

REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER: ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The new globalization agenda is a rip-off from the end of the phenomenal Cold War that in itself is a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the emerging developments in the new world order is the creation of regional organizations for enhanced development within the context of the new globalization agenda. As globalization entails competitiveness between nations in all spheres of development, there is the need for less-developed states who want to be part of the new world order to create structures that would enhance their socio-political and economic development. Africa as one of the expected regional players in the globalization agenda and in dire need for sustainable development needs to be an effective participant in the new process by adopting to the new technologies of development. How she needs to do this in the light of creating and enhancing her regional economic structures and organizations for integration is what this paper intends to examine.

Introduction

The new world order which has come about as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology has introduced a new dimension in the formation of integrative regional organizations. This has been enhanced by the new globalization agenda that, according to one of its objectives, is to promote "increasing interaction or integration of national economic systems through growth in international trade, investment and capital flows" (Nwokoma, 2003:485). Implicitly, the promotion of interaction or integration cannot take place in a vacuum, but through national and international organizations. The footmat of these institutions is obviously the states from where the process of integration would begin. Globalization therefore encourages the formation of regional and international organizations to carry out the socio-political, cultural and economic functions of integration.

During the period of the Cold War, regional and international organizations that existed operated essentially under the ideological divide of capitalism and socialism with the United States (US) and the former Soviet Union (USSR) as their arrow heads. Thus, interactions between these organizations were restricted and limited in scope. Even their actors and activities were tailored towards the socio-political and economic interests of the US and USSR divide. The implication of this was the hindrance posed by the inability of regional or some international organizations to interact freely. This impediment is seemingly being removed as states now have more opportunities to interact with themselves irrespective of ideological competitiveness. Regional economic integration is therefore a necessity in order to promote the new globalization agenda aimed at universal development. Africa as a regional entity in the community of nations must play a role in this integration process so that it can sustain its development aspirations. The significance of economic integration, which is gaining currency in this era of globalization is just not only in the area of integrating the economies of member states, but it aims at transforming the lives of the peoples and redefining the social relations within the geo-political zones. How Africa will fit in into this new development of regional economic integration is what the paper intends to examine. In doing this, the paper will clarify the concepts of the 'New World Order', globalization and integration.

Conceptual Perspectives

The New world Order

To say that there is a 'New World Order' is to assume that there was an 'Old World Order'. If there was one therefore, then what was it? It was in 1991, that former President Bush of United States initiated the concept of the New World Order when he observed that the World was at a crucial turning point, which for almost half a century of the shifting cold war and management of superpower confrontation, was characterized by

ideological division of the two super powers, the US and USSR. It is therefore, understood from the above that the Old World Order was the period of the Cold War which ended in 1991 after the demise of the Soviet Union.

The New World Order is thus, the historic chance or opportunity to the world to move toward an era of peace, cooperation and dialogue. The antecedents of this new world order could be traced to the mid-1980s particularly when the Soviet Union witnessed socio-economic stagnation, loss of momentum and inertia. This situation motivated the then Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to introduce the twin policies of glass not (political openness) and perestroika (economic reconstruction). The introduction of these twin policies in the Soviet Union led to reform and democratic movements in most Eastern Europe in the later part of the 1980s.

In Other words, the new world order is a new international system that is security conscious, emphasizing disarmament, absence of warfare, non-interference in the internal affairs of nation states and respect for the sovereignty of nations among others. However, an inevitable requirement of the new world order is that the individuality of states must give way to a sense of world community. Thus, national interests of states must find reconciliation with the interests of the world that will in the same vein serve the best interests of each nation. This implies that sovereign nations will accept allegiance to an international code of conduct and to an international authority.

Be that as it may seem the attributes of the new world order, what is Africa's position in it? Africa as a major continent in the global political and economic relations must be seen to be a major player in the international arena. But the America-Europeanization of the new world order seems to leave Africa and its peoples with much to do in order to be accommodated in the new global community. The challenge therefore, is that if Africa must be part of the new world order, she must wake up from her knees and establish comparable regional or other economic institutions that will put her on a better competitive level with the major America-European players.

Globalization

The concept of globalization has been seen severally to have many dimensions in social, cultural, political and economic spheres. In this regard, it has been defined to mean different things to different people. In its current usage it is seen as complementary to, the new socio-economic and political world order, which has to do with the breakdown of socio-economic and political barriers among nations of the world. It is thus a multi-dimensional concept and activity that involves a worldwide spread or the universalization of certain socio-economic, cultural and political practices, identities and structures.

Conceptualizing globalization in its multi-dimensional term, Babangida (1998:10) describes

it as,

the liberalization and intensification of international linkages in trade, finance, markets, production, research, transportation, energy, medicine, education, politics and cultures, that is, accelerated by discoveries in microelectronics, information processing, communications and biotechnology. . These forms of cooperation and linkages have created mutual interdependency in the global system. The implication of this definition is that almost every aspect of human life in our present world is affected by globalization, in which the world is effectively linked.

In its narrow economic sense, Obadan (2003) sees globalization as the process of change towards greater international economic integration through trade, financial flows, exchange in technology and movement of people. For him, openness and markets constitute the platform of globalization while trade, finance and investment entrepreneur are the heart. It is in the same vein that Solomon (1999:192) defines globalization as "...the increase in economic and financial linkages among the countries of the world often referred to as growing interdependence". Implicit in the linkage of this economic growth is the disparity it encouraged between the developed and developing countries both of which are involved in the linkage process. For instance, as Fwatshak (2003:183) shows there is no true integration in the factors of economic production in the areas of land, labor, industry, mining, agriculture, and non-financial services and capital, the continuous dominance of national economic outlook of major world economies, the control and management of world economies by multinationals with their branches overseas and dollar-dominated money markets and stock exchanges among other disparities. Ojo (2003) has also shown that it is only a few developing

countries in Asia and Latin America that have national corporations or companies that take part in the integrated networks of transnational corporations and that could foster strategic alliances to exploit vibrant trade and investment linkages. Some other developing countries particularly in Africa are sidelines in the process. As Ojo (2003:84) further observed, in the East and South East Asian countries their

Competitive, export-led growth and openness to foreign investment, both direct and portfolio, facilitated by an external policy environment that strongly advocated such policies and a leadership that was prepared to force the pace of development, generated rapid and strong economic growth, greater integration into the global economy and healthy advances in social development,

But even this development was limited as the financial crisis of 1997-1998 which led to a sudden loss of confidence on the part of investors, the swift withdrawal of investments and the rapid spread of investments to other developing countries, threatened the close integration of the economies of the region with global financial markets. In other words, the expected improvements in the economic growth of nations across the globe is obviously not there as the dynamics of the globalization agenda is tilted in favor of the industrialized nations who are the major actors and determinants in the process. These major globalization actors instead of fostering the needed close economic ties, they rather encourage trade imbalances, increased financial volatility and less effective domestic macro-economic policies. The obvious thing for the developing countries to do particularly Africa, is to regenerate themselves and face the challenge of competition which the opportunity of the increasing integrated global economy is presenting. It is through this way that she can enhance her development. One other way of doing this is to establish interregional economic institutions strong enough that would promote trade and other economic activities.

Integration and Regional Integration

Integration as a concept and a theory in the study of international relations could be mostly associated with Deutsch (1989) who sees integration of two or more states in terms of forging a new and larger entity for defending themselves as well as contributing to world peace. Mass (1971) had earlier described integration as the tendency toward voluntary creation of larger political units, each of which self-consciously abhors the use of force in the relations between the participating units and groups. Therefore, integration is the desire of states to forge a sense of unity on the basis of the considerations of supra-nationality. The regional context of it is implied in the promotion of cooperation¹ in economic and socio-political and cultural fields, and in particular the reduction of conflicts among the states.

Integration as a theory implicitly requires the redefinition of the concept of nationalism, it means that it must seek to explain a new sense of allegiance or loyalty to a world community rather than* the often-held national consciousness or sovereignty of nations. In essence, international cooperation would more or less be advantageous to states rather than the traditional competition between states that may not satisfy their aspirations. Integration also encourages federalism as this provides a suitable strategy of the final stage of international integration. That is why Hass (3976) observed that states in the form of international actors would voluntarily give up their some of their national sovereign powers and evolve .new techniques of facing common problems or resolving mutual conflicts.

In the current dispensation of international politics, and as it were before, the urge to integrate is born out of the fact that many countries in the world are quite small and resource deficient and thus cannot on individual basis bargain in a complex and multi-variegated world or provide for the minimum basic needs of their people. International relation has therefore witnessed several forms of integration particularly in economic and political fields and on various regional levels. On the regional level how has' integration therefore faired? A brief look at the historical evolution of regional integration will give us a leeway.

To talk of regional integration, it is first necessary to explain the concept of 'region' or 'regionalism'. The concept of region is an elusive one as it poses the problems of conceptualization,

definition and operationalization. Thus, while it is agreed that it is an important factor in political analysis in terms of international relations, it is not generally agreed on what it is. On the one hand, it is seen as a geographical or spatial construct, capable of being located on maps and demarcated on the ground. On the other hand, it is seen as a shorthand for a number of shared social phenomena and properties that correspond in a general way with spatial realities (Grundy 1985). Still in some cases, the connotations of the concepts as outlined above may transcend the spatial designations, it now becomes the questions or issues of race, religion, language, culture, social organization, and economic system. This thus means that there may be some overlap in the analysis of what region is as a concept.

From the foregoing, if we take a look at the African continent how should it be classified? Should one focus on black Africa as a region of its own based on attributes that are peculiar to it such as the commonalities of history, culture, economy, social organization and religion.? Obviously, Africa can be distinguished from Asia, Middle East and Europe in terms of the above properties that can be used as the basis of calling it a region of its own. In other words, there are a lot of cultural traits that are diffused throughout Africa particularly South of the Sahara where there exist similar modes of adaptation to the natural and historical environment.. And despite North Africa's close affinity with countries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, there have been a lot of economic links through the erstwhile trans-Saharan trade and other cultural ties enhanced by extensive migration, communication and mass movement. The historical and colonial experiences of the various peoples in Africa have however, tended to make them form groups that tally with their regional placement in Africa. Thus, we have regional groupings that spring up in West Africa, Southern Africa, Equatorial Africa, East Africa, North Africa, the Horn and Central Africa. These groupings are self-evident as there is a tendency for peoples physically near one another to share many social traits such as language, culture, economic patterns, social organizational forums, that might bring them closer together and encourage them to give greater structure to their shared characteristics and aspirations (Grundy 1985). In all these, regionalism therefore has to do with the groupings of two or more nations for the purpose of natural agreements in the areas of socio-economic and political interests.

Regional Integration- a Brief Historical Perspective

As it has been observed, the concept of regionalism in international politics can be viewed outside the geographer's concept of region and the comprehensive order of physical landscapes and resources. This is because other considerations predominate the calculation of states in joining or forming organizations. Padelford (cf Agom-Tor 1999:1) had pointed out that speaking of regional organizations,

We are thinking of those spatial areas which have come to be spoken of as regions as a result of usage, stemming from practices of states or group of states, the utterance of statesmen, or the terms of treaties and agreements between groups of states.

The elements of geographical contiguity makes it easy to explain the designation of the area covered by the organization of American states (OAS), for instance, but it is only in political terms that the significance of the region can be properly understood, especially that Canada is not a member of the O.A.S.

Kleffans (1949) has given further insight for explaining regionalism. For him, an association can call itself a regional pact if a state is not compelled to join and it is free to withdraw as considerations of its national interests dictate. We have already observed that regional organizations became prominent at the end of the Second World War particularly as they have become conspicuous in promoting political, economic and security landscapes of the international system. With respect to their institutional manifestation in the contemporary system, there are instances in their operation in the broad fields of security, pacific settlement of disputes and economic cooperation in different parts of the world. Among the several regional organizations that sprang up after the Second World War-include the North Atlantic Treaty, Organization of African Union (OAU), Organization of American States (OAS), Arab League, Association of South-East Asian Nations (-ASEAN) and European Union (EU) among others. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and with attention diverted to other issues outside the military and security ones, emphasis has now been shifted more or less to economic cooperation as a way of

enhancing an integrated and comprehensive global development. Today, every region in the World has established its own regional organization with the sole aim of promoting economic development and cooperation among states in the region and against the background of United Nations Millennium Development Goals that each region in the world is expected to embrace.

One objective policy of the formation of these regional economically orientated organizations is the reduction or limitation of trade barriers only among their regional members. The European Economic Community (EEC) or Common Market is an example of an economic integration process. It succeeded so much that it became a model for other similar experiments in regional economic integration. This Economic Community has developed politically to now becoming an European Union that has a parliament among other-of its economic structures like the European Union currency, the Euro, which was introduced recently and has even become more powerful than the erstwhile American dominated dollar.

Following the footsteps of the European Union, other regional economic organizations that exist today include the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the Andes Pact among others. There is the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Arab League and the African Association of Petroleum Exporting Countries. All these were formed to safeguard the interests of the various regions in which they were established.

Regional Economic Integration in Africa

Towards the end of colonialism in Africa particularly in the 1950s, several attempts were made at regional integration. In the political fronts their formation was seen as possible means of reducing tensions between states that were divided by artificial, mostly colonially imposed boundaries. It was also felt that regional groupings were necessary because larger entities could both surmount local conflicts better than small ones and more easily pursue a policy of non-alignment that could promote political stability. According to Sklar (1966) a larger organization that would promote supra-state unity in Africa was an historic value of the African nationalist movement.

The first of the political Unions were the Union of Ghana and British Togo land in 1957 just after Ghana's independence that year, then the Italian and British Somaliland in 1960, Southern Cameroon and the Republic of Cameroons in 1961. Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964, Senegal and Gambia which collapsed in 1989 and the failed attempts at political unions in the case of the Mali federation, the Ghana-Guinea -Mali Union, the East African Federation, the Greater Maghreb and the United Arab Republic. Even the several attempts by most of the Francophone Countries to form political Unions failed as a result of the perception of the incumbent leadership at the time that political union would entail a loss or diminution of political power. This perception was also reflected in the failure of states in East Africa-Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika, to unite. The East African Community had to collapse as it was bedeviled with personality problems between Idi Amin of Uganda and Nyerere of Tanzania. Many of the other African leaders in search of federation or union also felt that their domestic political base would be threatened and it would affect their opportunity to play a significant role in the larger African political life.

Be that for all the dynamics of the political unions in Africa, more serious efforts were made toward the end of the 1950s to form a larger continental Pan-African regional political unions that it had hoped would lead to a United States of Africa in the like of the United States of America. These efforts materialized in the formation of the organization of African Union in 1963. Needless to overemphasize how it came about, suffice to say that it had its roots from the Pan-African movements that were spearheaded by Africans in Diaspora, that is, people of African descent in the Caribbeans and the United States, and Europe. Having organized several Pan-African conferences between 1900 and 1945 in London, Paris, New York and Manchester, the Pan-African Movement moved to Africa under its prime mover, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. As a prelude to the formative of the OAU, Nkrumah initiated two conferences, after Ghana achieved Independence in 1957, the Conference of Independent African States (CIAS) and the All-African People's Conference (AAPC) Following these were the competing blocs of the Casablanca radical states, the Brazzaville bloc and the intermediate one, the Monrovia bloc. By 1960 when most African states got political independence, and with the Congo Crisis, it was

obvious that it was necessary to reconcile the differences between the blocs. The subsequent result of this was the formation of the Organization of African Union on May 25, 1963 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Until its demise in the year 2001, the (OAU) apart from promoting its political union agenda, it became very much interested in the promotion of economic co-operation within the continent. One of its major concerns was the convening at Lagos of an Economic Summit in 1980. This conference which came out with an ambitious economic program called the Lagos plan of Action was principally aimed at creating an African Common Market by the year 2000 and to make the continent self-sufficient in food, building materials, clothing and energy. The plan further articulated the objectives of economic development in Africa in terms of deliberate promotion of an increasing measure of self-reliance, democratization of the development process and the acceleration of the process of regional integration among others. Even though the Lagos Plan of Action had obstacles in the execution of its objectives due to the OAU's financial problems, OAU never relented in its efforts at promoting economic development in Africa. It had done this by constant consultation with the UN's Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on questions of economic development, it received some assistance from the Arab states after the hosting of the First Afro-Arab Summit in Cairo in 1977 (Chazan, Mortimer, Ravenhill and Rothchild 1992).

At the international arena the OAU initiated contacts with UNCTAD and negotiated with the African—Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) to facilitate trade and aid agreements with the EEC. Several other negotiations and agreements took place between the OAU and the IMF/World Bank in the areas of health and education. Unfortunately, relations with these international financial institutions have not been very healthy as there has been increased interference by them in Africa's economic development and recovery programs. For instance, these international agencies have focused more on Africa's greater reliance on market mechanisms in order to achieve a more efficient allocation of resources. But the extent of their recommendations is based on the question of whether these markets actually function effectively in Africa as there are more or less dominated by a few large transnational corporations. Next to this question is the overhang of debts on the neck of African countries that incidentally is motivated by the IMF/World Bank and other international money lenders.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of the New World Order have posed new challenges to Africa to adopt a new competitive policy. Africa needed right from the inception of the new world order to therefore reinforce some interdependencies between different countries and regions in the world. This imperative led to the need to transform its regional organization, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU). The issues which motivated the formation, of the OAU such as colonialism, white supremacist regime and apartheid in South Africa had disappeared from Africa and thus, it was necessary for the organization to re-examine its charter to re-direct it to a more purposeful direction. We have already alluded to the fact that failure of the international money lenders to promote meaningful development instead recommending policies to African solutions which will ironically favor the interest of their western sponsors. The reduction of aids to Africa by these International Financial Institutions has not helped things as even when these aids are made available, the conditions attached to their payments are quite insurmountable. In addition to Africans to cooperate in order to ward off dictation from outside the continent, the emerging global trend toward the formation of economic and political blocs in order to enhance regional self-sufficiency obviously warranted the transformation of the more political oriented OAU to a more economically regional organization that would compete effectively with the European Union, the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) and the South East Asian Nations Organization (ASEAN) among others.

Before its final transformation several conferences were held under the aegis of the OAU itself. From the June 10, 1999 Ouagadougou Declaration to the July 1999 OAU Summit in Algiers, 4th Extraordinary Summit at Sirte, Libya in September same year, several declarations were made toward the repositioning of the organization toward an African Economic Community. In the end the Constitutive Act of the African Union was drafted with its ratification in the 5th Extraordinary Summit at Sirte, Libya in March 2001. The final two-thirds ratification of member states gave it the last nod at the OAU 37th Summit of July 2001 at Lusaka and in July 2002, the organization was transformed to the African Union (AU) at the Durban, South African Summit.

The new African Union has improved on the OAU objectives and principles and in contrast to it and in line with its desire to position itself, it has structurally provided for nine main organs as

stipulated in Art 5(1) of the Constitutive Act. Of importance to us in this paper is the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, and the proposed establishment of Financial Institutions with a Central Bank that would facilitate inter-African trade. In fact, one of the objectives of the AU in this direction" is to, promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies. It will also coordinate and harmonize the policies between the-existing and future regional economic communities for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the" Union. Eventually the AU aims to strengthen these regional organizations and ultimately merge them into a single continental economy. But as Kawonishe (2002) rightly pointed out how the AU will: achieve the above objective is still a mystery.

Associated with the above problems are those of free movement of persons and goods across, the continent, a situation that will result into socio-political problem arising from the unrestricted mobility of labor. There is also the issue of poor inter-state transport and telecommunication systems, problem of external interference and control of African resources as African economies are tied to the economic and strategic interests of the developed world, including transnational corporations, and the existence of sub-regional organizations which have encouraged disloyalty to the wider African course.

The last point must be stressed, as the competition between these sub-regional organizations will work against the overall objective of integrating the African continent. As Kawonishe (2002) once more" observed, giving the instance of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'ouest (CEAO). relationship between them has been hampered by the latter's belief that any unity in West Africa should first begin with the Francophone states which incidentally have a strong mutual identification with themselves and supported by France.

The above problems and others not mentioned here notwithstanding, there are still some prospects for African development. Even though globalisation is a threat to regional integration as a result of the globalization of decision making through the dispensing of political authority throughout the international order as observed by Ojeh (2001), there is still some hope if there is a people's-oriented leadership to pursue the laudable and articulately formulated policy objectives of the African Union and those of the various sub-regional organizations such as the ECOWAS, South African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO) and the Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique (CEEAC) among others. The unfortunate thing however, is the problem of the over-used, redundant, less articulate and sit-tight leadership Africa has today as in the case of Zimbabwe's Mugabe, Gabon's Bongo, Cameroon's Biya, Uganda's Museveni and the recently deposed Mauritania's Taya. These African leaders instead of promoting democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance as stated in Article 3(g) of the AU's Constitutive Act, are the ones encouraging the underdevelopment of their countries through the plundering of the financial resources, corruption, siphoning of aids and accumulating debts. If Africa must sustain its development in this era of globalization, it must need to look more inward through a critical re-examination of its historical past. In which ways does it have to achieve this task of sustaining development in the continent?

The Significance of Regional Economic Integration to Sustainable Development in Africa

Since the beginning of the post-colonial period, African states have adopted several strategies to cope with economic crisis. Unfortunately these strategies did not show or provide the much-needed foundations for a viable long-term strategy for the development of African economies. One of the strategies to encourage the development of the post-colonial state was the creation of a Pan-African regional organization in the name of the Organization of African Union, now renamed, the African Union and subsequently, sub-regional integrative organizations. The most prominent of them we have already mentioned as the East African Economic Community; others include the Economic Community of West African States, The South African Development Coordination Conference and Franco-ophone-inspired Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CBAO). These economic institutions were formed against the backdrop of the small populations and limited economic resources of the countries. Moreover, many of them could not provide a domestic market that is sufficient in size to permit manufacturing plants to reap economies of scale through long production runs. It was therefore felt that economic cooperation among neighboring states through joint financing of Services such as agricultural research, meteorology, telecommunications, and transport jobs established,

The initial integrative organizations lasted as they existed. However, the factor of focal territorial unit as exhibited by the leaders of (he regional organizations, the need to guard jealously the acquired national sovereignty, the difference in resource bases and levels of development of the consisting states, all made these regional institutions to decline. For instance, the East African Community which was the longest -lived and most extensive of the various integrative schemes attempted in Africa could survive till 1977 only to collapse as a result of the crises between its members, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. ECOWAS and others have not failed better in promoting regional integration. For ECOWAS, it has not been able to achieve- sustainable growth been use of what Tide (2U03) calls its high dependence on the export of primary products, macro-economic policy slippages and weak institutional framework. For him,

The global challenge of ensuring that globalization becomes a positive galvanizing Force for reinforcing an integrated global community that would guarantee a shared bright future for all basal on a common humanity in diversity remains, the sub-regional challenge for ECOWAS and other organizations is in improve trade competitiveness so as to minimize global risks and maximize its benefits (Tule 2003:455).

The challenge Africa is facing today has sometimes been attributed to the inarticulate domestic ruling class. They usually articulate their development policies with major inputs from the agents of foreign monopoly capital. Thus, such policies, rather than facilitate the development or liberation of productive forces (end to consolidate the process of its suppression. These policies include transfer of technology through turn-key projects, import substitution and devaluation, etc. For instance, the NEPAD project being promoted as an African oriented program of development is nothing more than a derivation of the UN Millennium Development Goals in whose formulation Africa never participated in.

Africa must show a more positive concern lo sustain its own development outside dictation from the western economic giants. In the world over, regional economic integration has been identified as an important tool for promoting economic development among the communities in the globe, Africa should not ignore the present disparity in the economic relations between the developed and developing countries and sit down to think that participation in the globalization agenda would enhance for her any meaningful development. the way out for her is to re-invent her regional organizations in order to create a more balanced political and economic relationships among African states so that they would be in a more competitive level at the global scene. The European Union has remained a model of integration scheme unsurpassed anywhere in the world. It has an impressive record of moving progressively and systematically toward supranationalism. In 1999 the Union introduced a single currency, the Euro, in addition to the creation of a common market. With greater zeal and political will and determination, the new African Union can learn from the example of the successes of Europe and adopt the necessary sub-regional and regional arrangements that will serve the objectives of African development. Furthermore, African geographical proximity to Europe promoted under the ACP-EEC accords, stands to bring Africa's decision makers close to the realities of economic integration in their own region.

Africa has timelessly pursued and remained committed to the establishment of a New International Economic Order. It has also not lost sight of the fact that development has to start with and be nurtured and sustained through the development of its tremendous resource potentials."Mere lies the significance of close cooperation among African nations so that they can establish relevant priorities and commitment to sound economic management and domestic policies. African needs to establish pan-African regional structures (hat are sufficiently dynamic, self-reliant and independent to enable her to function as an effective partner in the international economic system.

Ojo (2003) has observed that for-Africa to experience rapid socio-economic development, her sub-regional institutions need stronger structures especially for sub-regional integration agreements. For him, "this is the only way Africa can make meaningful progress in the areas of macro-economic coordination, common competition and regulatory policies, physical infrastructure, and the advocacy of common interest within global processes". (Ojo 2003:98) These sub-regional institutions he pointed out should be able to defend the interests of smaller countries vis-a-vis their larger partners within the agreements in order (o nurture confidence in the integration processes.

Integration process does not only mean the role of state institutions and that of political leaders. Since integration is a comprehensive endeavour, (here is the issue of partnership that involves a dynamic relationship between the various sectors of the polity-both private and public. Thus, African integration process can no longer be the sole responsibility of the state, but as Olomola (2003) rightly stated there is the need for private sector initiatives, including those of industries, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations, universities, labor organizations, women societies and students among others. Transnational institutions should be formed within Africa that should encourage economic development so that they can play a more rigorous role in competition with the multinational corporations from outside Africa.

In the overall, the establishment of strong regional integration institutions is important for Africa's socio-economic growth. If it must integrate itself and get more integrated with the rest of the world she must be able to maintain strong and stable macro economic framework, embark on serious institutional reforms that have African initiatives including promoting good governance in all respects, invest in people, capacity building, mobilize the civil society and improve agricultural development among others. In this way it would be able to chart a more equitable path in order to compete more favourably in the new globalization process.

Conclusion

The importance of regional economic integration as a prelude to development must be over-emphasized. For Africa to survive and sustain development in this new era of globalization, it needs a properly organized forum. The failure of African countries to effect regional economic integration within the continent would expose Africa to more marginalization, given the intensive pressures, challenges and opportunities of globalization. Obviously cooperation and integration have therefore become of absolute necessity. As even the more powerful and developed economies of Europe, North and South America, Asia and the Pacific are moving rapidly toward deeper regional economic cooperation and integration, Africa should not be left behind in this process. In other words, Africa should intensify efforts to sustain the present regional and sub-regional arrangements such as the AU, ECOWAS and SADC which should foster closer regional ties for a comprehensive participation in the global economy. Above all, there should be the political will of the African leaders to promote meaningful regional and inter-regional integration so that the narrow nationalism of the African states cannot be an obstacle to the development and progress in the African region.

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