



The Challenges of Regional Integration and Effective Implementation of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Policy in Africa

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Abstract

The paper is an investigation of the challenges of regional integration in Africa and their effects on the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) policy. The major objective of the paper is to proffer solutions to the challenges for the effective actualization of the policy. The assumptions of the neo-liberal theory were used to support the AfCFTA initiative to promote economic growth and development in Africa. The data used to advance the argument were obtained from secondary sources of data collection. The study finds that language barrier, multiple currencies, porosity of borders, foreign interference, political instability and insecurity, poor human development, over-lapping of membership of sub-regional organizations, poor state of infrastructure, and state-centric nature of integration initiatives are some of the core challenges hindering the effective execution of the AfCFTA policy. The study recommends that the African Union (AU) should intensify effort at realizing a single currency policy for Africa; design comprehensive regional security architecture to include high technological surveillance, joint air and ground border patrol among member states of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to address trans-border crimes and insecurity. There should also be institutionalization of counterpart funding among AU member-states for infrastructural development; and encouragement of private and civil society participation in the integration initiative, among others. In concludes that if the challenges identified are not effectively addressed, it will be very difficult for the AU to successfully realize the objectives of the AfCFTA policy.

Keywords: Africa, AfCFTA Policy, Challenges, Implementation, Regional Integration

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Introduction

The importance of regional integration in supporting economic development has long been recognized by various leaders at every level (national and continents/regions). Pan-Africanist like W.E.B. Du Bois, Markus Garvey, Jomo Kenyatta, Sylvester William, Kwame Nkrumah, etc. who in their resistance against colonialism consistently expressed their desire for continental integration. This aspiration sufficed in the year 1963 with the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which was later transformed into the African Union (AU) in 2002 (Qobo, 2007; Fagbayibo, 2017; Garba & Alexander, 2021).

The continental organization (AU), launched at its inaugural Summit in Durban, South Africa has 55 member-states. The organization is guided by Agenda 2063 “The Africa we Want”, and the vision of becoming “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”(AU Commission, 2015, p. 3). This is a call on deeper collaboration and support for African led initiatives to ensure the achievement of the aspiration of the people. Within this purview, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was launched in 2017 as one of the key AU Agenda 2063 flagship projects. Its objective is to create better integrated markets through the removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

Regional integration in Africa is characterised by so many challenges ranging from poverty, insecurity, poor human capital, poor infrastructure, language barrier, political instability, corruption, over-lapping of membership among regional economic communities etc. (Qobo, 2007; Garba & Alexander, 2021; Alexander & Garba, 2021; Alexander & Magaji, 2021). These no doubt pose challenges to the realization of the aforesaid AU objectives, which need to be investigated. It is against this background that this paper seeks to discuss the effects of the challenges of regional integration in Africa on the effective implementation of the African Union AfCFTA policy.

Concept of Regional Integration

Nye (1968, p. vii) defines region as ‘a limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence’. While, according to Lombaerde and Langenhove (2007), regional integration refers to as “a worldwide phenomenon of territorial

systems that increases the interactions between their components and creates new forms of organisation, co-existing with traditional forms of state-led organisation at the national level”. From a slightly different point of view, Balassa (1961) regards regional integration as both a process and a state of affairs. As a state of affairs, it is the “absence of various forms of discrimination between national economies.” As a process, it includes “measures designed to abolish discrimination between economic units belonging to different national states” (Balassa, 1961, p. 1). In simple terms, regional integration is a form of economic, political or social cooperation, which involves the elimination barriers to trade, capital movements, migration and the exchange of information such as tariffs, quotas, visa etc. among countries that consider themselves as a region or are aspiring to achieve regional integration.

Brief Historical Background of AfCFTA

AfCFTA can be traced historically to numerous initiatives for integration in Africa during and after the formation of OAU in May 1963 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was developed within the purview of AU framework, that is, the deepening of continental integration and unity in the spirit of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance, the African Union Assembly adopted Agenda 2063 officially in 2015. This provides a new collective vision and roadmap to building a prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny (Garba & Alexander, 2021).

African leaders organized a number of high-level meetings in the 1970s and 1980s. Prominent among them are the Monrovia Conference (1979), the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (1980), and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) (Atta-Mensah, 2022). These initiatives set out a roadmap for using sub-regional economic integration arrangements as steps toward the establishment of an African Common Market and, ultimately, an AEC. This roadmap was later formally adopted by African Heads of State through the 1991 Treaty establishing the AEC (Abuja Treaty) by 2000 and sought to create the AEC in six stages that will culminate in creating the African Common Market by using the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocks (Fofack & Mold, 2021; Atta-Mensah, 2022). See Table 1 for the timeline and action plan.

Table 1: Timeline and Action Plan on AEC

Phases	Timeline	Action Plan
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Phase 1	5 years	Strengthen existing RECs and create new RECs in regions where they do not exist
Phase 2	8 years	Ensure consolidation within each REC, focusing on liberalizing tariffs, removing non-tariff barriers, etc.
Phase 3	10 years	Establish in each REC and FTA and customs union (with a common external tariff and single territory)
Phase 4	2 years	Coordinate and harmonize tariff and non-tariff systems of RECs to establish a continental customs union
Phase 5	4 years	Establish an African common market
Phase 6	5 years	Establish the AEC, including an African Monetary Union and a Pan-African Parliament

(Wapmuk & Ali, 2022; Fofack & Mold, 2021; Atta-Mensah, 2022).

Table 1 above suggests that the AfCFTA complements the Abuja Treaty as it is a step toward the implementation of the fourth stage in the creation of the AEC (viz. the creation of a continental customs union) as well as the fifth and sixth stages, as it concerns the free movement of goods and services, and the adoption of common policies.

AfCFTA became one of the flagship projects in the African Union 2063 Agenda, which was adopted at the 50-year anniversary of the AU. Specifically, the Heads of States of the AU endorsed the action plan on Boosting Intra-African Trade (BIAT) and adopted a decision to fast-track the establishment of a CFTA by 2017 through a 4-step roadmap. First step, finalization of the COMESA-EAC-SADC tripartite FTA by 2014; second step, establishment of regional FTAs by non-tripartite RECs that reflect the preferences of member states between 2012 and 2014; third step, consolidation of the tripartite and FTA and other regional FTAs into a CFTA initiative between 2015 and 2016; and fourth step, establishment of the CFTA by 2017 with the option to review the target date according to progress made (Wapmuk & Ali, 2022; Afreximbank, 2018; UNCTAD, 2019).

The AfCFTA negotiations have been split into two phases: Phase 1 covers the areas of trade in goods and trade in services, and Phase 2 covers the areas of investment, intellectual property rights, and competition policy. Negotiations on Phase 1 were launched in 2015. The agreement establishing the AfCFTA together with three protocols (viz. trade in goods, trade in services, and dispute settlement) were adopted by 44 AU member States at the 10th extraordinary meeting of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Kigali, Rwanda



on 21 March 2018. The AfCFTA agreement entered into force on 30 May 2019 and currently counts over 40 State Parties, i.e. AU Member States that deposited their instrument of ratification with the African Union. A new AfCFTA Secretariat has been established and charged with monitoring and facilitating the implementation of the AfCFTA (Vera, Jamie & Stephen, 2021; IMF, 2019; World Bank, 2020a).

Aims and Objectives of AfCFTA

The AfCFTA is one of the AU's Agenda 2063 flagship projects. To United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), ADB (African Development Bank), Africa Union Commission (AUC) (2017) and World Bank (2020a), AfCFTA aims to create better integrated markets through the reduction or removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers. AfCFTA is expected to enable the levels of economies of scale and investment necessary to develop wide-reaching regional value chains and to support the continent's transformational industrialization. African Union Commission (2019) and International Monetary Fund (2020) aver that AfCFTA is expected to create one of the world's largest free trade areas, covering a current market of 1.2 billion people and a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.5 trillion across the 55 AU Member States. The specific objectives of the AfCFTA, according to African Union Commission (2019) are to:

- a) create a single market for goods, services, facilitated by movement of persons in order to deepen the economic integration of the African continent and in accordance with the Pan African Vision of "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa" enshrined in Agenda 2063;
- b) create a liberalized market for goods and services through successive rounds of negotiations;
- c) contribute to the movement of capital and natural persons and facilitate investments building on the initiatives and developments in the State Parties and RECs;
- d) lay the foundation for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage;
- e) promote and attain sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural transformation of the State Parties;



- f) enhance the competitiveness of the economies of State Parties within the continent and the global market;
- g) promote industrial development through diversification and regional value chain development, agricultural development and food security; and
- h) resolve the challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships and expedite the regional and continental integration processes.

For purposes of fulfilling and realizing the objectives set out in Article 3, State Parties shall:

- a) progressively eliminate tariffs and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods;
- b) progressively liberalize trade in services;
- c) cooperate on investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy;
- d) cooperate on all trade-related areas;
- e) cooperate on customs matters and the implementation of trade facilitation measures;
- f) establish a mechanism for the settlement of disputes concerning their rights and obligations; and
- g) establish and maintain an institutional framework for the implementation and administration of the AfCFTA.

Theoretical Framework: Neo-liberalism

Neoliberalism is a political theory of international relations that emerged in the 1980s. Neo-liberal scholars like Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, David Mitrany, Ernst B. Haas, Stanley Hoffman, Andrew Moravesik, etc., are of the view that institutions are mediators and the means to achieve cooperation among actors in the international system. Neo-liberalism presents the most convincing challenge to realist and neo-realists. The core assumptions of neo-liberal institutionalisms' according to Baylis, Smith & Owen (2008) include:

- i. States are key actors in international relations, but not the only significant actors;
- ii. States are rational or instrumental actors, always seeking to maximize their interests in all issue-areas;
- iii. States seek to maximize absolute gains through cooperation. Rational behaviour leads states to see value in cooperative behaviour.

- iv. States are less concerned with gains or advantages achieved by other states in cooperative arrangements;
- v. The greatest obstacle to successive cooperation is non-compliance or cheating by states; and
- vi. Cooperation is never without problems, but states will shift loyalty and resources to institutions if these are seen as mutually beneficial and if they provide states with increasing opportunities to secure their international interest.

Neo-liberalism, the orthodoxy that calls for limited governmental intervention in the economy, privatization, the demise of the welfare state, and monetary and fiscal discipline, has been at the forefront of economic policies in Africa in the guise of IMF/World Bank, economic programs or policies like SAP through nation-states, regional/sub-regional communities like AU, EU, COMESA, EAC, CEN-SAD, ECCAS, ECOWAS, etc.

With trading, goods are produced in one country, distributed to another, and moved across borders to enter the distribution system of the target market(s). The unsatisfactory state of development of countries in Africa and the benefits/challenges posed by globalisation necessitate the establishment of Continental Free Trade Areas which can be seen within the purview of neo-liberalism. To neoliberals, 'regional integration' essentially boils down to material interdependence among countries and competition. Since the mid-1980s there has been a proliferation of regional integration on a global scale (Lombaerde, Söderbaum, Langenhove, & Baert, 2009). Consequently, the AfCFTA agenda of AU for regional integration within the prism of neo-liberalism, cannot be discussed devoid of globalization where power disparity is not a problem because it is assumed that all states benefits from open regionalism where economies of scale and the demand for export is paramount.

In Africa, regional blocs like ECOWAS, EAC, etc. are market and interdependency driven, with trade liberalization at the core of their objectives. More so, since regional integration is characterized by a multiplicity of complex and dynamic processes involving state and non-state actors engaged in transnational networks and is taking form as the result of emerging global, regional, national, and local social forces.



Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa and AfCFTA Implementation

Africa's regional integration is poised to achieve large markets for themselves, reap the benefits of economies of scale, and attain a coherent political cooperation (Garba & Alexander, 2021). AfCFTA under the auspices of the AU is poised to removing tariff and non-tariff barriers on goods and services, member states intend to: facilitate intra-African trade; promote regional value chains to foster the integration of the African continent into the global economy; boost industrialization, competitiveness and innovation, ultimately contributing to Africa's economic development and social progress (Andrea, 2018). However, challenges like language barrier, multiple currency differences, porosity of borders, foreign interference, political instability and insecurity, poor human development (human capital), over-lapping of membership, poor state of infrastructure, and state-centric nature of integration initiatives would hamper its actualization.

Over-lapping of Membership

According to Hartzenberg (2011), Alexander & Garba (2021) and Wapmuk & Ali (2022), among others, over-lapping of membership in regional integration among African states is a challenge to regional integration. Thus, the implementation of AfCFTA in Africa according to Alexander & Garba, (2021), the existence of multiple, overlapping and often conflicting regional integration arrangements within the same region would be a serious challenge to regional integration in Africa if not addressed properly. The Constitutive Act of the African Union recognizes (8) RECs (consist of COMESA, EAC, CEN-SAD, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC and UMA) as the pillar on which the AEC is built on. This is in spite the existence of other sub-regional groups like Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and Southern African Custom Union (SACU). This underscore regional integration in Africa to be characterized by too many ambitious targets which also informed the poor implementation of integration objectives (Hartzenberg, 2011).

The situation of SADC, EAC and COMESA for instance has a "spaghetti bowl" (overlapping of membership) type of sub-regional blocks or unions which their member states are belonging to. EAC is at present a common market, but it shares four member States with COMESA and one Member State with SADC. For SADC, the same might be said as well, five of its members are in

another sub-regional group called SACU (Okechukwu & Chikata, 2018). Same challenges are visible in other RECs. Again, the RECs and the other sub-groupings have most of the memberships drawn from states that have the same past colonial ruler, and thus, the same linguistic appellation (Alexander & Garba, 2022). This also suggests sovereign states in Africa joining many kinds of integration groups are no longer accident. To Atta-Mensah (2022), regional integration has strong historic bonds, and perhaps has other economic rationales for the “spaghetti bowl”. Often overlooked are the political origins explaining the presence of the “spaghetti bowl”. Table 2 below describe the multiplicity, overlapping and conflictual membership of African states in various RECs in the continent.

Table 2: Multiple Regional Membership & Colonial Ties in Africa

S/N	Countries	Colonial Masters	Groupings Recognised by AU	Other Groupings
1	Algeria	France	AMU	
2	Angola	Portugal	ECCSA, SADC	ICGLR
3	Benin	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
4	Botswana	Britain	SADC	SACU
5	Burkina Faso	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
6	Burundi	German/Belgium	CENSAD, ECOWAS	ICGLR
7	Cameroon	France/Britain	ECCAS	
8	Cape Verde	Portugal	ECOWAS	
9	Central African Republic	France	CENSAD, ECCAS	CEMAC, ICGLR
10	Chad	France	CENSAD, ECCAS	
11	Comoros	France	CENSAD, COMESA	IOC
12	Congo, Rep. of	France	ECCAS	CEMAC, ICGLR
13	Côte d’Ivoire	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	MRU, WAEMU
14	Dem. Rep. of Congo	Belgium	COMESA, ECCAS, IGAD	ICGLR
15	Djibouti	France	CENSAD, COMESA, IGAD	
16	Egypt	Britain	CENSAD, COMESA	
17	Equatorial Guinea	Spain	ECCAS	CEMAC
18	Eritrea	Italy/Britain	CENSAD, COMESA, IGAD	
19	Ethiopia	FREE	COMESA, IGAD	
20	Eswatini	Britain		

21	Gabon	France	ECCAS	CEMAC
22	Gambia	Britain	CENSAD, ECOWAS	
23	Ghana	Britain	CENSAD, ECOWAS	
24	Guinea	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	MRU
25	Guinea-Bissau	Portugal	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
26	Kenya	Britain	CENSAD, COMESA, EAC, IGAD	ICGLR
27	Lesotho	Britain	SADC	CMA, SACU
28	Liberia	FREE	CENSAD, ECOWAS	MRU
29	Libya	Italy	AMU, CENSAD, COMESA	
30	Madagascar	France	COMESA	
31	Malawi	Britain	COMESA, SADC	
32	Mali	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
33	Mauritania	France	AMU, CENSAD	
34	Mauritius	France/Britain	COMESA, SADC	
35	Morocco	France	AMU, CENSAD	
36	Mozambique	Portugal	SADC	
37	Namibia	Germany	SADC	SACU
38	Niger	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
39	Nigeria	Britain	CENSAD, ECOWAS	
40	Rwanda	German/Belgium	COMESA, EAC, ECCAS	ICGLR
41	São Tomé and Príncipe	Portugal	ECCAS, CENSAD	
42	Senegal	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
43	Seychelles	Britain	COMESA, SADC	IOC
44	Sierra Leone	Britain	ECOWAS, CENSAD	MRU
45	Somalia	Italy	CENSAD, IGAD	
46	South Africa	Britain	SADC	CMA, SACU
47	South Sudan	Britain		
48	Sudan	Britain	CENSAD, COMESA, IGAD	ICGLR
49	Swaziland	Britain	COMESA, SADC	CMA, SACU
50	Tanzania	Britain	EAC, SADC	ICGLR
51	Togo	France	CENSAD, ECOWAS	WAEMU
52	Tunisia	France	AMU, CENSAD	
53	Uganda	Britain	COMESA, EAC, IGAD	ICGLR
54	Zambia	Britain	COMESA	ICGLR
55	Zimbabwe	Britain	COMESA, SADC	

Note: CFA, French Colonies of Africa (Colonies françaises d' Afrique); CMA, Common Monetary Area; CEMAC, Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale); COMESA, Common

Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; EAC, East African Community; ECCAS, Economic Community of Central African States; ECOWAS, Economic Community of West African States; IGAD, Intergovernmental Authority on Development IOC, Indian Ocean Commission; SACU, Southern African Customs Union; SADC, Southern African Development Community; UMA, Union of Arab Maghreb; WAEMU/UEMOA, West African Economic and Monetary Union/Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine; WAMZ, West Africa Monetary Zone

Source: Alexander and Garba (2021).

Table 2 above indicate that multiple RECs and over-lapping of membership is often seen as a drawback to Africa's integration in general and AfCFTA in particular. Adding to this defect is the lack of political will and commitment to push forward regional integration agenda in spite of the good intentions of AfCFTA. More so, the enforcement mechanism is rendered weak to deal with African states that fail to observe the protocols and treaties to which they are parties (Atta-Mensah, 2022). Accordingly, the implementation of AfCFTA in Africa will be slow because "spaghetti bowl" create unhealthy multiplication and duplication of efforts and the mismanagement of scarce resources. Furthermore, countries' attachments to more than one REC leads to fragmentation of loyalties and incumbers full commitment to the regional integration processes (Atta-Mensah, 2022). Also, the implementation of AfCFTA policy in Africa will be a direct result of competing colonial interests (foreign interest) which constitute interference. According to Alexander and Garba (2021), the long foreign interference in African affairs has made relations between African countries and the West (developed countries) especially the Africa's ex-colonial masters to be skewed. This is evident in trade relations (intra-African import and export & African import and export with developed economies). Thus, the table below show the trade relations pattern in Africa.

Table 3: Export Trade of the RECs by Partner, 2000-2017 Average Per cent

RECs	INTRA-COMMUNITY	CHINA	UNITED STATES	EUROPEAN UNION	AFRICA	REST OF THE WORLD
ECCAS	2	34	15	20	4	25
SADC	19	20	8	20	3	30
UMA	3	5	8	63	2	19
ECOWAS	9	3	12	29	7	40

COMESA	9	12	4	37	8	30
IGAD	14	21	3	16	12	34
CEN-SAD	7	5	9	40	5	34
EAC	20	5	4	19	18	34
Africa average	10	13	8	31	7	30

Source: UNECA, AfDB and UNCTD (2019).

Table 4: Import Trade of the RECs by Partner, 2000-2017 Average Per cent

REC	INTRA-COMMUNITY	CHINA	UNITED STATES	EUROPEAN UNION	AFRICA	REST OF THE WORLD
ECCAS	3	34	13	19	5	26
SADC	16	27	8	21	3	25
UMA	3	5	8	64	2	18
ECOWAS	8	4	13	31	6	38
COMESA	9	13	5	38	5	29
IGAD	14	21	3	16	12	34
CEN-SAD	6	5	11	41	4	33
EAC	17	14	5	19	14	31
Africa average	9	17	8	31	6	28

Source: UNECA, AfDB and UNCTD (2019).

The above tables (2, 3 & 4) vindicate the assertion that African States have strong historic ties, and economic rationales for the “spaghetti bowl” in Africa. Obviously, Africa is deprived of her industries becoming more competitive by creating economies of scale and weeding out producers that are less productive in the marketplace; transfer of technology and knowledge via spill-over effects; infrastructure development and foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction (Kimenyi, Lewis & Routman, 2012). This also explains why intra-Africa exports are still dominated by primary products, manufactured and intermediate goods. This appears to be gaining significance in trade within the regional groups, which, however, is characterized by small number of processed exports commodities. As such, African countries tend to trade more with the developed countries than with each other (Wapmuk & Ali, 2022). This, further justify regional integration in Africa to be a sponsored and guided one primarily to consolidate the asymmetric relations between the centre and the periphery (Alexander & Garba, 2021).

Language Barrier



Language is basically a system of communication based on actions and ideas. In international politics, language is core in inter-state trust and relationship (Folarin, Folarin & Olorunyomi, 2015). Language is necessary in the processes of peace and security and an imperative to the achievement of the dream of regional integration particularly in Africa (Mulokozi, 2008). Sahel and West Africa Club and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2006) identified 2,000 living languages on the African continent excluding languages of non-African origin. Out of the 2,000 living languages identified in Africa, 1,200 are spoken in West Africa. The colonial languages in Africa (English, French and Portuguese) have since become the “currency of exchange” in Africa and international politics, and are the factor for social integration or disintegration. Expectedly, these should have been a unifying factor, however, English and French in particular have had more divisive influences on Africans. Reasons because the languages came with inbuilt elements, such as ideology, philosophy and cosmology of the colonial masters, which have created sharp different individualities among the recipients in West Africa and Africa at large (Folarin, Folarin & Olorunyomi, 2015).

The greater concern on language barrier according to Betek, Fayomi and Agboola (2018), is the sharp divide along the colonial languages of English, French and Portuguese. The influences of these languages and the associated colonial masters have been that of competition as opposed to cooperation. These have nurtured diverse administrative, religious and bureaucratic traditions. For instance, Africa’s francophone countries are united by a shared language, the civil law legal system, and in many cases monetary union. Likewise, the Africa’s *arabophone* countries to the north share language and Islamic law, and are covered by similar membership of RECs and FTA (Plaut, 2016). Within this purview, Folarin, Folarin and Olorunyomi (2015) posit that, the West African region, which is multi-ethnic, culturally plural and bi- or multilingual in imported languages, may never evolve an integrated region.

Note that Francophones and Anglophones, the two different Africans own allegiance first and foremost to their colonial masters. This, apart from creating a bond within Francophone and Anglophone blocs as well as bond between the blocs and their colonial masters, has also created disunity between the two blocs in African blocs. This manifest in hostilities at the borders (between Nigeria-Benin Republic, Nigeria-Cameroon, etc.) (Folarin, Folarin & Olorunyomi,



2015). Other manifestation of interference in Africa's integration through colonial language is in conflict especially in West Africa. Conflict in Cameroon for instance, is basically base on the Anglophone-Francophone divide in the country. The conflict which informed the Ambazonia secessionist movement of the Anglophones in the country has claimed many lives, with some displaced and properties destroyed is a threat to national unity and peaceful coexistence of Cameroon. This, will be the very factor in futile attempts at regional integration in general and AfCFTA in particular at both informal and formal levels in Africa.

Poor State of Infrastructure

Equally important challenge against the backdrop of the AfCFTA, is poor infrastructure. According to African Development Bank, African Union Commission and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020a), the functioning of modern society depends on viable infrastructure-dependent services that improve the quality of life. These services are the foundation for social well-being, acceptable health and safety standards, and a decent environment. In short, poor infrastructure equates to a bleak future, both economically and socially. More so, 'inadequate infrastructure hampers economic activities: raw materials do not get to the factories and production cannot ensue; goods do not reach consumers; trade and financial activities cannot flourish within or across borders' (African Development Bank, African Union Commission & United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020b, p.13).

Infrastructure, no doubt is a necessary attribute for trade especially AfCFTA which aims at allowing free access of commodities, goods, and services across the continent. In this vein, Alexander and Garba (2021) corroborate that infrastructural linkages especially physical infrastructure are basic necessity in facilitating successful trade. Infrastructure facilitates mobility of goods, mobility of the means of production, flow of information, opening of new opportunities and reducing asymmetries and other market imperfections, easy access to energy for industries and domestic use, safe transportation and reliable communication. These as a whole improves productivity and reduces cost. However, infrastructure as and has always been a major challenge in Africa. For instance, the total length of roads in Africa is 2 million kilometres. The railway network in many parts of the African continent, particularly in Western



and Central Africa is poor. Maritime transport and ports, which handle about 95% of Africa's international trade, are fitted with sub-standard equipment (Atta-Mensah, 2022).

According to African Development Bank, African Union Commission and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020a), Africa lags in infrastructural integration given its low average score of 0.220. Many of the African countries scored almost zero and this contributes to the overall low integration of the region and its subsequent underperformance. 31 countries in Africa are low performers and 11 countries performed averagely. In the African continent, South Africa, with a score of 0.898 is ranked the highest in the infrastructure dimension. The next-strongest performers are Egypt, Seychelles, Morocco, and Tunisia, which score 0.585, 0.531, 0.530, and 0.498, respectively.

The poor road network that connect African countries is a challenge to cross border trade. Transportation sector in the African continent is characterized by fragmentation, inadequate capacity, and poor performance as road and rail network is sparse and many of its sea ports and airports are in need of renovation and expansion (Wapmuk & Ali, 2022). Adding to the problems of the infrastructure inadequacy are the numerous roadblocks on African highways, delays at border posts, long and inappropriate customs clearance and corrupt activities by officials. Also, in terms of energy infrastructure, many African countries are lacking behind (Alexander & Garba, 2021; Wapmuk, 2021). This is a challenge to improving the livelihoods of Africa's population. Thus, Africa cannot effectively achieve the objectives of the AfCFTA if basic infrastructures are not put in place.

Political Instability and Insecurity

Another challenge to the actualization of AfCFTA policy in Africa is the problem of political instability and insecurity. These involves the complexities of hybrid and asymmetric threats like terrorism, transnational organised crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering and piracy, small arms proliferation, illicit mineral extraction and wildlife poaching, oil and counterfeit goods, advanced fee and internet fraud, illegal manufacture of firearms, armed robbery, and theft (Garba & Alexander, 2021). Currently also, the crisis in Ethiopia between the government forces and the Tigray forces, arm banditry, militancy, Boko Haram insurgency, and



famer-herders conflict in Nigeria, secessionist crisis in Cameroon between the Anglophone and francophones Cameroonian, etc.

The Global Peace Index (2022) highlights that terrorism remains a serious threat, with Sub-Saharan Africa accounting for 48% (or 3,461) of total global deaths. Of the ten countries with the largest increase in death from terrorism, Niger, Mali, DRC and Burkina Faso of Sub-Saharan Africa, forms part. Similarly, the threat to peace in Africa is military coups. Accordingly, Africa has experienced an increase in the prevalence of political instability and military coups in recent years. Since August 2020, military forces have assumed control in four countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali), and two coups attempt in Guinea-Bissau and Niger Republic (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022; International Monetary Fund, 2022). This is due to weak political systems, inter-community tensions, poor governance, poor service delivery and country-specific triggers (electoral tensions, security challenges) (Alexander & Magaji, 2021).

Consequently, conflicts impose large social and economic costs. Apart from the direct negative impact on development goals such as poverty and hunger, educational attainment, child mortality, and access to essential services, conflict also leads to reduction in tax revenue, rising public debt, and the increasing spending on security. These further complicate the policy environment of states thus undermining macroeconomic stability and longer-term growth (Alexander & Magaji, 2021; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022; International Monetary Fund, 2022). According to Kimenyi, Lewis and Routman (2012), political tension, conflict and violence diminish the capacity for African states to engage in intra-continental trade as it leads to low levels of economic growth, destroy needed export infrastructure, and slow and reverse regional integration. These challenges constitute threats to the implementation of AfCFTA policy in Africa. More so that AfCFTA policy requires the free movement of goods and services (people) amongst African countries.

Poor Human Development

The development of any continent requires investment in human development (human capital) constituting good education, health, food security, and high standard of living of the people. This is of basic necessity because, human capital is an integral part of advancing development. It



promotes productivity and entrepreneurship, complements physical capital in production, serve as an input to technological innovation, and in the long-run, economic growth. Again, is the advancement of social capital (Alexander & Garba, 2021).

However, poor level of education, poor health and poor standard of living is a challenge to Africa's development. This according to Kamla Foundation (2018), accounts for about two thirds of the world's extreme poor. This is estimated to rise to nine-tenths by 2030 if current trends persist. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2022), Sub-Saharan Africa was ranked 0.398 in 1990, 0.421 in 2000, 0.498 in 2010, 0.514 in 2012, 0.526 in 2014, 0.531 in 2015, 0.534 in 2016, 0.537 in 2017, 0.537 in 2018, 0.552 in 2019, 0.549 in 2020, and 0.547 in 2021. These suggest worsening human capital which is essential to the development of any continent. Moreover, poor education means poor productive capacity and entrepreneurship, increase poverty and inequality. This, by implication, is a threat to the implementation of AfCFTA in Africa. Moro so that, the more educated people are, the more tolerant of immigrants in the case of free movement of services (persons). Therefore, failure to accumulate good human capital will undermine social cohesion (Alexander & Garba, 2021).

State-centric Nature of Integration Initiatives

Integration efforts in Africa have mainly been state-centric, limiting the process to a narrow group of political leaders and technocrats on behalf of the state. This, according to Millstein (2015), means that states are seen as the drivers of economic and political integration in a context of neoliberalism. This is yet another challenge to the effective implementation of AfCFTA in Africa since non-state actors and general public that play key roles in the political economy of Africa are given limited attention on the issue of integration (Hailu, 2014). The process of cooperating to promote economic development, to safeguard peace and security, and to sustain common values, like AfCFTA in the continent of Africa, requires an almost paradigmatic shift from a state-centric conception of regional integration, to a more broad-based conception that involves non-state actors like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) since they do 'not only likely to build regionalism 'from below,' but also that some processes within the civil society arena can lead to meaningful contestations of existing regionalism paradigms and contribute to reshaping regions in line with 'alternative' agendas' (Fioramonti 2014 cited in Millstein, 2015, p.6).



Vulnerability to External Shocks

International shocks are likely to have significant implications for the macroeconomic outlook in Africa. Reason because, Africa is characterized by poor response capacity to external shocks. For instance, the war in Ukraine and the reduction of oil exports from Russia are stoking inflationary pressures across the globe because of their impact on energy and food prices (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Health Pandemics which involves the emergence and spread of infectious diseases, the steady and increasing rise in non-infectious diseases, is for instance a threat to the public health security of states in Africa. This situation is largely a result of inadequate logistics and health infrastructure, prevalent in many African states (Aning & Abdallah, 2016).

Of recent, COVID-19 has caused instability in the economy of states. It necessitated the restriction of movement in order to contain the spread of the virus. To this effect, flights were highly restricted; schools were shut down; pressure on people to stay indoors was advanced; production and distribution of stimulus packages (palliatives) to support sound business environment and maintain high levels of human development; employees worked from home where possible, and some, laid off; regional trade reduced as a consequence of the interruption in international travel (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). Again, COVID-19 vaccinations remain low in sub-Saharan Africa, this is driven initially by limited supply and later by logistical challenges. As of early April, only 12.2 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa has been fully immunized, compared with 64 percent in emerging markets and developing economies and 74% in advanced economies. Only five countries in the region (Botswana, Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles) reached the IMF-proposed target of 40% coverage by the end of 2021 (International Monetary Fund, 2022). These constitute a challenge to the implementation of AfCFTA in Africa owing to the fact that AfCFTA will require state capacity especially in human capital development to manage unforeseen shocks.

Lack of Common Currency

The impact of a common currency on trade is an important topic in literature on regional integration. Since World War II, 123 countries have been involved in a currency union at some point, and by 2015, 83 countries continued to be involved in one. This is an indication that currency unions are an important formal arrangement to facilitate international trade (Chen &



Novy, 2018). It is expected that a stable currency would spur economic growth and development. According to Masson and Pattillo (2004), African single currency has numerous guarantees as far as boosting exchange over the continent and advantages for all states through collaboration and beneficial interaction. Within the framework of the Abuja Treaty, Africa is expected to become an economic union by 2027, with a common currency (Atta-Mensah, 2022). Undoubtedly, some progress has been made by some sub-regional communities, indeed, WAEMU and CEMAC now are economic unions with a single monetary policy, a multilateral surveillance of macroeconomic policies setting, and a CET for WAEMU. However, these regional organisations have not yielded the desired effects in achieving sustainable economic growth and the fight against poverty.

Conclusion

The above is a discourse on the challenges of Africa's regional integration on AfCFTA policy in Africa. The paper concludes that AfCFTA, an AU initiative, within the prism of the Agenda 2063, is novel instrument for the integration of Africa. However, findings suggest that overlapping of membership, foreign interference, language barrier, poor state of infrastructure, porosity of borders, political instability and insecurity, poor human development, state-centric nature of integration initiative, vulnerabilities to external shocks, and lack of multiple currency are some of the core challenges hindering the effective execution of the AfCFTA policy.

Recommendations

The paper recommends as follows:

1. The African union (AU) should intensify effort at realizing a single currency policy for Africa;
2. The AU should design a comprehensive regional security architecture to include high technological surveillance;
3. The AU should establish a joint air and ground border patrol among member states of RECs to address transborder crimes and insecurity.
4. There should also be institutionalization of counterpart funding among AU member-states for infrastructural development;
5. The AU should encourage member states to improve the level of their economic development;
6. The AU should intensify efforts at addressing the problems of political instability in the



- continent by entrenching and strengthening democracy;
7. and encouragement of private and civil society participation in the integration initiative, among others.



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