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THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

International integration- a process of shifting upward of sovereignty from state to supranational institutions, is a reality of modern day globalized world. Thus, states across the globe are increasingly getting involved in different forms and levels of integration platforms. Africa is not an exception, as African leaders formed the African Union in 1992 (an off-shoot of the organization of African Unity OAU). Today, twenty years after, the debate is on whether the move has really helped Africa and Africans. The challenge of this paper therefore is an evaluation of the African Union in respect of its stated objectives. In doing this, the neo-functional theory was employed as an explanatory tool. The findings of the study indicate that the biggest challenge facing African integration today is the issue of leadership. Thus while there are many extraneous obstacles and challenges to African integration, the major challenge remains internal and therefore any serious efforts at integration must first of all address the leadership question. Keywords: African Union, Integration, Leadership, Development

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Introduction

The origin of the Africa Union lies in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) which it replaced. The OAU was established in May 1963 at Addis-Ababa Ethiopia, at the prompting of the late Emperor Haile Salassie of Ethiopia. The meeting of Addis Ababa was convened to discuss “how best to forge a single political organization that could promote and sustain unity, socio-economic and public development as well as eradicate colonialism in Africa” (Obi, Ozor & Nwokoye, 2012, p.192).

Nearly fifty years after its formation, it was apparent that the Union has not gone far in terms of meeting the goals and aspirations of its founding fathers hence, the need for change. The reasons for the failure of the OAU are varied. Though different scholars have outlined various reasons for its failure, we identify with Arora(1984) views that internal political rivalries, ideological differences and conflicting ties with major powers have further stood in the way of the effective working of the organization.

Thus the formation of the AU in 2002 via the ‘Sirte Declaration’ offered a glimpse of hope that it may be the needed tonic to help Africa out of the woods, where she has been for long. However ten years after, the story is not much different. Africa still remains the poorest continent in the world. Hunger, poverty, diseases, wars and generally poor human living conditions are still prevalent in the continent.

This study is an attempt to look at the Africa Union as a regional integration effort *vis-à-vis* the leadership challenges facing Africa. The essence is to interrogate the leadership factor as an essential ingredient in development. This study is divided into six parts including the introduction. The second part offers a theoretical review of the integration theory on which the study is anchored. The third part looks at the concept of regional integration. The fourth is a

brief look at the AU in terms of its objectives and challenges so far. The fifth reviews the leadership question in Africa, while the last serves as the conclusion.

Integration Theory

International integration refers to the process by which supernatural institutions replace national ones-the gradual shifting upward of sovereignty from state to regional or global structures. The ultimate expression of this is the merger of many states into a single state or ultimately into a single world government (Goldstein, 2003, p.379). It is further seen by Haas (1958) as the “process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states.”(p.16).

The integration theory is seen as having originated from functionalism. Functionalism according to Diego (2006, p.3) is a theory of international relations that arose principally from the experience of the second world war and a strong concern about the obsolescence of the state as a form of social organization. Functionalists instead of agreeing with the realist view of self interest of nation states as a motivating factor, rather focus on common interests and the needs shared by states and non-state actors in a process of global integration, triggered by the erosion of state sovereignty and the increasing weight of knowledge and hence of scientists and experts in the process of policy making. In the functionalism theory, international integration, the collective governance and interdependence between states develops its own internal dynamics as states integrate in limited functional, technical and economic areas. The functional theory was later modified by scholars to be able to explain developments in Europe. This is referred to as neo functionalism.

Neo functionalism argue that economic integration (functionalism) generates a political dynamic that drives integration further. Close economic ties require more political coordination in order to operate effectively and eventually lead to political integration as well- a process called spill over (Goldstein 2003, p.380). Sinnot (1993) believes the theory of integration has gone through three phases. These are Trans nationalism and neo functionalism, a second short-lived phase characterized by an intense revisionism in the late 1960s and early 1970's and the third contemporary phase or revival. In the first phase, sense of community was an essential element, thus explaining why integration was defined as a matter of mutual consideration of partial identification in terms of semi-images and interests, of mutually successful predictions of behaviours and of cooperative actions in accordance with it(Deutsch et al; 1957, p.36). The twelve conditions that were seen as essential to the process of integration include: mutual compatibility of main values; a distinctive way of life; we values, institutions and habits of action that mark the area off from major neighbours, unbroken links of social communication both across territories and across strata; broadening of political elite, both in regard to recruitment from wider strata and in regard to connections between strata, mobility of persons and a multiplicity of ranges of communication and transition; and mutual predictability of behaviour (Sinnot 1993.p.3)

The neo functionalists on their own restricted the main motives for integration to integrationist elites, without according much weight or importance to public opinion. This led to the second phase which was revisionist, where a lot of importance was accorded public opinion in the process of integration, which (Sinnot, 1993) believes “the key concept in this regard and one of particular contemporary relevance is politicization” which involves “a broadening of the

arena of participants, in which political legitimizing decision-makers and broad political opinion became more heavily involved as integration decisions make heavier incursions upon national sovereignty and the identitive functions of the states”(p.4).

The third phase which is quite recent involves different strands but also incorporates a core concern for public opinion especially in this era of democratization all over the world.

Regional Integration In Africa

Regional integration arrangement is a preferential (usually reciprocal) agreement among countries that reduces barriers to economic and non economic transactions (Economic Commission For Africa {ECA}, 2004 p. 9). At present, there are different types of regional integration arrangements in the world . The ECA (2004) has listed six different forms that exist today. They are:-

1. Preferential trade area- an arrangement in which members apply lower tariffs to imports produced by other members than to imports produced by non members. Members can determine tariffs on imports from non members.
2. Free trade area- a preferential trade area with no tariffs on imports from other members. As in preferential trade areas, members can determine tariffs on imports from non members.
3. Customs union- a free trade area in which members impose common tariffs on non members. Members may also cede sovereignty to a single customs administration.
4. Common markets- a custom union that allows free movement of the factors of production (such as capital and labour) across national borders within the integration area.

5. Economic union- a common market with unified monetary and fiscal policies, including a common currency.
6. Political union- the ultimate stage of integration, in which members become one nation. National governments cede sovereignty over economic and social policies to a supranational authority, establishing common institutions and judicial and legislative processes-including a common parliament.

From the above, it is obvious that these different forms also pursue different objectives, thus, it is those objectives that define the membership as states join groups they believe have objectives that help them pursue their national interests. The importance of these arrangements is clearly made manifest by the fact that “for all the far reaching economic cooperative efforts at the global level, the degree of activity and economic cooperation and integration at the regional level is even more advanced. (El-Agrna 1999,as quoted in Rourke & Boyer 2003, p. 355)

Though the activities of regional organizations are diverse, while some are not even seen as performing very tangible functions, yet the very existence of each organization represents the conviction of its members that compared to standing alone, they can achieve greater economic prosperity by working together through economic or even economic integration (Rourke & Boyer 2003, p. 356)

Benefits Of Regional Integration

There are many benefits that can accrue to countries when they belong to regional bodies. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA,2004) has outlined some of these benefits and they include:-

- a. Regional integration can combine markets enabling firms to expand and markets to be more competitive.
- b. Regional integration arrangements can increase investment
- c. Regional integration can enhance the credibility and ensure the continuity of economic and political reforms
- d. Regular political contact among members can build trust and facilitate cooperation, including on security
- e. As a part of integration, countries are often required to update and improve their legislative and regulatory frameworks.

Challenges Of Regional Integration In Africa

Though Africans have long realized the need for regional integration, these arrangements have been facing serious challenges. These according to the ECA (2004) include:

- a. Low income and widespread poverty reflect the weak production structures and low productivity of many African economies.
- b. Most African countries have failed to shift their exports from primary products toward manufactures.
- c. Cross-border and civil conflicts remain a tragic reality or constant threat.

In summation Collier and Cunnning(1999 in ECA,2004) believes that Africa's growth problems arise from bad policies, poor infrastructure, low levels of social capital stock, lack of political rights, lack of openness to trade, inadequate human capital and aid dependency. As diverse and difficult as these challenges seem, there is no doubt that they are problems that a good and committed leadership can address. Unfortunately this is what is lacking in Africa. This raises the issue of leadership challenges in the continent which will be treated shortly.

The African Union (AU)

The AU as already stated is an offshoot of the O.A.U. The fourth extraordinary session of O.A. U. held in Sirte Libya in September 1999 with promptings by the late Colonial Muammar Ghaddafi decided on the formation of the A.U. in conformity with the objectives of the O.A.U Charter and the provisions of the African Economic Community. It is modeled after the European Union, which is the most successful attempt at regional integration in the world today. The declarations of the African Heads of State and Government at Sirte, popularly known as the Sirte Declaration (item8) says:

Having discussed frankly and extensively on how to proceed with the strengthening of the unity of our Continent and its peoples, in the light of those proposals, and bearing in mind the current situation on the Continent, we decide to:

- (i) Establish an African Union, in conformity with ultimate objectives of the Charter our Continental Organization and the provision of the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community.
- (ii) Accelerate the process of implementing the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community

The Union was launched in Durban South Africa on 9th July, 2002 with the then South African President Thabo Mbeki as the first Chairman. Article 5 of the Union lists the following as its organs:

- (a) The Assembly of the Union;
- (b) The Executive Council;
- (c) The Pan-African Parliament;
- (d) The Court of Justice;
- (e) The Commission;
- (f) The Permanent Representatives Committee;
- (g) The Specialized/Technical/Committee;
- (h) The Economic, Social and Cultural Council;
- (i) The Financial Institutions;

We are not going to take a deep look at these organs as that may not be too useful to our discuss, we must at this point emphasize that one of the most interesting innovations of the A U that elicited interest is the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). This is the economic development programme of the Union, which was adopted at the 37th session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2001 in Lusaka Zambia. Ten years after, there is still considerable debate on whether it has really achieved the objectives for which it was founded. NEPADs CEO, Dr Ibrahim Mayaki believes the agency has done well, because since its launching, NEPAD has recorded numerous policy frameworks and programmes for the continent such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) and the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI) under which African governments have agreed to prioritize the implementation of regional infrastructural projects(Mayaki 2012).

Quite good, but it largely remains to be seen, how the above have translated into a better life for the people. Also on the concrete achievement of NEPAD in the past 10 years of its existence, Mayaki opines that;

During the past 10 years, NEPAD has played a critical role in promoting democracy and good governance through one of its flagship programmes, the African Peer Review Mechanism. Currently 30 African countries have acceded to the programme and more countries are ascribing to it. Of the 30 countries, 14 have already had their political governance, economic governance and corporate governance reviewed
(<http://www.newafricanmagazine.com/features/economies/nepad>).

The APRM of NEPAD has been echoed loudly but then, one might wonder whether it has really enthroned good governance in Africa. We would come to that later. On the other side, NEPAD's major problems have been identified as lack of communication with the people. Most Africans are not aware of the existence nor the programmes of NEPAD, which in any case they are supposed to be the beneficiaries. This is in line with the style of leadership in Africa, where the leaders do not consult the people on issues affecting their lives. There is this leaders know it all attitude. This has affected NEPAD. Secondly, is the problem of funding. Though NEPAD is supposed to be a socio-economic programme designed for Africa by Africans, the bulk of NEPAD's funds are expected to come from external partners. These external partners have not been forthcoming. Thus Mayaki says the difficulties and unpredictability of external support have inevitably affected the pace at which NEPAD's ambitious programmes have been implemented. This raises the issue of the propriety of tying one's ambitions on the whim of other persons or groups that also have their own ambitions, which in the context of international relations should be guided by national interests.

Though some are claiming that NEPAD has achieved much, one of the initiators of NEPAD, Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal believes the organization has failed, thus he accused NEPAD of wasting hundreds of millions of dollars and achieving nothing (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/NEPAD>).

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which is seen as the major achievement of NEPAD still faces major challenges of human, financial, technical and political nature. Major weaknesses include the lack of an effective follow up mechanism to monitor the implementation of recommendations and the limited level of civil society participation (<http://www.u4no/publications>). These are issues that have to do with leadership, and thus brings us to the leadership challenges in Africa.

Leadership Challenges In Africa

In his submission, Deng (1988) believes the problems of Africa can be summarized as follows:

- a. A pervasive and debilitating malnutrition problem.
- b. A back ward and fragmented agriculture. The weakest industrial base in the Third world.
- c. Environmental degradation reflected in a losing war against desertification.
- d. Withering features of the modern society to which Africans have been introduced.
- e. A debilitating debt problem.
- f. Intervention by international financial institutions and their expert advisers who are assuming control over the management of African economies.
- g. A pervasive atmosphere of domestic unrest, tensions and conflicts, which have often times resulted in civil wars.

- h. Interstate conflicts resulting from border problems or the activities of dissidents or rebel groups across the colonial boundaries.
- i. A chronic state of instability resulting from these internal and regional tensions and conflicts.
- j. An increasingly marginalized position in the geo-political dynamics of the global scene(pp5-6).

Furthermore, he identified the problem of corruption at all levels, mistrust of the leaders by the peoples and general cynicism towards government affairs while Africans leaders tend to display an attitude of contempt and disregard for the people even as they claim to government in the name of the masses. Beyond this issue of abuse of the public by contemptuous leaders is the disrespect for human dignity.

Over the years, many scholars and authorities have adduced many reasons for Africa's underdevelopment. Thus scholars like Rodney (1972), Ake (1981), Amin(1971), Frank(1969) and others have identified colonialism and neo-colonialism as the main reasons behind African underdevelopment. However while not discarding the role of colonialism and its cousin neo-colonialism in African underdevelopment, it might be right to argue quite justifiably that Africa is not the only continent that was colonized and neither is it the only one where the colonialists left, socio-political and economic measures to manipulate them after their departure. The Asians who have almost the same colonial experience with Africa have since moved on, hence the miracle of Asian Tigers. South America was also colonized but today they are quite better than Africa. What this means is that beyond colonization there should be other factors that have been contributing immensely towards African underdevelopment.

Mbeki (2005) believes that the root of Africa's problems are the ruling political elite that have exploited their position in order to:

- a) bolster their standards of living to western levels,
- b) undertake loss making industrialization projects that were not supported by the necessary technical, managerial and educational development, and
- c) transfer vast amount of money from agriculture and mineral extraction to over seas private bank accounts, while borrowing vast amounts from developed countries.

These elites that took over power in Africa saw government as a source of personal enrichment or as one may rightly say, one of the factors of production.

Other factors that have been identified as being responsible for African underdevelopment are political corruption, low productivity, intra state conflicts, low human capital levels, low industrialization etc. A perusal of these factors could show that all of them have some link to leadership. This is because irrespective of how difficult a problem is, the duty of the leadership class is to find workable solutions to such problem. African leadership has failed in this regard.

In explaining the African condition Ake(2001) opines that the identified factors are colonial legacy, social pluralism and its centrifugal tendencies, the corruption of our leaders, poor labour discipline, the lack of entrepreneurial skills, poor planning and incomplete management, inappropriate policies, the stifling of market mechanisms, low level of technical assistance, the limited flow of foreign capital, Falling commodity prices and unfavourable terms of trade and low level of savings and investments(p.1). He however believes that:

The assumption so readily made that there are has been a failure of development Is misleading. The problem is not so much that

development has failed as it was never really on the agenda in the first place(p.12).

What most African countries did after independence was to transfer the burden of development.

Once again Ake(2001) argues that:

Most of the newly independent countries relied heavily on expatriates for their Development plans which were usually collections of policy targets and programs that took for granted the validity of the inherited economic structure..... It Would appear however, that the manpower constraints were a minor problem compared with the dearth of ideas and a weak political will (p.19).

The end result was that Africa became a grave yard of disjointed development plans that were nearly always never implemented because of the issue of bad leadership. On this, Obi (2005a) has argued that the role of a good and committed leadership in the success of development planning is one that is not in doubt. In the same vein Waterson (1965) argues extensively that:

Experience demonstrates that when a country's leaders are strongly devoted to development, inadequacies of the particular type of plan in use or even the lack of any formal planning will not seriously impede the country's development conversely in the absence of political commitment or stability, the most advanced form of planning will not make a significant contribution towards development (p.210).

In occurrence with the above, Okigbo (1993) insist that:

Any plan will succeed only to the extent of the discipline behind it. It requires a committed bureaucracy, an informed public opinion and private sector and more than anything else, a fully committed and dedicated leadership (p.60).

It is this dedicated and committed leadership that is lacking in Africa. One of the most prominent programs adapted by most states in Africa was state capitalism (public enterprise), while there

are many reasons for state involvement in the economy in Africa, ranging from gaining control of the economy, promoting import substitution, and ideological orientations, the most important reason has to do with the desire of the ruling class to create an economic base for itself. This was because;

The national bourgeoisies which came into office in the wake of independence movement soon found that they were in office only but not in power because they had very little control of the economy. But they also understood that political power offered opportunities for economic power, and that the opportunities inherent in their political power were the best and perhaps only way they had in creating an economic base for their political power and they did not hesitate to use these opportunities(Ake 1996, p.16).

Commenting on the effect of state capitalism. Obi(2005b) posits that:

The government having gotten a stronghold on the economy through its various industries and enterprises became faced with a big problem. The problem of management. The fact that the government has not been a good businessman stared everybody in the face. Most public enterprise have proved to be citadels of corruption, studies in inefficiency and net drains on their economies(p.82).

At that point it never really mattered that these enterprise served as drain pipes on the economy so long as what was been drained entered the pockets of the petit bourgeoisie. It was a misnomer to remain capitalists without capital for a long time. The state enterprises offered a quick opportunity for transformation. After decades of looting these state enterprises most of them collapsed, and the elites with the prompting of the Brettonwoods institutions decided to privatize them. Thus started a process of giving away the collective patrimonies of Africans to the same people who looted their countries.

While the leadership has been blamed for the sorry state of affairs in Africa, it must be noted that the followership contributed in developing this kind of leadership. The reason for this being that the followership in most African countries simply tolerated all sorts of abuse of power without really asking questions. They are simply too docile and uninterested. There is no doubt that the near absolute lack of will on the part of the people to assert themselves is a major factor that has helped to create and sustain the prevailing leadership failures we have in Africa. Ake(1996) believes that our leaders behave the way they do because those they lead, do not hold them accountable; hence they are at liberty to behave irresponsibly. He argues that:

We are as submissive to those who have power over us as we are oppressive of those who are weaker than we are. We corrupt those who are stronger by allowing them every indulgence including the liberty to abuse us. We have no will to resist power; our inclination is to worship. We think nothing of submitting to all manner of indignity to get those in power to notice us or throw us some crumbs. Even without the crumbs we still ache with desire to please them(pp15-16).

When we talk about the character of the state, we refer to the nature of the state, its powers, autonomy and its composition. According to Ake(1996), the character of the African state is such that it lacks autonomy, the immensity of its power is prone to abuse and the lack of immunity against it. It rules out a politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness and extension. This arises because the nature of the state makes the capture of state power, irresistibly attractive. Based on this what we see is that:

The winners in the competition for power win everything, the losers, lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing, noting better than winning. Thus everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics that does not know legitimacy or legality only expediency (Ake, 1996:7)

It is the same character of the state that has made it to be captured and privatized by a tiny fraction of the elite that use it to terrorize, abuse human rights, loot public funds and mortgage the future of the citizenry (Ihonvbere, 2003). The consequence of this is that people now perceive it as wicked, aloof, insensitive, corrupt and distant force, which they relate with as an enemy that must if possible be subverted, avoided, cheated, dismantled and destroyed if the interests of the citizens are to be protected.

The issue of corruption as a major leadership challenge is almost being overflogged without a reduction of the scourge. The cost of corruption on the African society are indeed very enormous. It has resulted in gross capital flight out of Africa through laundered funds, high cost of doing business, shoddy jobs at high prices, disincentive to investment, poor infrastructural development, untimely and avoidable deaths, general poor service delivery, discourages genuine hard work, and generally poor living standard among others. Unfortunately, despite the glaring bad effects of corruption, it has remained on the increase and has indeed become systemic. This is a situation in which corruption has become institutionalized and raised to the level of a structured parameter. It has become part of the culture of the society (Okowa 1997). Though most African governments shout about fighting corruption, the fight has remained at the level of shouting with little action.

Conclusion

From our study, there is no doubt today that leadership is the biggest challenge facing the African continent. Though some of the continent's problems are natural and some as a result of the colonial past, we however believe that with the right leadership, there would be significant turn around in the fortunes of Africa.

To start with, there is real need for the strengthening of the democratic structures in the continent. In a real democratic system, the best candidate usually emerges. In this type of situation the people themselves are also involved in government thereby reducing their alienation. Democracy empowers the people by giving them a say in the running of their affairs, the way they can make the right choices of the right people to lead their affairs.

Leadership as a concept is greatly misunderstood in this part of the globe. It is often perceived as an opportunity for self aggrandizement very few understands it as the process of guiding subordinates towards goal setting and goal attainment. Thus problem of poor leadership appear every where from the home to the larger society. There is therefore the need to inculcate leadership education into the school curricula, so as to grow the culture of leadership in the citizens. If children start encountering issues of leadership from childhood, it may help in changing our understanding of and attitudes towards leadership. When this happens perhaps we may be nearer to getting a leadership that will in line with Ikejiani Clark (2010:22) be able to

- a. Encounter and turn setback into comebacks;
- b. Know the way, go the way, and show the way
- c. Add value to the people and organizations they lead;
- d. Use their influence at the right times for the right reasons;
- e. Lead themselves successfully before attempting to lead others;
- f. Inspire and motivate rather than intimidate and manipulate;
- g. Understand that Nigeria society is the reflection of their character
- h. Live with people to know their problems and live with them in order to solve them.

It is only when Africa can boast of such leaders who understand the problems of the continent and also genuinely interested in proffering workable solutions to them, committing themselves in their individual countries that the benefits of integration can be fully realized in the continent. With the present crop of leaders who neither show a proper understanding of the problems of their countries nor real solutions to them, Africa and Africans may not enjoy the tangible benefits which regional integration can bring.

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