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**Key Factors of Capacity
Development for Regional
Integration in Africa**

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Key Factors of Capacity Development for Regional Integration in Africa

Over the last few decades, there has been a resurgence of regionalism across the globe. The world has witnessed a proliferation of new regional blocs; and a revival of old ones. As Schiff and Winters observe, by the turn of the decade, virtually all countries belonged to at least one regional bloc (Schiff & Winters, 2003). They further note that more than a third of world trade now takes place within regional trading blocs (Schiff & Winters, 2003). Most of these regionalization initiatives have been pursued with objectives ranging from simple reduction of barriers to trade (tariffs and non-tariff barriers), to far-reaching initiatives featuring deeper economic integration and even extending to some form of political union. There is a marked discontinuity between this new wave of regionalism and the preceding regional integration initiatives. The new wave features deeper political and economic integration, beyond the free trade arrangements that characterized traditional regionalization, and is characterized by far more complex and multi-dimensional processes and institutions. Theorists posit the new wave as a response to the failure and decline of the nation-state, and as a means of containing the phenomenon of globalization. At its essence though, regionalism has been perceived, especially by countries in the “South”, as a tool for development. Proponents of this view would add that regionalism of the kind that characterizes the current wave has been inspired by the success story of European integration.

This new wave of regionalism has also swept across the continent of Africa. Indeed, regionalism itself is not a new phenomenon in Africa. Some of the world’s oldest customs unions are found in Africa; a legacy of colonialism. Whereas we associate African regional trade integration initiatives since the 1960s with what Mario Telò (2001) has termed as “economic regionalism,” which emerged alongside US-centred multilateralism of the same period, the actual

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urge for the unification of the African continent pre-dates African Independence. Since the pre-Independence period, Africa has been persistent in its call for a regional approach to its development efforts. Even if in the subsequent decades, following Independence, the rather idealistic dream of a politically united Africa, tempered by the complex realities of nation-building, has given way to more modest forms of integration, Africa has remained steadfast in its belief that its welfare is predicated on the unity of the Continent. As Olivier has noted, there has existed a consensus in Africa since decolonization, “that given the Continent’s economic and geo-political realities, regionalization is the sine qua non for meaningful progress” (Olivier, n.d.).

However, Africa’s past attempts at integration have almost all been unsuccessful. Many reasons have been cited for these failures. The anti-colonial fervour of the immediate post-Independence period which featured a clamour for unification under such slogans as “African Unity”, “African Fraternity” and “Pan-Africanism”, and envisaged an ultimate transformation of the Continent into a single African political state - the United States of Africa, would be hampered by several factors, including, a “lack of clear leadership and the iron law of impenetrable national sovereignty”, and would therefore fail to move beyond minimalist-intergovernmentalist cooperation (Olivier, n.d.). The efforts at integration would further be compounded by the subversive post-colonial leadership “driven by the expedience and power political considerations”, and the twin burdens of nation-building and consolidation of national identities (Olivier, n.d.).

The current wave of African regionalism has unfolded against the backdrop of these failed attempts at integration. The urge for revival of the African regionalist project can roughly be traced to the initiatives of the now defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU), in the early 1980s, to revitalize the African economy in the wake of the failure of Africa’s post-colonial economic strategies of the 1960s and 1970s (El-Affendi, 2009; Olivier, n.d.). With the support of the United Nations (UN) through its Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the initiative of the OAU would culminate in the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos (FAL), which urged the revitalization of the already existing, Economic Community of the West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa, and the establishment of the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) in 1981 for the East and Southern African states, and the Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) in 1983 for central African states (El-Affendi, 2009).

The Abuja Treaty of 1991, which marks perhaps the most important phase in the evolution of African integration, was launched upon the foundations of the LPA and FAL. The Treaty would lay down the groundwork and a timeline for full continental economic integration, initially by the year 2025, now updated to 2034. Continental integration, it stated, would be achieved progressively, in stages, beginning with the construction/revitalization of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks. The continental integration would culminate in the African Economic Community (AEC). Table 1 shows the stages outlined by the Abuja Treaty for achieving the African Economic Community.

Table 1: 6 Stages for Achieving the AEC

Phase	Objective	Time Frame
1	Strengthening of existing RECs and establishing new ones in regions where they do not exist	1994 - 1999
2	Stabilization of tariff and other barriers to regional trade and the strengthening of sectorial integration, particularly in the field of trade, agriculture, finance, transport and communication, industry and energy, as well as coordination and harmonization of the activities of the RECs	1999 - 2007
3	Establishment of a free trade area and a Customs Union at the level of each REC	2007- 2017
4	Coordination and harmonization of tariff and non-tariff systems among RECs, with a view to establishing a Continental Customs Union	2017- 2019
5	Establishing of a continent-wide African common market	2019 - 2023
6	Establishing of a continent-wide economic and monetary union (and thus also a currency union) and pan-African parliament	2023 - 2028
7	End of all transition periods	Latest by 2034

Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2012.

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The Sirte Declaration of 1999 proposed the establishment of the African Union (AU), and the two subsequent summits, in Lomé (2000) and Lusaka (2001) which adopted the Constitutive Act of the African Union and the Plan for the Implementation of the African Union, respectively, would reinforce the objectives of the Abuja Treaty. The Abuja Treaty therefore embodies the dream of African integration, and provides both its roadmap and a framework for achieving it. Table 2 shows the status of the implementation of the Abuja Treaty.

Like the previous attempts at regional integration in Africa, the current wave of African regionalism is predicated on the ability of stakeholders to circumvent a myriad of impediments. Among the factors that could potentially hamper the efforts at African integration are: overlapping membership in multiple RECs, insecurity and political instability, inadequate and poor regional infrastructure network, weak institutional and human capacity, diversity across the economies and divergent country attitudes towards regional integration, and the strong attachment to state sovereignty. Each of these factors is discussed in the following section.

Table 2 (next page) shows the membership of African states in different economic organizations. Nearly all African states are members of four of the eight RECs. Most states belong to at least two RECs, while some, like Kenya, belong to up to four.

Figure 1 (on page 6) demonstrates the overlap and redundancy of certain regional economic communities, and the complexity of economic integration in Africa. Overlapping membership of regional economic communities, now referred to as the “Spaghetti Bowl”, has been often cited as a factor which affects the development of regional integration in Africa. Overlapping membership in the RECs is, for instance cited as the reason for the coordination challenges facing the organizations. It also leads to duplication of integration activities, resources and programs, and conflicting goals and policies, rendering the implementation of provisions of the organizations mostly impossible for member states. Overlapping membership also leads to a lack of a clear and strong commitment of member states to particular regional blocs. It further dissipates the energies and resources of the states. Policy makers and theorists have therefore repeatedly counseled rationalization as a condition for the success of Africa’s integration project.

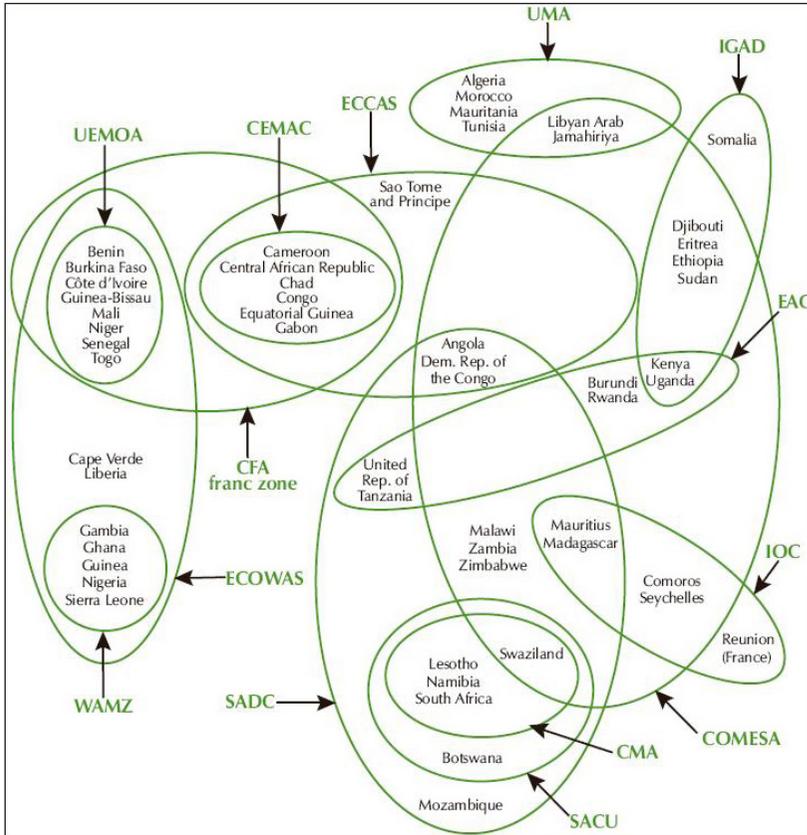
Table 2: Status of Implementation of the Abuja Treaty per REC

Source: African Union, 2012

Stages of the Abuja Treaty	Stage one: 1994-1999	Stage two: 2000-2007		Stage three: 2008-2017		Stage four: 2018-2019	Stage five: 2020-2023	Stage six: 2024-2028 latest 2034
	Strengthening existing RECs and creation of new RECs where they do not exist	Coordination and harmonization of activities	Gradual elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers	Free Trade Area	Customs Union	Continental Customs Union	Establishment of an African Common Market	Monetary and Economic Union
UMA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In progress	Not yet	Not yet	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved Customs Union and harmonized their respective CET, with a view of creating one single continental CET		
IGAD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	In progress	Not yet	Not yet	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved continental customs union as well as free movement of labour and capital		
SADC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2013	This stage will be achieved when all RECs have achieved African Common Market at which time there will be a common currency, issued by the African Central Bank.		
CENSAD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not yet	Not yet	Not yet			
ECOWAS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2015			
COMESA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
ECCAS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No date fixed			
EAC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

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Figure 1: African Nations' Overlapping Membership in RECs: The "Spaghetti Bowl" of African Economic Organizations



Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2008.

Insecurity and Political Stability

A novelty of the new wave of regionalism has been the inclusion of issues of security as an objective of regional integration. Most previous regionalization attempts were often limited to trade and economic cooperation. In the Cold-War bipolar world, despite attempts at a multilateral approach to issues of insecurity by the UN, matters of security were judged to belong to the domain of the nation-state rather than regional blocs. Moreover, during the Cold War, the threats of

insecurity were posed, not by regions but by individual nation-states and it was the responsibility of the state to guarantee the safety of its citizens.

For many, the Cold War - a war of ideas and ideologies rather than direct conflict between the major protagonists - exemplified all the doubts about the value of the modern state, which was forged out of violence and seemed unable to guarantee the safety of its citizens except through a balance of terror with other states, and over which hung the constant threat of nuclear annihilation. A successful state must keep most of its people happy most of the time, but many theorists asked whether the modern state could ever do this given its ties with nationalism, and its potential for misunderstanding and conflict (McCormick, 1999).

It is, in fact, this demand for peace, and the doubts about the ability of the modern state to provide it, that led to the idea of peace through international cooperation and resulted in the proliferation of many international organizations, including the UN in 1945. It also, most importantly, led to experiments in regional integration.

The African continent has over the decades constituted a whirlpool of conflicts. It has been susceptible to all triggers of conflicts - structural, political, economic, social and cultural - and has witnessed almost every type of conflict, both violent and non-violent forms, sporadic and endemic. The Eastern African region has for instance been plagued by civil wars, cross-border conflicts, social strife, arms trafficking, piracy off the Somali coast and terrorism. Some of these conflicts have been the subject of international attention over the years. These include the long-running civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan which only ended with the secession of the South, the raging conflict in Darfur, and the long-drawn out civil and ethnic conflicts in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). And yet, peace and security comprise perhaps the most important public goods that should justify the formation of regional blocs. Peace and security constitute the foundational conditions for achieving the other objectives of regional integration, and especially the ultimate objective of full political union. Political instability frightens investors, inhibits development, stifles economic growth, and consumes resources that could be channeled into productive regional activities (AfDB, 2011). Successful African regionalism is thus, also predicated on a peaceful and politically stable Africa.

Inadequate and Poor Regional Infrastructure Network

An African Development Bank Strategy Paper on Eastern African Regional Integration notes how inadequate and poor regional infrastructure networks impede the growth of regionalism in the East African region and beyond. The Paper states that poor regional transport infrastructure networks “limit growth and trade expansion”, and observes how poorly maintained regional railway networks, which are not commercially run and have different track gauges, prevent “seamless regional connectivity between Eastern and Southern Africa” (AfDB, 2011). Also cited in the report are, the incompatibility of road networks, with some designed for higher axle-load limits than others; cumbersome trade logistics, regional variations in technical standards, seaports with dilapidated handling facilities and equipment, and insufficient logistics infrastructure. These lead to high costs for regional trade transactions, and hence slow the pace of integration. Suffice is to say, adequate and functioning infrastructure are the bedrock of successful regional integration.

Weak Institutional and Human Capacity

Many studies have highlighted the institutional and human capacity challenges faced by Africa’s RECs. The AfDB report further states that the RECs and member states have insufficient financial and technical capacities to design, implement, and maintain Regional Organizations. It also points out the lack of adequate capacity for thorough policy analysis and expertise for the negotiation of international trade and technical agreements (AfDB, 2011). Several other studies have shown how the African Regional integration project is surviving on scarce resources.

Diversity Across the Economies and Divergent Country Attitudes Towards Regional Integration

The lack of complementarity and convergence of state policies is cited as a constant impediment to successful regional integration in Africa. For successful regional integration, it is important for states to identify complementary areas of activities based on their comparative advantage (AfDB, 2011).

The Principle of Sovereignty

The principle of sovereignty of the nation-state as inherited from colonialism is credited with undermining integration projects in Africa. At the founding of the OAU, the “state-centric (confederal) Westphalian model of sovereignty was accepted and institutionalized as the ruling paradigm and political lode star” (Olivier, n.d.). Successful models of integration like the EU owe their success to the willingness of the member states to cede some state power to supranational/organizations. In Africa, on the contrary, states have sought to guard their sovereignty jealously and this has led to the construction of institutional structures without cohesion and supranational scope. This has consequently rendered the implementation of decisions, declarations and resolutions by member states both slow and poor. Yet, from a regional and continental perspective, achieving integration is predicated on states ceding power to the centre as well as regional goals take precedence over national interests. “Supranationalism”, an essential element of regionalism, implies that states are able to abide by norms adopted at a higher level of organization.

Conclusion

Regional integration, as demonstrated by the example of the EU, can be an effective instrument for development. Africa, indeed, concedes as much. This is evidenced by the fact that Africa has, despite many false starts, and several failures, persisted in its pursuit of continental unity. The Abuja Treaty provides the framework and the map for African development. Yet, the project of African regionalism faces serious impediments, which although not insurmountable, require more than small and half-hearted measures of commitment. How Africa navigates through these factors will determine whether it achieves the ultimate objective of integration as spelt out in the Abuja Treaty: An African Economic Community.

To navigate through all these factors, it is essential that the requisite capacities and competencies be given to individual officers as well as to institutions at both the national and regional level.

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