

The African Union, the Transformation and Challenges of a Continent¹

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Abstract

The establishment of the African Union was noteworthy in the way it undermined the authoritarian theory and practice of its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity. The justification was based on the right of peaceful co-existence of member states and—as a consequence—the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security. The African Union's Constitutive Act introduced an array of responsibilities, powers, and rules that challenged the premises of Africa's earlier leaders. The Act established how the Union would carry out its business through a network of organs, agencies, government ministries, and NGOs, which this paper examines in some detail. While the organizational structure attempted to balance national and continental concerns, it also revealed an obvious weakness in the power of its three principal parliamentary, administrative and legal bodies. Although AU has made great strides in building an institution committed to human security and development, there is need to sharpen its focus, and bring about more specificity in organizational goals. The dual missions of a movement championing the independence of sovereign African states and simultaneously creating a homeland for all of African descent were, if not contradictory, at least so divergent as to strain the ability of its leaders to ensure a lasting consensus. While the initial vision was a powerful one and attracted a group of true believers, the complexities of a modern global economy have demanded an array of new developmental strategies to meet this challenge. The challenges include but not limited to good governance in Africa, alleviation of poverty and hunger, as well as hindrances to citizen participation, especially women, in civic and state affairs.

Keywords: AU, OAU, African Transformation, African Challenges

1. Introduction

In 2002 the African Union (AU) took over from its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that was founded decades earlier to bring African nations together to gain and strengthen their independence from their European rulers. The Constitutive Act of the African Union defined the objectives and purpose of the new organization (Constitutive Act, 2001). It affirmed once again the principles of domestic sovereignty and nonintervention. But while stressing respect for existing borders after independence, Article 4 of the Constitutive Act permitted "The right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to the decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity." The Union's Constitutive Act set a more proactive tone and agenda, and in that respect the two bodies—the OAU and the AU—were significantly different in their approach to intervention, including military action, in Africa. The Constitutive Act of 2001 made the African Union a significant player and partner for peace on the international stage. It is not that OAU was insignificant prior to AU's arrival on the scene, but the influence it exerted—in human rights in particular—was moral and without the means of enforcement.

The justification of intervention, by force if necessary, was based on the right of peaceful co-existence of member states and—as a consequence—the right of member states to request intervention from the Union in the interests of peace and security. Other stated principles justified intervention: respect for democracy, the rule of law and good governance, and finally condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government. This was a major departure from the autocratic way in which OAU political leaders interpreted sovereignty.

The predicament that the African Union (AU) now faced was reconciling the dream of continental unity with the socioeconomic and political realities of contemporary Africa. Caught between Africa's hope for a united continent and conflicting demands of African sovereign states, the African Union had to compromise. Struggling with the complexities of a global economy and the poverty of sub-Saharan Africa, it devised an array of new human security strategies to meet this challenge. Compromise was essential, since the modern continent has an altogether dissimilar profile from earlier decades. Today's African politicians and citizens

¹ The views expressed here are the authors' own and not necessarily those of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development.

have moved on from the past, creating a continent that embraces notions of liberty, even if imperfectly realized.

Despite all the problems confronting the continent, there is far more democracy among African countries than previously. Perhaps even more important is the demand for liberty on the street and at the polling booth. From the 1960s until 1991, not a single one of Africa's 53 countries saw any leader or ruling party being peacefully removed from power. Since 1991 no less than some 30 ruling parties or leaders have been voted out of office (Economist, 2001, pp. 46-47). Among the African countries ousting leaders or parties, some multiple times, since 2011, are Benin, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, San Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Zambia. Some leaders have accepted defeat in good grace, others grudgingly or even violently, but the people's voice was heard, establishing the precedent and practice of democracy. Much of the democratic change and political liberalization took place in the 1990s. By the middle of 1994, presidential and/or parliamentary multiparty elections had occurred in the vast majority of African countries. After sixteen years of wars, Mozambique held general and presidential elections. Apartheid officially ended in South Africa in 1994, and democratic multiracial elections followed in April of that year.

1.1 Coming to Terms with Diversity

To maintain a balance in times of change, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggested important principles to protect cultural rights and make provision for poorer communities and countries to share in the wealth of nations. But tradition itself can hold back human development, and its defense must be balanced. Respect for cultural diversity is essential for a just society, and diversity thrives in a globally interdependent world when people have multiple and complementary identities. Addressing imbalances in economic and political power helps to forestall threats to the cultures of poorer and weaker communities (UNDP, 2005).

While traditional values and practices are important to a nation, they are seldom static. If treated as immutable, they can be an obstacle to development and democracy, especially when they threaten civil rights (of women, for instance), or when they shut out new ideas. Fear that traditional national values will be harmed by openness to the world community, if unchecked, can result in repression of cultural diversity within a country. Opposition to diversity, whether it takes the form of anti-immigration legislation or religious intolerance, can polarize a society and fuel community discord.

The diversity of mechanisms and approaches to measuring governance in Africa is indicative of a growing recognition that governance matters in terms of socioeconomic development, entrenching democracy and achieving peace and security. Linking improvements in governance with improved living standards creates impetus for change, improved aid effectiveness and creates benchmarks and targets against which countries can measure their respective governance goals.

2. African Union's Institutional Framework

The recognition of continental diversity in culture, economics, and politics has posed a challenge to the African Union in devising a system that would take account of both a deep desire for continental unity and competing national goals. Global interaction can only be productive if governed by bonds of common values, communication and a shared commitment (Perrons, 2004). When the leaders of 53 African nations passed the African Union's Constitutive Act they specified the responsibilities, powers, and rules of that body. The Act established how the Union would carry out its business through a network of organs, agencies, government ministries, and NGOs. The structure of the AU consists of nine organs: AU Commission; the Assembly of the Union; Court of Justice; Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC); Permanent Representative Committee; Special Technical Committees; the African Central Bank (ACB); the African Investment Bank (AIB); and the African Monetary Fund (AMF). While the organizational structure attempted to balance national and continental concerns, it also revealed a weakness in power and authority, most noticeable in three of its principal parliamentary, administrative and legal organs:

- 2.1** The Pan-African Parliament (PAP). Established in March 2004, by Article 17 of the Constitutive of the African Union, PAP is the premier unit or organ provided for in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community signed in Abuja Nigeria, in 1991. But its status is tenuous and more aspirational than a functioning legislature with authority to pass binding laws on member states. At this point it only consults and advises, though its ambition is to evolve into a body elected or appointed by the legislatures of member countries with the legislative authority over member states (Badejo, 2008, 45). To promote a Pan-African agenda, the Union's Constitutive Act delegates chief authority to the General Assembly of the Union.
- The African Union Commission (AUC). This is the Secretariat of the Union that is entrusted with executive functions. Its mission is to promote the African integration and development process in close collaboration with the AU member states, the regional economic communities and African citizens. But its ability to effect substantial continental change is negligible. It represents the Union

and protects its interests under the auspices of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government as well as the Executive Council of Ministers. Commission is made up of Portfolios, seeking to reconcile African and global goals with the competing concerns of Africa's sovereign states. While the Union's bureaucratic structure is elaborate, its overall effectiveness is very limited.

- African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). This court, established as a regional court to make judgments on AU member states' compliance with an earlier charter of human and people's rights, has constricted authority (African Charter, 1986). It was established in 2004 with the initial ratification of 15 member states. At the AU 2008 summit of heads of state and government, the African Court of Human and People's Rights merged with the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. Established as a regional court to make judgments on AU member states' compliance with an earlier charter of human and people's rights, the court has limited authority (Shivji, 2005). It has undertaken to collect documents and conduct studies on human rights affairs in Africa; lay down rules concerning legal problems dealing with civil rights; and interpret the charter on human and peoples' rights—all laudable but not the essence of a court of law that can enforce its decisions.

Notwithstanding its institutional weaknesses—to a large measure due to restricted financial support—the African Union has been successful in a broad range of activities from peace efforts to economic development. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) is an advisory unit composed of different social and professions groups of the Union's member states. It promotes dialogue on Africa and its future with special attention given to women, youth, the African diaspora, organized labor, and the private sector. The Council is essentially an advocacy group devoted to people at risk or marginalized in society. It champions policies and programs that promote gender equality, peace, security and stability in Africa, and fosters development and integration of the continent.

Assisting in the work of socioeconomic development is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Its priorities include:

- Establishing the conditions for sustainable development by ensuring peace and security; democracy and sound political, economic and corporate governance; regional cooperation and integration;
- Policy reforms and increased investment that encompass agriculture; human resources development with a focus on health, education, science and technology; building and improving infrastructure; accelerating trade in African countries and improving access for their exports to markets in advanced countries; and the environment; mobilizing resources by increasing domestic savings and investment; improving Africa's share of global trade; attracting foreign direct investment; increasing capital flows through further debt reduction and enhanced aid (OSSA, 2010).

The breadth of the institutional mission of NEPAD required a way of monitoring and evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of program activities. NEPAD offered a new approach to addressing traditional development issues by linking concepts like poverty alleviation to political issues such as democracy and government corruption. The need for peer review was identified in 2000 (Heads of States, 2000). The review led to the establishment of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) three years later. A key feature of APRM is its entirely voluntary nature, mutually agreed upon by a number of AU member states as a self-monitoring mechanism. The APRM process entails periodic review of the policies and practices of participating countries to evaluate progress towards achieving the mutually agreed goals and compliance in four focus areas, namely democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development (Expert group meeting, 2007). As of January 2011 APRM counted 30 member states; between January 2006 and January 2011, 14 member countries had been peer reviewed—Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, Algeria, Benin, Uganda, Nigeria, Burkina, Mali, Mozambique, Lesotho, Mauritius, and Ethiopia.

The aim of APRM is to work in the framework of NEPAD so that each country can design its own review process—ideally based on transparency and accountability—where structures are put in place to ensure the participation of citizens and civil society in assessing the governance practices in the country. In the words of research report of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), the mandate of APRM is to encourage conformity in regard to political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards (ACCORD, 2011):

Essentially, the APRM is a tool to assess the good governance and sustainable development frameworks. As such, it is seen by many as an innovative and ambitious African-led exercise, which breaks new ground in terms of the concept of 'peer review' and moves beyond the existing norms around the inviolability of sovereignty that had previously hampered debate around more effective governance measures in Africa. Based on voluntary commitment by heads of states, is ideally funded—and 'owned'—by the country undertaking the review. In this way, the mechanism does not operate as a governance watchdog, but is rather intended to function more as a support structure for those governments that are committed to improving governance in their respective counties. (p. 19).

Although AU have made great strides in building an institution committed to human security and development, there is need to sharpen its focus, and bring about more specificity in organizational goals. In its favor, NEPAD has gone beyond economic concerns to political issues. However, NEPAD falls short in many ways, among them a failure to prioritize (Murray, 2004, pp. 264-265). The standards of governance are stated in very general and vague language, without sufficient elaboration. The goals are laudable, but closely examined only amount to modest incremental change when Africa stands in need of radically faster progress (Herbert, 2002). Part of the fault lies in NEPAD's apparent failure to engage with African civil society, and instead of popular participation adopts a top-down approach. The focus has been on setting standards, but not backed up in practice with a clear enforcement mechanism.

While critics complain of AU's generality in setting standards, there are in fact good tools for monitoring progress. Such instruments are the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP), and Human Development Index (HDI), which UNDP publishes annually (ACCORD, 2011, pp. 19-20):

- The Ibrahim Index of African Governance is a statistical measure of governance levels across the continent. Funded by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the index uses a variety of indicators to complete a ranking table displaying the overall quality of governance in the respective countries. The results are compressed into a single statistical measure, where an improvement or decline of governance performance can be tracked and compared annually. The advantage of this index is that it allows citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) to assess the performance of their country's performance. The index measures and assesses national governance against 57 separate criteria in order to capture in a comprehensive way the quality of services that governments provide to citizens. The essential purpose is to look beyond policy statements and intention, and instead focus on measurable output and the impact perceived by citizens.
- The Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP). With the aim of complementing existing initiatives such as AU's APRM, the AfriMAP was established in 2004 to offer in-depth research on selected themes in order to provide an independent source of information on governance issues. The AfriMAP monitors the compliance of AU's member states with selected standards of good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Working with CSOs and other citizen groups and national agencies, Afri-MAP develops country reports on governance issues focusing on the link between democracy and human rights. The reports serve as an audit of government performance across the justice sector, political participation and democracy, in addition to the effective delivery of public services. AfriMAP has also commissioned reviews of the APRM process in several countries, leaning on APRM to emphasize the need for accountability in Africa's governance.
- Human Development Index (HDI). This index was introduced as an alternative measure of socioeconomic progress, calling into question the adequacy of per capita income as the dominant development indicator (Trabold-Nubler, 1991). It is a composite statistical index used to rank countries by their level of human development. This innovative way of measuring human development combines the indicators of life expectancy, literacy, educational, and standard of living. While ideally an index should reflect all aspects of human experience, the rationale behind this instrument is the need of selectivity, simplicity, and the avoidance of overlapping categories. Its significance lies in being a single statistical measure for both social and economic development (UNDP, 2011). HDI measures average achievements in basic human development in one simple composite index, allowing the ranking of countries. Not only can HDI be used to distinguish whether a country is developed, developing or underdeveloped. The HDI index could also measure the level of governance in highlighting, for instance, two countries with similar levels of income per person, but vastly different levels of life expectancy or primary school education and literacy. Such statistical contrasts allow the questioning of government policy.

The African Union has consistently advocated a Pan-African policy that would be acceptable not only to African heads of state but also to ordinary African communities and people across the continent. But a united Africa is hindered by those very leaders of sovereign states as well as by regional bodies with their own particular concerns. Governments can pledge allegiance to an ideal while pursuing regional and nationalist ambitions that make, for instance, a practicing Pan-African Parliament or a genuine Pan-African Court of Justice and Human Rights good only in theory but unlikely to happen in this generation, if ever. The notion of a single currency is still further away. There are, however, other paths besides a Pan-African Parliament and an African court of law to a true Pan-Africanism based not on an authoritarian bureaucracy but on a looser continental community. This can come about, and can only do so, through wider citizen involvement.

2.2. Collective Governance and Collective Action

When in 2009 Elinor Ostrom was awarded the Nobel Prize for economics, it was "for her analysis of economic

governance, especially the commons.” In her research, Ostrom shows how the different types of institutions in society promote or hinder cooperation. Within the framework of institutional analysis and development (IAD), she explores how and why institutions are formed and sustained, how they can be modified, and the role they play in the political and economic arena. In the IAD framework, rules of conduct affect the situations in which individuals and communities find themselves. In the public domain, collective action is needed to establish and enforce rules governing the appropriation of common resources like land or water. Failure to understand how rules are formed or how they are modified is hazardous. Rules, administrative regulations and cultural norms alike affect outcomes in different environments (Ostrom, 2005). An understanding of rule-structured interaction is essential in the public domain where commercial and community interests can conflict or, if well managed, converge. A broad assumption that resources are so interconnected that they should be centrally managed is in fact disingenuous. Likewise unwarranted is the belief that communities lack the expertise to handle their own affairs or always stand in need of an outside authority to regulate a complex situation. Exploring the conditions that are most conducive to collective action and self-governance is a better approach.

The theoretical framework of institutional analysis rests on the notion of shared ownership of public assets whether these are tangibles such as pastures and lakes or are non-material resources like knowledge and peace. Unlike resources such as fisheries where the gains are “subtractive” in that one company or community lessens the common resource for others, the intangibles like knowledge, peace and security can benefit everyone (Hess & Ostrom, 2007, pp. 41-48). Political peace and stability fit this latter non-material category. Such human security is cumulative in that the more it is shared the better. An outcome of this kind, however, is demanding and does not come without its costs. It requires collective action in a manner that common assets come under the guidance of supportive institutional rules. As in the instance of a natural resource commons like grazing land or forests, ideally there should be equity, efficiency, and sustainability. Equity embraces the just and equal use of a resource as well as the time, effort or financial support needed for its upkeep. Efficiency is concerned with optimal production, as well as the most advantageous usage and management of a resource. Sustainability concerns outcomes and a project’s viability over the long haul.

The general consensus among the advocates of common-pool resources supports legal safeguards to protect the various stakeholders along with the willingness of the participants to work together. The importance of human security is critical in the world’s developing regions where modern technology offers significant benefits for local communities (World Bank, 2003). Initiatives focusing on economic growth, social development, and environmental management have succeeded in increasing income, access to social services, and environmental improvements. However, the benefits of these development initiatives have rarely reached the weakest and most vulnerable groups such as poor farmers or illegal migrants found in their thousands in sub-Saharan Africa.

3. The Norms of Good Governance: An African Manifesto

The ideal of good governance finds its expression in the Charter adopted by the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments in Ethiopia (African Charter, 2007). Embracing a multipart state and conducting free, non-violent elections, and creating an environment for a vibrant civil society and free press is the way forward to a truly democratic Pan-Africa. The principles of the Charter are laid out in its Article 3:

1. Respect for human rights and democratic principles;
2. Access to and exercise of state power in accordance with the constitution of the State Party and the principles of the rule of law;
3. Promotion of a system of government that is representative;
4. Holding regular, transparent, free and fair elections;
5. Separation of powers;
6. Promotion of gender equality in public and private institutions;
7. Effective participation of citizens in democratic and development processes and governance of public affairs;
8. Transparency and fairness in the management of public affairs;
9. Condemnation and rejection of acts of corruption, related offenses and impunity;
10. Condemnation and total rejection of unconstitutional changes of government;
11. Strengthening political pluralism and recognizing the role, rights and responsibilities of legally constituted political parties, including opposition political parties, which should be given a status under national law.

The role of social media and technologies is central to good governance and the ability of governments and citizens to speak to each other, silently or loudly. The use of information communication technology (ICT) generates a host of channels—the Internet, cell phones, telepresence, Twitter, blogs, and Facebook—which permits citizens to participate actively in matters of state, even to the extent of overthrowing corrupt regimes. The year 2011 saw a series of youth-led popular demonstrations and uprisings from North Africa across the

Arab world into Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria. Popularly known as the Arab Spring, these mass protests highlighted the power of social media alongside the mainstream press to spark revolutions. To what extent these measures achieve their purpose will always be debated and, depending on the outcome, be praised or blamed. But what cannot be denied is the innate force of social media.

Regional and intergovernmental organizations, alongside CSOs, are increasingly influential in advocacy for good governance in the African Union's member states. Community organizations cover a wide range of territorial special interests, and include the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). They see it as their duty to facilitate electoral assistance to member states through capacity building for electoral management bodies, and the observation and monitoring of elections. More important, these civil society organizations promote and consolidate good governance through capacity building for political parties, legislative bodies, judiciary, the media and human rights and anti-corruption institutions. While applauding such activities, it should be remembered that political governmental alliances could have the unintended consequences of dividing regions from each other (Hess & Leach, 2013).

3.1 The Private Sector and Civil Society

Government agencies are important players in civil society assisted by a network of local administrative and municipal bodies responsible for policy and development administration at the grassroots level. The state exercises and develops its capacity through its agencies, human resources, and technological support so as to bring about sustainable development in communities, especially in post-conflict situations (UNDESA, 2007). But this is not done in isolation. To achieve maximum results government combines its personnel and infrastructural resources with private and non-government firms and agencies. Business leaders, technical experts, community workers, and ordinary citizens with their individual expertise and social circles are well suited for constructive advice and assistance.

The new global economy has changed African society in significant ways. The emergence of a worldwide trade and banking networks in addition to greater economic connectivity and interdependency has lessened the distance between government and the private sector through the development of regulatory frameworks that facilitate the global reach of both corporations and small businesses. Interdependency growing at a fast rate is apparent in the building of markets, environmental issues, global health, social inclusion, industrial development, human security and good governance (Hamdoc, 2011). The private sector is not only responsible for increasing profit margins or achieving optimum growth, it adds to the public good through a number of entrepreneurial initiatives. In research on the widespread use of mobile phones to meet social, business, and service needs in Africa, data reveals that telcom's technical innovation results in overall economic and social gain for developing countries, drawing together the disparate needs of government and the private sector (Jones, 2010).

Muhammad Yunus, joint recipient with Grameen Bank of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, believes that for too long people in developing countries have cherished a fatalistic attitude in the battle against poverty. The problem of underdevelopment seems so intractable that many are tempted to give up. In what at first sight might appear to be the direct opposite of the conventional wisdom in traditional development circles, Yunus places his hope for true human security on an alliance between business and the poor. It is not for nothing that his book *Creating a world without poverty* has as its subtitle *Social business and the future of capitalism* (Yunus and Weber, 2007). Whether social business is the missing piece of enlightened capitalism, as he would have it, or a distraction from the mainstream efforts to tackle poverty is arguable, but there is certainly an argument to be made on the importance of the private sector for governance.

Civil society is an essential element in the relationship of government and the private sector. The relationship facilitates the enhancement of a holistic, inclusive and needs-based approach to good governance. Civil society has a decentralizing role to play and is in a good position to comment on the programs and initiatives that contribute to good governance. In this respect, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are important actors in the political space. CSOs play an important role in promoting good governance by formalizing the engagement between governments and citizens around particular issues of significant importance to society. This is a mark of activism, and characteristic of vibrant community organization. An illustration of activism is the international agency Transparency International, which works intensively in advocacy around anti-corruption. Transparency International in Kenya, for instance, launched the Kenya Bribery Index, which is an advocacy mechanism that has been used to identify state officials involved in corrupt business deals (ACCORD, 2011, pp. 26-28).

Besides Kenya, in other African countries such as Ghana, Madagascar, Senegal and Sierra Leone, Transparency International launched the Africa Education Watch project, which seeks to improve transparency and accountability in the management of primary education resources. A further example of civic activism is Sierra Leone's Campaign for Good Governance, which undertakes assessments of governance in Sierra Leone

using the UNECA instruments for monitoring good governance. In 2007, the Campaign for Good Governance started a project titled “Measuring and Monitoring Progress towards Good Governance,” demonstrating how CSOs can play an integral role in ensuring accountability and transparency.

Good governance from a gender perspective means creating spaces for women to actively participate in civic affairs, and be seen as legitimate actors in the process. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Beijing Platform for Action, which speak to the importance of the participation, identifies the need for gender inclusion—equity in the making of decisions that affect society. In promoting gender equality, it is crucial that a favorable work environment be created where women are treated with equal respect as their male counterparts, and they are justly represented in all government institutions, committees and offices. Regarding elections, in the view of South Africa’s Gender Advocacy Programme (GAP), political parties should support women candidates on their party lists, ensure that every alternate candidate is a woman, and develop and adhere to a quota system that reduces the under-representation of women (GAP, 2000, p. 14). Engendering national governance institutions also requires that these are accountable to women as citizens; that they actively adapt the rules, procedures and priorities to incorporate the interests of poor women in the development agenda; and mobilize active women’s agencies in civil society (Mukhopadhyay, 2003, p. 46). Other aspects of good governance relate to poverty, food insecurity, and violence—election-related hostility in particular (ACCORD, 2012, pp. 29-31)

3.2 Poverty, Development Policy and Food Insecurity

In the past decade Africa has achieved impressive economic growth rate. According to UNECA and AU recent report, the continent has 5 per cent a year growth rate over the last decade while some countries such as Ethiopia achieved 9.4 per cent growth rate (UNECA and AU, 2014). The same Report underscored that despite this impressive economic growth rate, a large part of the population remained trapped in economic poverty, facing rampant unemployment and inequality. According to UNECA and AU (2014):

“To translate rapid economic growth into sustained and inclusive development, Africa must follow through on development strategies that foster economic diversification, create jobs, reduce inequality and poverty and boost access to basic services.” (p. 3).

Although Africa’s progress has been generally encouraging, performance has been mixed across countries as well as in terms of MDG indicators. For example Ethiopia, Libya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, etc. have recorded the fastest growth rates while South Africa, Swaziland, Sudan Madagascar and Central African Republic had sluggish economies (UNECA and AU, 2014).

When it comes to achieving MDGs, a UN Report (2013) indicates that Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Namibia have made progress in 16 out of the 22 indicators. The same Report also described Africa as “off track” concerning the achievement of the first MDG- Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger. Although Africa has made progress, it is not sufficient to meet the target by 2015. The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day in Central, East, Southern and West Africa fell to 48.5 per cent in 2010 from 56.5 per cent in 1990, still 20.25 per cent point off the 2015 MDG target (UNDP, et. al. 2013). This is mainly because many African countries did not embrace inclusive growth and address the problem of social and income inequality. In this regard, the UN Report suggests that African countries should commit to inclusive transformative development that reduces income poverty, creates decent jobs, enhances the quality of and access to social services, reduces inequality and promotes resilience to climate related hazards.

Despite its large reserves of natural resources, Africa remains the poorest country in an increasingly prosperous world (Hope, 2002). According to the 2010 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) report, chronic poverty, insecurity, recurrent natural disasters and underdevelopment are critical threats to the lives of many Africans (FAO, 2010). The continent continues to be marked by constant food crises for populations dependent on food aid—especially in the Horn of Africa region. The FAO report also asserts that food and agricultural in Africa will continue to decline in the future, thus increasing the vulnerability of many African lives and households.

Climate change and its subsequent environmental consequences have further intensified the problem, resulting in the increasing scarcity of resources. This increasing scarcity in environmental resources where weak governance is weak can exacerbate existing social and political problems, and be economic drivers of conflict. Existing sociopolitical conditions—such as poor wealth distribution and insufficient employment, particularly for a youth population—also increase the risk of instability. Most African states are underdeveloped with a poor physical infrastructure, which is a requirement of economic growth and development.

Africa’s urban populations are placing greater strain than ever on the existing infrastructure to support expensive infrastructure development. Urbanization in Africa presents both opportunities and challenges to the continent. Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, social development and much more. At their best, cities have enabled people to advance socially and economically. Concentration of people in urban areas facilitates provision of education, health care and other social services. Energy and natural resources are conserved since people living in densely-populated cities use substantially less land, energy and water per person than people with comparable incomes in suburban or rural areas. However, providing for

millions of urban residents with essential services requires vast investments, skilled management and innovative leadership. Inadequate management capacities of African cities continue to pose serious urban development challenges, key among them being what the World Bank referred to as “urbanization without growth”, unplanned settlements, slums and shanty towns, etc.

3.4 Weak Democracy and Election-related Violence

Post-independence African states had been largely characterized by one-party governments until the wave of democratization swept across the continent in the 1990s. As a result of this, many African states went through constitutional review processes to allow for multiparty politics. The Conference on Security, Stability and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) was created within the AU system as a way of processing policy in a time of change (CSSDCA, 2000). However, the inability of numerous states to exercise effective and truly inclusive democracies is a grave governance concern (Andrews, 2003). Many African states find electoral processes difficult to manage, resulting too often in manipulation, political brinkmanship and subversion. Elections that should give hope and the feeling of inclusivity to populations are now regarded with anxiety, marked as they frequently are by rigged results or violence (Adejumobi, 2000). The winner-takes-all model of democracy is the greatest challenge for multiethnic African states, making this the root cause of identity-based polarization—evident in Kenya’s 2007/8 elections. Electoral processes should emphasize the peaceful management of social conflict through public dialogue and open debate, and the selection of leaders through agreed rules and processes (UNDP, 2009). The challenge remains as to how African states can practice democracy, be more inclusive, and ensure that all citizens feel represented.

3.5 Conflict and Peace building

Africa is a vast and varied continent whose political economy is shaped by multitude of historical and geographical factors. Even though Africa’s conflicts reflect continental diversity, they are generally linked to ethnicity and disputes over natural resources, boundaries, and most importantly very much associated with poverty. Conflict is exhibited in ethnic and religious wars, political violence, and border conflicts as currently exemplified by Somalia, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic, South Sudan, etc..

This civil and military strife means tremendous human and material resource losses not only to the countries where conflicts are raging but to their neighbors as well. The latter often end up hosting refugees who seek safe haven further resulting in considerable economic and environmental problems for these countries. The increase in violent conflicts, including those around issues of local autonomy and ethnic identity, as well as distribution of resources have hampered social integration and diverted attention and resources away from economic development to conflict management. African Union has tried its best in bringing peace through negotiations as well as provision of peacekeeping forces in conflict zones. But its noble ambition is constrained by limited resources as well as the necessary modern equipment to bring about peace and stability in the continent.

4. Conclusion

The African Union is now established and testing its own strength. Its administrative structure is in place, and it has some of the tools for an active role in continental and global affairs. But political and economic uncertainties persist, and will in all likelihood do so for some decades to come. How, for instance, will the Arab spring play out? The political direction it takes will not only affect the 23 CEN-SAD member states, but will have implication for political alliances and possibly the global economy. Certainly the Community of Sahel-Saharan States’ decisions will impact Pan-Africa, and determine the Community’s relations with other African states and regional associations.

Political decisions are frequently linked to economic conditions. Politicians and heads of state in particular are sensitive to domestic and budgetary concerns, and react to sudden shocks in the financial market. This became apparent when the European Union—and the euro zone—suffered a widespread recession. Many countries faced high unemployment, severe austerity, and cutbacks in spending for public services and pensions. The outcome was predictable. Countries such as Britain, a key financial player in Europe, along with other euro zone countries questioned the merits of the currency, signaling a centrifugal force that threatened the collapse of the European Union itself. The reaction to this state of affairs was immediate at the international level, with the unusually public insistence by the United States—a close diplomatic, economic, and military partner—that Britain remain in the Union for fear of other nations like Poland following suit (Higgins, January 18, 2013).

The European experience illustrates all too clearly the centrifugal forces at work in all continental and territorial regions. Countries may genuinely aspire to African unification, and yet acknowledge national realities, as they must. Realpolitik is based on pragmatic rather than ideological considerations, but the choice is a difficult one either way—to sacrifice a vision long held is painful, while on the other hand a pragmatic decision may seem to offer immediate rewards. Debate ensues, and not infrequently a compromise is reached. Pan-Africa faces a whole host of issues—the importance of a homeland for the diaspora, the costs and benefits of integration, the prioritizing of competing interests. Only through such a process can policymakers and African society at large

hope to achieve a clear vision of the future. In the meantime, future research on the same topic should focus on the role and responsibilities of AU in the globalized world and new world order which has brought so much interdependence and integration of the world economy and creation of regional unions.

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