African leaders foresaw a need for integration as a mechanism for realizing the lofty goals and expectations of the population. These include, good governance – embedded in the principle of rule of law – respect for human rights; provision of security and improvement in the standard of living, all aimed at fostering unity and integration on the continent. Unfortunately, the current situation, with respect to the socio-economic and political well-being of the peoples on the African continent is far from these envisaged results after several decades of political independence. The authors noted scholars' acknowledgement that African's integration efforts over the years have not yielded clearly noticeable and significant success especially with the emergence of challenges of widespread poverty, political misrule resulting in unbridled corruption, endemic diseases, and the sit-tight syndrome of African leaders. Furthermore, it is a generally held view that the pursuit of an integration strategy as a way to facilitate the realization of the objectives of African leaders in meeting the expectations of their peoples has not yielded satisfactory outcomes. The authors viewed the AUC as an organ that plays an interventionist role through policy advocacy which proposes and recommends policies and programmes for the consideration of African leaders during their plenary sessions towards pursuing their integrative goals. The study submits that, if accorded a near-supranational status, the AUC has the potency to galvanise resources and support to facilitate the desired integration of the African continent.

Keywords   Integration - Functionalism - Neo-functionalism - Inter-governmentalism
                        Supranationalism

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Background to the African Union (AU) and the integration agenda

From a historical perspective, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) which transformed into the African Union (AU) was set up on May 25, 1963 in Addis Ababa with a mandate to, among other things, promote unity and solidarity among African States; eradicate all forms of colonialism; co-ordinate and intensify co-operation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa and promote a continental forum designed to catalyse the continent's aspiration agenda. The transmutation from OAU to AU which was formalised in 2012 at the Durban Summit of the African Union could be predicated on the dynamics of socio-economic and political development within the continent in over three decades of its existence as has been acknowledged in the views and writings of scholars and commentators alike. For example, Duodu (2012) and Hestermeyer (2002) observed that with the end of apartheid in South Africa, the major goals of the OAU had been achieved and the dreams of a united Africa regained momentum, and served as the impetus for a rebranding of the organization. This assertion could be true if complete political decolonisation of the continent was the only challenge faced by African countries at independence. But this is not so, as evidenced by the charter of the organization and its mandate referred to earlier.

Hestermeyer (2002) further argues that over time the priorities of the OAU started to change, and issues of human rights, need for good governance, ethnic and religious conflicts, infrastructural disparities, wide spread corruption by African leaders among others, emerged and constituted serious challenges against the organization which unavoidably required collective efforts to address. In response to this, the Heads of States and Government, at an Extraordinary Summit of the OAU held in Sirté, Libya on 9 September 1999, issued the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of the African Union, with a view, inter alia, to accelerate the process of unity among countries of the continent. It was believed that this will enable the organization to better participate in the global economy to more effectively address social, economic and political problems. In the furtherance of this, three summits were held to facilitate the implementation of the African Union. These include the Lome Summit in 2000 which specified the objectives, principles and organs of the AU as enshrined in the Constitutive Act adopted at the summit; the second is the Lusaka Summit in 2001, which drew the roadmap of the implementation of the AU, while the third, the Durban Summit in 2002 was where the AU was formerly launched and witnessed the First Assembly of Heads of States of the African Union, (AU: 2002).

Methodological Approach

This paper is based on literature and discourses on the subject of integration in Africa and relies considerably on relevant extracts predicated on the findings from the thesis of a doctoral degree programme of one of the authors which dealt with African Union and the role of its organs to catalyse the integration agenda of the continent. This paper drew on relevant theoretical models such as Functionalism, Neo-functionalism and Inter-governmentalism to provide reinforcement and context for analysis. Findings from the data generated for the doctoral degree will be deployed and highlighted in this paper, and recommendations arising from the analysis and discussion on the findings will be provided.

Literature Underpinnings

The concept of integration may be considered as old as human society, especially if viewed from the perspective of a collective attempt to advance shared concerns and expand mutual benefits of collaboration. In the contemporary international system, formal integration arrangements evolved in the aftermath of the holocaust that characterized the 2nd World War as an envisaged

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panacea to halt future similar occurrences. In Europe for instance, cooperative arrangements were at the level of economic activities, but soon developed to incorporate political and diplomatic engagements, culminating in the European Union (EU) as it is today. From an historical point of view, the EU could be pin-pointed as a culmination of the sequential process of cooperative engagements that held sway in the 1950s. It is recalled that Frenchman Robert Schuman had opined that pooling together the production of Coal (France) and Steel (Germany) under a given authority would help to obviate the tendency to strife and ultimately, war between the two contingent countries (arch-rivals) and neighbouring countries in Europe (Schuman, 1950).

Specifically, in a declaration by Schuman Foundation of 9th May 1950, European Issue No.204, the following excerpt is considered insightful, and has been lifted to provide a basis for the link between integration and the search for peace in Europe -

> … Schuman had "proposed that Franco-German production of coal and steel as a whole be placed under a common High Authority, within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development as a first step in the federation of Europe, and will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims. The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" Schuman (1950).

The above declaration is generally believed in academic cycles to signal the evolution of economic cooperation which later snowballed into integrative arrangements among certain European countries, aimed towards achieving peace, and avoiding another world holocaust in which the 1st and 2nd world wars resulted. Subsequent and more formal arrangements by European leaders led to the Treaty of the European Union (EU), also known as the Maastricht Treaty which was signed in Maastricht in 1992 and came into force in 1993. This Treaty established the EU and gave Parliament more say in decision-making. Among the four decision-making organs of the EU is the European Commission (EC). This seems to have provided the model after which the African Union Commission has been patterned.

As pointed out in a report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2003), regional integration in Africa continues to hold a central place in the continent's endeavours to achieve economic transformation and attain sustainable socio-economic development. In the view of Qobo (2007), for regional integration in Africa to be a success, African leaders will have to move beyond grand gestures and abstract vision, suggesting that Africa's challenges call for pragmatism and a sense of urgency in action. And that this would require more focused and gradual steps that are carefully executed at the domestic level as the starting point. In this instance, the focus of such steps at the domestic level should be on bold and sustainable political and economic reforms. In Africa intergovernmental cooperative arrangements are as old as the independence era. However, this is not to prejudice the existence of cooperative arrangements prior to independence. As noted by Maruping (2005), some of the many African sub-regional arrangements have a long history of existence, dating back to the pre-independence era, but have been characterised by occasional stagnations or reversals in a few cases, and only modest achievements at best in others. Some of the African regional arrangements also cover issues of common interest in the areas of public governance, defence and security among other socio-economic and political dimensions. For instance, in the West African sub-region, attempts towards regional integration started with the Ghana-Guinea Union formed in 1958, to which Mali joined in 1960, known as Union of Independent African States. This Union, described as a loose organisation disbanded in 1963,

served as a quasi-model and a catalyst for subsequent efforts toward integration on the continent. Martin (2002) argues that post-independence African leaders had consistently pursued policies of regional cooperation and integration as a means of promoting socio-economic development and of reducing their dependence on the West. Martin however noted that while African scholars and policy-makers generally agreed on the need and desirability of African unity, they tended to disagree on the level, strategy, and ultimate goal of unification as well as on the scope of cooperation. This situation may be adduced to be a contributory factor for the slowness of the pursuit of harmonization of policies that African leaders have tended to contend within their aspirations for integration on the continent. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), integrative activities have clearly manifested on the economic front, according to a report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA:2004), and this is evident in the establishment of such bodies as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in 1983, The Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) in 1989, East African Community (EAC) in 1999, replacing the Permanent Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation which itself was formed in 1967, and the South African Development Community (SADC) in 1992, formerly the South African Development Co-ordination Conference established in 1980. Maruping (2007), Gibb (2009), Tavares and Tang (2011), while admitting that the various sub-regional economic groupings have recorded some successes, though minimal, they have also been faced with challenges which include among others, membership issues; slow ratification of protocols and reluctant implementation of agreed plans; socio-economic policy divergence as well as limited national and regional capacity. This study observes that the foregoing challenges are clearly sub-regionally based, and perhaps reflects the different colonial experiences of the African states notably in language and culture.

It is the contemplation of this study therefore that the attention of the contemporary African leaders would seem not to have been directed on internal mechanisms or institutions within the African Union in the context of their capacities. For example, the African Union Commission which serves as the secretariat for the articulation of policy guidelines and implementation of resolutions toward continental aspirations has not been subjected to discourses or critique to determine its efficacy on its mandate. This paper opines that such an inquiry is relevant in the contemporary times based on the statutory duty of the organ and also of necessity in view of the role of its European counterpart (the European Commission) whose impact on the European Union (EU) offers insights in a paper such as this.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Perhaps, it is noteworthy to mention that a great deal of scholarly work had been done on the issue of the integration of the African continent, and that it is widely acknowledged by scholars and commentators alike that such an initiative is a panacea to Africa's growth and development. The myriad literature on integration has unavoidably reflected on what the authors describe as the underlying theoretical frameworks which justify the phenomenon of integration. The authors will rely on select theoretical models to provide a reinforcement for this paper. These include Functionalism theory pioneered by David Mitrany, (Mitrany: 1943); Neo-functionalism theory led by Ernst Haas, (Haas: 1964); and the theory of Inter-governmentalism as conceived by Michelle Cini (Cini: 2010).

In examining the Neo-functionalist paradigm and its applicability to justify the capacity of the AUC in this paper, it is relevant to note the position of Haas, as a Neo-functionalist. Haas (1964) supports a direction that would permit the need for both experts and persons who have more influence on national policies to be involved in activities designed to be integrative.

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Haas further argues as follows - organisation must develop an ideology that is compatible with the sub-goals of potential supporters, and which binds the organisation's staff; organisation's decisions should be made so as to upgrade common interests and that organisation's powers and objectives are extended; programming should proceed within the confines of organisation ideology and care should be taken that sub-goals do not become dominant over the more general ideology. By application, Haas prescriptions can be justified in the establishment and operations of the AU as an organization which exists to serve the interest of member states. In carrying out its functions, the AU is peopled by experts in various fields of human endeavors who can translate the vision of the Union into practical terms. In a more specific context, Schmitter (2002), suggests that neo-functionalism represents a theory of regional integration that places emphasis on the role of non-state actors – especially, the secretariat – of the regional organisation involved and those of interest associations and social movements that form at the level of the region in providing the dynamic for further integration. Schmitter further asserts that member states of such organisations remain important actors in the process. The member states set the terms of the initial agreement, even though they do not exclusively determine the direction and extent of the subsequent change. This inexclusivity has to do with the nature of the international environment which is globalized and dynamic with the possibility of volatility. However, the ability of a regional community, such as Africa to facilitate growth and development of the continent, would seem to be better enhanced through an integrative arrangement which requires an integrating authority such the AU and its implementing organ - the AUC.

In the context of Inter-governmentalism theory, Garza (2006) contends that governments control the level and speed of state integration and that any increase in power at supranational level results from a direct decision by governments. This theory further posits that integration driven by national governments is often based on the domestic political and economic issues of the day. Garza however submits that, unlike a federal state, member states fully retain their sovereignty and participate voluntary being subject to the supranational government only so far as they decide to remain members. Implicit in the foregoing is that sovereign and independent states, sharing common ideas on how positively to relate together, could enter into an agreement to form an entity for the advancement of their interests, which could be economic and political. And such is the African Union. The relevance of inter-governmentalism as a theory therefore derives from the standpoint that every inter-governmental organisation gets its statutory and enabling power from the Member States that created it, and that its operational capacity depends on the amount of commitment bestowed on it by the states. The AUC as an organ of the AU is a subset charged with the responsibility to implement decisions of the organization on behalf of African leaders. The relevant question that should arise here is – Does the AUC possess the authority to enforce implementation of its mandate on African leaders? The answer to this question in the light of the findings arising from the data generated for this study, and as presented in the previous chapter is No, especially in the present circumstance. This is because the AUC derives its strength and resources from the Member states of the AU. However, this is not to say that the AUC is totally ineffective as a result. After all, some developments within the organization in terms of fresh initiatives and ideas on how to empower the organization to achieve its set objectives, attributable to the AUC, are indications of its ability to facilitate integration efforts in Africa.

The AUC as an institution seeks to become *"an efficient and value-adding institution driving the African integration and development process in collaboration with African Union Member states, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and the African citizens"* (AUC Website). The Commission is the key organ playing a central role in the day-to-day management of the AU. Among others, the commission represents the Union and defends its interests; drafts common

positions of the Union; prepares strategic plans and studies for the consideration of the Economic Council; elaborates, promotes, coordinates and harmonizes the programmes and policies of the Union with those of the RECs; and ensures the mainstreaming of gender in all programmes and activities of the Union.

The AUC in pursuit of its mandate plays an interventionist role through policy advocacy for use by member states by way of adopting policies and programmes that would usher good governance for peaceful co-existence among their peoples, (NAN Report: 2014). A current initiative in this respect is the establishment of the African Union Foundation (AUF) which represents a bold step by the AUC for the overall benefit of African countries. In specific terms, the mission of the AUF is to mobilise resources in support of the African Union's vision of an integrated, people-centred and prosperous Africa at peace with itself and taking its rightful place in the world (AUC website: 2002).

Data collection, analysis and discussion of findings

As indicated earlier the authors draw considerably from the findings of the doctoral thesis of one of the authors which dealt with the African Union and the role of its organs (in this case, the African Union Commission) to catalyse the integration agenda of the continent. In the thesis, the following research question were posed –

How can the AUC drive and facilitate integration in Africa?
- What are the challenges facing AU's integration arrangements in Africa?
- How would you assess the various sub-regional communities as building blocks for integration in Africa in terms of successes and failures?
- How can the international environment influence the AUC in its integration efforts?
- What policy options and recommendations can be identified and proposed by the AUC for effective of integration.

To be able to address these research questions, the researcher formally contacted target participants at the secretariat of the Africa Union; the New Partnership for Africa's Development (an agency of the AU); the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; the South Africa Institute for International Affairs, on the basis of their involvement with and knowledge of the activities of the continental body. This aligns with the criteria of sampling as espoused by Spradley (1979) which include – enculturation and involvement. By enculturation, Spradley refers to a situation when information is sought from someone who is very familiar with the setting or domain of the needed data, while current involvement is concerned with accessing those with current knowledge about the subject of research. Consequently, the AUC personnel and those from affiliate bodies such NEPAD and the UNECA are genuine sources of information for this study.

In carrying out the fieldwork to generate data for the thesis, the researcher sampled a total of thirty five (35) participants spread across the institutions targeted, and conducted interviews whereby the data collated were synthesized and the following findings emerged. On question one (Q1) of this study which sought to find out the role of the AUC and if it can facilitate integration on the continent.

All the participants in their respective responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the role and mandate of the AUC as an implementation organ to deliver on the decisions of the AU. It has been mentioned in this study that the AUC as an organ of the AU, emerged to replace the former Secretariat of the Organisation of African Union having been adopted at the Durban Summit of the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government which held from 9-10 July 2002. Article 20 of the African Union states as follows –

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> *"There shall be established a Commission of the Union, which shall be the Secretariat of the Union. The Commission shall be composed of the Chairman, his or her deputy or deputies and the Commissioners. They shall be assisted by the necessary staff for the smooth functioning of the Commission. The structure, functions and regulations of the Commission shall be determined by the Assembly", AU Constitutive Act (2002).*

This paper argues that there is no ambiguity about the role and the mandate of the AUC, and that it is an organ whose sole responsibility is to pursue the implementation of the decisions of the AU as may have been adopted. This speaks to the somewhat weak position of the AUC on account of its inability to enforce compliance on African leaders to provide the necessary environment, conditions and ultimately, needed resources the AUC requires for coordination and facilitation responsibility. However, the AUC is not a supranational body or organ like the European Commission (EC), and therefore does not possess a coercive capacity to compel any member state of the AU to obey and carry out any agreed instructions. As indicated earlier , the AUC is in a dilemma being an appendage of the AU in spite of its being peopled with seasoned experts and diplomats. This can be seen in quality of elected and appointed officials for all the organs of the AU. For example, the current Chairperson of the AUC was a former Prime Minister in the Republic of Chad, while the current Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council is is the Nigerian Ambassador to Ethiopia.

The question that would be asked is whether the AUC can facilitate integration efforts in Africa which this study question one (Q1) seeks to answer. In providing answer to this question, it will be worthwhile to reflect on the environment in which the AUC has had to operate. It will be recalled that the assumption of office of the outgone Chairperson of the organ, Her Excellency, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was characterized by infighting within the AU. This internecine rivalry arising from this can be measured in terms of the view by Maasho (2012) thus, "the issue of political infighting within the AU appears to be a volatile phenomenon that has continued to haunt the growth of the organisation. As pointed out by Maasho (2012), the election of the current Chairperson, Dr Nkozasana Dlamini Zuma on the 15th July 2012 was reported to be a culmination of a bruising leadership battle that had threatened to divide and weaken the organisation. The contest to head the Commission of the 54-member organisation had been deadlocked since the vote at the previous Summit ended in a stalemate.

> *Maasho (2012) noted that the impasse that persisted through the Summit of the AU heads had prompted the then African Union's Chairperson, President Boni Yayi to warn African heads of states that the inability and failure of the organisation to resolve the leadership deadlock would divide and weaken and undermine its credibility in the world. Undercurrents at the Summit suggested that the contest between the outgoing Chairperson, Dr Jean Ping and Dr Nkozasana Zuma had clearly reinforced the polarity between the Francophone and the Anglophone member states of the Union. While the former reportedly had the support of the French speaking member states, the latter obtained the patronage and support of the English speaking member states, especially from the Eastern and Southern African countries".*

Consequent upon this background, it can be inferred that the ability of the AUC to facilitate integration in Africa may be faced with some challenges internal to it. However, it is noteworthy to reiterate that the AUC as its interventionist role of has been demonstrated through the establishment of the African Union Foundation (AUF: 2013). This is an initiative of the AUC designed to assist in financing the African priorities through voluntary contributions. In specific terms, the mission of the AUF is to mobilise resources in support of the AU's vision of an integrated, people-oriented and prosperous Africa, at peace with itself and taking its rightful place

in the world. At the inaugural meeting of the foundation by its promoters which consists of the Chairperson and twelve others, the Chairperson – also the founder on behalf of the Commission, suggested that it was time for Africa to mobilise its own resources in support of its development and take charge of its destiny, AUF (2013).

In particular, the Chairperson was of the view that the foundation will strive to more deeply engage Africa's private sector, African individuals and communities and leading African philanthropists to generate resources and provide valuable insights on ways in which their success can enhance the growth and development of Africa. In furtherance of this, the AU at its July Summit in Kigali adopted as one of its resolutions, African leaders agreeing to raise about one-point-two-billion ($1.2) US dollars a year to fund the African Union Commission to enable it carry out its mandate as an organ of the organisation. It is believed that this development will enhance the capacity of the AUC to carry out its mandate to implement decisions in pursuit of the goal of the organisation for the continent.

On research question two (Q2), which borders on the major and remote challenges facing integration efforts of the AU, the participants' responses have been synthesised by the researcher thematically as reproduced here below –

- Lack of political will and commitment
- Unequal economic capabilities
- Differing vestiges of colonial legacies, coupled with predisposition of the former imperial masters to maintain a dependency syndrome
- Multi-cultural nature of African economies and non-competitiveness of products
- Differing political interests of African leaders
- Corruption, tyranny and perpetuity in office.

The researcher alluded to what could be regarded as the remote challenges the AUC seems to be contending against. The challenges were identified in the publications emanating from a non-governmental and independent think tank known as the Conflict for Conflict Resolution, based in Cape Town, and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany (2012). These include the issue of political infighting within the AU which appears to be a volatile phenomenon that has continued to haunt the growth of the organisation; the allegation of administrative failures associated with the AU; the issue of overlapping inter-agency responsibility; the challenge of low rates of intra-African trade and its attendant consequences; the AUC's effectiveness also believed to be hampered by the challenge of low staffing; and finally, the unwillingness of member states to pay their dues and annual subscription. As a consequence, the organisation is being described as lacking effective leadership (in addition to the other challenges beyond its control) significantly because of its inability to enforce compliance on member states to meet their obligations.

The issue of lack of political will and commitment on the part of African leaders in the pursuit of the organisations' agenda seems to be a paramount challenge to the continent's aspiration towards integration. As observed in the reactions of the participants in this study, African leaders are yet to show enough collective readiness and willingness to pursue the goal of integration through practical demonstration of intentions which will result in effective harmonisation of policies and protocols leading to result-oriented execution. It will be recalled that a participant from NEPAD had remarked that African leaders' desire towards integration is not in doubt, especially in terms of policy commitment and protocols adopted so far. However, the journey towards integration is not an easy one. While there are leaders who are genuinely committed, there are others who seem to be hypocritical and therefore create some form of bottlenecks with no authority to enforce actions towards implementation of the organisation's programmes. With regard to the issue of unequal economic capabilities subsisting among the member countries of

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the AU, the researcher notes the common narrative in the responses of the research participants which tends to confirm this claim of inequality. Among the fifty four (54) independent and member states of the AU, it is noteworthy to argue that just a few can be said to be developing while a majority of nation-states are very poor in the strict economic sense. This is because, in much of the continent, there is widespread poverty, incidences of diseases, poor and bad governance system, coupled with tyranny and civil dictatorship. Given the mono-cultural nature of African economies, and the non-competitiveness of products produced on the continent, the volume of intra-Africa trade has not been significant to propel development of the continent. In a publication by NEPAD titled Move Africa (2016), the share of intra-African trade in Africa's total trade over the past decade was only about 11%. The implication of this is the generally held view that African countries are dependent economies, and do not have capacity to engage in competitive trading activities.

On the effects of differing colonial experiences and the perpetuation of dependency consideration, all the participants are agreed that African countries are still tied to the apron strings of their former colonial masters. The ties can be viewed in the context of what the former imperial powers stand to benefit in such a relationship. It is generally argued that the continent of Africa accounts for a significant portion of the resources available for exploitation by the former colonial powers who will do anything to preserve their grip on Africa. According to Adisa and Agbaje (1986), Africa is known to possess vast reserves of natural resources in form of minerals and serve as immediate raw materials for the industrial needs of the colonial masters. On the other hand, the failure of the African leaders to provide good leadership on the continent, coupled with the tendency to perpetuate office indefinitely is also being regarded as having the connivance of the western powers. Shaw (1989) contends that while Africa is the largest regional sub-system in terms of territorial size and number of states, it is unarguably the least industrialised and characterized by the most inequality. This perhaps explains the dependency syndrome that characterizes African countries relations with the European powers.

The phenomenon of corruption and greed, sustained by tyranny and dictatorship, African leaders have not disguised their tendency in this regard, but have created structures around leadership that seem to assist in preserving their stay in office. The fallout of this is the widening level of poverty and the temptations to rebellion by the people. In this instance, there has been a rise in civil strives in much of Africa in the last one decade in protest against bad governance lack of respect to constitutional provisions guiding tenures of office.

In assessing the effectiveness of the sub-regional bodies as building blocks for continental integration arrangements representing research question three, all the participants in the study agreed that such framework is very relevant and has contributed in some way to demonstrate the essence of economic cooperation among countries within the respective regions. ECOWAS for instance has facilitated the movement of people across the region through the adoption of a regional travel document such as the international passport, and has also permitted a travel free visa for a period of three months within the region. This has reportedly been replicated in the East African Community.

All the interviewed participants admitted that the sub-regional organisations indeed provide a platform for continental integration project, especially with the level of relative successes recorded in each region. For example, in the area of free movement of goods and services, the ECOWAS, ECA and SADC, etc, can be tipped to have made significant impact in their respective regions. According to some of the participants, while it can be said that the African Union (AU) has an excellent development model on ground, this, in practice, has not been the case with the sub-regional bodies because of the following factors, and these include the fact that

the regional bodies were created on separate treaties that have nothing to do with the AU. This brings about loyalty issues and challenges. These sub-regional groupings don't report to the AU but to their national governments. Besides, there are competing demands between the AU and the sub-regional bodies which seem to result into duplications in many areas. The AU and its member states only appear to converge on issues of peace and security, as well as, on governance (in particular, election matters). Furthermore, the AU suffers from what can be referred to as the "big brother mentality" where the relatively bigger and stronger member-states call the shots all the time. Essentially, with the differing, and sometimes contradicting internal structures of the sub-regional bodies from the set up at the AUC level, the role of coordination of their activities by the AUC remains an intractable challenge.

Besides, further consideration on the relevance of sub-regional bodies, and particularly focusing the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), which starts Libya down to Zimbabwe, the view that sub-regional bodies can lead to integration of the continent may be plausible as observed by some AUC participants. However, they submitted that it all depends on the final objectives being pursued or intended. COMESA for instance, has so far not mentioned about political integration, but has continued to emphasise economic integration. Member states are often divided on which direction to follow between economic and political integration. It is clear then that the problem with the AU is its mandate, structure and powers, hence, impeding the role of the AUC which relies on the mandate of the AU. There is the need to decentralize the focus and objectives of the organisation and for the implementing organs to be given more resources and effective power and authority. In all of this, there seems to be a collective acceptance by the participants, of the relevance and effectiveness of regional economic communities to offer a credible platform upon which a continental superstructure can be laid, subject to unwavering political will and commitment of African leaders in this regard. Reactions by the participants to research question four (Q4) which borders on how can the international environment influence the AUC in its integration efforts, showed a unanimous position which depicts an influential relationship. As presented in chapter five, the AUC participants' disclosures of the level of assistance coming from the donors who are principally outside the African continent to support the latter's programmes lend credence to the unavoidable influence under review.

Specifically, the participants responded as follows – With over 90% of AU program budget financed by external forces, the organization is clearly made to dance to the tune of the funders. Donors put in money to sustain their interest. For instance, donors tend to put their money to ensure peace and security and in the contemporary times, paying attention to migration issues. The international environment does and can influence integration arrangement in Africa. Integration is not done in a vacuum. Africa is equally a player in the international environment, and can be affected by developments therein. The influence can either be positive or negative, depending on the policy initiatives and drive of the integration arrangement of the integrators and the policy direction of the blocs outside of the African environment, such as the European Union (EU) and BRICS, etc.

In another dimension, there are arguments that given the issues associated with globalization, African continent cannot be immune to events happening around the international system. These include technological advancement in transport and communications and attendants improvements in information travels and services delivery across the world. UNECA participants provided the following supporting views –

> .....Unstable and volatile global environment, triggered by politico-economic upheavals, will and have continued to negatively affect integration efforts in Africa. There is no doubt that the European integration experience offers some insights for Africa.

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Scholars like Arnold Rivkin contend that African presence in the world economy is an indication of its leaders' determination to give meaning to their political independence by developing support economies. And this would require a determined effort to catch up with the developed states, with other areas of the world, and with one another, Rivkin (1963). Implicit in the above submission, is the fact that having suffered economic deprivations and political subjugation for a period referred to as the colonial era, Africa would need to have practical affinity and interactions with the international system in spite of clear structural disparities that characterize the global system. In so doing, Africa will unavoidably be affected one way or the other by happenings outside of the continent. As remarked by some of the study participants, such effect could either be positive or negative.

Regarding the research question five (Q5) which sought to explore potential policy options and recommendations that can be identified and proposed by the AUC for effective of integration of the continent, the participants submitted as reproduced below - Leadership is of essence in the efforts to achieve results in every endeavour. In the case of the AUC, its leadership must be purposeful, committed, unbiased, transparent, and focused. While it is noted that the AU has enough of policies and resolutions aimed at achieving the goal of integration in Africa, the following recommendations will be offered for consideration – Overlapping membership challenge should be urgently addressed to give room for a clear political commitment; given the challenge of economic inequalities among member states, new policy instrument to deal with the fears of economic polarization must be explored, e.g, multispeed arrangement which requires allowing weaker member states more time to liberalize; Private sector groups to be adequately involved in the integration project; Disputes resolution mechanisms must be strengthened and ways to ensure policy credibility must be pursued; Peace and security to be enhanced because wars and conflicts in a number of African regions and countries which have devastated transport networks, poor communications networks and inadequate and damaged infrastructure need to be resolved. On issues of greed and corruption, the AU should adopt a protocol on zero tolerance for corruption by African leaders, promote transparency and accountability in government. Political institutions in African countries should be strengthened so that it will be very easy to vote out corrupt leaders during elections. Leadership is of essence in the efforts to achieve results in every endeavour. In the case of the AUC, its leadership must be purposeful, committed, unbiased, transparent, and focused. While it is noted that the AU has enough of policies and resolutions aimed at achieving the goal of integration in Africa, the following recommendations will be offered for consideration – Overlapping membership challenge should be urgently addressed to give room for a clear political commitment; given the challenge of economic inequalities among member states, new policy instrument to deal with the fears of economic polarization must be explored, e.g, multispeed arrangement which requires allowing weaker member states more time to liberalize; Private sector groups to be adequately involved in the integration project; Disputes resolution mechanisms must be strengthened and ways to ensure policy credibility must be pursued; Peace and security to be enhanced because wars and conflicts in a number of African regions and countries which have devastated transport networks, poor communications networks and inadequate and damaged infrastructure need to be resolved. On issues of greed and corruption, the AU should adopt a protocol on zero tolerance for corruption by African leaders, promote transparency and accountability in government. Political institutions in African countries should be strengthened so that it will be very easy to vote out corrupt leaders during elections.

Critically viewed, the following themes were captured from participants' responses to research question five -

- Need for good governance and purposeful leadership;
- Internalise sources of funding in order to reduce dependency syndrome;

- Establishing relevant and manageable structure/resolving overlapping membership incidences;
- Develop and adopt workable and practicable treaties and priortise developmental programmes;
- Respect for rule of law, human rights, and promotion of genuine democratic practice;
- Greater level of commitment to common continental agenda;
- Promotion of and respect for Pan-Africanist ideals to facilitate unity and cohesion.

Participants from SAIIA specifically contended that the AUC can only provide the necessary platform where decisions on integration can be explored and pursued towards implementation. This view is predicated on the somewhat weak position of the AUC which, on its own, does not have any enforcement authority over member states. Hence, African leaders who have the responsibility to demonstrate the needed political will for integration, should engage more in intense consultation to encourage unenthusiastic members to get on board.

Concluding remarks

This study set out to critically examine the capacity of the African Union Commission (AUC) to facilitate the integration agenda to which African leaders had expressed commitment in the context of institutional capacities and the challenges of continental integration. It is worth repeating that the AUC is one of the organs of the African Union (AU) which conducts the administrative affairs of the continental organization, and charged with the responsibility to implement the decisions and resolutions of union which may arise from either its ordinary or extra-ordinary summits.

Considering the challenges which could pass for limitations, and in view of the findings that emerged from both the fieldwork and the strength of the literature accessed and applied, the following conclusive remarks about this study can be highlighted.

Firstly, and in reaction to research question one, the authors argue that the African Union Commission (AUC) being the organ in charge of the Secretariat of the African Union (AU), can facilitate integration agenda of the organization. This assertion is in consonance with the status of the AUC having being vested with the statutory responsibility to represent the Union and defend its interests under the guidance of and as mandated by the Assembly of Heads of State and government and the Executive Council, and also implementing the decisions taken by Policy Organs. Additionally, the mandate of the AUC which empowers it to initiate proposals for consideration by Policy Organs – The Assembly and the Executive Council – portrays the AUC as having the ability of the organ to perform accordingly.

Secondly, despite the enormity of the challenges facing integration efforts in Africa as has been established from the findings, the researcher submits that the goal of continental integration is achievable. What is perhaps required is for African leaders to muster courage and take steps to address the identified impediments, many of which are self-inflicted. These include the intractable factor of absence of political commitment needed to collectively resolve issues on which there are differences; non-payment of annual dues and subscriptions by member states; over-reliance on external support and its dependency syndrome; greed, corruption and sit-tightism and its accompanying consequences such as civil strifes, wars, diseases, etc. On this basis, the researcher argues that a deliberate effort by African leaders to replace their personal interest with the interest of their peoples will mark a turning point in the pursuit of the goal of continental development.

Thirdly, on whether the sub-regional bodies can provide a platform for the integration agenda of the continent, the authors contend that the level of successes recorded within each of

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the regional economic communities is an indication that such can be replicated on the continent. For example, free movement of goods and services in ECOWAS and the EAC, may be seen as a catalyst to the adoption of the African passport which was launched at the 27th African Summit in Kigali in 2016. Even though the continental travel document is still being developed, its evolution points to the fact that the integration aspirations for Africa are gaining momentum. The impact of ECOWAS passport as a travel document for the citizens of the region has greatly facilitated travels within the region and goes to validate the claim of regional economic communities as requisite building blocks upon which a continental institution can stand.

Fourthly, the views expressed by the study participants whether the international environment can or does influence integration efforts in Africa leads the authors to agree less. As indicated in the discussion in chapter six, African continent cannot be immune to events happening around the international system. By implication therefore, any occurrence within Africa will either trigger another round of events outside the continent or contend with the effects emanating from the international system as a consequence of an action previously taken. For example, it was also noted that unstable and volatile global environment, will and have continued to negatively affect integration efforts in Africa, in terms of slow response to demands for attention or for aid in the area of finance, infrastructure and security. Therefore, happenings in Africa, including integration arrangements, trade and commerce will be influenced by events outside of the continent, especially now that the world is a globalized system.

Fifthly, the authors align with the view by a majority of the respondents to the effect that there is no famine of policies, treaties, protocols and agreements aimed at leading Africa to its desired level of development. But what seems to be a source of worry is the widely accepted view of absence of political will or commitment by African leaders to concretise their decisions in respect of their developmental agenda. Besides, the failure to accept and practise democratic values and respect for rule of law as essential ingredients to building a stable society on the continent is the bane of development in Africa. These challenges, if not addressed, will continue to haunt the continent.

Recommendations

All said, the authors are of the opinion that reflecting on the results of this study, as espoused in chapter six, dedicated to discussion of findings, conclusive remarks above, theory and extant literature reviewed, the researcher makes recommendations on the following areas – the role of the AUC; challenges facing integration in Africa; regional economic communities as building blocks; influence of the external environment on integration efforts; and policy options to speed up integration in Africa.

On the AUC and its role, the authors recommend that the 32-action points which spell out the functions of the organ could better streamlined, made issue-based and workable. This will require that duties or functions which may have been duplicated or which bear considerable similarity, would be realigned and put together. Doing this will define and present a template of action that would make for easy implementation of decisions on issues and resolutions adopted towards achieving target goals.

On challenges facing integration in Africa, the authors recommend very strongly that the refrain of lack of political will associated with African leaders required for effective action should be addressed with utmost urgency, so that implementation of decisions could proceed seamlessly. With respect to the issue of overlapping membership associated with the regional economic communities and consequences for continental issues, the researcher recommends that appropriate steps should be taken by member states to redress the condition and with the

required sense of urgency willingness. While the new initiative on funding whereby member states have committed to raise funds from a levy on imports at a given percentage, the researcher recommends that this step should be backed up with noticeable action. Member states should also see their membership dues and subscription as an obligation that cannot be treated with levity, but should be viewed seriously. On greed, corruption and sit-tightism, the authors acknowledge with delight, the intervention by ECOWAS in the situation in Gambia leading to the ouster of the former President, and strongly recommend similar reaction in any country on the continent where the leader refuses to abdicate power even after losing election.

Regarding an assessment of regional economic communities (RECs) as building blocks for integration at the continental level, the authors acknowledge the role and impact of the bodies and recommends that the necessary support be given them for greater level of successes than currently is. In the view of some of the AUC participants, sub-regional organisations as building blocks provided an opportunity to reach the grassroots, and as such, will be better placed to discharge their functions if given the support they require. As noted under the conclusive remarks above, integration has recorded visible success at the sub-regional level in terms of harmonization of policies in the area of movement of people and goods, and this has provided an impetus for a replication at the continental stage. The ECOWAS experience readily comes out for mention.

On the impact of the external environment on integration efforts in Africa, the authors note that given the globalized nature of the world system, Africa remains a participant in the system and will be affected by occurrences therein. Consequently, the authors recommend that African leaders should be more united than ever in their cooperative engagements and forge a solid front to be an active participant alongside others in the international system. As a first step in this regard, issues of leadership challenges should be addressed, and that deliberate efforts be made to provide good governance anchored on respect for democratic practice, rule of law, and fundamental human rights. Besides, it is recommended that African leaders should seek to achieve growth of their economies for the purpose of development of their peoples, especially through the creation of a conducive society, integrated to collectively pursue common goals for the benefit of their peoples. This can be facilitated by massive provision and development of infrastructure, manpower development programmes through the provision educational facilities for improve literacy.

On policy options to speed up integration, the authors acknowledge existing policy guidelines, protocols and resolutions adopted to pursue integration agenda on the continent as highlighted in the course of this study, but would recommend as follows –
That the AUC, as an implementing organ be strengthened perhaps to the level of supranational entity by which it could enforce compliance with agreed decisions by member states. Although, this suggestion may appear to be difficult, its adoption will no doubt, catalyse efforts towards development on the continent.

That the policy of engaging private individuals and non-state actors for resource mobilization is noteworthy, and being a novel initiative, and first ever endeavour of its nature the continental body has embarked on should be given a chance to evolve. It will be recalled that the African Union Foundation (AUF) founded in 2013 was a practical development in this regard. It is an initiative of the AUC designed to assist in financing the African priorities through voluntary contributions.

Furthermore, since finance has been identified a major challenge of the organisation as it seeks to pursue its goals, it is recommended that the inward-looking strategy of an imposition of levy which came out as one of the resolutions at the 27th AU Summit in Kigali in 2016 should be enforced and maintained. By so doing, the ability of the AUC to carry out its implementation

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mandate will be enhanced and chances of more visible successes will be high.

Finally, the authors note that the vestiges of colonialism still remain a scourge, and continually hamper the speed of decision making process at the AU. Of particular concern is the manifestation of divergences on the basis of differing languages in Africa and its challenges. Against this situation, the researcher would admonish African leaders to seek to relegate the impact of language barrier to give room for more productive engagement and interactions to facilitate greater socio-economic and political framework in the interest of the citizens of the continent.

The paper submits that, if accorded a near-supranational status and given the requisite authority to act, the AUC has the potency to galvanise resources and support to facilitate the much desired integration of the African continent.

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