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The Idea of Political Integration in Africa: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The main focus of the paper was to assess the efforts for the political integration of Africa and its challenges and prospects. The paper argued that it is hard to achieve political integration in Africa because of the presence of different grass root problems. The paper answered the questions like: what were/are the efforts to bring political integration in Africa? what are the challenges and prospects to the political integration of Africa? The paper employed qualitative research approach. It analyzed secondary sources about the efforts to realize the political integration of Africa and the recurrent challenges which restrain the political integration of Africa until the present time and for the future. Political integration is all about establishing a single central government which can govern people of a particular region with uniform laws. In different times, Africans tries to promote the idea of Pan-Africanism which is an engine to establish Unified Africa or a single central government in Africa. However, the political integration in Africa has not achieved yet due to the existence of various challenges. Still, there are no genuine ways which can bring Africans for a common goal.

Keywords: *Integration, Africa, Political Integration, Challenges, Prospects*

Introduction

The idea of political integration has been a pre-dominat idea in the African politics since the movement of independence from colonialism. It has been taken as essential aspect to promote economic growth, sustainable development and improving the bargaining power of Africa in the world politics. The focus of this idea was to fight the impact of colonialism and build a United States of Africa (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). African countries are militarily weak compare to the rest of the world. They cannot also compete in international political economy. Consequently, to counter the negative effects of the global political and economic system, the African countries seek for strong political integration (Ansah, 2013).

Most scholars argue that Africa's development will be achieved through the unity of the Africans themselves. Thus, the establishment of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU) was the first step towards promoting the continental political unity. In addition, the formation of the African Union Commission (AUC), the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development

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Bank (AfDB), and the Regional Economic and political Communities (RECs) are among the key players of regional political integration (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). A lot of efforts have been carried out to achieve the political integration of Africa. For instance, one of the aims of the OAU/AU and pan-Africanism are to bring the deepest possible political integration of the continent though Africa has no success stories to tell with respect to regional political integration. These failures are due to the presence of serious challenges such as inadequate financial resources, macro-economic instability, poor governance, sovereignty, conflicts and war, multiple memberships to different RECs etc (Ansah, 2013).

The main objective of the paper was to assess the exertions to the political integration of Africa and the major challenges which hinder the political integration of Africa as well as its prospects. Under pan-Africanism, there has been a movement to establish a United States of Africa or a politically integrated Africa. This idea is advocated by regional organizations such as OAU/AU. However, the effort is not successful due to several challenges. The findings of various literatures are optimistic about the political integration of Africa. However, this study tried to see the challenges and prospects of political integration of Africa. In doing so, the study may contribute in filling the gap in existing literatures.

2. Political Integration

Political integration is defined as surrendering of sovereignty among integrating member states in favor of a particular sovereign supra-national entity (Kingsolver, 2011). Political integration is significant to promote common political values and systems, legitimate and democratic institutions, peace, security, and stability. For instance, Southern African Development Community (SADC), promotes the establishment of shared values and norms. The shared values and norms regulates the goals of regional co-operation and development. They are embodied in the agreements, declarations and protocols that cover a wide range of political, economic and social aspects (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014). Political integration is the creation of supranational institutions' norms and values. Thus, it should consolidate the political systems or the decision making power in institution level (Ansah, 2013).

3. The Efforts to the Political Integration of Africa

3.1. Promoting the Spirit of Pan-Africanism

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The idea of Pan-Africanism traces back to 3200 B.C. when Pharaoh Aha united the upper and the lower Nile to form a united country. It was to resist foreign aggression and invasion effective and efficient manner (Nantanmbu, 1998). The idea of Pan Africanism focused on liberation, equality and unity. It was to organize Africans against racism and colonialism and to achieve United States of Africa. As Nantanmbu, Pan-African Nationalism is a unified struggle and resistance of African peoples against all forms of foreign aggression and invasion. The goal of Pan-African Nationalism was the total liberation and unification of all Africans and blacks (Nantanmbu, qoated in Okhonmina, 2009).

In Manchester Conference, the idea of Pan-Africanism was built with the aim of liberation and political unity of Africa. Some independent African States also assembled in Accra, Ghana, in 1958. They advocated the 1945 Manchester conference and played a significant role in building a common African stance in regional and global level (Laporte & Mackie, 2010). In another conference i.e. the All Africa Peoples Conference at Accra, Ghana in 1958, Nkrumah, tried to push towards politically integrated Africa. In the Conference, around 300 delegates of non-state actors were engaged and they took common stance for the realization of the political integration of Africa. In 1960, the idea of a United States of Africa was proposed in Cairo by Kwame Nkrumah. He needed a radical unification, while Nyerere advocated the gradual process to create the United States of Africa (Ansah, 2013).

According to Nkrumah, United States of Africa based on a common market, a common currency, a unified army and a common foreign policy is the only way for a massive reconstruction and modernization of the continent. As to him, it is important to increase the bargaining power of Africa in international politics and to address the interest of Africans. In doing so, Africa can gain its right place in the international arena (Quasi- Adade cited in Olaosebikan, 2011). Nkrumah's proposed Union Government included: the immediate creation of a magnificent continental superstructure, total surrender of sovereignty of individual independent African state to a supranational body, the establishment of the Federal Union Government of Africa, establishment of an African High Command as the defense unit of the continental government (Quasi- Adade cited in Olaosebikan, 2011; De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014).

3.2. Facilitating the Political Integration of Africa under OAU/AU

The OAU was established in 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was established with the visions of continental unity and integration. It was established as a loose coalition. It was used as a forum to address the mutual interest of member states without any interference in the internal

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affairs of member states (Laporte & Mackie, 2010). At the beginning, the OAU aimed in creating strong economic interaction among Africans to build mutual trust. It was perceived that strong economic interaction could lead to political integration (ibid). In 1960s, Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere became the cause for the agenda of political integration (Iroanya, 2011). As a result, during 1960s into the early 1970s, the idea of regional cooperation and integration were launched in a bid to promote inter-state economic interaction in the continent (Laporte & Mackie,2010; Ansah, 2013). The replacement of OAU by AU in 2002 was one of the steps towards the political unification of Africa. The AU is expected to work on the political integration more. The establishment of the Pan African Parliament or African Parliament in 2004 as a part of AU was accepted as essential progress to attain United States of Africa (Iroanya, 2011). In July 2005 report in Sirte, Libya, the committee which was established to deal with political integration pointed out that the creation of a union government in Africa is important (ibid). The creation of a United States of Africa was the main topic for debate at the July 2007 AU summit held in Accra, Ghana (Biney, 2008). In Accra, Ghana, the African leaders agreed to promote the economic and political integration of the Africa; conduct an audit of the organs of the AU; review the relationship between the AU and the Regional Economic Commissions; and consolidate AU and establish a central government of Africa (Olaosebikan, 2011). They also agreed to promote the involvement of African peoples and Africans in the Diaspora in the process of achieving African political integration (ibid).

4. The Challenges to the Political Integration of Africa

Despite a lot of actions have been taken for the political integration of Africa, there are a lot of challenges which hinder the genuine political integration in Africa. The challenges can be seen in the form of political, economic and social aspects.

4.1. Political Challenges

4.1.1. Controversy between State Sovereignty and the power of Supra-National entity

Members states believe that political integration may erode their sovereignty. States may be forced to give up their supreme power for another supra national entity. They believe that the decision making power will concentrate in the supra-national government. As a result, this may contain states from making their own decisions on their internal and external affairs (De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). African countries have not surrendered sovereignty to the AU. This hinders the political integration in Africa (German Development Institute, 2010; De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). African countries are not willing to surrender their sovereignty to a supranational institution. This hampers the success of a continental political integration (Olaosebikan, 2011).

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4.1.2. Nationalism and Xenophobia

Nationalism has been the major obstacle to political integration of Africa. Most African states focus on their national identity than Africa (Gomes, 2014). The post-colonial leadership and the nation building process was based on nationalism or national identity. It was important way to control state power. For this reason, African governments pay lip service to the importance of African political integration (Ansah, 2013). Some African people also dislike other African immigrants. For instance, some South African citizens attacked other African immigrants. This can creates distrust among the people of Africans and hold back the political integration of Africa.

4.1.3. The Unbalanced North-South Political Relation

The broader global economic and political environment is dominated by the strong nations particularly by the western world. African countries are still largely dependent on economic and political support of industrial countries for survival. Thus, this has been eroding the Africa's potential to the political integration (Nzewi, 2009). African states cannot rely on themselves because everything in Africa is influenced by the industrialized states. As a result, some scholars

argue that the only way Africa could achieve integration was/is by delinking itself from pre-independence geopolitical ties or colonially derived political and economic links (Ansah, 2013). **4.1.4. The Inability of AU to Lead the Integration Process**

The AU is not strong enough in creating the United States of Africa. The African Union is viewed as a transition to an "intended to be a transformation of the existing institutional framework into a qualitatively higher form of integration and cooperation that would better meet the aspiration of the peoples of Africa for greater unity and solidarity in line with the vision of

the founding fathers" (African Association of Political Science AAPS Newsletter quoted in

Okhonmina, 2009, p. 9).

There is no regional arrangement in Africa that has moved to the supra-national level (Gomes, 2014). Nevertheless, African Union is not successful in transforming to political integration. Unlike the Africa Union, the European Economic Community had already attained a high level of efficiency before its transition to the European Union (Ansah, 2013).

4.1.5. Inconsistence and incredible Policies

There is no policy consistency and credibility in Africa. The policies of most of African states are completely changed with the change of regimes in different times. For instance, in Nigeria the market-oriented economic reforms of the Obasanjo are being completely reversed by the Yar' Adua regime. Such policy uncertainty and reversals in the implementation of reforms

affects the successful integration process of Africa. The Africans have not shown consistent commitment to organizational goals to OAU or AU (Okhonmina, 2009). This staled the political integration of Africa.

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4.1.6. Recurrent Inter and Intrastate Conflicts

Since the 1960's a lot of civil wars, and inter- state conflicts have taken place in Africa. The negative impacts of the conflicts retard the process of integration. It also disturbs the political stability and peaceful coexistence of Africans. This has weakened the cohesion, unity, and the emergence of a political union in Africa (Olaosebikan, 2011). The problems of peace and security continue to challenge Africa's integration and development efforts. For instance, a number of African countries such as Sudan (Darfur and Southern Sudan), Sudan-South Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Comoros and the Central African Republic experienced conflicts and civil wars. This conflicts have devastating consequence in the process of African political integration because conflicts increase the degree of mistrust among Africans (United Nations Economic Commission of Africa, 2010; Gomes, 2014).

4.1.7. Less Popular Participation Another challenge to the success of African political integration is the non-inclusive nature of forums about the agenda of political integration. The political elites dominate the issue only as their own concern. This may undermine its acceptance by the citizens of Africa. This was one of the challenges which deter the political integration in Africa (Olaosebikan, 2011). The political leaders usually reflect their views without considering the African peoples' interest. Though OAU has been transformed to the AU, still it is not effective in conducting open popular participation on the African political integration (African Association of Political Science AAPS Newsletter cited in Okhonmina, 2009).

> "without public consultation, the United States of Africa proposal will have as much chance of flying as an elephant. African governments and citizens must therefore explore the immediate implications and opportunities a Union Government creates for ordinary citizens"(Deve quoted in Olaosebikan, 2011, p.226).

4.2. Economic Challenges

4.2.1. Less Regional Trade Exchange in Africa

Most of African states produce only raw materials. They produce almost similar commodities. There is less product diversification. As a result, there is low volume of trade among Africans. Most African countries usually conduct trade exchange with European, Asian, and American countries. Therefore it is difficult to move for political integration of Africa without promoting a low politics issues such as the intra and inter Africa trade exchange (Gomes, 2014). Trade can consolidate the relation between or among states. For instance, the European states are adhered by trade and other economic activities. It is what led them to highly integrated European Union.

4.2.2. The Uneven Benefits of Integration

The expected gains and losses are important to attain political integration. The disparities among African states lead to mistrust each other. The gains and losses

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must be shared among the members in a fair way. The benefits should not be dominated by few strong states. If the benefits are dominated by few states, the weak states may prefer more the sub-regional integrations where smaller states can band together to increase their bargaining power (Nzewi, 2009; De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). For instance, the SADC countries have acute differences in the sizes of their economies and levels of socio-political and economic development. South Africa has the most highly advanced economy in the region, while Malawi, Mozambique and Lesotho have the least developed economies. This led them to suspicion among each other (De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). The huge material difference in economic power and capacity means that the more powerful partner will dominate the benefits. This hampers the rapid integration of the sub-region and African political integration as a whole (Ansah, 2013). For genuine political and economic integration in Africa, the benefits and costs of integration must be equitably distributed among the members. Uncertainty in the sharing of benefits breeds lack of commitment to the provisions in transactional agreements (Gomes, 2014).

4.2.3. Unfair International Economic Structure

Regional Integration in Africa is advised to be in horizontal economic linkages i.e. among African themselves. However, the existing structure is vertical i.e. North-South linkages. It is economic relation between developing and developed world. In this structure, developed countries dominate the benefits. African has been marginalized from the benefits from international economy because they have less bargaining power. The North has a strong interest in Africa for accessing raw materials and markets for manufactured products (Chingono & Nakana, 2008; De Melo & Tsikata, 2014). Through manipulation of the international trading system by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO), raw agricultural and mineral products are bought at low prices determined by the North (buyers), processed and sold back to the South at higher prices also determined by the North. This leads to deterioration in terms of trade and balance of payments deficits, debt and dependency and challenges the political integration of the continent (Ansah, 2013). 4.2.4. An Overlapping Membership In Africa, overlapping membership of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) is another obstacle for the political integration of Africa. The RECs were created as stepping stones to facilitate regional integration. Now, there are 13 RECs where African states are members. Almost all African countries belong to more than one of these RECs. Twenty seven (27) African countries belong to two, 18 belong to three and one country belong to four. Two prominent examples in these regard are the Arab League and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Ansah, 2013).

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According to Njemanze,
The membership of the Arab League is working against the economic
integration of Africa. This is because the Arab world, which includes
African countries North of the Sahara desert, is united in the promotion of
the interests of the Arabs worldwide. The interests of the Arab League do
not always agree with that of African countries south of the sahara (Njemanze qoated in Olubomehin and Kawonishe, 2004, p.8).

On Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Njemanze notes further that:
The existence of OPEC as a commodity cartel is working against
economic integration of Africa. This is because its membership, which
includes non-African nations has polarised the continent into OPEC and
non-OPEC members. As the allocation of production quotas by OPEC
affects the price of crude oil in the world market and the high price of
crude oil adversely affects the economies of non-OPEC African countries,
the boat of economic integration of Africa is moving against the tide since
the prices of crude oil will remain a source of disharmony in relationship
between the OPEC and the non-OPEC African countries(Njemanze qoated in Olubomehin and Kawonishe, 2004, p.8).

4.3. Social Challenges

4.3.1. Poverty

Poverty is another problem which can restrain the successful political integration in Africa. The people living in extreme poverty (living on less than US$1 per day) in Africa increased from time to time, while the other world developing countries as a whole registered a significant reduction in extreme poverty (Mkwezalamba & Chinyama,2007). Poverty is the cause for inadequate social infrastructures in Africa such as low level of transportation, communications, education, health etc. For instance, in the area of communications Africa has the lowest telephone density in the world and the highest telephone charges. There is also low transportation infrastructures in each African state and between or among African Countries (De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). This highly hinders the regional integration process.

4.3.2. Diverse Ethnic Composition and Divergent Interests

African countries differ greatly in historical background, political structure, language, size, geography, external alignment and ideological orientation (Olaosebikan**,** 2011). Africa is perhaps the world's most fragmented region both politically and economically. It has diverse backgrounds. Different groups have different understanding and opinions on various issues. There is a problem in attaining solutions which accommodate those differences. This restrains the success of African political integration (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014).

4.3.3. Restriction of the Movement of the People

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One of such challenges is the restriction of movement of people across the breadth and length of the continent. Most African countries cannot allow the free movement of Africans from one country to another country without visa. This retarded the people to people interaction in Africa and it slowed down the progress toward political integration of the continent (Olaosebikan, 2011).

Generally, those political, economic, and social challenges are recurrent and the probability of their existence in the future is high. Therefore, in the future also the chance for the realization of the genuine political integration of Africa will be low and it needs a high sacrifices (Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2007; Gomes, 2014). The United States of Africa remains beyond the realm of African real politics. The idea of political integration of Africa is being paid lip-service by the African leaders. The largely dysfunctional OAU institutionalized this mindset, proclaiming state-centric inter-governmentalism as Africa's paradigm for the future. African political integration has not yet succeeded because African countries cannot transcend the Westphalia barrier. African countries are stick with state-centric views rather than international views (Ansah, 2013). This implies that the idea of political integration of Africa is almost existed only in principle.

5. Prospects of Political Integration in Africa

There are various sub regional organizations in Africa such COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), EAC (East African Community), ECWAS (Economic Community of West African States), and SADC (Southern African Development Community). Sub-regional organizations are important in promoting economic integration which can facilitate the political integration in continental level (De Melo, & Tsikata, 2014). There are different potentials for regional integration. For instance, some African states have petroleum oil, hydro-electric power, ports, and cash crops. These are big potentials to facilitate regional integration. However, the sub regional organizations in Africa are almost not properly used in achieving political integration. In addition to this, there are various challenges of political integration in Africa (Ansah, 2013). Thus, the idea of United States of Africa is unlikely to be achieved due to the presence of different challenges. The challenges almost become beyond the capacities of African countries. The efforts of achieving political integration are not satisfactory to achieve political integration in Africa. Usually, the issue of political integration is raised in terms of idea in different forums but they are not being realized in practice. Africa has no good integration story. For instance, Organization of African Unity was changed to African Union but the change was not more than its name. Thus, African political integration is an elusive goal (Olu-Adeyemi & Ayodele, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the idea of political integration of Africa (United States of Africa) has been started with the movement of Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanism has

advocated the independence of Africa from colonial rules, elimination of marginalization in the international political economy, avoidance of neo-colonization, the unity of Africa etc. Here one of the agendas of pan Africanism is the unity or political integration of Africa which was mostly propagated by Kwame Nkrumah and later by the other pan Africanists. Following the Pan Africanism strong believes in political integration, Organization of African Unity (OAU) had been established in 1963. This regional organization had also an intention of bringing integration in Africa though it was not as such visible. In 2002 OAU has been replaced by Africa Union (AU) to facilitate the popular participation and the realization of the political integration of Africa but still it is not successful. The political integration of Africa is not still achieved because of so many political, economic and social challenges. The political challenges such as sovereignty, absence of popular participation, recurrent conflicts etc, economic challenges like low level of trade relation, uneven economic benefit from the integration, unjust international economic structure, and so on and social challenges such as poverty, absence of free movement of people in Africa, diversity etc. Most of the challenges are recurrent and which can also persist in the future to hinder the realization of the United States of Africa. To achieve a genuine political integration of Africa, the paper recommends that there should be a strong political consensus among the African leaders and the people because it can eliminate mistrust and suspicion among Africans.

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