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EUROPEAN AND AFRICAN UNION RELATIONS: A CATALYST FOR PROMOTING ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACTS

This paper examines the prospects of promoting regional economic integration in Africa leveraging on EU's commitment to support the initiative. The paper appraises some of the pondering issues on promoting regional economic integration on the continent: Will the AU succeed in integrating African economies? Can the EU form of integration be suitable for Africa? Will inter-regional trade (through EPAs) with the EU undermine regional cooperation amongst the African countries? Will these initiatives help in reducing fragmentation of African countries in the world economy? It has become necessary to design and implement an African model of integration that correlates to the challenges and realities on the continent and perhaps the metamorphosis of the OAU to the AU and the establishment of NEPAD are a positive response to this necessity. The inclusion of other societal forces beyond government officials i.e. civil society and NGOs, politicians, but also of parliamentary representatives, think tanks and the private sector could be crucial in determining the policy direction of regional integration on the continent. The political willingness and commitment to regional economic integration therefore need to be fully reinforced by Africa's leaders, who should cash on the existing initiatives and relationships established over the years with the EU towards regional economic integration.

Keywords: European Union; African Union; Relationships; Promotion; Economic Integration; Africa

I. INTRODUCTION

Europe and Africa have shared a long history that extends far beyond the origins of the regional integration processes on either continent. Over the past century, the relationships between Europe and Africa have gradually shifted from those between colonizers and colonized, to donor-recipient relations and more recently to an increasingly multilateral partnership of equals. Although the European Union (EU) recognized the importance of Africa for Europe early on, its Africa policy remained fragmented. It was only in the early 2000s that a confluence of global and regional developments brought about a profound shift in EU-Africa relations towards a more multilateral, continent-to-continent approach. The adoption of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) in 2007 marked a turning point in this respect, laying the corner stone for a strategic partnership between equal partners. It provides both sides with an overarching, long-term strategic framework, identifying priority areas and establishing a complex web of inter-institutional engagement between EU and African Union (AU) actors, member states and civil society.

Economic integration is defined as a close degree of economic intertwining that, by formal agreement of informal circumstances, the countries involved begin to surrender some degree of sovereignty and act as an economic unit (Kimunguyi, 2015). This is quite different from economic cooperation which is understood according to Rouke (2005) as a process whereby sovereign states cooperate with one another bilaterally or multi-laterally through international governmental organisations. However, economic integration takes various phases and stages to fully evolved and these include customs union, common market/ commercial policy, to economic cooperation, and lastly to economic integration.

The European Union (EU), and to some extent, the North America Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA) have gone through these stages in the process of their integration. It is vital to recognise that the process towards economic integration is a complex phenomenon that is culminated through interactions and mutual reinforcement of trans-national economic activities for example trade and finance, intergovernmental and non-governmental international organisations, values, and other facets of regime building. Moreover, it is difficult to separate the link between economics and politics since it is live in the process towards regional integration. To this end, integration does not just imply "economic integration, but economic and political integration, infrastructure, linking energy, transport and so on.

In general, regional economic institutions have been created by independent states within their geo-political regions and the United Nations (UN). The UN has established five regional economic commissions across the World: The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the Economic Commission for West Asia (ECWA), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Conversely, the examples of functioning independent regional institutions in the world regions include the European Union (EU) in Europe, North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) in North America, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Asia, the Arab League (AL) in the Middle East, and the African Union (AU) in Africa.

It should however be noted that today, the EU and its regional counterparts in Africa (including the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)) cooperate on a broad range of issues ranging from peace and security, to democracy and human rights, trade, development, energy, climate change and the environment, migration, science and the information society. However, it should be noted that the partnership of equals is often more rhetorical than real as the EU continues to dominate agenda setting and negotiations (Anna-Luise, 2018). This paper therefore examines the prospects of regional integration in Africa leveraging on the EU – African Union relationship and co-operation.

The paper is divided into four parts. Part one is the Introduction, which examines historical relationship between Europe and Africa; the meaning and a brief overview of integration from a global perspective. Part two briefly traces the origin of economic integration in Africa from 1963, when the OAU was formed up to 2001/2002, when it was transformed into AU, and the launching of the NEPAD. Part three dwells on the concept of regionalism while part four deals with the EU-Africa relations with focus on the evolution of the relationship and the Cotonou economic liberalisation. Part five illuminates the challenges of regional integration in Africa, and concluding observations are made part six.

II. ORIGIN OF ECONOMIS INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

The quest for economic integration in Africa pre dates the formation of the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) in 1963. Pan – Africanism as preached by Africa founding fathers like kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba was aimed at promoting regional integration of Africa (Dinka and Kennes, 2007). The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was established by the United Nations (UN) in 1958 to promote the economic and social development and foster intra-regional integration, and promote international cooperation for Africa's development (AUC, 2009). This further suggests that the economic integration of Africa predates Africa independence.

The ECA, over the years has contributed immensely in driving regional integration in Africa through the formation of the Africa union and other sub- regional economic blocks within the continents. Such regional economic blocks and institutions established according to Sesan (2014), include the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCEAS) the Common Market for Eastern and Southern African States (COMESA), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Inter governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), among others.

These arrangements were expected to eventually lead to an all African common market. This was further boosted in 2001 with the launching of the African Union as replacement for the OAU by African heads of state. These arrangements were made to fast tract African integration and bring development to the continent.

However, the developments have so far failed to impact much on the economic integration efforts of the continent as the level of economic and social interaction among Africa states remain low (Sesan, 2014). Meanwhile, due to the continent's tract record of sub regional alliances over the decades, the case for co-operation and integration has become much stronger.

However, in recent years, the increasing cases of complex challenges face by the continent such as globalization and the changing global economic and political environment in which enhanced integration constitute an appropriate response, has made if imperative for Africa sub regional bodies to facilitate efforts towards the socio- economic integration of Africa. And, with the emergence of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), there is the need for Africa's regional economic communities to brace up for the rigorous challenges of economic integration in Africa. The study therefore intends to look at the possibility of facilitating the socio- economic integration of Africa leveraging on the existing sub regional groups.

III. THE CONCEPT OF REGIONALISM

Regionalism is a concept which refers often to formal cooperation and integration arrangements of a group of countries within a common geographical space aimed at facilitating or enhancing a sense of common identity and purpose through the creation of institutions that give shape to, and drive collective action (Lamberte, 2004). On the other hand, regional integration connotes a form of interdependence among nation states (Adetula, 2008; Lamberte, 2004). In establishing regional integration arrangements, sovereign states within a geographical space enter into a formal agreement to work together in order to actualise political and socio-economic benefits (Adetula, 2004). More importantly, regional integration requires independent nation states to cede their national sovereignty, make political commitments and sacrifices, and forego certain benefits in the interest of the larger body (Adetula, 2008; Claar and Andreas, 2010). To Ravenhill (1990), cooperative or collaborative ventures do not require an enduring commitment from participating governments. They can be established to achieve a particular project or a number of projects; cooperative agreements could be between two countries or the arrangement could be such that many countries are involved. Cooperative arrangements are flexible and, to this extent, participating governments are not pressured to cede their national sovereignty. Radelet (1999) adds that cooperation arrangements usually have smaller secretariats and bureaucratic hierarchies, and, therefore, are less demanding on scarce administrative and financial resources than more formal trade agreements". According to this scholar, cooperation can assist in facilitating increased intra-regional, inter-regional or inter-continental trade through effective communication. Cooperation links participating countries together, thereby accelerating the pace of regional economic integration (Radelet, 1999). Economic integration, according to Mattli (1999), involves two or more sovereign states willingly deciding to shift the authority to make decisions over economic concerns from the national level to the supra-national level. As Lamberte (2004) informs the reader, most initiatives are policy induced integration, the net result of regional cooperation (Lamberte, 2004).

In differentiating between regional cooperation and integration, Adetula (2008) explains that, while cooperation may be used to classify a relatively informal type of collaborative ventures between two or more countries aimed at achieving particular goals, regional integration involves a formal agreement. Regional integration requires some level of political willingness, sacrifice and commitment on the part of integrating states to redesign strategies to maximise their potential in the capitalist world economy (Adetula, 2008). Following these definitions, therefore, regional cooperation may be understood as a stage in the process of regional integration where states relinquish some aspects of their national sovereignty (Haas, 1958; Adetula, 2004; Claar and Andreas, 2010; Khadiagala, 2011).

Haas (1958), notes that, as regional integration deepens, formerly independent nation states are motivated to transfer their loyalties, expectations, and political activities towards a new larger centre whose institution and processes demand some jurisdiction over those of the national states. Corroborating this assertion, Etzioni (1965) views integration as a condition in which political entities are merged. A community of states is created with a decision making institution which regulates the affairs of that community. Member countries would begin to see themselves as having a particular regional identity having become members of this community (Etzioni, 1965). Given the above definitions, integration connotes a process as well an outcome (Adetula, 2008; Adeniran, 1983). Integration involves a process of connecting an existing system with a future one (Adeniran, 1983). It could also be seen as a situation in which political integration has been achieved (Etzioni, 1965). However it is defined, integration is considered an outcome of the decision taken willingly by sovereign nation-states (Adeniran, 1983). Over the years, regionalism has attracted several debates and contestations among scholars. Perspectives on the concept and practice of regionalism have changed over time. This is also true of the theoretical explanations (Olivier 2010). There are debates not only over issues of what constitutes a „region" or who the members of a region represent, but also on the motives and interests which drives regionalism in different parts of the world. In Africa, for instance, there are also questions on what should be integrated and how integration should proceed. Thus, it has become the common approach to differentiate between old and new regionalism, and various types of regionalisations (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000; Gilpin, 2001; Olivier, 2010).

Old regionalism is linked to regional integration attempts between the 1950s and 1960s which were inward oriented; explicit about the objectives to be achieved; clear about the programmes and had restricted membership (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000; Olivier, 2010). New regionalism, on the other hand, is inclusive, outward looking and is associated with regional integration arrangements from the 1990s (Gibb, 2009; Olivier, 2010). New regionalism establishes the reality of growing interdependence of nation states in the international political system (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000; Gibb, 2009). It makes it difficult to establish a general definition or theoretical explanation of regionalism (Gilpin, 2001). To this extent, there is a growing recognition of the need to develop a new regional approach towards a multi-dimensional, broadly focused perspective on regionalism (Olivier, 2010). In the last decade, regional cooperation and integration arrangements have been established in various parts of the world to an extent which has ensured that almost all countries in the developed and developing worlds are members of particular regional institutions (Delving and Estevadeordal, 2002). Moreover, countries in the developing world have also shown interest in cooperation. Cooperative arrangements also exist between developed and developing countries. There has been increasing interest in cooperating to accomplish regional cooperation projects in various sectors; promoting research activities; and creating regional bodies that regulate diverse aspects of economic policy making (Lambert, 2004). Thus, Devin and Estevadeordal (2002) assert that, regional integration agreements have increasingly been established as a strategy to respond to the challenges and demands of a fast globalising world marked with technological transformations.

The conceptual foundation of the theory of integration can be traced all the way back to the classics (Adam smith) and David Ricardo). However, the interpretation and the techniques of the analysis of their concepts where basically and mainly in line with the new − classical and welfare international economics, which examined the benefits gained from international trade. The analysis of the international integration process became general in international economic and world economics in the period after the Second World War and was similar to political science.

With the emergence of customs Union in Europe in the 1950s, and having realized the gain from such a marriage, the agitation for regional integration gained momentum. Therefore regional integration first started in Europe in the early 1950s with the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952. Haas (1958), defined integration as a process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, economic and political activities towards a new centre, whose institution poses or demand jurisdiction over the pre existing national states.

Deutsch (1957) also defined integration as the attainment within a territory of a sense of community and of institutions and practices strong enough and wide-spread enough to assure, for a long time, dependence expectation of peaceful change among its population. According to him, when a group of people or states have been integration this way they constitute a secure community. The early efforts to study regional integration were concentrated on the ECSC area.

Hass (1958), developed the concept of spillover which was also applied by Linberg (1963) in which a given action related to a specific goal creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action and so forth.

The EEC was seen as a spin over from the ECSC. They predicted that the process would continue in the EEC liberalization of trade within customs union would lead to a harmonization of general economic policies and eventually spill over into political area and leads to the creation of some kind of political community.

IV. THE LIBERAL INTER-GOVERNMENTALISM APPROACH TO INTEGRATION

In his work on liberal inter-governmentalism, Moravcsik (1998) focused on the big decisions he referred to as grand bargains. The three frame works include:
National preference formation, interstate bargaining and institutional choice

The first stage concerns national preference formation and the question here revolves around whether economic or geographical interests dominate when national preference of member states are formed. In most cases economic interests are the most important preference base on moravcsik (1998) argument.

The second stage which focused on inter – state bargaining focuses on the efficiency and distributional outcome of negotiations. Here two possible explanations of agreements on substance contrasted: asymmetrical interdependence or supranational entrepreneurship. Moravcsik arrives at the answer that asymmetrical interdependence has most explanatory power. Some states may have more at stake than others. They will therefore work harder to influence the outcome and may have to give more concessions.

According to Moravcsik (1998) three factors are likely to determined the outcome of interstate bargaining: the value of unilateral policy alternatives, relative to the status quo, which underline credible threats to veto, the value of alternative coalitions which underline credible threats to exclude; and the opportunities for issue linkage or side – payments which underline package deals.

Theorists seek to explain behavior in a decentralized setting in which states face problems for which solutions beyond the states are required (McDonald, 2005). The starting point of integration is usually the free trade area, followed by a customs union, a common market and then the integration of monetary and fiscal matters to establish on economic union. Integration is multi dimensional and may cover political, social cultural or even economic issues.

According to Babarinde (2012) there are three broad approaches to integration: the federalist strategy, the functionalist strategy and the new functionalism approach under the federalist approach. Under the federalist approach a higher super national authority is created to which participating states surrender their partly or entirely their sovereignty and takes the shape of federalism. The functionalist approach involves a mere functional co-operation by participating countries and does not require member states to part with their autonomy. On the other hand, the new functionalist approach favour the creation of specialized administrative institutions at the trans – national level, which shall endeavour to demonstrate the relevant and worthiness of regional integration to member states. If they are successful, the supranational central entities would be accorded more competences by member states.

Some notable organizations trying to achieve regional integration across the globe currently are the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) the East African Economic Community (EEC) Southern, Africa Development Community (SADC) the African Union (AU), among others.

V. REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES RECOGNIZED BY THE AFRICAN UNION

The regional economic bodies and their member nations recognized by the AU according to ECA (2015), include the following:

CEN-SAD: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde; Central African Republic, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, São Tomé & Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia.

COMESA: Burundi; Comoros; Democratic Republics of Congo; Djibouti; Egypt; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Kenya; Libya; Madagascar; Malawi; Mauritius; Rwanda; Seychelles; Sudan; Swaziland; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe.

EAC: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda.

ECCAS: Angola; Burundi; Cameroon; Central African Republic; Chad; Democratic Republic of Congo; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; Republic of Congo; São Tomé and Príncipe.

ECOWAS: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo.

IGAD: Djibouti; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Kenya; Somalia; Sudan; Uganda.

SADC: Angola; Botswana; Democratic Republic of Congo; Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Seychelles; South Africa; Swaziland; Tanzania; Zambia; Zimbabwe.

UMA: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia.

VI. THE EU-AFRICA RELATIONS

The European-African relations can be largely traced to the era of colonialism. Though, after independence efforts were made to keep the relationship running through various meetings, conventions and agreements such as the Yaounde Convention (1963-1974) and the successor Lome Agreements (1975-1999). The European countries therefore sought to retain the economic links, the access to natural resources and raw materials, and other strategic economic interests they had enjoyed under colonialism (Holland, 2002). From the beginning the European Community built relations with

African countries around a set of institutionalised arrangements based upon the concept of partnership.

Not surprisingly, the Lome Convetion was hailed as an innovative model for the conduct of North-South relations, and the management of political dialogue among countries with an extreme asymmetrical distribution of power in international relations. Obviously, this relationship evolved over time as successive accords were signed by participating states to create an institutional framework for regular dialogue between the political representatives of the two regions, ultimately through five different joint EU-ACP institutions (Kimunguyi, 2015).

Building upon the colonial legacy, provisions for EU-Africa relations can be found in a number of the Treaty of Rome clauses, including the Treaty's articles 131 and 136, which allowed for an inclusion of some of the then colonies of the founder members in the European Economic Community (EEC). Following the independence of these colonies, the new states were offered significant financial assistance as well as preferential access, without the requirement for reciprocity, to their primary products. While the first Lome Convention related primarily to trade cooperation, subsequent agreements were broadened in scope to include clauses on such issues as human rights, the rule of law, economic, social and cultural rights and good governance (Furrel, 2010).

However, the asymmetrical trading relationship was mirrored in the unbalanced nature of political dialogue between the two-partner regions. The African group never had the necessary political weight to exercise influence within the partnership, and their bargaining strength was clearly limited to what could be negotiated with the EU countries. It was a relationship based less on partnership than on inequality and general institutional inertia, described by some commentators as a form of collective clientelism. However, from the beginning of the 1990s, pressures were mounting both within the EU and at the global level to force a change in this traditional partnership with African countries (Kimunguyi, 2015). Within the EU, the strategic interests of the individual member states and the union had changed from those that motivated the origins of the Lome Conventions three decades earlier. New preferential arrangements were under consideration by the EU, and the geographic focus of its external relations was changing to encompass diverse areas from Eastern Europe, and the countries bordering the EU, South- East Europe, Asia and Latin America. The partnership with Africa no longer held the political salience of the past.

The decade also witnessed a shift in EU policy on development and aid to reflect the common belief that trade and not aid was the route towards development. Moreover, the EU had changed its position towards the approach long adopted by the multilateral institutions with conditionality clauses attached to the agreements on aid and trade-related development and structural adjustment programmes.

Perhaps the greatest pressure for a change in the EU-Africa relationship came from the World Trade Organisation (WTO), with a rules-based trading system supporting a global open trading order (Babarinde, 2012). The Lome preferences were contrary to the principle of multilateralism and clearly contravened the most-favoured nation (MFN) clause embodied in the GATTT/WTO agreement. The EU-Aufrican agreement clearly contravened the WTO rules, since it offered preferential market access to goods from selected countries and discriminated against non-signatories to the agreement. Consequently, the Cotonou Agreement was drawn to contain an agreement on mutual (reciprocal) trade liberalisation, with a proposal to establish regional economic integration and trade initiatives. Several aspects of the Cotonou Agreement are worthy of note, for they represent a departure from the previous policy (Sesan, 2014). According to Sesan, (2014), the first one is the regional initiatives called economic partnership agreements (EPAs) to be negotiated between the EU and groups of African countries. The EPAs must be compatible with WTO rules, and this requires the commitment to ensure liberalisation of trade affecting substantially all products and services, and covering all sectors.

The second one is resorting to negotiations with groups of countries with a view to creating regional economic agreements.

The third one is the significant financial assistance that continues through the European Development Fund (EDF), and the fourth one is the EU's Everything-But-Arms (EBA) initiative operating in parallel to protect the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) through non-reciprocal trade preferences for the foreseeable future.

The decision to revitalise the political dimension on EU-Africa relations according to Kimunguyi (2015), was a recognition that under the predecessor Lome Accords, the partnership was showing signs of weakness, based in part on the credibility gap since it was being presented as a partnership of equals when the reality showed the African countries to have institutional weaknesses and high dependence on aid, and an inability to cope with the conditionality demands now being imposed by the European Union as well as other international donors.

One question remains as to whose interests are being served by the decision to continue the relationship through the CPA. From the perspective of the EU, the CPA and the policy activities that arose out of the agreement allow the EU to protect European interests, while also facilitating a mini 'regime-change' in African countries, in accordance with EU values and standards. Even though the outcome would not be realised fully, the EU has 'set the ball rolling' and created channels through which it can convey its values, priorities and even serve its own strategic economic interests that is bound to snowball Africa into an integrated economy. It could support the partnership by focussing on core areas in which it considered itself to have competence and added value, for example promoting economic capacity through economic interaction of African states and good governance; improving capacity for policy making, analysis and implementation; and support for regional economic organisations.

VII. CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

According to the International Peace Institute (2014) regional integration in Africa faces multiple challenges, which underline the need to strengthen coordination among the RECs as individual countries cannot overcome them alone. Various challenges that stand out include:

Energy access and security constitute one of the greatest constraints on sustainable and inclusive growth. Despite the continent's vast energy resources, its energy access lags far behind that in the rest of the world. In addition, energy supply is hampered by inefficient utilities, and weak cross-border collaboration in energy trade. Hence some sub-regions need to spur themselves further, in order to harness the benefits of for example, gas and power supply pools and regional energy markets.

A major challenge to regional integration in Africa is how to promote inter-and-intra regional trade in Africa. A number of factors have contributed to the poor (inter/intra) African trade performance. Firstly, most countries in the region basically produce raw materials, which are less competitive in the international markets. Sometimes they are raw materials for which there is virtually no demand elsewhere in Africa.

Also, many African countries have not diversified their products hence few commodities often make up the bulk of their exports. For instance, petroleum and petroleum products account for more than 90 per cent of Angola's export to other countries in Africa. Likewise, fresh fish constitutes nearly 98 per cent of such exports for the Seychelles. Thirdly, many African countries are still "grapping to undo a legacy dominated by trade with their former colonial rulers rather than with each other. For example, though Senegal is the Gambia's neighbour, trade between the two is negligible. France is Senegal's biggest trading partner, while the Gambia trades largely with the United Kingdom (UK). Furthermore, because of these "hindrances to trade within Africa, exports from Tunisia and Cameroon often find their way to French warehouses before being redirected to each other's market shelves.

Another major challenge of promoting regional integration in Africa concerns the low level if not inefficient or inadequate infrastructures, particularly transport and communications on the continent. Transportation of goods is very costly, for example, the freight costs for imports to "landlocked African countries are more than twice as high as in Asia. Furthermore, it is not incidental to note that travelling from one African country to another by air is more difficult and in some cases, this has meant that one has to "travel via Geneva or Paris. The problem is even intensified in relation to visa acquisition formalities. For example, African entrepreneurs frequently need to wait 6 – 8 weeks to get visas to visit other African countries while citizens of the UK or France can travel to many African countries and obtain visa on arrival.

Similarly, Africa is lagging behind in the area of communications. Statistically, Africa has the lowest telephone density in the world yet the highest telephone charges, and three times the rate of faults per line as in other developing regions.

The next challenge stems from the fact that regional integration efforts have not been very successful in Africa. This is because a compensation mechanism has not been designed to leverage the gains and drawbacks that are "unavoidably and unequally distributed between member countries. A significant drawback to successful regional integration on the continent has been the "great diversity in African countries' sizes, national resources, level of development and connections to global markets. For example, tiny Benin does not have the same economic interests as its giant oil-rich neighbour, Nigeria, and also South Africa and Malawi do not experience the costs and benefits of regional trade arrangements in the same way."[46]

Besides, the African countries have difficult choices to make in terms of whether to commit to regional integration or concentrate on the domestic problems. We must acknowledge that benefits from integration are only somewhat accruable in the long run whereas its cost has to be met in the short term by members who obviously have more than enough social, political and economic problems to cope with at home. These include salaries for civil servants, internal conflicts, endemic diseases etc. It is difficult for these countries to commit their limited resources and contribute to regional organisations.

Another challenge is how to make African governments incorporate regional agreements into national policies. The policies of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation as well as unsound package of macro-economic policies imposed through structural adjustment and conditionality by the IMF and World Bank have been widely criticised as being biased against African countries on one hand and regional integration efforts on the other. The programmes, focusing heavily on liberalisation and market mechanisms, are almost exclusively national in scope, as they have obliged each African government to negotiate separately with its external financing institutions, but with no reference to regional dimensions. Similarly, the donor institutions have strong preference for funding national programmes rather than those with a regional focus[49]. For example under the structural adjustment programs in place in most African countries, domestic considerations take precedence over sub-regional preoccupations.

Besides, competition of products pauses yet another challenge. Economic liberalisation is leading to opening of the African market to goods originating from the developed countries (for example the EU), which no African country can compete with. That has led to the de-industrialisation of Africa as manufacturing now account for less than 5 per cent of GDP compared to 10 – 15 percent in 1960 – 1975. Hence, there is need to address the question of how to launch a new process of industrialisation, which could at least contribute to getting Africa on the track of economic growth.
The multiplicity of schemes holds back integration, by imposing a huge burden on countries' inadequate administrative and financial capacities and by leading to conflicting obligations. A smooth integration process is also held up by the lack of self-financing mechanisms for the RECS, limited progress on fostering production integration and regional complementarities, or for developing regional infrastructure (especially transport and communications) to drive market integration.
One of the main challenges facing Africa's Regional Economic Communities identified by ECA (2015), in implementing their integration programmes is overlapping membership. Consider the case of COMESA, EAC and SADC. EAC is already a

common market, but it shares four member States with COMESA and one Member State with SADC. Five SADC member States are members of Southern African Customs Union (SACU). Ten countries in the region are already members of customs unions, but all of them are also in negotiations to establish alternative customs unions from the one they now belong to. COMESA and SADC have seven member states in common that are not part of a customs union, but all are preparing customs unions. So, of the 26 countries in COMESA, EAC and SADC, 17 are either in a customs union and negotiating an alternative customs union to the one they belong, or are negotiating two separate customs unions. Similar overlaps, though to a lesser scale exists among members of RECs in Western and Northern Africa.

Similarly, Africa needs effective government and stronger institutions that are capable of tackling insecurity. In other word insecurity has become one of the greatest obstacles to integration in Africa. Insecurity span across the continent in the forms of terrorism, intra and inter-state conflicts, armed robbery, piracy, among others. However, the threat posed to security, stability and development by terrorism is not new in Africa as it was not until a few years after the 9/11 attacks in the United States that the issue of the vulnerability of Africa to domestic and transnational terrorism assumed centre state (Sesan, 2014). The activities of Al-Qaeda in Mehgrib, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO have contributed immensely in worsening the insecurity situation in Africa; from North Africa to West Africa; from central Africa to East Africa; and from North Africa to South Africa. In addition to terrorism, intra state conflicts and rivalry among African States have not improved the security situation in Africa. This is further aggravated with the easy flow of small arms and light weapons to further exacerbated the level of conflict in the continent. Conflict in Congo D.R, Central Africa Republic, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Libya, Somalia and host of other African Countries are due to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across the continent. Insecurity in the continent has prevented the easy flow of trade, social and economic interaction among African States and this has contributed immensely in slowing down the developmental integration efforts of the continent (Gerry, Dannie and James, 2008).

Africa's economic crisis and over dependence on aid for survival also constitutes a serious obstacle to integration in the continent. Soderhaum (2012) opined that these have slowed down integration efforts of the continent because of their negative impact on government policies. Aid flowing from the west are normally conditioned or tied. Recipient African countries are not at liberty to apply such aid at their own discretion and aid are conditioned in such a way that the awarding countries receive the ultimate benefits instead of the recipient country.

African economic crisis is also associated with poor economic growth rates, low domestic savings and investment, severe foreign exchange scarcity, balance of payments difficulties and a heavy foreign debt burden. Onuoha and Ezirim (2014) see the continent's economic woe as deeply rooted in history as with the mono cultural or single-commodity dependant, primary-export led economies colonial masters bequeathed to individual nations at independence. The combination of these problems make integration in the African continent difficult in the nearest future.

Africa development challenges had also negatively affected the pace of integration in the continent. In the year 2000, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which consist of eight benchmark goals with measurable targets were introduced to promote development in Africa and other developing countries via improving poverty level in these countries – from 2000 to 2015. While other regions successfully integrated the MDGs into their national development plans which helped them to achieve unprecedented transformative results, the African continent was off track. According to Obi (2018) China alone lifted over 400 million people out of poverty through MDGs, while poverty level rose in Sub-Saharan African from 290 million in 1990 to 414 million in 2010, undernourished children rose from 27 million in 1990 to 32 million in 2012. This is blamed on weak leadership and poor planning. However with 17 global goals that accompanied 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launched in 2015 to replaced the MDGs, it is hoped that governments in Sub-Saharan Africa will key into this new vision of the United Nations so as to achieve better results by 2030. This would go a long in facilitating integration in the region.

Discriminatory Polices of the World Bank and IMF including other International Financial Institutions and agencies. African Countries, of course are constantly in need of finance for development considering the backward nature of their economies and poor level of infrastructural development. Several African Countries had turned to the International Financial Institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for loan. But, the policies of these lending institutions and the stringent conditions for awarding credit to Sub-Saharan Africa have not helped to facilitate development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Conditions for re-payment of such loans are also stringent and hard. And therefore, development is stifled and the purpose of such funding is normally defeated. For example, the IMF SAP policy in Africa has always been unfavourable to Africa continent. This contributes immensely in retarding development in the Africa thereby slowing down the integration efforts of the region.

Another major challenge to economic integration in Africa is the ability of criminal elements within the continents to co-operate and synergise in the art of criminality. The international peace institute (2014) raised concern about the link between insecurity in the gulf of Guinea and the crisis in Mali and the Sahel. The co-operation among pirates from the East Africa Sahel and those from the gulf of Guinea has also been established. Insecurity at sea does not in any way enhance the level of security on land. It is in view of this that the government of Benin Republic in 2013 entered into a partnership agreement with Mali and Niger, two landlocked countries which operate at the Cotonou port to ensure security right from the international waters off the coast of Benin to the two landlocked countries.

Policy differences within regional groupings and participating members also contribute to slow down the integration effort of the continent. For instance, within ECCAS, some member states remain firmly opposed to free movement of people for fear of destabilization and increased pressure on local economies. Similarly, responses to the crisis in the Sahel were led by ECOWAS with no involvement of the GGC. There is also the challenge on Neo Colonialism in Africa. This has made African countries to always tend to align with their colonial masters in times when independence and crucial decision are required to be taken that will eventually affect the regional body. This has constituted a serious clog on the wheel of progress of the African Union in its quest to integrate member states.

There is the challenge of poor infrastructural development and inter linkages among Africa States. Poor social facilities like good road and rail network, reliable communication equipment, port facilities etc also contribute to the poor inter linkages and trade among African States. Goods are ordinarily supposed to flow through rail or land without hitch from Kenya to South Africa, from Egypt to Nigeria, from Ghana to Morocco and among others.

Another easily identifiable threat to regional integration in Africa is lack of democratic governance and rule of law in African countries. The dictatorial tendencies of Africa leaders had enabled them to stay in power indefinitely without check and accountability. This has promoted massively the making and implementation of selfish policies and laws which has not benefited the ordinary African and promoted development in member states. The sit tight syndrome has fueled political instability and conflicts which do not encourage regional integration of the continent.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The political willingness and commitment to regional economic integration need to be fully reinforced by Africa's leaders, who should cash on the existing initiatives and relationships established over the years with the EU. It is obvious that the integration process in Africa is different from that in Europe, America or Asia. In Africa, it is an integration of countries with few products (mostly raw materials) accounting for the largest percentage of their export and weak industrial bases as well as infrastructures. It has been necessary to design and implement an African model of integration that correlates to the challenges and realities on the continent and perhaps the metamorphosis of the OAU to the AU and the establishment of NEPAD are a positive response to this necessity. The inclusion of other societal forces beyond government officials i.e. civil society and NGOs, politicians, but also of parliamentary representatives, think tanks and the private sector could be crucial in determining the policy direction of regional integration on the continent.

In relation to the trade liberalisation through EPAs, the EU would rather opt for negotiating EPAs with sub-regional groupings than with individual countries. This is based on the argument that sustainable economic development in the ACP countries cannot be achieved as they have small domestic markets with low per capita income and small domestic savings rates.

In line with the above issue, it can be assumed that all the sub-Saharan African countries accepted the EU's view and harness the desire to foster greater economic integration through harmonisation of their RTA's not only for trade with the EU but also within the framework of the African Union. Thus, it is essential that African countries adopt measures towards the harmonisation of their overlapping trade policies and memberships in RTAs. Such measures could lead to greater efficiency and increase their bargaining power for example in the EPA and other multilateral negotiations, to foster greater integration, which could in turn encourage greater liberalisation of trade and increase intra-regional trade flows within Africa and with other regions of the world.

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