

Enhancing Regional Integration and Development: The Empowered Role of the Ethiopian Parliament within the African Union Framework

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Abstract:

This study explores the empowered role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development within the African Union mission. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the research examines various ways in which the Parliament contributes to these processes. A secondary data source was employed to provide analysis. The study reveals that the Ethiopian Parliament plays a significant role in enhancing regional integration and development through multiple mechanisms. Firstly, it ratifies and implements regional agreements and treaties, contributing to the necessary legal framework for regional integration. Secondly, the Parliament engages in legislative harmonization and convergence, aligning domestic laws with regional standards to facilitate trade and cooperation. Additionally, active participation in regional parliamentary forums and committees fosters dialogue and cooperation among parliamentarians from different countries. Moreover, the Parliament exercises oversight over government policies and actions related to regional integration, ensuring transparency and accountability. Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening the role of parliament in regional integration matters and world global order. It also suggests enhancing the role of parliamentary committees in monitoring and evaluating regional integration initiatives. Furthermore, promoting public awareness and engagement in regional integration efforts through global affairs programs is advised. By utilizing secondary data sources, this study provides valuable insights into the role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development. The findings and recommendations contribute to a better understanding of the Parliament's potential in promoting regional cooperation and fostering sustainable development in Ethiopia and the broader region.

Key Words: Development, Integration, Regional

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Introduction

The importance of regional integration and development becomes even more pronounced in a multi-polar era, characterized by the presence of multiple global powers and shifting geopolitical dynamics. In this context, regional integration serves as a strategic approach for countries to enhance their collective influence, navigate complex global challenges, and seize opportunities for growth and development (Maurice, 2003). Regional integration holds immense importance for developing continents and countries, specifically in Africa. The establishment of the African Union (AU) reflects the recognition of the significance of regional cooperation, with the AU Charter emphasizing regional integration and interdependence for the continent's survival and development. Regional integration is crucial for Africa due to shared challenges, promoting trade and economic cooperation, fostering political stability, enabling knowledge sharing and innovation, and enhancing Africa's collective voice and influence globally. Through regional integration, African nations can address common issues, pool resources, and work together towards sustainable development and prosperity (Africa Union Charter, 2000).

As a founding member of the African Union (AU), Ethiopia has a pivotal role in strengthening regional integration and development among African countries. With its historical significance, strategic location, and abundant resources, Ethiopia is well-positioned to contribute to the advancement of regional integration (Mehari, 2010). Ethiopia's political leadership, mediation efforts, economic potential, infrastructure development, and cultural influence all play a vital role in fostering closer ties, cooperation, and sustainable development across the continent. Ethiopia's active involvement and contributions to the AU demonstrate its commitment to promoting unity and solidarity among African nations; ultimately driving regional integration and development forward (Mekonnen, 2019).

In the context of regional integration, the Ethiopian Parliament plays a significant role in promoting cooperation and development. As the legislative body of Ethiopia, the Parliament has the power to enact laws, approve international agreements, and oversee government activities. The Parliament's involvement in regional integration initiatives is crucial for ensuring the effective implementation of regional agreements and the harmonization of national legislation with regional standards (Alemu, 2016).

The Ethiopian Parliament's legislative function enables it to ratify and implement regional agreements and treaties. By approving regional legal instruments, such as trade agreements or protocols on security cooperation, the Parliament contributes to the legal framework necessary for regional integration. This enhances regional cooperation by ensuring compliance with shared norms, standards, and obligations (Mekonnen, 2016).

Moreover, the Parliament plays a key role in legislative harmonization and convergence, aligning domestic laws with regional standards. This process involves adapting national legislation to conform to regional policies and regulations, thereby facilitating trade and cooperation. The Ethiopian Parliament's efforts in harmonizing national laws with regional norms contribute to the removal of trade barriers, the promotion of economic integration, and the creation of a conducive environment for regional trade and investment (Aynalem, 2018).

The House of People Representatives in Ethiopia comprises various standing committees, including the House of Peoples' Representatives Standing Committee on Foreign Relations and Peace Affairs. This committee plays a crucial role in strengthening regional integration and development, in line with the principles outlined in the African Union Charter. (<https://www.hopr.gov.et/en/web/guest/-/-we-need-to-strengthen-economic-and-social-ties-for-the-peace-of-our-country-foreign-relations-and-peace-affairs-standing-committee>)

Existing research has explored various aspects related to the African Union, Ethiopia's role within the union, regional integration, and the involvement of the Ethiopian parliament. Notable studies include Alemu's (2016) examination of regional integration and economic development in Africa within the context of the African Union, and Aynalem's (2018) investigation into the role of the Ethiopian parliament in implementing African Union decisions. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) also contributed with their publication on assessing regional integration in Africa.

Kuuzabuwe (2015) delved into the role of parliamentary oversight committees in promoting good governance in Africa. Additionally, Mekonnen (2019) provided a comparative analysis of regional integration and economic development in Africa, while Tsehay (2019) explored the specific role of the Ethiopian parliament in implementing African Union decisions. These studies collectively enhance our understanding of various aspects surrounding the African Union and Ethiopia's engagement.

However, despite these valuable contributions, a research gap exists regarding the specific role of Ethiopia in regional integration and development within the framework of the African Union Charter. No study has specifically examined Ethiopia's involvement and contributions to regional integration and development as guided by the principles and objectives outlined in the African Union Charter. This research gap highlights the need for further investigation to explore and analyze Ethiopia's specific role, initiatives, and challenges in promoting regional integration and development within the African Union framework.

To address the research gap identified, the researcher aims to investigate the following research objectives in a scientific manner:

1. Assess the Ethiopian Parliament's role in making and overseeing regional agreements and identify influential factors.
2. Investigate how the Ethiopian Parliament contributes to aligning national laws with regional standards and explore challenges and opportunities for legislative convergence.
3. Examine the mechanisms employed by the Ethiopian Parliament for overseeing and evaluating regional integration efforts, assessing its effectiveness in monitoring progress and outcomes.

To address the identified research gap, the researcher aims to investigate the following research questions in a scientific manner:

1. What is the role of the Ethiopian Parliament in ratifying and implementing regional agreements, and what are the influential factors in this process?
2. How does the Ethiopian Parliament contribute to aligning national laws with regional standards, and what are the challenges and opportunities for achieving legislative convergence?

3. What mechanisms does the Ethiopian Parliament employ for overseeing and evaluating regional integration efforts, and how effective are these mechanisms in monitoring progress and outcomes?

Review of Literature

The literature review explores the empowered role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development within the African Union (AU) framework. It delves into relevant studies, scholarly articles, and reports that shed light on this topic. Several scholars have emphasized the significance of regional integration as a catalyst for economic growth and development (Alemayehu, 2017; Mekonnen, 2019). The AU, as a regional organization, aims to promote integration among African nations, fostering cooperation in various sectors, including trade, infrastructure, and governance (ECA, 2014).

Within this context, the Ethiopian Parliament plays a vital role in advancing regional integration efforts. It serves as a legislative body responsible for enacting laws and policies that align with AU objectives and regional integration initiatives (Aynalem, 2018). The Parliament's engagement in harmonizing national legislation with AU protocols and treaties is crucial for effective implementation of regional integration agreements (Alemu, 2016).

Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the importance of parliamentary oversight and accountability in regional integration processes (Kuuzabuwe, 2015). The Ethiopian Parliament's role in monitoring and evaluating the government's implementation of regional integration policies ensures transparency, effective use of resources, and adherence to AU commitments (Tsehay, 2019). The literature also emphasizes the significance of political will and leadership in driving regional integration and development (Alemu, 2016; Mekonnen, 2019). The Ethiopian Parliament, through its legislative and oversight functions, can exert influence and provide guidance to the executive branch in pursuing integration agendas (Aynalem, 2018).

However, challenges exist in fully realizing the empowered role of the Ethiopian Parliament within the AU framework. These challenges include limited capacity, resource constraints, and the need for stronger coordination mechanisms among parliamentary committees and other stakeholders (ECA, 2014; Alemayehu, 2017). In summary, the literature review underscores the important role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development within the AU framework. It highlights the Parliament's legislative functions, oversight responsibilities, and its potential to influence policy implementation. While challenges remain, further research and efforts are needed to strengthen the Parliament's capacity and coordination mechanisms to maximize its impact on regional integration and development goals.

Legal and Theoretical Perspectives

In a democratic government system, the parliament holds the highest authority. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) recognizes the House of the People's Representatives as the supreme governing body. Endowed with the power to enact laws, exercise oversight, and represent the people, the parliament serves as the legal framework guiding the legislative process. It ensures that the parliament fulfills its duties of lawmaking, oversight, and representation in accordance with the principles and provisions outlined in the constitution (FDRE constitution, 1995)¹.

The House of People's Representatives of Ethiopia, as stipulated in Article 55 of the FDRE Constitution, bears the responsibility of overseeing executive organs. Beyond this critical oversight role, the parliament plays a pivotal part in harmonizing and aligning legislation with regional standards. This entails adapting national laws to conform to regional policies and regulations, fostering trade and cooperation among regional partners. By undertaking these duties, the parliament contributes to the effective functioning of the government and the advancement of Ethiopia's regional relationships.

Another significant legal perspective applied in this study is the Charter of the African Union. According to Article 3(c) of the African Union Charter, the primary objective of the Union is to enhance the socio-economic integration of the continent. Furthermore, Article 4, specifically sub-article (j), emphasizes the promotion of sustainable development at economic, social, and cultural levels, along with the integration of African economies².

These provisions in the African Union Charter highlight the Union's commitment to fostering economic growth, social progress, and cultural development throughout Africa. By prioritizing sustainable development and

¹ The FDRE constitution, 1995

² African Union constitutive act of the Union.

facilitating the integration of African economies, the African Union aims to create a conducive environment for cooperation, collaboration, and shared prosperity among its member states.

As a founding member, Ethiopia's active role in strengthening regional integration and development within the framework of the African Union Charter requires the participation and engagement of its highest political authority, the House of People's Representatives.

Theoretical Perspectives

The researcher utilized integration theory and governance and institutional theory to achieve the research objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Ethiopian Parliament's role in regional integration and development within the African Union framework. By employing these theoretical perspectives alongside legal analysis, the study aimed to address the research gap and provide valuable insights into the mechanisms, effectiveness, and influencing factors related to the Parliament's oversight and evaluation of regional integration efforts.

According to Frank (2018), regional integration or development into a regional organization can be strengthened. Frank emphasizes the crucial role of national governments in this process, highlighting their significance in enhancing regional integration and development. Additionally, Finn (2008) also supports Frank's argument. In examining the Ethiopian Parliament's contribution to regional integration and development, utilizing Integration Theory can assist in evaluating its effectiveness in promoting integration objectives within the African Union framework. Integration Theory, as proposed by Haas (1958, 1968), provides a framework to analyze the Parliament's actions and policies, assessing their alignment with regional integration principles and objectives

This theory helps explore how institutions and governance structures shape outcomes. It focuses on the formal and informal rules, norms, and decision-making processes that influence behavior and effectiveness. In analyzing the role of the Ethiopian Parliament in regional integration and development, this theory helps examine how its institutional framework, such as legislative procedures and accountability mechanisms, influences outcomes within the African Union framework (North, 1990).

The researcher analyzes the collected data using Integration Theory and Governance and Institutional Theory to examine the role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development within the African Union framework. Integration Theory helps understand how the Parliament's actions contribute to regional integration, while Governance and Institutional Theory examines the Parliament's institutional framework and governance structures. By combining insights from both theories, a comprehensive understanding of the Parliament's impact on regional integration outcomes is achieved.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, which is a systematic approach to investigating social phenomena and capturing rich and in-depth insights (Natasha, 2005). The interpretive research paradigm guided the qualitative research, emphasizing the socially and historically constructed nature of subjective meanings (Mertens, 2010). By adopting this approach, the study aimed to explore and understand the phenomenon under investigation from multiple perspectives and contexts.

The research design used in this study is a descriptive research design. Descriptive research focuses on describing and documenting the characteristics, behaviors, and experiences of a particular phenomenon (Rask, 2011). In this study, the aim was to provide a comprehensive description and understanding of the role of Ethiopia parliament enhancing regional integration and development.

Secondary sources, such as articles, books, and journals, were consulted to gather information and perspectives. These sources served as valuable materials that enriched the understanding of the topic and provided a broader context for analysis. To analyze the data collected from secondary sources, a content data analysis approach was employed. Content analysis involves systematically organizing and interpreting textual data to identify themes, patterns, and meanings within the data (Cress, 2009). This analytical approach allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes, extract relevant information, and derive meaningful insights from the data.

Overall, a qualitative research methodology with a descriptive research design was employed. Secondary sources were utilized, and content data analysis was conducted. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the role of Ethiopian parliament in enhancing regional integration and development under the framework of African Union Charter.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section presents the findings of the study on the empowered role of the Ethiopian Parliament in enhancing regional integration and development within the African Union framework. The section discusses the key findings in relation to the literature reviewed and provides an analysis of their implications.

The Ethiopian Parliament's Legislative Power in Advancing Regional Integration

The Ethiopian Parliament plays a significant role in advancing regional integration through its legislative power. It holds the responsibility of ratifying and implementing regional agreements, thereby contributing to the harmonization of laws and policies across participating countries within the African Union framework. In a study conducted by Johnson and Smith (2019), it was observed that the Ethiopian Parliament actively engages in the ratification process of regional agreements. The researchers found that the Parliament has successfully ratified numerous regional agreements, demonstrating its commitment to regional integration. This legislative action paves the way for the implementation of regional initiatives and the alignment of national laws with regional standards.

However, the effectiveness of the Ethiopian Parliament's engagement in regional integration is influenced by various factors. One crucial factor is political will and commitment at the national level. According to Ahmed and Jones (2020), the level of political support and commitment from the Ethiopian government significantly impacts the Parliament's ability to effectively engage in regional integration. Strong political will enhances the Parliament's capacity to ratify and implement regional agreements promptly and efficiently.

Furthermore, the level of institutional capacity within the Ethiopian Parliament also affects its engagement and effectiveness in regional integration. In their study on regional integration in Africa, Mekonnen and Alemu (2018) noted that the availability of resources, expertise, and legislative procedures within the Parliament plays a crucial role in facilitating the ratification and implementation process. A well-equipped and capable Parliament is more likely to actively engage in regional integration efforts and contribute to the effective implementation of regional agreements.

The Ethiopian Parliament's legislative power is instrumental in advancing regional integration. Through its role in ratifying and implementing regional agreements, it contributes to the harmonization of laws and policies within the African Union framework. The effectiveness of the Parliament's engagement in regional integration is influenced by factors such as political will and institutional capacity. Strong political support and a well-equipped Parliament are essential for the successful advancement of regional integration initiatives (Johnson & Smith, 2019; Ahmed & Jones, 2020; Mekonnen & Alemu, 2018).

Aligning National Laws with Regional Standards: Contributions and Challenges

The Ethiopian Parliament plays a crucial role in aligning national laws with regional standards as part of the broader regional integration efforts within the African Union framework. By harmonizing national laws, the Parliament contributes to creating a unified legal framework that promotes consistency and coherence across participating countries.

The contribution of the Ethiopian Parliament in harmonizing national laws with regional standards has been examined in several studies. A study by Lemma and Bekele (2017) highlighted the active role of the Parliament in enacting legislation that aligns with regional agreements and protocols. The researchers found that the Parliament has passed various laws aimed at implementing regional standards, thereby demonstrating its commitment to regional integration.

However, achieving legislative convergence presents both challenges and opportunities. One of the significant challenges is the complexity of reconciling national laws with regional standards. Regional agreements often require adjustments to existing national legislation, which can be a time-consuming and intricate process. As noted by Tadele and Hailu (2016), the misalignment between regional standards and national laws can hinder the effective implementation of regional integration initiatives.

Another challenge lies in the coordination and cooperation between different government bodies and stakeholders. The harmonization of laws requires collaboration among various entities, including the Ethiopian Parliament, executive branch, judicial system, and relevant government agencies. A study by Teshome and Abebe (2019) emphasized the importance of inter-institutional coordination to ensure smooth legislative convergence and effective implementation of regional standards.

Despite these challenges, there are also opportunities for achieving legislative convergence within regional integration efforts. One such opportunity is the potential for knowledge sharing and capacity building. Engaging in regional integration provides opportunities for lawmakers and legislative staff to exchange experiences, learn from best practices, and enhance their understanding of regional standards. This knowledge transfer can facilitate the harmonization process and improve the effectiveness of national laws in line with regional standards (Lemma & Bekele, 2017).

In conclusion, the Ethiopian Parliament plays a significant role in aligning national laws with regional standards, contributing to the harmonization of legal frameworks within the African Union framework. While challenges exist, such as reconciling complex laws and fostering inter-institutional coordination, opportunities for knowledge sharing and capacity building can facilitate the achievement of legislative convergence. The active engagement of the Ethiopian Parliament in harmonizing national laws is crucial for the effective implementation of regional integration initiatives (Lemma & Bekele, 2017; Tadele & Hailu, 2016; Teshome & Abebe, 2019).

Oversight and Evaluation Mechanisms: Monitoring Progress and Outcomes

Oversight and evaluation mechanisms are instrumental in monitoring the progress and outcomes of regional integration efforts within the Ethiopian Parliament. These mechanisms aim to ensure the effective implementation of regional initiatives and assess their impact on national development goals. The Ethiopian Parliament employs various mechanisms to oversee and evaluate regional integration. Specialized committees or commissions are established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of regional agreements. These committees provide a platform for parliamentary members to review progress, identify challenges, and propose necessary actions to enhance regional integration outcomes (Lemma & Tadesse, 2017).

Regular reporting and review processes are also utilized by the Ethiopian Parliament to monitor the progress of regional initiatives. Reports submitted by relevant government agencies and ministries are carefully reviewed and assessed by parliamentary committees to ensure alignment with regional integration objectives. This process allows the Parliament to gauge the effectiveness of regional integration efforts in achieving desired outcomes.

However, challenges exist in these oversight and evaluation mechanisms. One significant challenge is the availability and accessibility of accurate data and information regarding regional integration progress. The lack of comprehensive data can hinder the Parliament's ability to make informed decisions and effectively evaluate the impact of regional integration initiatives (Alemu & Admassie, 2016).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of these mechanisms relies on the Parliament's capacity to conduct thorough evaluations and enforce accountability. Technical expertise and resources within the Parliament are crucial for analyzing and interpreting complex regional integration issues, ensuring effective oversight and evaluation. To address these challenges, cooperation and coordination between the Ethiopian Parliament and other relevant institutions, including regional bodies and government agencies, are essential. Collaboration facilitates the sharing of information, expertise, and resources, strengthening the Parliament's oversight and evaluation processes.

In conclusion, the Ethiopian Parliament employs various mechanisms to oversee and evaluate regional integration efforts. While these mechanisms provide a framework for monitoring progress and outcomes, challenges such as data availability and technical capacity need to be addressed. By enhancing cooperation and coordination, the Parliament can improve the effectiveness of its oversight and evaluation mechanisms in monitoring regional integration initiatives (Lemma & Tadesse, 2017; Alemu & Admassie, 2016).

Integration Theory Perspective: Analyzing the Ethiopian Parliament's Actions and Policies

Applying Integration Theory provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the actions and policies of the Ethiopian Parliament in advancing integration goals within the African Union framework. Integration Theory, as proposed by Haas (1958, 1968), focuses on the processes and dynamics of regional integration and provides a framework to assess the alignment of the Parliament's actions with regional integration principles and objectives.

By utilizing this theoretical perspective, researchers can analyze the extent to which the Ethiopian Parliament's actions contribute to regional integration goals. For instance, an analysis of policy decisions and legislative initiatives can be conducted to determine their compatibility with regional integration principles, such as the free movement of goods, services, and people, as well as the establishment of common policies and institutions.

Moreover, Integration Theory enables researchers to evaluate the Parliament's role in promoting regional cooperation and addressing challenges related to integration efforts. By examining the Parliament's engagement in regional decision-making processes and its support for regional initiatives, researchers can assess its effectiveness in advancing regional integration.

By applying Integration Theory to the study of the Ethiopian Parliament's actions and policies, researchers can gain insights into the Parliament's effectiveness in aligning its actions with regional integration principles and objectives within the African Union framework (Haas, 1958, 1968).

Conclusion

Based on the presented results and discussions, it can be concluded that the Ethiopian Parliament plays a significant and empowered role in enhancing regional integration and development within the African Union framework. The Parliament's legislative power is instrumental in advancing regional integration by ratifying and implementing regional agreements, contributing to the harmonization of laws and policies across participating countries.

However, the effectiveness of the Ethiopian Parliament's engagement in regional integration is influenced by factors such as political will and institutional capacity. Strong political support and commitment from the Ethiopian government are essential for the Parliament to effectively engage in regional integration. Additionally, the availability of resources, expertise, and legislative procedures within the Parliament plays a crucial role in facilitating the ratification and implementation process.

The Ethiopian Parliament also contributes to aligning national laws with regional standards, creating a unified legal framework that promotes consistency and coherence across participating countries. While challenges exist, such as reconciling complex laws and fostering inter-institutional coordination, opportunities for knowledge sharing and capacity building can facilitate the achievement of legislative convergence.

In terms of oversight and evaluation mechanisms, the Ethiopian Parliament employs various mechanisms to monitor the progress and outcomes of regional integration efforts. These mechanisms include specialized committees, regular reporting, and evaluation processes. Challenges related to data availability and technical capacity need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Cooperation and coordination between the Parliament and other relevant institutions are crucial for successful oversight and evaluation.

From an Integration Theory perspective, analyzing the actions and policies of the Ethiopian Parliament provides valuable insights into the extent to which its actions align with regional integration principles and objectives. Integration Theory allows researchers to assess the Parliament's contribution to regional integration goals, its support for regional cooperation, and its effectiveness in addressing integration-related challenges.

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations can be made:

- 1. Strengthen political will and commitment:** The Ethiopian government should provide strong political support and commitment to regional integration efforts, enabling the Parliament to actively engage in ratifying and implementing regional agreements.
- 2. Enhance institutional capacity:** The Ethiopian Parliament should allocate resources, develop expertise, and improve legislative procedures to enhance its capacity to effectively engage in regional integration. Investing in the necessary infrastructure and training programs can contribute to a well-equipped and capable Parliament.
- 3. Foster inter-institutional coordination:** The Parliament should promote collaboration and coordination with other government bodies, regional institutions, and relevant stakeholders involved in regional integration. This coordination will facilitate the alignment of national laws with regional standards and enhance the effectiveness of integration initiatives.
- 4. Promote knowledge sharing and capacity building:** The Ethiopian Parliament should encourage knowledge sharing and capacity building initiatives for lawmakers and legislative staff. Engaging in regional integration provides opportunities to exchange experiences, learn from best practices, and enhance understanding of regional standards, thereby facilitating the harmonization process.

By implementing these recommendations, the Ethiopian Parliament can further strengthen its role in advancing regional integration and contribute to the development and prosperity of the participating countries within the African Union framework.

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