IJSSP
42, 13/14

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African Regional Integration and Globalization in Africa: Challenges and Prospects

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Received 23 Sep. 2022
Accepted 27 Oct. 2022
Published 28 Oct. 2022

Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that Africa's integration efforts have thus far failed to bear satisfactory fruit. While other regions have successfully used their integration mechanisms to improve their economic welfare, Africa lags behind with respect to GDP growth, per capita income, capital inflows, and general living standards. The roots of many of the current struggles faced by Africans were placed in their continent's difficult past. The lasting effects of slavery, unequal trade, and colonialism have impeded the advancement of government, education, socio-economic structures, and technology. Decades after the continent's independence movements, many African states are in disadvantaged positions within the global marketplace, or absent from it altogether. This paper interrogate the challenges of globalization in Africa and the role played by African Union in enhancing socio-economic and political integration in the continent. A secondary source of data collection was adopted in the course of data collections while dependency theory was utilized as framework of

International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy
Vol. 42 No. 13/14, 2022
pp. 148-161
Emerald Publishing Limited

analysis. Results obtained from the findings showed that African States lack basic infrastructural technology, faced with migration and brain drain problems, political will among others. These common problems with basic infrastructure largely contribute to the region being so unappealing to corporate investment. And that African Union has no alternative means to the realization of Africa dreams with little mechanisms to transform the African states. The study therefore recommends among others that African must develop social capital, especially by investing in the education and health sectors. Such an attitude would then create a mindset for self-assessment and appraisal to see how the weakness can be conquered.

Keywords: Globalization, Regional Integrations and Socio-Economic and Political Integration

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that Africa's integration efforts have thus far failed to bear satisfactory fruit. While other regions have successfully used their integration mechanisms to improve their economic welfare, Africa lags behind with respect to GDP growth, per capita income, capital inflows, and general living standards. This is a problem across most of the continent, in spite of the existence of a plethora of policy plans and grand visions (Oyejide, 2005). It can be argued that most of the Africa states have faced significant challenges in realizing the benefits of a globalized economy. This is not to say that Africa has been ignored by the international community or that Africa has not been a participant in trade and development. Africa's challenges, among others, are capitalizing on its rich natural resource base to enhance its role in a globalized world. Far too often and for too many years Africa, its people, and its resources have been exploited by others in the industrialized world. Africa faces some of the most formidable development challenges in the world. Many of the current challenges, both domestically, and with the outside world are directly or indirectly related to Africa's rich but sometimes troubled past.

Worthily noted, are the nontrivial roles of Africa's ruling class during the era of Atlantic slavery. The imperial powers' "scramble for Africa" and colonialism in the nineteenth century not only inhibited the African continent but also left it underdeveloped and unprepared for the world when its states started to achieve their own independence. With special analysis of the histories and economic evolutions of some African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, the case is made that this difficult past has damaged Africa's economic development and put most of the continent in a disadvantaged position in the globalized world (Samuel, 2010). It is notable to say that African continent has a rich but tumultuous history. Africa was once known as a "land of milk and honey." Agriculture and food production began on the continent around 5,000 years ago.

Maize and cassava were first grown in western Africa but as people migrated to other parts of the continent, so did their agriculture. Much of the continent is also home to numerous natural resources including wood, fruits, and freshwater fish. Discovered later, Africa is also rich in gold, diamonds, platinum, numerous other minerals, and even oil. For much of its pre-colonial history, though, Africa's primary export was human labor—slave trading (Nye, 2004).

There is no doubt one saying that the need to form an African unity-oriented organization came as a result of the quest to create a collective anti-colonial struggle on a continental level.

This quest brought about a manifestation of the age-long search for an institutionalized body which led to the formation of Organization of African Unity in 1963, some black Africans, who gained the required political and socio-national consciousness to champion the struggle for freedom and improve social material life for the people of Africa, held series of conferences in London, Paris, Lisbon and Manchester respectively (Nkurundzinza and Bate, 2003). This paper no doubt explores the arrival of African Union as well as the organization's effort at coping with these challenges with the aim of adumbrating those challenges through the attainment of a stable, viable and reliable African States for the ultimate benefit to Africa and its people.

Conceptual Clarifications

Globalization

Broadly speaking, the term globalization connotes the deepening of social, economic and cultural interactions among countries of the world (Saliu and Aremu, 2013). It is the "integration of economies and societies through cross country flow of information, ideas, technologies, goods, services, capital, finance and people (Rangarajan, 2003).Technological breakthroughs such as mobile phones, computers, internet, satellite networks, among others are traceable to globalization. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has greatly impacted positively on health sector, financial institutions, entertainment, education, hospitality business and social interactions among Africans.

Regional Integration

Regional integration generally involves a somewhat complex web of cooperation between countries within a given geographical area. It demands harmonization of policies in such sectors as trade, investment, infrastructural development, as well as monetary and fiscal policies of members. The overall objective is to ensure stability and sustainable economic growth and development within the area (Anadi, 2005). More so, according to Olukoshi, (2010), integration is not just understood and employed in terms of economic process and the institutional mechanisms by which they find expression but also with reference to the associated political visions and actions with which they closely inter-twined.

Integration can be conceived of as a process (dynamic), terminal condition (static) or combination of both. As a process (Bach, 2000) integration involves the establishment of common legal rules and legal systems for citizens.

African integration in this paper refers to a process and stages of regional unity and integration or fussing together different economies and removing all discriminatory trade, custom and immigration barriers between them. Regional integration allows for the creation of a common market, single currency and standardization of various government institutions. Integration here does not refer to political union where sovereign nations are merged to form a Federation. However, the process allows the formation of a common political Parliament where policies will be debated and harmonized; and networking of various government institutions to provide and shape the process and institutions of integration.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts dependency theory as its framework of analysis. Dependency as a concept becomes externally tricky in an increasingly integrated world economy. However, political independence means nothing without economic independence. It is within this context that Kwame Nkrumah (1965:98) in Mato in Olasupo (2014, p.30), former President of Ghana in his work: *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism* observed that:

The Third World Countries would not make a forward march towards economic independence until neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism was vanquished. To give credence to this assertion, decades after political independence for most of the Third World Countries, they have remained perpetually dependent.

According to Offiong (1980) in Sheriff (2015) dependency refers to the situation that the history of colonial imperialism has left and that modern imperialism creates in underdeveloped countries. According to Johnson (2002), dependency is imperialism seen from the perspective of underdevelopment. Dependency from this perspective is not an external factor but as a conditioning situation in which the specific histories of development and underdevelopment transpired in various societies.

To Dos Santos cited in Sheriff (2015:73-74):

Dependency refers to a situation in which certain groups of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies and between these and world trade assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant) can expand and give impulse to their own development, while other countries (the dependent) can only develop as a reflection of this expansion.

From the forgoing definitions, there seemed to be some common agreement by these scholars on some issues which include:

i. That development and dependency is relational;
ii. That global inequality in wealth and development is situated within the historical exploitation of poor societies (Third World Countries) by the rich countries (Advanced Countries);
iii. That the dominant (Advanced Countries) are capable of dynamic development responsive to their internal needs whereas the dependent (Third World) have reflex type of development;
iv. That the development alternatives open to the dependent nations are defined and limited by its integration into, and functions within the world capitalist market;
v. That the basic situations of dependence lead to a global situation in dependent countries that situated them in backwardness and under the exploitation of the dominant countries;

Therefore, dependency theory emphasizes that the condition of underdevelopment is precisely the result of the incorporation of the Third World economies into the capitalist world system which is dominated by the West and other western allies.

Emphatically, the view points of the dependency theory are not far from the realities of situation in all spheres of life. Globalization and its historical trends no doubt has affected all sub sectors of Africa's development and hence determine all aspect of the society. Globalization is purely imperialist ideology, its operations cannot value free, and hence the fruits of globalization cannot be evenly ameliorates the development challenges in third world and indeed in Africa in particular.

Africa's Regional Integration in Historical Perspective

After independence regional integration became a pillar of Africa's developmental strategy. Pan-Africanism, an ideology which emphasizes continental unity and strong identification with ongoing anti-colonial struggles, was the leitmotif of Africa's developmental framework. This perspective sought to externalize Africa's problems, with much of the blame laid at the door of former colonial powers, with little responsibility and accountability demanded of the postcolonial African elite. Politically this was the safest position to be in as economic failures could always be ascribed to the legacy of imperialism and colonialism. As observed by Mistry (2000), 'Africa's commitment to integration appears to have been visceral rather than rational, more rhetorical than real.'

From the beginning of the decolonization process in the 1960s, the establishment of sub-regional economic communities was a significant part of Africa's development strategy. Regionalism in Africa began during this period, spearheaded in large measure by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and Economic Commission on Africa (ECA), partly as a response to the last vestiges of colonialism as well as to spur political and economic progress on the continent; and partly as a political instrument to deal with the power imbalances in the international system. It is worth pointing out that at independence Africa lacked the human and physical capital that is required for industrialization.

Initiatives such as the Economic Community of Central African States, the Arab Maghreb Union, and the Preferential Trade Agreement for East and Southern Africa (later the Common Market for East and Southern African States - COMESA) were inspired by this pan Africanist vision. There are other initiatives that evolved outside this framework, such as the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the Southern African Development and Coordinating Conference (and later the Southern African Development Community), and the East African Community (EAC). While colonialism did play a role in Africa's lack of development, the policies adopted by postcolonial leaders as well as their practices in power, denied Africa any room for growth and development. Consider, for example, that the growth path of the post-colonial elite mostly took the form of import-substitution industrialization. Predicated on substituting domestically produced products for foreign imports and for preserving foreign exchange, this growth strategy constrained the full development of productive forces in most parts of the continent. It produced inefficient and uncompetitive economies, with stunted private sectors (ECA, 2004). Such an approach would not help to overcome the intractable challenges of rural poverty; the small size of the economies; the lack of product complementarities as manifested in the narrow set of similar commodities; the low value of primary export products and basic minerals; and the dependence on imports for intermediate and finished goods. As Ndulu and O'Connell (1999:63) observe: 'In choosing state led and inward-looking industrialization, Africa's first generation of leaders were captive to ideas rather than interests.' The foregoing reality has to be viewed within the context of Africa's positioning in the international division of labor, in which the continent is export dependent on oil and non-oil commodities and is import dependent on manufactured goods largely from Europe, and is adversely affected by fluctuating terms of trade. Although there has been a gradual shift by some countries towards exports of processed goods and manufactured items, there are serious supply-side constraints and lack of competitiveness in most of the economies on the continent (Nye, 2004). Indeed, Africa's challenges are a combination of external and internal factors. Much has been made of the unequal relationship between Europe and Africa, and the adverse effects of the unfavorable external environment on the continent, with little responsibility apportioned to Africa's leaders. As is pointed on in the UNCTAD report, 'even under a favorable external trading and financial environment, considerable domestic policy efforts would be needed to ensure that economies gradually become self-reliant in sustaining rapid growth' (UNCTAD 2001:12). African leaders have had little success in their integration and development efforts. They hoped to achieve at the continental level what they had failed to do on the domestic level, namely economic development through combination of sound policies.

Globalization and Development in Africa

While few would argue that the increased economic productivity, expansion, and capital access can be attributed to globalization, the World Bank does not ignore the fact that there are also possible adverse consequences. In fact, many of these consequences are currently manifested in the poorest and least developed nations including much of Africa. Growing inequality, pressures on labor markets and environmental threats are increasingly evident and are likely to worsen in the coming years. Also, while developing countries are, in fact, closing the income gap with rich countries, such macro-data ignore the domestic income disparities, which, in many of the poorest countries, are becoming wider. With the worsening problem of inequality, increased social tensions and potential government backlash are almost sure to follow. According to the World Bank's report, the primary reason for internal inequality is the expanding difference in earning potential between skilled and unskilled workers due to "investments in capital and technology create a more rapidly growing demand for skilled workers." Reasons like this help amplify the argument that, taking a macro view, globalization has created equal opportunities and helped create a more level and inter-connected global economy. However, the benefits are not realized equally and by all (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2007). While globalization has buoyed the development and expansion not only of firms but also of economies, the impact on Africa has been mixed at best.

Globally, the share of people whose living standards fall below those of the middle class will decline from 82 percent in 2000 to 66 percent in 2030.Sadly, most of those left behind are heavily and increasingly concentrated in Africa. The World Bank predicts that by 2030, Sub-Saharan Africa could be home to almost 55 percent of the poorest of the world income distribution, representing an increase of 80 percent since 2000. The study suggests there are three main factors driving Africa's decline: wide income inequalities; high population growth; and the lowest per capita income growth among developing-country regions. While the first reason presents a serious issue for Africa's poor by limiting their ability to enjoy the growth benefits equally, the latter two reasons are even more worrisome because they underline that—as if the plight of the poor is not already grave enough—the trend shows it is getting even worse. While some economies in regions like Asia and South America have achieved, or are seeing benefits, this certainly begs the question if globalization is actually hurting the poorest nations?

Without question, globalization has enabled more countries access into a global economic system. Some argue that in much of the developing world though, and specifically Africa, globalization has helped make worse an already bad situation. Professor and Economist Dr. Ravinder Rena expand on the idea of globalization's "winners" and "losers" and argues that even though globalization has opened up more opportunities for many developing nations, it has also increased the economic interdependence of the developing nations on wealthier and emerging global partners (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2007). Rena cites the "growing volume and variety of cross-border flows of finance, investment, goods, and services, and the rapid and widespread diffusion of technology" (Ravinder, 2010). To be sure, some amount of interdependence is necessary to participate in the international trade network but the global dynamics are unbalanced. Rena seems to acknowledge that industrialized countries are often highly interdependent in their relations with one another.

However, developing countries are largely independent from one another, while their economic interests remain highly dependent on industrialized countries. Echoing the aforementioned study by the World Bank, Rena also stresses the damaging and increasing inequality that is either created or worsened. Inequality is not just a problem in the developing world, either. Countries like China and India have been beneficiaries of globalization and seen their total respective economies rise to new heights. Nonetheless, these countries are home to some of the poorest people in the world--millions of them. As for Africa, Rena points out that the poorest nations, many in Africa, have experienced no growth during the past years. He places much of the blame on poor governance along with the recognition that outside parties such as international organizations and consultancies have helped steer these leaders into ineffective or counter-productive decision-making. The divide between the rich and the poor is growing in the era of globalization. Case in point, Rena points out that nearly three-quarters of Africa's population live in rural areas while in the developed world, this number less than 10 percent. More telling though is the comparison amongst the poor countries, many of which are African states. While globalization has certainly aggravated the economic inequality within wealthy and emerging nations, among the poorest nations, "the main divide is between countries—those that adapted well to globalization and, in many areas, prospered, and those that maladjusted and, in many cases, collapsed (Ravinder, 2010).

However, it can be argue that globalization has made a significant impact on many parts of Africa. Even many previously undeveloped regions have been transformed by advances in technology, communications, and transportation. With this, some of the African problem is apparent. Globalization, as previously defined, has not bypassed Africa, as some may suggest. Some argue that many African states have failed at gaining entry into a globalized marketplace, or have not had legitimate opportunity to do so. In some cases, this may be true, but an argument can be made that, in those cases, globalization still has a major impact. These, "unaffected" countries will continue to fall further behind, become more irrelevant to international commerce and continue to find it increasingly difficult to establish meaningful connectedness.

One does not need to look hard to find globalization success stories from the information age of the past half century. China, on its way toward becoming the world's largest economy, has shifted from a rural and state directed economy toward an urbanized industrial and increasingly capitalist system (Dale, 2003). China has been a magnet for foreign investment and an export powerhouse. Its strong economic growth over the past 29 years (averaging more than nine percent annually) is unparalleled in modern history and China's "economic miracle" also coincided with a dramatic drop in extreme poverty (people living on one dollar or less per day). This economic growth has not only expanded China's global reach, but it has also helped turn China into the major engine for regional trade in developing Asia. According to the Asian Development Bank, China is the world's biggest consumer of copper, tin, zinc, platinum, steel, and iron ore; second biggest of aluminum, lead, and oil. The Chinese have had great success in conquering global markets via its exports of manufactured goods and the acquisition of natural resource assets in places like Africa, Australia, and Latin America. Its accomplishments in the area of foreign investment have been significant. In addition to China, countries like India, the Philippines, Mexico, Russia, parts of Eastern Europe, and South Africa are loaded with educated workers who speak Western languages and can handle outsourced IT work. India is leading the way in this regard. By strictly economic measures, India is a definite globalization success story. Average incomes, steadily rising, have doubled since the mid-1980s. New industries have emerged, most visibly in the high-technology hubs of Bangalore and Hyderabad.

The idea of global outsourcing is not exactly new, but previously undeveloped countries are how home to more than just rudimentary assembly lines. Virtually all consumer products sold by developed country retailers today are made entirely or to a significant extent in offshore factories located in developing countries. Even products requiring precision manufacturing, like hard disk drives and many kinds of semiconductors, are becoming "high-tech commodities" made in capital intensive facilities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere (Ravinder, 2010).

Challenges of Globalization and Africa's Integration

During the period between 1960 and 1970 Sub-Saharan Africa experienced something of an economic boom. This, however, was short-lived. Africa was severely affected by the steep *increase in oil* prices by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the debt crises of the early 1970s. It ushered in a period of economic decline, aptly characterized by African scholars as the lost decade. It is a trough from which Africa is still struggling to recover. The economic strain experienced during this period made it felt both in production and social structures, with literacy and life expectancy rates beginning to decline. Internal factors, such as ill-conceived domestic policies, overvalued exchange rates, the inefficiency of parastatal organizations, and excessive regulation of domestic economies further contributed to the poor economic situation (Helleiner, 1999).

Historically, African states have been subjugated by the actions of the international community, often without proper voices of their own. Continental and intercontinental slavery and colonialism are primary examples and have certainly left lingering and damaging aftereffects. Even after achieving independence for most states Africa was still targeted and exploited by outside interests. This added to the newly independent African states' the widespread inability to install effective governance and civil societies. Africa was often treated as a pawn amongst leverage-seeking wealthier nations and even sometimes as the innocent recipient of strategically proffered financial support. Since most of this financial assistance supported the economic and political aspirations of its benefactors, the recipient governments rarely had any oversight over the aid program's delivery or proper implementation. Combined with already unstable governments, civil conflicts, and poverty, it was like pouring fuel onto the African fire. Then—upon the end of the Cold War, much of this outside assistance stopped. For most of Africa, it has been a constant struggle to attract external economic investment especially that which comes with no strings attached (Paul, 2007). History and conflict play major roles in how African states operate and how they view each other. Not only that, but the continent is also distinctively disadvantaged in other ways. Professor Paul Collier observes that Africa is disproportionately either landlocked or resource-rich. This is a difficult combination for diversifying exports and trade. Throughout the rest of the developing world, the population that falls into these two categories is barely over 10 percent. In Africa, it is nearly 70 percent of the continent's population. This puts Africans at a major disadvantage in comparison to other emerging economies and is one of the reasons Africa has had such a difficult time trading with the west. Without easy and sufficient access to ports, most African countries fail to even approach the delivery cycles of other emerging economies. Africans find themselves facing the significant challenge of competing for international trade with other countries, such as China, which can offer manufactured goods opposed to Africa's raw materials quicker and cheaper.

Africa's troubles are manifold and are well publicized. Government instability, war, famine, and disease are some of the most obvious problems that are deterring investment in the region. Another issue is the lack of skilled human capital. Even when incentive programs were introduced to help make foreign investment in Africa more attractive they have tended to backfire. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were created in Africa with the goal of making their economies more fiscally-balanced to induce greater savings and investment. Instead, argues John Mukum Mbaku, economist and Fellow at the Brookings Institution, the SAPs often became vehicles through which TNCs could become heavily involved in the economies and dictate institutional reforms and governance within African countries (John, 2008).

Africans had a vehicle and hopefully the means for taking responsibility and control of their own rights, decisions, futures, and roles in international relations. According to their charter, among the functions and duties of the AU is to develop and accelerate "integration in the continent to enable it play its rightful role in the global economy while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems compounded as they are by certain negative aspects of globalization." Contrary to so much of their troubled history, the AU's vision is to be driven by Africa's own citizens. This is a new stance toward which the AU has moved—a fundamental shift in focus from supporting liberation movements against colonialism and apartheid, to working single-mindedly on Africa's development and integration. In addition to human rights issues, unification, and defense of sovereignty and independence, the AU has multiple objectives designed to continue and enhance Africa's role in the globalized world. Included is the goal to establish the necessary conditions that enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations.

Conclusion

Regional integration in Africa has repeatedly met with failure in the past. Wrong priorities have hindered success. Much has been written about the lack of 'political will' without an accompanying explanation as to what it really means particularly in the context of globalization. In this paper an attempt was made to highlight the challenges related to non-implementation of commitments and to trace its reasons to a lack of focus and willingness by leaders to transcend narrow nationalistic concerns. In other words, defending sovereignty has been more important than the real commitment to growth and development which is the means to a well-managed integration process.

Globalization links economies throughout the world through trade, investments, and financial flows. These transactions employ modern technology and information sharing. Countries such as China and India confirm that connecting to the global economy can be beneficial. As the emerging economic winners prosper, however, the poorest suffer and fall further behind. In the age of globalization, the poorest in Africa continue to get poorer. There have been some areas of economic success but, in keeping with its troubled history, most of Africa faces subjugation and inability to properly participate in the global economy.

Recommendation

In view of the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

It's recommended that Africa must develop social capital, especially by investing in the education and health sectors. Such an attitude would then create a mind-set for self-assessment and appraisal to see how the weakness can be conquered.

More so, African states must address institutional capacity needs (i.e., create and/or strengthen institutions that are change-oriented, outward-looking and able to interact meaningfully with global actors). These institutions must be in all spheres of politics and public administration and they must be tailored to have the ability to network with the private sector, civil society and the international community.

In the same vein, African Union must adopt and practice participatory governance involving all actors (governments, the private sector, civil society, both national and international, as well as world bodies) and should be able to address human capacity needs from a comprehensive angle (skills, knowledge, attitude, networks, and information technology).

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