POLITICS, PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE AFRICAN UNION

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Abstract
Regional integration in Africa has proven to be a herculean task. Scholars have attempted to identify what they consider to be the problems with African integration, and have suggested ways to catalyze its process. Yet, the progress of African integration so far has been embarrassingly slow. Why this is so is the focal point of this work. The paper strikes an unfamiliar note. Using the African Union as a case study, it strongly contends that the diagnosis of the real problems with African integration has proved elusive to many scholars so far, and has not been fully captured. It is contended, that most of the issues raised by scholars as 'problems' are no more than opportunities in the garb of problems, and that thus, scholars have problematized opportunities and created opportunities and prospects for the major issues identified in this paper, which have been responsible for slowing down the integration process. It is noted moreover, that while problems have been over-emphasized, prospects and opportunities inside, which can be leveraged upon as building blocks for African integration have been seriously de-emphasized. The real problems constituting a cog in the wheel of the integration process are also identified. The study adopts a historical method. The study draws mainly from secondary sources such as journal articles, text books, and internet materials among others. These materials are qualitatively analyzed and presented in discursive and interpretative frames. It finds that there are many opportunities within Africa for its integration which have been ignored or wrongly recognized as problems. A shift in mindset is recommended.

Keywords: Politics; Prospects; Problems; Regional Integration; African Union

Introduction

In the Sirte Extraordinary session of September 1999 ("Sirte 9.9.99,"), African leaders decided to establish an African Union to hasten the process of African integration. Obviously inspired by the astonishing achievements of the European Union, they wanted to build an African organization patterned after it. Quickly, they swung into action by drawing up and adopting the Constitutive Act at Lome, Togo, the following year (2000). Realizing that a road map for the implementation of the African Union was necessary, they met in Lusaka in 2001 for that purpose, and came up with the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which was actually a merger of the Millennium Partnership for Africa's Development and the Omega Plan. In 2002, three years after the Sirte 9.9.9.9, the African Union was launched with fanfares in Durban, South Africa. Its predecessor, the Organization for African Unity (OAU), accused of being too slow about the business of integration was finally laid to rest. Indeed, Africa became a "continent in a hurry to make up for the past and to build a stronger future."[i] Two decades have come and gone since the arrival of AU was greeted with fanfares and hurried moves were made to integrate Africa along the line of the European Union, yet not much progress has been made. This situation has attracted the attention of scholars. But most

scholarly works on African integration have focused on the problems with the AU. Efforts have been made by scholars to point out the problems with African integration. Most of the time, this is done by comparing the AU with the EU. Some have even suggested how they think these problems could be solved, though these envisaged solutions are mainly obtained from what is trending in Europe. Yet the progress of African integration has remained embarrassingly slow. What could be responsible for these repeated disappointments? Some have expressed their reservations for the AU, wrongly concluding that it has nothing to offer Africa.

This paper strikes an unfamiliar note. It is the strong position of the present writer that the opportunities or prospects that abound for African integration have not been fully recognized, let alone utilized. It is also contended that the real problems with AU have not been fully captured. It is argued that scholars have been focusing on minor challenges, leaving out the major problems which if solved would take care of those minor challenges. It is proposed that some of the issues raised as problems are even opportunities in disguise, and that thus; scholars have problematized opportunities and thereby created opportunities for the major problems to thrive. African leaders have continued to look outside for too long and as a result have failed to see the opportunities inside. Some important questions then have to be answered.

In the first place, how far has AU gone in the business or politics of integration? What are the opportunities that abound for Africa's integration which have wrongly been seen as problems? And more importantly, what are the major or real problems of African integration and how can they be solved? It is the task of this paper to attempt to answer these questions. To do justice to this identified task, the paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, focus is placed on how the AU has fared in the politics of integration with emphasis on the progress so far. The second section analyses the so-called problems of the AU, showing how they are mere opportunities in the garb of problems. The paper then sheds light on the real problems of the AU in section three. Some suggestions on the way forward are made in section four, followed by the conclusion.

African Union, the Politics of Integration and the Progress So Far
In order to understand the present situation of the AU, one needs to understand its historical evolution. This is because the past, the present and the future are inextricably connected, and none of them can be understood in isolation. The present and the future are strongly tied to the past with an infinitely elastic rope that enables progress while disallowing disconnection. In order to understand the present situation of the AU, and how it has fared with the politics of integration, one needs at least a peep into the history of the AU. For example when people make comments like, "AU is an old, stale wine in a new label,"[ii] how can one fully understand that without a good knowledge of the history of the AU? It is then necessary to examine the history of this organization.

The history of the AU can be traced back to the pan African movement. The AU has been seen as a phase in the process of the institutionalization of pan Africanism.[iii] Pan Africanism did not start after decolonization as some think, it only got intensified. The first remarkable attempt at harmonizing the Africanist movement was the pan African Conference of intellectuals, held in Manchester, UK, in 1900. The gathering was presided over by Menelik II, uncle of Haille Selassie I.[iv] Four years later, i.e 1904, Marcus Gavey, a pan Africanist convened another epic meeting that brought African communities world-wide together, and started the Afro-centric "Back to Africa" movement in 1914.[v] The most visible attempt at regionalization after decolonization was the launching of the First Conference of Independent African States in 1958, which aimed at creating an African supra-national institution.[vi] Later that year, as more African states gained independence, the pan African Freedom Movement of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa was formed, followed by the Conseil de L'etente (1959).[vii] This was followed closely by the Union of African States (1960), the African States

of the Casablanca Charter (1961), the African Malagasy Union (1961) and the Organization of Inter-African and Malagasy States (1962).[viii] All these were the various attempts made to integrate Africa, and they also paved the way for the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the 25th of May 1963. On that day, representatives of 32 African States signed the OAU charter. Twenty-two (22) more states joined over the years, South Africa being the 53rd member in 1994.[ix]

African countries in their quest for unity, economic and social development under the OAU structure, took various initiatives to expedite the process. Some of these initiatives included the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, Nairobi (1981), Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APER) [1985], the Charter on Popular Participation (1990), the Abuja Treaty seeking to establish an African Economic Community, AEC, (1991), the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (1993), Cairo Agenda for Action (1995), African Common Position on Africa's External Debt Crisis (1997), Algiers Decision on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (1999).[x]

At a point, African leaders, influenced by the rapid changes taking place in Europe and elsewhere, saw the OAU as being too slow. As a matter of fact, the Lagos Plan of Action had postponed the attainment of self-reliant development to the year 2000, and the Abuja Treaty had removed the issue of common market from the minds of Africans at least until 2001. Moreover, there was nothing to convince Africans that these goals would be achieved at the set dates given the weakness of OAU in enforcing compliance, and the fact that some of the initial goals to be achieved before these main goals were yet to be achieved. Moreover, the hands of the clock were tickling fast. It was as a result of that that African leaders had to force the pace of change. So in July 1999, in Algiers, Algeria, African leaders decided to convene an extraordinary session to expedite the process of socioeconomic and political integration of the continent.[xi] The AU was eventually formed and launched in Durban, South Africa in 2001 after series of meetings; and in the first assembly of the Union, the New Partnership for African Development [NEPAD] was formally adopted. When AU was newly formed, it was widely believed that AU as a continental body for all-round integration is better placed than the OAU it replaced to further African integration. NEPAD, the political and socio-economic agenda of AU was also lauded mainly because it promised to transform North-South relations from a parasitic to a symbiotic one. It is therefore necessary to assess the performance of AU since its inception. How has it played the politics of integration? In other words, what progress has been made so far?

First, NEPAD as a programme of the AU has brought some changes. Before the AU, most of the integrative efforts were more of economic than political. NEPAD is a well-rounded package touching the social, economic as well as political aspects of African integration. NEPAD actually stands on three pillars – good governance (politics), massive foreign investment (economic) and sustenance of the environment (social). The logic is simple. If African leaders could create good political, social and economic environments, foreign investors would be attracted to come and invest in the continent and more capital would thus be injected into African economies. Jobs would be created and the living standard of the people would be improved upon, all things being equal. Then the foreign investors would also be compelled to take care of the environment in which they operate by the observance of global business ethics of corporate social responsibility. The foreign investors would gain socially and economically. By implication, the mutual partnership that NEPAD upholds would thus be realized. The donor-recipient relationship that Africa had hitherto maintained with the industrialized world would be changed to a symbiotic one.

It is also believed that with the economic opportunities that would be created, conflicts would reduce[xii] and African countries would go into joint development planning to enjoy economies of scale. By so doing, regional economic blocs which are believed to be the building blocks for continental unity would emerge. It also needs to be added that with the reduction of conflicts, harm done to the environment by the brutal hands of war will also reduce and the social lives of the people will be improved upon.

However, foreign investment has not markedly increased owing to the fact that the necessary environment has not actually been fully created even with the gradual political transformation of Africa. Creation of an investment-friendly environment also entails ensuring the free movement of people, goods and services and the use of best business practice methods. African countries are still rigid about their borders, and the needed advanced technology that would ensure the up-to-date best business practice methods is still largely absent. Even the little investments coming in, like the hydro-carbon exploration and exploitation, are concentrated in few countries with known or promised deposits of such exploited mineral resources.[xiii] African countries are not evenly blessed with the mineral resources that foreign investors search for. This raises a serious question that should be considered by policy makers: How will even development within the continent be realized with the use of foreign direct investment (FDI)?

Also worth mentioning is the fact that not all the economic gains from the little investments made have been enjoyed by Africa as there have been challenges like tax evasion and capital flight with advanced technologies. Going into business with a more technologically advanced party like Africa is trying to do with the West will never ensure equal gain as envisaged by NEPAD. These are some of the challenges remaining to be addressed. Apart from the attraction of foreign investors, NEPAD has also acted as a unifying factor. An elaborate headquarters office has been built for NEPAD in South Africa with member countries represented as staff. National NEPAD offices have also been put in place in member African countries.[xiv]

In terms of good governance, laudable progress has been made. More African countries have imbibed democratic principles in the practice of governance, and the military rule is no longer fashionable. The AU's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has yielded some fruits. After the ratification of NEPAD's Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, the APRM demanded that members submit to periodic peer reviews and be guided by agreed parameters for good governance at both political and economic levels.[xv]

The APRM was not made compulsory for all African states, states could join or snub it at their own volition. The only attraction is that members are held in high esteem as states with excellent performance in governance. As a top official describes it, APRM is a voluntary club of excellence in governance…"[xvi] But once a state accepts to become a member, it has to be guided by the APRM's parameters of good governance or face sanction from peers. It has to compulsorily submit to reviews which take place between three and five years after signing the APRM's Agreement of Intent to submit to a base review.[xvii]

APRM has served caution to unpopular regimes and undemocratic governments have realized that their days are numbered if they do not carry out necessary reforms. Unlike what obtained before, Burundi has changed its constitution to one that enforces power sharing; Somalia which had been without a central government for 14 years now has a transitional government in place; electoral successes have been reported in Senegal, Ghana, Benin, Niger, South Africa, Mozambique and others; Egypt now has a constitution that allows for multi-candidate presidential election, and countries like The Central African Republic, the Republic of Togo and Democratic Republic Of Congo which endured long periods of single party regimes have held elections.[xviii] The review process of the APRM has also provided

opportunities for states to learn from peers. More than half of African countries have signed the APRM's Agreement of Intent to submit to a base review and the review process has been completed for some of them already. There is a noticeable improvement on good governance in Africa. Although all the credit for this cannot be attributed to the APRM, it sure deserves a share of it. Most African countries have moved from single party to multi-party and have enacted laws in favour of zero-tolerance for corruption. But APRM has not come out of the fire of criticism unhurt. One major weakness of the APRM is its voluntary nature. Its voluntary nature has slackened the pace of even development and the attainment of good government in Africa. Non- APRM states have taken laws into their hands, abused human rights and made peace difficult to achieve. Take the former boiling Sudan for example, where many Sudanese people died in the hands of their North-dominated Darfuris government. Attempts to bring peace to reign in Sudan met with brick walls until the act of violence divided the country into two –The Northern and Southern Sudan. Three weeks after the more progressive Sothern Sudan became independent, i.e July 28, 2011, it joined the African Union. But its traditionalist Northern counterpart looked away from the ALL. The argument is this; if the Darfuris government of Sudan was forced to sign the APRM agreement, it would have exercised some restraints in the killing of its citizens and the abuse of human rights. Much still remains to be done in convincing African governments to join the APRM club. As at 2004, only four states had gone through the peer review. The utility of the APRM will remain questionable if African countries do not submit to its reviews.

> *Despite the misgivings expressed above, the idea of APRM is a good one. It is a step in the right direction. It has the potential of ensuring progress on the attainment of human rights, good governance and sound development. It will also promote mutual learning. It is also a means through which African Union members can be assessed under the auspices of NEPAD. But the major problem that has to be conquered is the problem of implementation as would be shown later.*

Security and its associated peace and stability are necessary for sustainable development. The African Union has therefore also paid attention to this area. The AU has made some progress in connection to peace, security and conflict resolution in the continent. In July 2002, the AU adopted the Peace and Security Protocol, an instrument that would enable it play an effective role in the managing conflict and ensuring peace and security. The protocol established the African Peace and Security Council (APSC) as a standing body for preventing and managing conflict.[xix] In February 2003, AU's Interim Commission on Peace and security and the NEPAD secretariat met to discuss how they would work together on peace and security issues in Africa.[xx] The AU Assembly of Heads of States and Governments Meeting in Maputo in July 2003 established and approved a broad-based agenda for the African Peace and Security Council.[xxi] In an extraordinary Summit in Libya on February 27 and 28, 2004, a Common Security and Defense Policy for Africa was adopted, the Peace and Security Protocol having secured a sufficient number of ratifications to come into force.[xxii]

The APSC obviously patterned after the UN Security Council has the main objective of preventing conflicts between member states. As one of the organs of the AU, its function is to facilitate a timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.[xxiii] It can intervene militarily if necessary. The APSC has made some impacts to justify its establishment. The Peace and Security Council of the AU envisaged having an African Standing Brigade made up of military and paramilitary personnel picked from the regions which can be trained and

deployed at sub-regional or continental levels. The example of the use that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) made of ECOMOG, a multi-lateral peace monitoring group, to intervene in the Liberian civil war (1989 – 1996) was what gave inspiration to the AU. The right of the Union to intervene in any member state under a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances like war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity,[xxiv] as provided by the Constitutive Act was used as a legitimizing ground. A goal was set for 2010 for the African Stand-by Force (ASF) and its military and civilian crisis management tool to reach its full operational capacity.[xxv] Realizing the need for the training of the military brigade, the EU was approached for assistance and collaboration mainly because the EU had experience in military missions in Africa.[xxvi] Also, the AU lacked continent-wide experience in such a type of security mission and equally lacked available equipment for the training.[xxvii] The AU-EU dialogue thus got intensified.

After sharing the vision with the EU, the latter organized an intensive educational training cycle dedicated to the ASF. The training cycle was named Amani Africa (peace for Africa) in the Swahili language based on an EURORECAMP, adapted to African reality.[xxviii] The Amani Africa Cycle lasted between 2008 and 2010 when it culminated with the Command Post exercise.[xxix] The AU has continued to partner with the EU ever since over the matter of security, and the interaction between them in the form of hybrid security missions, summits, committee and working groups has led to the emergence of a trans-regional organizational infrastructure. A secretariat has been ordination and implementation.[xxx] A trilateral dialogue was established between the AU and the EU for the purpose of research, policy planning, co- also initiated between the AU, the EU and China with the aim of promoting peace and security and contributes to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).[xxxi] There have, however, been challenges in the trans-regional relations. Sometimes, a clash of interest has affected co-operation. In the case of the Ivorian and the Ethiopian crises, the EU refused to act majorly because it also had security issues on its hands.[xxxii] But the minor clashes notwithstanding, the AU-EU relations have remained virile. Just last year (2014), the fourth Africa–EU Summit was held in Brussels between 25th and 26th April, and discussions on issues of common interest even went beyond security.[xxxiii]

Moreover, the APSC has recorded some laudable feats. It has sent peace-keeping troops to alleviate political and social disorder in places like Darfur (Sudan), Somalia, Burundi, Comoros, Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo. Some of these missions have been criticized as being too underfunded, and the troops under-trained.[xxxiv] It has also suspended some member countries from the union after bad political events like coup d'etats and civil and other political crises. For example, it suspended Mauritania in2005 (because of coup d'etat), Madagascar in 2009 (due to political crisis), Guinea Bisau in 2012 (due to coup d'etat), Egypt in 2012/13 (due to political crisis).[xxxv]

Progress has also been made on the implementation of plans focused on areas of challenges common to most African countries. Such priority areas of challenge critical to sub-regional and continental economic integration like agriculture, infrastructure, communication, etc have received AU's attention. The detailed implementation plans for each priority area under the NEPAD agenda were prepared, and the initial action plan for their implementation was ratified during the AU Summit in Durban in July 2002.[xxxvi] Thus far, the agricultural sector has been picking up, and AU has been able to get international organizations and donors like the World Bank, EU, USAID, IFAD and others to support the development of agriculture. For example, the World Bank has earmarked US$60 billion for agricultural research and technological development in the continent every year.[xxxvii]

In the area of infrastructure, the introduction of competition has brought more efficiency. Market liberalization policies have been encouraged by the AU. The African Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank have also been engaged by the AU leaders in financing

infrastructure projects. To reach the grassroots, existing Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have been asked to identify important multi-country infrastructure projects for urgent attention.[xxxviii] In the area of communication, the AU is working on setting up a single numbering digit code for Africa.[xxxix] This will enable Africa to have a single access digit code as obtainable in some of the developed regions of the world and would help to reduce the cost of telecommunications in the whole of the continent. Apart from reducing cost, it will also make communications across the continent more efficient and faster, and thereby make intra-African business transactions easier.

Apart from these identified areas, the AU has also shown interest in ensuring the security of food, water supply, environmental sustainability etc. In 2003, AU made its Declaration on food security in Maputo, Mozambique.[xl] The Declaration at least showed the AU's interest in ensuring the availability of food and the7strategy it Wants to use to achieve it. Similar declarations were made on water security (Libya, 2004) and on environment (Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, 2004).[xli] However, there has not been sufficient progress in these areas.

The AU, realizing that this age of globalization is also the age of international terrorism, has taken measures to develop the capacity to prevent and tackle international terrorist attack. A research centre has been established to that effect by the African Union.[xlii] It was established in November 2004. While this is a step in the right direction, it must be noted that it is not enough to combat terrorism, aggrieved groups within the continent must be listened to and their grievances ironed out. That is how to solve the problem from the root, not from the roof as the AU is trying to do. Moreover, the organization must increase its technological power base. Also, the research centre should not become an abandoned monument; ardent commitment to it should be sustained by the AU leaders.

Another noble achievement of the AU is the move to involve Africans in Diaspora in the integration of Africa through the economic, cultural and social council (ECOSOCC) launched in March 2005. The Diaspora referred to as the "6th Region" of Africa is believed to be indispensable in the process of African integration. Through ECOSOCC, AU leaders are planning to achieve two major things. First, to give the Africans in Diaspora, the opportunity to have more say in African affairs; and second, to harness the African brains outside Africa, for Africa's development. A plan is ongoing to "assemble and utilize a data bank of human resources available in the Diaspora to turn Africa's brain drain to brain gain."[xliii] In the 2009 African union flag-choosing competition organized by the Africa union commission (AUC), entries were made by and accepted from the Diaspora.[xliv] It is, however, pertinent to note that not much has been achieved in giving the African people the chance to make contributions in the running of the integration scheme. The Africa parliament that was established was not given legislative power. Africans have not been able also to have a common say or to express a common position on the reform of the United Nation Security Council. Although they spoke with one voice at the UN meeting, back in Africa, the common voice abroad brought disunity at home as some big countries like Nigeria and South Africa began to struggle for candidacy if eventually honoured.[xlv]

The issue of rationalizing the RECS which had been under discussion for several years and formed the theme of the 2006 Banjul Summit was finally decided on at the July 2007, Accra Summit. It was argued that too many RECS would hamper continental unity. A protocol on Relations between the African Union and the RECS was adopted. The RECS were eventually rationalized, and only eight [Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Sahara States (CE-SD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States

(ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)] were recognized by the AU.[xlvi] A memorandum of understanding was signed between AU and the RECS, as a way of harmonizing the RECS. The minimum Integration program (MIP) has been also introduced to coordinate the efforts of the RECS to come in line with the continental efforts. Strategies for funding MIP projects have been also devised. A proposal was endorsed by the Heads of state and Government to from an Integration fund. This rationalization exercise however, is not however in the best interest of Africa, as would be shown later in this paper.

Another commendable achievement of the AU is the move to revive the dying African languages. Although the Constitutive Act of the AU had listed Arabic, English, French and Portuguese, and African Languages "if possible,"[xlvii] as the working languages of the AU, the amended version of that portion of the Constitute Act adopted in 2003, added Spanish, Swahili and "any other African Language," and recognized all six as "official" languages of the African Union.[xlviii] An African Academy of Languages founded under the auspices of the AU in 2001 has been used to promote the usage and perpetuation of African languages among African people; and 2006 was also declared the years of African languages.[xlix]

Language of course is an integrative tool. Europe is also trying to preserve its languages because languages are a channel of interaction.[l] African states have maintained links with their former colonial masters mainly because a means of communication, basically languages has persisted even though the colonialists have retired. African integration cannot be truly completed without the resuscitation and perpetuation of the African languages. The establishment of African languages Academy is commendable. But the challenge remains how to pick one African language as the Africans lingua franca without being misunderstood of wanting to phase out the unused ones. Also what criteria should be used in choosing an African lingua franca? The AU must work on these challenges. Move towards the attainment of the goals of the Abuja Treaty-mainly the establishment of a common market in Africa-has been rather too slow, although the process that will lead to it has been broken into several stages.

Not much progress, however, has been made, at least in many areas. Overall, African integration still suffers serious setbacks. The Assembly of Heads of State still dominate the affairs of integration while the people's voice at least for now is not much reckoned with. The pan African Parliament (PAP), a platform that would have helped pan-African voice to be heard and felt in the AU is at least for now denied legislative right. It is only given a subsidiary place in the scheme of things as it has been given no more than the rights to be consulted and to make recommendations. Such recommendations will still have to go through the sifting hands of the AU Assembly or even be ignored all together. At its inauguration in 2001, it was agreed that the PAP would have to exercises only advisory powers for the first five years of its existence, after which its effectiveness will be assessed before the decision to entrust it with legislative power or not will made. With this tactical clause, it is doubtful if the leaders have the mind of empowering the PAP in the nearest future. The question then is, how can the effectiveness of a body in performing a particular role be ascertained, as African leaders claim they are doing, if that body is not given the opportunity to try its hands on that role? How will the AU ascertain the effectiveness of the PAP in acting as a legislative body, if legislative rights are not conferred on it at least under a probative condition? Moreover, Africa-wide elections are not even conducted to enable Africans elect parliamentarians who represent them in the PAP.

Apart from poor popular participation, which is itself a source of democratic deficit, some African governments are still undemocratic. And sometimes the AU has not been very serious about standing tall against undemocratic government. How can one explain the AU's recognition of Faure Gnassingbe of Togo, who just took over the presidency in Togo after his

father's death without being elected? The AU at first did not recognize the president, but later changed its position. Although the AU gave its recognition counting on the president's promise to conduct elections, the election which was won by Gnassingbe was popularly said to be highly rigged, yet he was recognized by the AU.[li]

It is also obvious that the African economic community is yet to be seen. The economic integration of the continent has continued to linger as the borders are still closed against each other with high economic protective walls in form of tariffs still erected. If African leaders know that the borders are the gateways to African integration, why are the borders still closed? What of the talk about single currency? Why has it not been achieved? In the overall, African integration, which is the major goal of the African Union has not been fully achieved, why? Apart from the obvious challenges like the scourge of HIV/AID and other health challenges, Poverty, underdeveloped nature of the countries of the continent, environmental issues and others, what are the problems confronting African integration?

In their bid to find answers to these questions, scholars have created a greater problem, namely, the problematization of opportunities. In the next section, this paper proves that most of the so called problems of African integration have in-built opportunities that are yet to be realized and utilized. Over-consciousness of problems has barred the door against opportunity-consciousness.

Problems of African Integration: Opportunities (prospects) in Disguise

When one continues to look at the same direction with the same eyes, the object that will be seen will not change. With the same eyes of the past, the opportunities that the present writer is about to show may still not be seen. But they are real and can be utilized to further the course of integration. The 'problems' raised here may still be seen as problems, but the argument of the present writer is that when the opportunities they offer are discovered, they cease to be problems but opportunities.

One of the 'problems' that scholars have mentioned is the proliferation of regional organizations.[lii] Closely associated with this is the issue of overlapping regionalism, or what has been referred to as "African spaghetti Bowl."[liii] It is argued, that the proliferation of regional (or sub-regional) organizations in Africa has had a draw-back effect on the course of African integration in the light of competition for resources and political affluence by intergovernmental organizations.[liv] But we must not stop at this. The author remained worried however, that even with the harmonization and rationalization move of AU, not all the envisaged problems have been solved. Hear him:

> *Even though many of the identified root causes have lost relevance in the continent's emerging institutional landscape, not all of the structural, political and cultural tensions underlying inter-institutional co-operation in Africa have been convincingly solved.[lv]*

If there is no solution there, then Africa must look elsewhere. The AU has rationalized RECs in Africa and has decided to recognize only eight which have been earlier mentioned in the previous section. The Union went further to place a ban on further proliferation of regional organizations within Africa.[lvi] How has this bettered African integration? Has not a harm to be realized later been done? Is this practice consistent with internationally recognized best practice of integration? Is the proliferation of regional groupings peculiar to Africa? It has been noted that the overlapping of regional organizations is not peculiar to Africa. Europe has many

regional organizations too.[lvii] Unlike the embargo move of the AU, the EU has created the committee of the regions as one of its organs through which dialogue can be maintained between the two parties. Continental and regional strengths are not supposed to stand in opposition to each other, as states remain the essential building blocks from which such arrangements are constructed.

The exclusivist or rather minimalist posture of the AU towards regional and sub-regional groupings in this regard is not new. Nkrumah, in an unguarded reaction against European integrative structures in place after independence, argued that regional arrangements are antithetical to real pan-Africanism.[lviii] It can be inferred that such a position maintained by a towering figure in Africa perhaps is yet to lose its hold on the minds of African leaders. Scholarly postulations including the ones that should best be confined to the realm of theory do indeed affect the course of governance. Perhaps the emphasis on proliferation of regional groupings as a problem by scholars has motivated the placing of ban on the further floating of regional groups. Perhaps it wouldn't have been seen as a problem in the first place.

What then are the opportunities derivable from operating multiple regional and sub-regional organizations? Regional and sub-regional organizations have been seen as the building blocks of continental integration. When there is harmony between the two parties, it helps to avoid asymmetrical regionalism". The more they are the better, if they can survive. What the AU needs to do is to strengthen them, and where it lacks the resources, it should allow them to be naturally strengthened through competition. Let the fittest ones survive, and let the weak ones phase out naturally. This approach has at least two advantages. First, it removes the question of marginalization or favoritism that could arise in the process of choosing the ones to survive through the rationalization process. Second, it makes the surviving ones stronger than the ones that were "artificially" strengthened.

Proliferation of regional organizations in Africa leads to division of labour or what the present writer calls "efforts distribution." Sub-regional, regional or continental priority programmes can be shared for each one to carry out the ones that fall within its competence. By so doing the integration business can be done faster. Thus, it can be seen that the proliferation of regional groupings is not really a problem, but an opportunity begging to be tapped into if we really care to open our eyes. In this light, it is better for the AU to lift the ban on the formation of new regional organizations and let the existing ones operate freely. They should be recognized too to make the integration process an all-inclusive and democratic one. They can be used as means to get connected to the people at the grassroots, where the AU's direct impact may not be felt. Recognizing them will also clear the bitter feeling of favoritism and smokes of bitterness that may be hanging over the rationalization process. Harmonization is the key, not rationalization.

Apart from the 'problem' of regional organizations proliferation, mention has often been made of the fear of domination being exercised by weaker nations (or rather their leaders). This is natural given the unequal nature of states all over the world. Some by geographical strength, or technological advancement, population etc. have edge over others. Is this then a problem or opportunity in disguise? The truth is that it ought to be an opportunity, to provide checks on the avarice of big states and put them at alert. That expression of fear is natural and not a problem. But it can also be turned into a problem as has been mostly done, thus problematizing opportunities. For example, within the SADC group, the other countries see South Africa as a threat. This is not necessary, it has been argued that the presence of a regional hegemon serves as a positive force for developing, nurturing, as well as building a regional peace and security system.[lix] This is in consonance with the theory of "hegemonic stability" propounded by Kaohane.[lx] By this theory, it is meant that the stronger nations can act as stabilizing force for the groups they belong to. What the other members of the group should do is to give them the right environment to act. They should not be suspected, limits should rather

be drawn. A compensating scheme should be designed for such powers. The compensation scheme will help to remind the stalwart state that it is 'hired' and also dissuade her from thinking of lording it over the others, as well as provide encouragement. It is normal to have such stronger nations or regions in the community of states or regional alliance. In the international scene it has been so. Britain at a time provided that 'stabilizing force', before USA took over. In African union, countries like Nigeria and South Africa can play this role. For example, Nigeria is the driving force behind the ECOWAS economy.[lxi]

Nationalist spirit is another issue that has been considered as a negative factor in the integration move. Rather than see this as a wheel of integration progress, it has been looked at as a cog in the wheel of progress. Even in Europe, "it is not possible to envisage in the foreseeable future, a Europe in which nationalism is eradicated."[lxii] In the 50's De Gaule brought nationalist pressures to bear on European integration. His inter- governmentalist conception of European political union is a display of nationalism.[lxiii] A complementary relationship between the nations and the continental body will help to tap into the opportunities that nationalism offers to continental integration. It can act as a brake to wrong policies, apart from providing membership for the continental body. Nations on the other hand should trust the continental or supranational institutions and entrust them with the necessary powers by sharing sovereignty with them just as the citizens in the states have entrusted their governments with power. Each party should be considerate.

It is important to note that extreme forms of nationalism associated with xenophobia and disdain for all foreigners are not supported by the present author. These will have more destructive than constructive effects. Unfortunately, Xenophobic wind just blew across South Africa, and the consequence was not favourable to integration as many foreigners had to flee. The fact is that AU can never be sapped dry of nationalist spirit at least in the foreseeable future. The earlier this is realized and factored into the cost as well as gain of integration, the better. The nations should be woven into the integration scheme, a cordial relation between the continental body and the constituent nations will ensure that they are used as bridges rather than as barriers to continental integration.

Another 'problem' is the scarcity of resources, funds and economic opportunities.[lxiv] It must first be borne in mind that the belief that Africa lacks resources or economic opportunities is a grand way of problematizing opportunities. Africa has enough resources for its development. The opportunities are there but have not been tapped. If Africa lacks resources, then the colonial officers would have not stayed more than a year in Africa given the harsh weather, tropical diseases and indigenous oppositions they encountered. There are resources in Africa, though unequally distributed within the states. What is lacking is the determination and technical know-how to explore and exploit the abundant resources. Also, when available resources are exploited, funds will be definitely obtained.

But even the current scarcity of exploited resources is not a wholesale disadvantage to the AU. The opportunity it offers for African integration is that it shows and reflects the strength of Africa currently and the need to streamline integration projects and scope to match with the strength for now. Harmonizing scope and strength is important, so we do not embark on more than we can afford and then rely heavily on support from outside. It is true that in this age of globalization, no continent or state can do without other states or continents, but the extent of dependence must be checked to avoid neo-imperialism.

Another issue that has been identified and most publicized as a problem of Africa integration is internal clash and conflict.[lxv] But internal conflict is not peculiar to Africa, Europe too has cases of conflicts to handle, the magnitude may be the only difference but it has not hindered them from moving forward. In the words of a scholar, "even if Europe's history is

characterized by conflicts and wars this has not prevented the states leaders from producing a common currency, a European passport and proposed European constitution.[lxvi] At least recently, EU had the issue of the origin of Georgia and Kosovo to handle. Conflict is normal in any relationship, at least indicating that the relationship is still alive. But the way the conflict is managed is what makes it a problem or not. Although not all who take up arms can be justified, but more often than not, people go to war when they feel aggrieved, cheated or denied a right. Conflict thus has the advantage of reminding us to gather round a table and settle some underlying factors in our relationship, and achieve true peace. Thus conflict has been seen as the fastest way to achieve peace. The AU leaders have been more concerned about how to wade in and suppress 'revolters', and thus postpone peace. Intervention is not a solution in itself. It should not be seen as end but a means to an end – resolving underlying grievances. It is then very obvious that these issues are not the main problems of African integration. The real problems have been mostly glossed over while these minor issues (opportunities in disguise) have been emphasized. In the next section, the real problems will be identified. It will become very obvious that if the main problems are addressed, the other minor challenges will be easily conquered and turned into opportunities.

Real problems of African integration
The real problems confronting African integration are not many. The greatest limitations to African integration are leadership or implementation issues and imitation. From these two come all the other issues. Any attempt to solve African integration problems without dealing first with these two will amount to trying to drive in a nail without hitting it at the head. In Africa, the ruling elites are the most important makers of policy. They are better organized than the population at large and command most resources – power, money, information etc.[lxvii] Thus to understand the outcome of politics one must look at them. Leadership is cause; everything else is effect even in the matter of integration. The apex organ of the African Union the Assembly of the Union is membered by African Heads of States. The organ determines what happens in all the other organs: every salient decision has to pass through its table. African leaders (Heads of States and Governments) exercise enormous power. African leaders have shown a lack of commitment, in implementing principles, plans and decisions arrived at the union meetings. This lack of commitment is the major obstacle confronting African integration. African leaders have good plans of action but lack action. They are not wanting in ideas; MIP, NEPAD, AEC, APRM etc. are all salutary ideas. What is lacking is the political will and practical commitment to implementing all the plans drawn and to opening up all the borders. African countries are still behind in the programme to open up their borders, and customs red tape prevails.[lxviii] The leaders' lack of full commitment has also manifested in the failure to incorporate the agreements reached at the continental integration body into national plans; and the unnecessary dominance of the ruling elites in the implementation process has made the people at the grassroots to withdraw their support.

There has also been the attitude of reluctance towards the ratification of protocols. It has been observed that of the thirty-four (34) protocols and conventions that had been ratified and thus in force as at May 2005, there was an average of three and half (3½) years between signing and ratification. Nine (9) protocols took five (5)years or more to come into force and similar number had not been ratified by the required number of states to come into effect.[lxix] Take the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) for example. More than one-third of the AU member states are yet to ratify it, only about thirty-three (33) have shown commitment by signing it. There are abundant resolutions, declarations, protocols, plans of action, statements and charters all aimed at furthering regional integration in the continent, but no real commitment is shown in implementing them. The greatest hurdle that has hampered African integration is the lack of willingness by the leaders to commit themselves to the stated goals

and objectives of the AU and NEPAD. Apart from the lack of commitment to implementing AU's decisions, the leaders' competence is in doubt.[lxx] African integration requires professional hands. There is a need for the professionalization of the leadership. Professional hands rather than the Heads of State who are more often than not, unskilled in the integration scheme. Moreover, many of them have run failed governments at the home Fronts (national levels). How then can they be able to deliver at the continental level?

The second major problem confronting African integration is imitation. African Union lacks much self-expression. There is so much concentration on the EU as a model. Rigidity as per the model to follow has hindered creativity. There is so much belief in everything European, and when there is continuous look outward, the opportunities inside will hardly be seen. Apart from failing to see the opportunities inside and the absence of creativity, imitation can be very deceptive and illusory. When the institutional structures and external features of EU are copied, it deceives Africans that the AU is just like the EU whereas the gap between the two is still very much internally and practically speaking. The thought of solving African integration problems by emulating the EU is a big problem Africa must conquer.

The bid to meet up with Europe in terms of integration has made Africa to jump certain necessary steps, not taking into cognizance the long time it took Europe to get there. For example, in 1991 when the leaders were yet to open all the borders and the border lands were yet to be developed, talk about common market in 2001 started, merely because Europe had established a common market. But 2001, and twenty-four more years have come and gone, yet African common market has not been realized. What is needed is adaptation not imitation. Of course, successful integration lessons can be learnt from regional bodies all over the world, but the lessons must be adapted to fit into African context.

Imitation has also led to much dependence on the industrialized world for both financial and intangible supports in building African integration to align with their integration schemes. Much dependence has also opened the road for imperialism. NEPAD's mutual relationship strategy notwithstanding, unseen hands still influence African integration through various indirect means such as donations and "officials' assistance." Surely, he who pays the piper somehow still dictates the tune. Again, comparing Europe's integration body with that of the AU has made Africa to become problem-conscious. For example, realizing that Europe started with few developed countries and then admitted more members as they developed, it is generally believed that Africa's all-inclusive approach was wrong in the first place. But instead of thinking of the opportunities that can be made out of this novel approach that has already been adopted, there is much talk of problems with little or no progress being made. This is another way problem-consciousness has been perpetuated. Indeed, as a scholar has observed, the major issues impeding integration in Africa could be classified into two related main areas: "issues of implementation and the limitation of insight from both the theoretical and empirical literature regarding the specific approaches that are appropriate for the continent."[lxxi] What then are the solutions to these identified problems? Providing answer to this question is what the next section, which is also the concluding section, sets out to do.

Conclusion

To start with, there must be a change of orientation. Opportunities should be discovered out of every seeming problem or challenge and exploited for the furtherance of the integration scheme. Problematization of opportunities which is a problem itself should stop. There must be opportunity and solution consciousness. The leadership holds the key to the transformation of the African Union. If the leadership becomes right and committed, every other challenge will be seamlessly arrested. The borders will be flung open, sub-regional and continental

interests will be harmonized, undemocratic states will be sanctioned, underlying grievances will be resolved and the process will become more participatory. With committed leadership, African integration is bound to move forward. A scholar hit the nail on the head when she wrote: "The key question for the future of regional integration is the extent to which the current and succeeding generations of leaders are willing to commit themselves to the stated objectives of the AU and NEPAD."[lxxii]

Moreover, the apex organ of AU must be urgently professionalized. This will help to bring in professional hands to run the system and thus weed out incompetence at the leadership level. Although there are professional hands in the AU Commission i.e. the commissioners, but since they are subservient to the apex organ, the Assembly of the Union, their full impact is not being brought to bear on the integration scheme. They only play the role of the errand boys of the Heads of States, and do not have the power to make any unilateral decision. Added to the professionalization of the apex organ, the Pan-African parliament should be empowered to act as check on the professionals. The PAP should be given legislative power.

On a final note, nothing is as limiting as self-imposed imitation. There is need for change of orientation. African leaders and scholars need to think outside the box and come out of the mould into which imitation has so far confined them. There is an urgent need for the total over-hauling of the available theoretical and empirical literature that focus on a specific approach to integration. African scholars should develop, write and publish good innovative ideas that can move the integration process forward regardless of the approach. On the other hand, the leaders should adopt the good ideas and suggestions made and published by both African and none African scholars all over the world. It will take this kind of cooperation between the gown and the town to achieve the regional integration of Africa's dream.

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