



LEADERSHIP AND THE SUCCESS OF AFRICAN INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: JUXTAPOSING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA - AFCFTA AND AGENDA 2063

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ABSTRACT: *After achieving independence from slavery and colonialism, African countries implemented various developmental policies, including import substitution, industrialization, and structural adjustment programs, among others. However, political instability, civil wars, poverty, bad governance, and environmental degradation hindered the continent's progress. This paper focuses on how leadership impacts the success of African regional integration and development, specifically the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) and Agenda 2063. The study uses content analysis and secondary sources to analyze leadership's role in achieving integration and development. The paper finds that visionary, competent, selfless leaders are crucial for achieving sustainable integration and development. These leaders should be committed to disentangling from neocolonial dependence and promoting mutual cooperation. The paper supports its findings with good governance theory and regional integration theories. Furthermore, the paper highlights the need for African leaders to unite, be disciplined, and pursue integration with integrity and transparency. This requires leaders to prioritize the continent's interests over their personal gains and reduce their reliance on foreign aid. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the success of African integration and development depends on the quality of leadership, which must be accountable, transparent, and committed to promoting the welfare of African citizens.*

KEYWORDS: African Development, Leadership, Regional integration, AFCFTA, Agenda 2063.



INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of economic advancement and the political liberation of the African continent, aimed at fostering a united and robust Africa following extended periods of intolerable exploitation due to slavery and colonialism, cannot be overstated. Consequently, Africa's coerced integration into the global capitalist system, structured to benefit Western capitalist nations at the expense of Africa's third world countries, cultivated an environment of inequitable exchange. Lacking the essential technological, scientific, and military capabilities to effectively compete in such a capitalist system, Africans were relegated to the role of mere providers and purveyors of inexpensive raw materials and labor. These materials were transported to Europe, where they were converted into finished products and sold back to Africa at exorbitant prices. It was under these unfavorable circumstances that numerous African nationalists, such as Bylden, Casely Hayford, W.E.B Debois, Jomo Kenyatta, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, Haile Selassie, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Eyo Ita, Mrs. Funmilayo Kuti, Ahmadu Bello, and others, embarked on a journey toward achieving independence.

Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical principle, which states, "seek ye first the political freedom, and every other thing will be added unto you," inspired successful nationalist and independent leaders to undertake various strategies aimed at decolonization, liberation, unification, and development in the realms of politics, economics, technology, monetary policy, and trade expansion. For example, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established to accomplish the aforementioned objectives of decolonization (African Renewal, 2002). The formation of the OAU (1963-2002) and the intergovernmental association of development, created in 2002 to encourage unity and solidarity among African states, was intended to stimulate economic growth and foster international cooperation. The African Union (AU) succeeded the OAU, with its headquarters located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As noted earlier, the attainment of independence prompted African leaders to pursue numerous development initiatives aimed at fostering economic growth and expansion, trade integration, common markets, and shared currency to enable the continent to effectively compete in and capitalize on the globalized market. Regrettably, shortly after gaining independence, numerous African countries found themselves grappling with myriad issues, including military coups, civil wars, secessionist movements, resource conflicts, environmental disputes, corruption, and reliance on foreign aid in nearly all aspects of their existence (Meres, 2017; Institute of Security Studies, 2022; Relief Web, 2019).

The African continent has employed both indigenous and Western-inspired policies to advance its developmental objectives. These policies include the import substitution and industrialization policy, structural adjustment program, privatization, millennium development goals, South African Development Commission, Intergovernmental Authority for Development, Economic Community Of West African States, sustainable development goals, the Lome convention, Cotonou agreement, and African Growth and Opportunity Act (Mahler, 1994; Lomazi, Borisch & Laaser, 2013; Sulaiman, Migros & Aluko, 2014; Office of the United States Trade Representatives; Gain, 2022; Schneidman, McNulty & Natalie, 2022). Despite these efforts, the continent continues to grapple with multifarious developmental challenges, such as poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, environmental degradation, corruption, and overreliance on foreign aid that often lead to overwhelming indebtedness and insurmountable balance of payment difficulties. It is disheartening that a continent so rich in promising natural, material, and human resources still remains underdeveloped.



As astutely observed by Olu-Adeyemi and Ayodele (2007), the quest for greater African integration has been a perennial issue that has yielded limited results. From the inception of the Organization for African Unity in 1963, official conferences and summits have consistently espoused the idea of a robust continental integration for development, but with little to show for it. However, there is renewed vigor to establish a robust economic and political platform among the states on the continent, given the urgent need for regional integration and a clearer understanding of the past challenges of regional integration. The Pan-African conferences of the past were unequivocal in their advocacy of freeing Africa in all respects, with economic cooperation as the bedrock of economic and political transformation, anchored on the ideology of political liberation and decolonization. With the establishment of numerous integrative mechanisms following the independence of several African states, the quest for integration was identified as critical to accelerating development on the continent (Aworawo, 2015).

Moreover, the post-Cold War international economic order intensified and fine-tuned existing regional integration attempts, leading to the establishment of supranational organizations and capacity-building institutions aimed at addressing the continent's underdevelopment (Aworawo, 2015). Nevertheless, the continent must persist in its efforts to achieve robust economic and political integration to achieve sustainable development and eradicate the multifarious challenges that impede its progress.

Igwe, Ochinanwata, and Nnamdi (2021) contend that regionalism presents a promising approach to foster Africa's transformation, economic development, and territorial advancement. The globalization of trade has become a primary concern for world leaders. However, regional integration, governance of treaties, and policies remain contentious grey areas. Africa's progress in regional integration can be observed from the regionalization of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its treaty implementation. Despite Africa's portrayal as the most underdeveloped continent globally, the emergence of ECOWAS and the African Union demonstrates Africa's commitment to taking responsibility for its affairs. Nevertheless, while some achievements in regionalism may have been recorded, such progress appears limited in scope. The glaring shortcomings include member states' internal insecurity, crime, illicit trading and smuggling across borders. Furthermore, ECOWAS's security apparatus suffers from financial distress and political interference, with forces receiving inadequate training, lack of preparation, and inadequate military equipment. These factors produce weak interventions, "seriously weaken" external and internal security of the region and its ability to neutralize the onslaught of the Boko Haram terrorist group. ECOWAS also struggles to bring into fruition the radical integration of the region with other economic blocs.

The Tralac News of 2017 estimated that the continent's current trade intensity barely exceeds 12 percent, making the issue of regional integration particularly prevalent in Africa. Africa's agenda aims to boost intra-regional trade from the current level to 25 percent or more by 2022. This ambition must be embraced by Africa's traditional and emerging trading partners, considering the promising development benefits that could be derived from such a scenario. Therefore, taking a retrospective intellectual premise from the above analysis, regionalism for economic, political, technological, and trade integration remains critically important. In a globalized era, the world and nations are entangled in a web of economic, political, cultural, environmental, military, and technical nest of continuous integration in a borderless world. African states cannot compete effectively as individual entities in a global capitalist terrain, necessitating regional integration to confront external influences.



The continent has embarked on many integration and development schemes, but little improvement has been recorded. Africa does not possess the requisite arsenal to survive in a global economy, thus reverting to the era of colonialism, where the continent remains as mere producers and suppliers of raw materials and cheap labor. Current integration moves have not yielded sufficient results as developed nations' markets have not been accommodating and favorable in terms and conditions for African goods to enter developed economies.

While acknowledging the bounties from African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) accrued to Africa, Alan Larson, the Under Secretary for Economic, Business, and Agricultural Affairs, cited several examples, including Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Malawi. AGOA-related businesses employed about 200,000 people in Kenya, and the country earned roughly \$650 million in AGOA exports in 2002, mainly textiles and apparel. Woolworths opened two new branches in Ghana's capital city, Accra, where the company will invest \$10 million over the next five years. Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, and Senegal are also considered success stories (Larson, 2003). However, Akiko (2017) criticized the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) for its limited method of selecting beneficiaries and legal instability, despite its success in supporting sub-Saharan countries to achieve trade-led economic development. African countries are currently facing new challenges such as AGOA reciprocation and the out-of-cycle eligibility review after its renewal for ten years in 2015.

In a bid to reinvigorate and revitalize Africa's economy and trade, the continent has embarked upon an ambitious integration and development scheme through the Continental Free Trade Area and Agenda 2063. These homegrown Pan-African Strategies represent a laudable effort to break free from the stifling web of global economic oppression. Agenda 2063, for instance, comprises seven aspirations, each with its own set of objectives, which seek to move Africa closer to realizing its vision for the year 2063. The AFCFTA, on the other hand, represents a revolutionary economic blueprint that seeks to create the world's largest free trade area by linking almost 1.3 billion people across 54 African countries. The agreement seeks to establish a single market for goods and services and deepen economic integration across the continent. Although the trade area has the potential to generate a combined GDP of approximately \$3.4 trillion, its success hinges on significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures across all African signatory nations.

The AFCFTA aims to reduce tariffs among its members and covers various policy areas such as trade facilitation and services, as well as regulatory measures such as sanitary standards and technical barriers to trade. The African Union (AU) brokered the agreement, and 44 of its 55 member states signed the accord in Kigali, Rwanda on March 21, 2018, with only Eritrea, which has a largely closed economy, yet to sign. As of February 10, 2022, 41 of the 54 signatories had deposited their instruments of ratification with the chair of the African Union Commission, making them state parties to the agreement. In light of this, it is evident that Africa's aspirations and vision for regional integration and development must be pursued with great zeal and tenacity.

Despite the potential benefits of the AFCFTA and Agenda 2063, previous attempts at integration and development have been unsuccessful. This paper, therefore, contends that the role of leadership in realizing both initiatives must be carefully examined. The recognition of past failures and the need for effective leadership to ensure that Africa's ambitious plans for regional integration and development are successfully realized is crucial. Thus, by focusing on



leadership, Africa can ensure the success of the AFCFTA and Agenda 2063, enabling the continent to achieve its Seven Aspirations and become a formidable global player and partner.

The Challenges of Africa's Integration and Development Initiatives

The recent integration and development initiatives undertaken by Africa to boost its economy and trade, such as the Continental Free Trade Area and Agenda 2063, represent a laudable and homegrown approach towards extricating Africa from the unpalatable global web of economic strangulation. Agenda 2063 aims to achieve seven aspirations, each with its own set of goals, which, if met, will move Africa closer to realizing its vision for 2063. The AFCFTA, on the other hand, is a renaissance economic blueprint that focuses on an integrated continental trade, aimed at forming the world's largest free trade area by connecting almost 1.3 billion people across 54 African countries. The agreement aims to create a single market for goods and services to deepen the economic integration of Africa, which could have a combined gross domestic product of around \$3.4 trillion. However, achieving the full potential of the trade area depends on significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures across African signatory nations.

The struggle for Africa's development has been marked by various setbacks and challenges, including slavery, colonialism, and the continued domination of the Western world. Africa remains mostly a producer of raw materials and cheap labor, while depending on the Western world for virtually everything, which creates a neocolonial syndrome. Despite possessing vast mineral resources, Africa continues to lag behind in terms of development, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and uncompetitive trade pedigree in the international global trade. In the era of globalization, where the free trade rhetoric and open-door policy have not benefited the African continent, Africa's place in the global market has been stunted by both domestic factors and global trade barriers. To counter this, an African-centered initiative is essential to bolster its quest for a promising venture, competitive and sustainable regional economic boom, that will make the continent thrive well in this area of globalization, with its concomitant free trade, liberalism, open-door policies, etc.

The African Development Bank Group (2018) recognizes the need for Africa to pilot a new course for its industrialization and economic development, using the momentum of regional integration. For Africa, regional integration has considerable potential not only for promoting robust and equitable economic growth through markets but also for reducing conflict and enhancing trade liberalization. Regional integration in Africa is capable of engendering a diversified economy, taking away dependence on the export of just a few mineral products, delivering food and energy security, generating jobs for the increasing number of young people, and alleviating poverty and delivering shared prosperity.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to examine the rationale behind the emergence of the African Continental Free Trade Area and Vision 2063, provide a brief analysis of Africa's regional integration challenges, and highlight the role of leadership in the actualization of regional integration and transformation agenda. In particular, the paper seeks to shed light on the need for resources-rich Africa towards regional integration, emphasizing the shared use of infrastructure to foster the nexus between extractive resources and the broader economy. The paper argues that African countries must not miss out on the opportunities presented by regional integration to promote their economic growth, reduce conflict, and enhance trade liberalization.



Theories for Effective Governance and its Implication to African Integration

This study incorporates two prominent governance theories, namely the Good Governance theory and the Regional Integration theory. As defined by Asaduzzaman (2016), Good Governance is a multifaceted concept that lacks a straightforward definition, but it is commonly associated with efficient and effective administration within a democratic framework. It encompasses a development-oriented administration that seeks to improve the quality of life of citizens and expand their participation in decision-making processes. Good Governance is characterized by a citizen-friendly, citizen-caring, responsive, decentralized local government system, an autonomous political society, an efficient and accountable bureaucracy, a strong civil society, and a free media (Huque, 2001; Minocha, 1998; Stowe, 1992).

According to Ekundayo (2017), Good Governance theory is a set of principles that must govern a government, regardless of its form. These principles include accountability, control, responsiveness, transparency, public participation, economy, and efficiency, among others. The theory is designed to encompass all the above principles and more, as well as an efficient public service, an independent judicial system, and a legal framework that enforces contracts and responsible administration of public funds. Other requirements for Good Governance include an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government, and a pluralistic institutional structure. In addition, Good Governance is predicated on three segments of society that directly affect governance, namely the political regime, the process by which authority is exercised in managing economic and social resources for development, and the capacity of governments to formulate and implement policies effectively (WorldBank, 1992).

The relevance of Good Governance theory to this study lies in its emphasis on leadership that adheres to the principles of transparency, accountability, and prudent utilization of available resources for national and regional interest. In this democratic era, effective and Good Governance leadership is critical to achieving domestic and regional integration and transformation. African leaders must be ready to disentangle themselves from any tenets of neocolonialism and Western domination to achieve success.

The Regional Integration theory, as posited by Schimmel and Fenning (2018), seeks to explain the establishment and development of regional international organizations. The theory examines why and under which conditions states decide to transfer political authority to regional organizations, how regional organizations expand their tasks, competencies, and members, and what impact they have on states and societies in their regions. The key debates in Regional Integration theory revolve around intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism, and postfunctionalism, with the former two explaining the development of European integration. Intergovernmentalism posits that national governments are the key actors in regional integration, with integration outcomes resulting from intergovernmental bargaining that reflects regional preference and power constellations. Governments delegate authority to regional organizations to secure their bargaining outcomes but remain in control of the integration process. Neofunctionalism disputes the notion that governments can control the integration process, with transnational corporations, interest groups, and supranational actors empowered to shape the integration process in their interests. Integration creates various spillovers and path-dependencies that push integration beyond the intergovernmental bargain. Postfunctionalism enriches and challenges the theoretical debate on regional integration by



assuming a backlash mechanism of integration that varies from neofunctionalism's empowering mechanism.

Regional Integration theory's input is that regional integration has become increasingly prevalent in global politics, especially in this era of unfettered globalization run by capitalism. Nations have recognized that no man is an island in this global village, and regional economic, political, technological, and military blocs have become a means of securing and achieving national interests. Africa cannot ignore the fact that it requires a conglomeration of willing, trusted, and effective states and leaders.

African integration: AFCFTA and Agenda 2063

The African continent requires a befitting transition towards economic, political, technological, and social advancements that boost citizen welfare and facilitate sustainable growth. However, Africa's historical role in the global economy, enforced through colonial occupation, has led to economic dependence, poverty, technological backwardness, debt burdens, and balance of payment issues. Consequently, the continent has channeled its compass towards various development ideas anchored on regional economic and political integration.

According to Hailu (2014), Africa's regional integration initiatives date back to the establishment of the South African Customs Union (SACU) in 1910 and the East African Community (EAC) in 1919. Since then, the continent has formed various regional arrangements and has attempted to create economic cooperation among African countries at a continental level. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted the Charter in 1963, which entrenched the fundamental objective of regional solidarity and cooperation for development. In pursuit of this objective, the OAU held several regional and intergovernmental meetings that resulted in the adoption of various treaties, declarations, and plans of actions.

Hailu (2014) also noted that the Treaty of Lagos established the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975. ECOWAS aims to promote cooperation and integration to establish an economic union that raises the living standards of its people, maintains and enhances economic stability, fosters relations among member states, and contributes to the progress and development of the African continent. ECOWAS's objective extends to almost all sectors of the respective economies of the member states. The ECOWAS treaty aims to achieve economic integration through harmonization and coordination of national policies and the promotion of integration programs. Although ECOWAS was formed to facilitate economic integration and cooperation, it has also assumed an active role in managing regional conflicts and humanitarian crises in the past decade, leading to an extension of its mandate by the revised treaty of 1993. Member states of ECOWAS have undertaken several efforts to establish a common currency among themselves as the eventual goal of economic cooperation is to establish a monetary union in the region.

Mendes, Rudolph and Teixeira (2014) highlight import substitution as a development strategy that gained traction in most developing countries post-war. In Latin America, particularly Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, the conscious implementation of import substitution policies was observed in the 1950s and early 1960s. In sub-Saharan Africa, the adoption of this strategy was associated with the ideology of development originating from the independence process, lasting until the second half of the 1980s when a structural adjustment policy strongly disapproved of the industrialization system for the region.



The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa bulletin reports that from the time of independence, there have been failed attempts to industrialize efficiently using import-substitution, which gave rise to the notion of regional integration as a means to facilitate structural transformation in Africa. As a result, African countries have embraced regional integration as an important component of their development strategies primarily driven by the economic rationale of overcoming the constraint of small and fractionated economies working in isolation. Several pan-African organizations have successively been working towards deepening economic, social and political cooperation and integration in Africa. A number of colonial cross-border arrangements have continued to exist post-independence and serve the regional integration agenda thus far. Prime examples are related to the previous African Financial Community (CFA) zone, comprising the West African CFA franc and the Central African CFA franc. The West African CFA franc was ultimately integrated to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) in the territory of ECOWAS, while the Central African CFA franc is set to join the envisioned Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa (CEMAC) in the ECCAS region. Likewise in Southern Africa, the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) with its associated monetary union – the Common Monetary Area – is set to be integrated to the SADC constituency (United Nations Economic Commission For Africa)

Various pan-African organizations are, through different mechanisms, promoting sustainable economic growth and development, where the key component of regional integration is present in their workings. ECA was established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 1958 as one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations that, together with partners and member States, consecutively work towards sustainable development in Africa. ECA focuses on providing technical assistance by undertaking research and policy analysis to strengthen the capacity of institutions driving the regional integration agenda, including the African Union, regional economic communities and member States (United Nations Economic Commission For Africa). ECA has been to target Africa's development challenges, particularly in the context of poverty eradication, to ensure sustainable growth and good governance on the continent and thus promote international cooperation for Africa's development. In this regard, ECA had, in the 1960s, recommended the creation of sub-regional groupings in Africa to serve that purpose. Around the same time, the Heads of State and Government of 30 of the 32 independent African nations gathered to establish the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at the Conference of Independent African States on 25 May 1963. Apart from the liberalization efforts of colonization and apartheid, the main objectives of OAU were to promote unity and solidarity among African States; to organize and strengthen cooperation for development on the continent; to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its member States; and to encourage international cooperation as outlined by the United Nations. Parallel to the creation of OAU was the establishment of the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), it was formed after an agreement signed by 23 founding member States on 14 August 1963 in Khartoum, Sudan. The Group includes two other entities, with AfDB as the parent institution – the African Development Fund, which was established on 29 November 1972 by AfDB and 13 non-African countries; and the Nigeria Trust Fund, which was set up in 1976 by the Federal Government of Nigeria (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa).

Hailu (2014) affirms that the Treaty Establishing African Economic Community (AEC) was signed in Abuja, Nigeria in 1991 by African Heads of States. The third paragraph of the



preamble to the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) reflects the signatories' view that the Plan will facilitate the formation of an African common market, leading to the AEC. Thus, the Abuja Treaty represents a continuation of the integration efforts initiated under the LPA. The treaty, which became effective in 1994, aims to create a robust pan-African economic community built upon existing sub-regional entities. The AEC Treaty aims to strengthen the existing regional blocks by establishing economic integration, with a target to achieve a Pan African economic community of fifty-three states and some 600 million people by 2028. This objective is expected to be realized through a six-level/stage integration process that spans 34 years.

The Abuja Treaty is arguably the most pivotal agreement regarding economic, social, and political collaboration, coordination, and convergence in Africa as it defines the future of the continent by creating an African Economic Community. The integration process is planned to cover 34 years, from 1994 to 2028. Following the signing of the Abuja Treaty, the Committee on the Review of the Charter (established in 1979) was directed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government to meet and re-examine the OAU Charter, with a view to aligning it with the Abuja Treaty. Despite numerous attempts since 1979, OAU member States were unable to reach an agreement on amendments to the 1963 Charter (Economic Commission For Africa).

During the thirty-seventh session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, African leaders ratified the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2002 in Durban to tackle Africa's development challenges in a new paradigm. NEPAD's primary objectives are poverty reduction, putting Africa on a sustainable development path, halting Africa's marginalization, and empowering women. The partnership provides a comprehensive, integrated development plan that addresses key social, economic, and political issues affecting the continent. The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa is a practical example of this initiative, comprising several cross-border infrastructure projects in transport, energy, water, and information and communications technology. The Durban Summit also approved the establishment of the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism, which became operational in 2003 to promote and monitor good governance practices among member states in Africa.

After years of sluggish regional integration initiatives, the fourth Conference of African Ministers of Integration adopted the Minimum Integration Programme on May 9, 2009. The programme contains an action plan to accelerate coordination, convergence, and collaboration among the regional economic communities to achieve the ultimate goal of the African Economic Community. It also identifies the financing and structural impediments hindering the implementation of the Abuja Treaty and offers a roadmap for overcoming the challenges. In parallel, COMESA, EAC, and SADC agreed to negotiate a Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA) as a building block of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) on October 22, 2008. In January 2012, the eighteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, endorsed the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade and the fast-tracking of the Continental Free Trade Area under the theme "Boosting Intra-African Trade." Following the successful first negotiation forum in Addis Ababa from February 22 to 27, 2016, and with the second forum planned for May 2016, the CFTA is currently the most extensive regional trade arrangement under negotiation (Economic Commission For Africa). Notably, leadership is critical in ensuring the success of any developmental effort or policy in any nation. Hailu's (2014) study shows that most developmental, security, social, political, and social issues faced by nations globally, especially in Africa, can be traced to the attitude of leaders. Thus, leaders need to prioritize issues of



national interest, map out strategies, allocate resources, and set implication, monitoring, and evaluation tasks.

Overview of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCFTA)

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) agreement aims to create a single market for goods and services in order to deepen the economic integration of Africa, with a combined gross domestic product of around \$3.4 trillion. The success of the agreement is dependent on significant policy reforms and trade facilitation measures across African signatory nations. The AFCFTA is designed to reduce tariffs among members and covers policy areas such as trade facilitation and services, as well as regulatory measures such as sanitary standards and technical barriers to trade. This agreement was negotiated by the African Union (AU) and was signed by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali, Rwanda on March 21, 2018, with Eritrea being the only country that did not sign.

As of February 10, 2022, 41 of the 54 signatories had deposited their instruments of ratification with the chair of the African Union Commission, thereby making them state parties to the agreement. The AFCFTA is grounded in seven aspirations, which include the creation of a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, an integrated continent that is politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance, an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law, a peaceful and secure Africa, an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics, an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children, and lastly, an Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner (African Union).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) bulletin highlights the ambitious aspirations of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) to promote a prosperous Africa founded upon inclusive growth and sustainable development, fostering a high standard of living, quality of life, and well-being for all. The AFCFTA's indicative national strategies include the implementation of the African Union (AU) frameworks on Labor Migration Governance for Development and Integration and Public-Private Partnership for Jobs Creation and Inclusive Development, as well as policies that enhance the free movement of people and workers while promoting better and more responsible labor migration flows.

Furthermore, the AFCFTA envisions an integrated continent, politically united and guided by the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance. To achieve this, member states are urged to domesticate all protocols leading to free movement of persons within the regional economic community (REC) and all appropriate ILO Conventions on Labor Migration. States are also encouraged to review all labor bilateral agreements with other member and non-member states while developing the capacity to manage cross-border migration flows while addressing concerns affecting women, youth, and vulnerable groups. Other commitments include the development and implementation of regional frameworks that promote access to entry points for women involved in cross-border trade and advocacy strategies to encourage the ratification of relevant agreements and frameworks by member states.



The nature of “Agenda 2063”: A Comprehensive Plan for Africa's Transformation and Collective Prosperity

The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) 2022 publication on "Agenda 2063: the Africa we want; first ten-year implementation plan, 2013-2023" presents a comprehensive plan aimed at accelerating Africa's political, social, economic, and technological transformation while continuing the Pan African drive for self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity. The 24th Assembly of the Union requested the African Union Commission (AUC) to finalize a draft First Ten-Year Plan of Agenda 2063 to ensure effective implementation, which was presented and adopted by the June 2015 meetings of the AU Policy Organs. Covering the period 2014-2023, it is the first of a series of five ten-year implementation plans to be developed to realize the vision of the "Africa We Want By 2063."

The Agenda 2063 Framework Document adopted in January 2015 highlights seven priority areas aimed at achieving the vision. Aspiration 1 seeks to create a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Aspiration 2 aims at integrating the continent politically and uniting it based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance. Aspiration 3 focuses on achieving an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law. Aspiration 4 aims at creating a peaceful and secure Africa, while Aspiration 5 focuses on building Africa's strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics. Aspiration 6 seeks to develop an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially women and youth, and caring for children. Finally, Aspiration 7 seeks to create an Africa that is a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner.

If well-implemented, the Agenda 2063 plan is expected to have significant impacts on the continent. The African Union Commission reports that it would increase real per-capita incomes by a third more than 2013 levels. The incidence of hunger, especially among women and youth, would be only 20% of 2023 levels. Job opportunities would be available to at least one in four persons looking for work. At least one out of every three children would have access to kindergarten education, with every child of secondary school age in school and seven out of ten of its graduates without access to tertiary education enrolled in TVET programs. Malnutrition, maternal, child and neonatal deaths as at 2013 would be reduced by half, and access to antiretrovirals would be automatic. The proportion of deaths attributable to HIV/AIDS and malaria would have been halved. Nine out of ten persons would have access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and electricity supply and internet connectivity would be up by 50%. Additionally, cities will be recycling at least 50% of the waste they generate.

Challenges to African Regional Integration and Development

As previously discussed, Africa's struggle with poor integration and underdevelopment is not due to a lack of initiatives. Over the years, numerous regional schemes have been implemented to address this concern, and the continent is richly endowed with both natural and human resources. However, Soumana (2015) pointed out that these efforts have not had a positive impact on the economic performance of the continent. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as a lack of political will and commitment to the integration process, frequent conflicts and political instability, inadequate funding, poor design and sequencing of integration plans, and the exclusion of important stakeholders. Despite these challenges, Africa remains determined to continue its push for regional integration.



To unleash Africa's full potential and develop the continent, it is essential to emulate the success of the Asian Tigers in breaking free from the neo-colonial trap of over-dependence, debt burden, and capital flight. This requires a shift in mindset and a willingness on the part of leaders to prioritize the development of their respective states in Africa. Qobo (2007) concurs with this view, noting that Africa's integration efforts have so far fallen short of expectations. While other regions have leveraged their integration mechanisms to improve their economic wellbeing, Africa lags behind in terms of GDP growth, per capita income, capital inflows, and living standards. Despite the existence of various policy plans and ambitious visions, this is a pervasive issue across the continent.

Qobo (2007) underscores that the historical disintegration of Africa is a significant factor that impedes integration. Unlike 19th century Europe, where people shared common attributes of nationhood, African states were largely internally unintegrated in the post-colonial period. This has resulted in a situation where national consciousness remains an exclusive project of the elites and bourgeois rather than a process driven by citizenship upward. Consequently, there is no true nationalism, but only elite nationalistic projects. The futility of attempting continental integration on the basis of fragile and shaky national foundations is thus evident. In a sense, Africa's regional integration project, as well as its slow and tumultuous integration into the global economy, is an integration of incomplete states. These are states that cannot fully claim complete nationhood and suffer from multifaceted internal instabilities. Nye (2004) suggests that the internal structure, with its cruel centripetal and centrifugal forces, presents one of the problems for Africa's developmental prospects. The lack of willingness of member states to cede or share sovereignty at the regional level by agreeing to a supranational body exacerbates the situation.

Gomes (2014) argues that Africa's specialization in the export of primary goods with prices established at the global level, rather than in Africa, is due to the current international division of labor. This model of unequal exchange not only limits the development opportunities of African countries at the expense of export but also results in a loss of competitive ability of African countries at the world market.

The Place of Leadership in Actualizing African Continental Integration and Development

Leadership is an indispensable factor in laying down principles, ideology, goals, direction, and coordination of efforts towards goal achievement, whether it be at an individual, societal, organizational, or agency level. The efficient use of human, capital, natural, and material resources cannot be realized without a group of individuals with a sense of responsibility who can spearhead a course in a prudent, competent, selfless, and progressive manner to meet objectives. This is particularly relevant for Africa, a continent grappling with insurmountable governance and developmental challenges in its respective states and the region.

Thiam (2003) cites former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, on his perspective of leadership, unity, and development in Africa and the role expected of African leaders in fostering a meaningful and purposeful cooperative mechanism. Obasanjo emphasizes the critical need for African leaders to be the architects of Africa's own fortune, as thus far, Africa's leadership style has only brought disaster to millions of Africans. For Obasanjo, Africa's redemption and liberation lie within the hands of Africans, via their leadership. To achieve this, Obasanjo established the African Leadership Forum with the mission of fostering genuine leadership in Africa towards regional integration for continental development.



Gordon (2002) concurs with the importance of African leaders as an instrument of continental breakthrough. Through his intellectual reasoning on the African condition, highlighting basic indicators such as health, education, food, housing, road conditions, and corruption, he concludes that the determining factor in Africa's problems is the governance pathology of leadership failure. He argues that even if all the money in the world is given to Africa today, without effective and creative leadership, the continent will be in shambles without any befitting achievement in the long run. Gordon further points out that Africa's leadership can be understood in two perspectives: a leadership that failed to promote political, economic, and social development, and a leadership that failed to set up basic infrastructures for genuine united Africa. The politics of ethnocentrism and division by Africa's leadership have bred a permanent state of conflict throughout the African continent. Ayittey (1998) presents a clear dichotomy between the leadership in Africa and the people. He argues that the traditional face of Africa works with efficiency and produces on a subsistence level for its people, while the "modern Africa" is rife with political greed, which breeds disruptions and dislocations.

Thiam (2003) further reiterates that due to the nature of African leadership and their failures to transform the continent, Africa is mirrored as a continent of hopelessness and backwardness. Scholars agree that the main obstacle to Africa's unity and development is its political leadership, which has exhibited a common pattern of inability to work together within the framework of a united front (Killick, 1993; Hope, 1997 in Thiam, 2003). Hope (1997) argues that there is a need for a new shared vision of regional cooperation and integration, and African leaders must prove their honesty with good sense of political correctness to disentangle from authoritarianism and dismantle bureaucratic obstacles to policy reform and change. Ihonvbere (2000) asserts that ideological differences, nationalistic interests, the inability to generate sufficient political will, corruption, regime turnover, and political instability are determining variables limiting the ability to implement the various charters and cooperation agreements.

The significance of African leaders in ensuring and actualizing a sound, beneficial, and sustained regional integration scheme for Africa cannot be overstated. According to the Commissioner for Economic Affairs of the African Union, Victor Harison, regional integration and development of the continent are congruent with the statutes of Member States of the Union and the Regional Economic Communities. Regional integration is a noble challenge that requires sustained efforts, leadership, and perseverance from all stakeholders.

Signe (2018) acknowledges the existence of many lofty ideas towards regional integration and development in Africa from independence. However, the continent still faces some of the most complex economic, political, and social challenges in the globalized world, as evidenced by results from consecutive Afrobarometer surveys. Leadership failure and legitimacy crisis remain significant obstacles to Africa's benefit from regionalism in a globalized world. Signe emphasizes the need for accountable leadership to transform Africa positively into an economically, politically, and socially competitive region to fulfill citizens' expectations while reaping the rewards in the globalized economy.

Igue and Jordan (2010) emphasize the need for African leaders who are abreast with and possess the requisite credentials to unravel the multidimensional issues confronting regional development and integration. Leaders who are intellectually capable of assimilating the current debate on development, adopting a long-term approach, using good negotiating skills, exploiting new information and communication technologies, and marrying new



developmental values with those of equality, integrity, good governance, and shared management of available wealth.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa publication titled "Strategic Leadership Needed for Africa's Transformation" further reiterates the role of leadership in achieving Africa's long quest for national integration. Speaking at the forum, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr. Carlos Lopes emphasized that managing diversity is the foremost governance challenge plaguing the continent. Africa needs leaders capable of managing diversity and practicing social cohesion. Issues of governance in Africa must be addressed thoroughly.

WAY FORWARD

The challenges facing African regional integration and development are significant and overcoming them requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders. The role of leadership cannot be overstated, but there is also a need for a paradigm shift in the way African countries approach regional integration and development. To move forward, several key strategies must be adopted.

Firstly, African countries need to prioritize development and emulate the success of Asian Tigers in breaking free from the neo-colonial trap of over-dependence, debt burden, and capital flight. This requires a shift in mindset and a willingness on the part of leaders to prioritize the development of their respective states in Africa.

Secondly, African leaders must commit to regional integration and work together towards a shared vision. This requires a willingness to cede or share sovereignty at the regional level by agreeing to a supranational body, as well as the inclusion of all stakeholders in the integration process. African leaders must prove their honesty with good sense of political correctness to disentangle from authoritarianism and dismantle bureaucratic obstacles to policy reform and change.

Thirdly, African countries must diversify their economies beyond primary goods and focus on value addition to improve their competitiveness in the global market. This will require investment in infrastructure, education, and innovation to support the growth of industries and the creation of jobs.

Fourthly, African countries must address governance issues thoroughly, including corruption, regime turnover, and political instability, to create a conducive environment for sustainable development. Good governance and shared management of available wealth are critical to the success of regional integration and development.

Finally, there is a need for sustained efforts, leadership, and perseverance from all stakeholders to achieve the noble challenge of regional integration and development. This includes the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, civil society organizations, private sector players, and development partners. The significance of African leaders in ensuring and actualizing a sound, beneficial, and sustained regional integration scheme for Africa cannot be overstated.



Ultimately, the way forward for African regional integration and development requires a paradigm shift in mindset, a commitment to regional integration, diversification of economies, addressing governance issues, and sustained efforts from all stakeholders. With the right strategies and a concerted effort, Africa can unleash its full potential and achieve sustained economic growth, development, and integration.

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