

Original Research Article

Regional Integration in Africa: The Role of African Union in African Developmental Process

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Abstract

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The study examined the activities of the African Union (AU) in the African developmental process using the secondary method of data collection. As a framework of analysis, the study adopted the theory of liberal institutionalism. From the findings of the research, it was discovered that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was transformed to the AU due to greater burden which bedeviled the continent of Africa such as; conflict, poverty, diseases, and unfriendly military regimes. Examining the role of the AU in Africa, findings revealed that the AU has been able to contribute its quota towards African development, through some of its specialized agencies such as; The Peace and Security Council (PSC), The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It was also discovered that the programs under the AU faced serious challenges, especially in the areas of conflicts bedeviling the region, military intervention in state's internal affairs, foreign powers increasing the rates of internal disorderliness.

Keywords: Africa, Development, Integration, Region, Union.

INTRODUCTION

Historically Africa has been a tale of struggle (Dauda and Ogbuehi, 2017). This struggle emanates from the evils deposited by colonialism, and the need for total liberation ushered in the decolonization process and African states gaining independence. These newly independent African states were divided into three major groups; the Casablanca, Brazzaville, and Monrovia groups all having a diverse view on the African integration process, but with a similar drive towards full African integration. The Casablanca group was composed of seven African states led by left-wing leaders of Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Morocco. The group first met in the Moroccan port city of Casablanca in 1961, hence the group name emerged. This group's ideology was primarily for the political unification of the African continent base on deeper integration, which will eliminate colonialism, and transfer powers from national governments to a

supranational African authority, one central bank, a single currency, and one parliament just like the European Union (EU).

Similarly, the Monrovia group held the same ideology of a united Africa which will exist without a full unification as proposed by the Casablanca group. This group met in the city of Monrovia, the Liberian capital in May 1961. The group was made up of twelve states belonging to the Brazzaville group as well as Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Togo, Tunisia, and Congo (AFDB, 2022). In 1963, the ideology of the Monrovia group prevailed and states from both groups merged to establish the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa Ethiopia. As a uniting force, the OAU was tasked with the responsibility of combating the remnants of colonialism, and racial discrimination in states like South Africa (Eghwere, 2014). To survive, the OAU allied with newly

decolonized African governments to work together (Alys, 2009). The organization could not withstand the test of time due to issues emanating from constant violence such as the Genocide in Rwanda, the Somalia-Ethiopia dispute in 1964 to 1978 over the Uganda desert region, Algeria-Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963 (Olaosebikan, 2010). The OAU did not stand the test of time due to the change in African geopolitics, leading to several military take-overs, corruption, conflicts, poverty, and distorted economies, making way for the emergence of the African Union.

The AU came as the institutional manifestation of the desire for integration in Africa (Okhonmina, 2009). The AU was established on 26 May 2001, as a reflection of a more efficient Africa. In a way to reflect this efficiency, the AU has been focused on institutionalizing Africa and its regimes (Tieku, 2001). Its emergence has provided a full-grown initiative in which the African people will effectively take the destiny of their continent into their own hands. This is in the area of promoting solidarity, cooperation, and support among African states and people; to address the catalog of problems they face (Murithi, 2007).

The AU has been able to accelerate certain levels of development and certainty against underdevelopment and uncertainty towards growth and progress. It has set up the road map for African transformation and significance on the global stage. The issues bedeviling the continent since the transformation of OAU to AU have been the dilemma of insecurity, economic backwardness, and political disorderliness. Even with this, there have been some levels of certainty and significance of the union towards the African developmental process. This significance has been in the areas of peace-building, restoration, and conflict management. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU was initiated to champion this course. Others include the promotion of an enabling environment for economic integration through; The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), performance and progress are measured in four thematic areas; Democracy and political governance, Economic and governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development (Nwakanma, 2016). Therefore, the roles of the African Union, in the African developmental process, shall be best examined through its key programs and agencies which are; the APRM, NEPAD, and PSC.

Conceptual Clarifications

Development

The concept of development has many defining features such as; growth, economic buoyancy, and total absence of underdevelopment. Developmental analysts have been placed with uncertainty to the exact meaning of

development, this means no concise term to quantify development. In the words of Omotola (2010), development emerges as an adjunct of globalization which further has no universally accepted definition. Todaro (1985) cited in Omotola (2010), opined that development as a concept is multi-facial. It encompasses distinctive changes in social structures, attitudes, national institutions, and well accelerated economic growth. Furthermore, development is traditionally interpreted as economic growth (Cobbinah and Black, 2011).

The above conceptualization of development is from a narrower angle, for it centers on majorly economic improvement and living standards of people. But within the context of this study, development is a state affair primarily because the rationale for setting up a regional, sub-regional, or any organization is for the satisfaction of its member's wants. AU was instituted as a body to drive the African continent into the pathway of development, against the constant issues of conflicts, economic meltdown, and bad leadership. Through the integration process, states are expected to share a common mindset, particularly on issues about member states which is possible via the formation of intergovernmental bodies and unions. Development in this sense is championed by AU in the areas of collective security, a unified security system, and a common goal career. AU developmental process, comes through various programs such as; The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), it was initiated to monitor developmental growth, the importance placed on trade and investments through greater liberalization for improved Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Omotola (2010) cited in Ali (2020).

Regional Integration

The coming together of different states within a region to achieve some predetermined goals and objectives is referred to as regional integration. It is an intergovernmental activity aimed at promoting cross-border economic, social, and political cooperation between nations and their governments. States regard regional integration as a way to align their policies with those of other states, promoting cross-border economic and social development. Sherriff and Nwokedi (2016) define regional integration as a power balance aimed at bolstering weaker nations. This is because states that come together for integration tend to lean toward and benefit from stronger states. Regional integration, according to Adeniji and Agaba (2014), is a way of strengthening global trade and gaining access to foreign technology, investment, and ideas. This means that deeper regional integration will not only enable states to achieve long-term political and economic development, but will also ensure poverty reduction, improved movement of goods, services, capital, and labor socio-economic policy harmonization, infrastructural

development, and the promotion of regional peace and stability.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of liberal institutionalism has been adopted as the basis for analyzing the roles of African union in the African developmental process. Liberal institutionalism is a theory of international relations first outlined by Robert Keohane in his 1984 book titled "After Hegemony". Liberalism has championed the emergence of continental and regional political organizations. In international relations, liberalism posits that orderliness, laws, and moral consciousness can undoubtedly provide the basis for inter-state relations (Mordi, 2015). Liberal institutionalism discourages any form of pursuit of individual self-interest but encourages cooperation. Institutionalism connects that which is a crucial variable contending with institutions that matters and shapes the interest of actors (Christiansen, 2015). Against the realist positions which views the state as anarchical and rooted in power tussle and human nature of which to the realist, cooperation cannot occur. Richardson (2008), argues that liberal institutionalism agrees for peace, regionalism and cooperation, and economic integration. The AU is set up to consolidate the lost cause of integration, economic and national security. Membership of the African Union is based on a liberal institutionalism approach which has been characterized to be for economic gains, cooperation, and continental identity. African states have willingly seen the need for an integrating body, with a wide range of responsibilities. At this point, certain institutions have been put in place to facilitate growth and progress within the region.

Method of Data Collection

For this study, the secondary method of data collection was adopted. Data were sourced and collected from textbooks, the internet, and periodicals, like seminar papers, articles. The data collected were analyzed descriptively.

African Union and Developmental Process

The African Union can only function effectively if its agencies are given much attention.

a. The Role of African Union in Promoting Peace and Security

There cannot be peace and progress in a conflicting environment, no wonder AU's major mandate is to

restore peace in Africa, for through peace, there can be progress and growth. Examining the role of any international security institution is an essential but notoriously difficult exercise (Williams, 2011). The PSC which signifies the Peace and Security Council of the African Union was established by the (AU constitutive Act 4). It has been an effective tool in the restoration of continental security and settlement of conflicts, arising within African states. In one sense, the activities of the PSC have been cost-effective as its funding has come from external actors, particularly states within the EU and NATO (Williams, 2011). The PSC is composed of 15 members, it is to:

- i. Promote of peace, security, and stability;
- ii. Anticipate and prevent conflicts;
- iii. Combat terrorism on the continent;
- iv. Develop a common defense policy for Africa;
- v. Promote democratic practices, good governance, and respect for human rights (Vines, 2013).

Most African conflicts have been often related to issues connected to whom or which tribe, the religious denomination emerged as head of government. With this trend, the AU in the early 2000s adopted a strategy of the illegitimacy of unconstitutional changes of government as an approach to the conflict management system. This made a major achievement against the OAU policy of non-interference in domestic affairs of members states (Rafiu, 2014). In this view, the AU frowned at constant attempts by incumbent governments to retain political power at all costs even after losing a legitimate election. The AU has provided a platform, which limits constant military involvement in the internal political affairs of member states. According to Rafiu (2014), since 2003 the AU has continued to condemn every successful coup on the African continent, particularly those in the Central African Republic (2003), Guinea-Bissau (2003), São Tomé and Príncipe (2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), and Niger (2010). In all this, the AU now makes public condemnation of military take-over, or attempted take-over in Africa. A case study was the demand by the AU in collaboration with the UN, EU, demanding that the military leaders released President of Mali Keita, and Prime Minister Boubou Cisse, and other officials detained on the allegation of corruption, economic stagnation, continuing Islamist insurgency (France 24News, 2020). The PSC received an international commendation in its decision to suspend Togo from participating in AU activities and the eventual restoration of the constitutional process in the state by the military (Williams, 2011).

In the area of peacekeeping operations, the UN is a special partner of the AU (Moolakkattu, 2010). The AU has been instrumental in mobilizing troops, notably in peacekeeping missions to Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, and Comoros (Williams, 2011). Taking a case of the Darfur crisis, states have largely spent financial, diplomatic, and military resources. Going by this poor nature of funding,

the AU has been laid on various setbacks in achieving sort-for-lasting thing peace. Keith (2007), argues that a handful of Africa's wealthier states are left to bear the burden of paying for the AU's regular and peacekeeping budgets, complemented by often generous but ultimately inadequate foreign funding that makes planning difficult. When few states are always left to shoulder responsibilities, there is always the problem of efficiency and effectiveness in output mechanisms.

Similarly, the AU in its pursuit of regional peace and stability has been able to collaborate with other miniature regional integrating bodies such as; Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This is because the AU has acknowledged that significant continental integration cannot be achieved without the strengthening and support of regional bodies; there is a saying that regional organizations provide the foundation for effective continental integration (Roslo, 2010) cited in (Aman, 2020).

b. The Role of African Union in Promoting Economic Integration

The inability of the OAU to provide a positive framework for African development led to the eventual emergence of the AU. Saddled with many responsibilities such as; regional integration security restoration, and economic development, the OAU was eventually replaced by the AU. Certain programs have been drawn out for efficiency and restoration of the lost call towards sustainability and economic con social well-being of the continent, a need to therefore achieve this was to form a program now known as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The birth of NEPAD was rooted in promoting peace and development in the continent (Akokpari, 2004). The AU wants to be patterned after the EU, seeking to promote unity, eliminate conflicts and integrate a larger African market and NEPAD has become the mechanism in which this call could be achieved. NEPAD is an amalgamation of three separate development programs initiated between 2000 and 2001.

NEPAD is among a series of programs, embarked by the AU to promote meaningful development among member states, and also fulfilling the course of the emergence of AU as an African integrative mechanism. As a tool in promoting development, NEPAD emphasizes the liberalization for more FDI, to aid the boosting of most African states' economies. Through NEPAD programs, several strategies have been employed such as; the comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), the Minimum Integration Program (MIP) in 2007, the Program for Infrastructural Development in Africa (Nagar, 2016). Even with these programs, the issues of malnourishment, poverty, lack of access to potable water supply, poor health care system is still skyrocketing. An estimated 186 million people are below

the poverty line, Africa's per capitaincome is way lower than it was in the 1960s. Only with the exemption of South Africa, the average per capita income in 1997 was US\$315, meaning Africa is like the poverty capital of the world (Ali, 2020).

c. The Role of African Union in Promoting Good Governance

The APRM as a process has been designed to periodically review the progress of states in matters of governance (Akokpari, 2004). This is done to ensure states comply with certain principles of good governance, instituted by both NEPAD and AU. The review process is supervised by the AU. The APRM was instituted in 2003 by the AU in the framework of the implementation of NEPAD (AU, 2020). Member states within the APRM undertake self-monitoring in all aspects of their governance and socio-economic development (AU, 2020).

Objectives of APRM and Good Governance

- i. Democracy and Political governance
- ii. Economic governance and management
- iii. Corporate governance
- iv. Socio-economic development (APRM Reports, 2020).

APRM for good governance in Africa has been through support and partnership of African Developmental Bank (AFDB), together with other strategic partnerships such as; United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission (UNEC), (AFDB Reports, 2020).

African Union and its Developmental Challenges

The prime aim of reforming OAU to AU was for t more united African state, built on good governance and sustainability. With the test of time, the Union has been saddled with uneven challenges such as terrorism, poverty, bad governance, and intra-states disputes. The current rates of conflicts in the continent have increased drastically, disputes in Libya especially have stood the test of time. Even though the AU was successful in quelling conflicts in Burundi, the reverse is the case. The conflict in Sudan, Somalia, and even Libya has stayed too long. The inability of the AU to curtail the Libyan crisis, made it to be internationalized by NATO and other foreign powers. Subsequently, the PSC has been accused of taking sides in carrying out decisions. The assassination of Chadian President, Idriss Deby, and the PSC's initial refusal to suspend Chad from AU provided another picture of the Union.

Also, most African states are in a state of lack and want. Even though most states are blessed with endless resources, conflicting interests of some foreign superpowers have left these naturally empowered states to be internationally poor. A critical example is the current situation in Congo. The interest from superpower nations has limited the internal progress of these states.

The issues of undemocratically imposed regimes have limited progress, and this has led to conflicts. A typical example is a post-election violence in Ivory Coast. Human rights abuses have been categorically associated with most African states. Disrespect to state institutions, political actors have now assumed a position of strength over the guiding compass of the state, which is; the Judiciary, and the Constitution of the state.

The inability of the AU to fulfill its promise of an inter-African trade relation is also a major setback. Member states are unable to have a universal tariff system that will make economic relations and the ease of doing business possible. With the proposed African Free Trade Area (AFTA), if it succeeds, a more formidable economic union will emerge just like that of the EU.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the AU since its inception has been able to perform necessary functions for the developmental process of Africa, to accelerate a well-structured developmental pattern built on the premise of peace, good governance, and the fulfillment of the principle of growth.

This study, therefore, discovered that AU has been able to achieve some significant developments, owing to its short time of existence through some of its specialized agencies and programs. The PSC, NEPAD, APRM respectively are programs and agencies functioning dependently for the purposeful achievement of the prime aim of reforming the OAU to AU. The promotion of peace, socio-economic development are major areas the AU has played key parts in putting Africa on the track to greatness.

This study subsequently has provided a few areas in which the AU will achieve greater progress if considered, they are;

- i. The AU should focus more on ensuring the fulfillment of its agenda by avoiding the duplication of certain programs.
- ii. The issues of economic integration should be given great attention such as; ensuring and promoting inter-state trade with the elimination of tariffs, and customs duties just as the EU.
- iii. The Peace and Security Council should be given the power to enforce decisions without necessarily getting the nod from the United Nations Security Council, particularly in the case of an emergency. Also, the PSC should have a standing army such as that of the EU in

the position of NATO for prompt deployment of contingents in the conflict-affected areas.

iv. The AU should further ensure that Inter or Intra-state conflicts should not be internationalized as in the case of the Libyan conflict, for such has led to the escalation, allowing the free movement of arms within the African region.

v. The Ubuntu philosophy emanating from the East and Southern African region which means 'I am because we are' teaches the relevance and importance of true brotherhood. It is only when this is imbibed into the African system, the issues of xenophobic and xenophobia will hardly go into extinction.

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