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Interregionalism as a mechanism for the harmonization of Africa's regional integration projects

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Introduction

Regional integration processes in Africa face the problem of competition between the regional economic communities (RECs). Based on the program set out by the African Economic Community (AEC) Treaty, the various sub regional economic groupings within Africa, most of which predated the AEC, are to be the building blocks for the continental Community. However in all these sub regions (West Africa, Central Africa, South Africa, East Africa, and North Africa) there exist rival regional groupings, and multiple memberships in these groupings that create operational problems in governance and administration of the African integration process. There is firstly, the issue of dispersal of scarce diplomatic, economic and human resources. The mostly poor member states have had to contend with making commitments to these organizations. Secondly, the multiplicity of the groupings has created an environment for high politicization of the African integration process. Effective regional governance for integration is hampered by clashes between leading members within the different regional groupings. On the whole, the performance of these regional groupings has been dismal (ARIA, 2002).

Attempts made to overcome this problem, however lacks theoretical and methodological support as to the ultimate objective to be achieved. Thus, this paper argues that *interregionalism*, i.e. the institutionalization of relations between regional groupings, is a mechanism that can help overcome the challenges of multiple regionalisms in Africa, and accelerate regional integration of the continent.

Interregionalism: A New Dimension of Global Governance

The international system, as it is today, is a galaxy of multiple levels of decision-making, all of which have a bearing on states. At present, decision-making takes place across broad spectrum of human affairs, which include local, national, sub regional, regional, interregional and global levels. Of these levels, the most novel is the interregional level, about which much is yet to be known. This layer of decision-making is emerging across different regions. Its importance is in filling the gaps in governance on matters/issues, which are clearly outside the exclusive purview of sub regional or regional authorities and beyond the capacity of multilateral institutions to handle.

The concept of *Interregionalism* was developed to describe the institutionalization of relations between world regions (Rüland, Hänggi, Rollof, 2006). It is a new structure of governance, developed to manage the manifold challenges caused by the growing incongruence between the border-crossing nature of policy matters and territorially defined political authority. The transcending nature of policy matters beyond limits imposed by territoriality of political authority necessitates collaboration between regions to manage their common affairs. Just as the limits imposed by state territoriality and sovereignty made states incapable of self fulfillment and self sustenance, and compel them to enter into relations with one another, so also regions seek to interrelate to overcome their inadequacies.

Interregionalism developed with the proliferation of regional groupings across the globe. The emergence and proliferation of regional groupings in the post cold war era created a fear that such regional grouping may constitute closed entities, thereby hampering global free trade and investment. That however did not happen as regional groups opened up to each other and engaged in mutual interaction. This is what came to be referred to as 'open regionalism', which is a policy matter concerning how to achieve compatibility between the explosion of regional trading arrangements around the world and the global trading system as embodied in the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Bergsten, 2010). The concept of open regionalism assures that regional arrangements will, in practice, be building blocks for further global liberalization rather than stumbling blocks that deter such progress (Bergsten, 2010). The debate about the role of regional groupings in global economy was therefore put to rest with the emergence of this new form of relations, interregionalism. Thus, interregionalism evolved among regional groupings as a means of managing relations among them in the post cold war period.

Interregional relations, generally, involve regional groupings interacting on the bases of more or less regular high-level meetings and engaging in the implementation of a number of joint projects or programmes. It may also involve sharing or exchange of information and cooperation in specific issue-areas, in most cases in the economic sphere such as in trade and investment. In some cases a political element is added to such interactions, for example, the issue of human rights and democracy. This is especially true with EU's discussions on such values as human rights and fundamental freedoms with other regional groupings (Hänggi, 2000). A common feature of international politics today is the discussion of many issues of national and international concerns on regional, interregional and global levels. For example, tax cuts or increases within a given country or in relation to another country are discussed at regional level. This is because most states are now involved in some form regional economic associations. States' interests are thus aggregated within regional organizations.

Interregionalism has captured the attention of some scholars of international relations (Hänggi 2000, Rüland 2001 & 2002, Aggarwal and Fogarty 2003, Rollof 2006, Gilson, 2007). Hänggi (2000) has developed a typology of interregional relations. He identified three types a) relations between regional groupings b) biregional and trans regional arrangements and c) hybrid, such as relations between regional groupings and super powers. He describes relations between regions as group-to-group dialogues traditionally practiced by EU in its external relations with other regions. Examples of such relations are the dialogue partnership between the EU-SADC (South Africa Development Community) and EU-Mercado Commun del Sur; while biregional and transnational arrangements designate the triangular structure of relations between the major three world economic regions, the Triad: North America, Western Europe and East Asia. Membership in these arrangements is more diffuse than in group-to group dialogues. Membership is thus drawn from more than two regions, but there is some form of regional coordination. Example of biregional arrangement is where membership is drawn from states in two different geographic regions, such as Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which includes 10 East Asian countries and the 15 member states of the EU. And transregional arrangements involve membership from more than two geographical regions, for example the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation involving 21 Pacific rim countries including 15 East Asian economies, 3 North American and 2 South American countries (Chile and Peru). Hybrid or relations between regional groupings and single powers denotes relations that involve super powers, whose dominant position in its own region is an equivalent of a region, such as the United States in North America, and India in South Asia. Thus, we have EU-Russia relations, EU- India, China-Africa etc, as examples of hybrid interregional relations (Hänggi, 2000).

Hänggi's typology however, sees region strictly in terms of geography, in that he posits that relations between sub regional groupings existing in the same (geographical) region, such as the Mercosur-Andean Community link, are not considered as interregional relations (Hänggi, 2000). However, understanding region from a perspective of function rather than geography, will lead us to the opinion that relations between such regional groupings is interregional. In that the notion of 'regioness' here is embedded in the process of their interaction; in the feeling and idea of self vs. other, as against territoriality or geography (Gilson, 2005). It also involves the level of institutionalization of relations-be it economic, organizational, or transactional-organized and coordinated in a regional fashion, which provides a basis for identification and differentiation. This conception thus leads to a broader conception of relations between regional groupings within the same geographical location as interregional.

Systemic Functions of Interregionalism

Rüland (2002), in his study of interegionalism in international relations, extrapolates a number of systemic functions of interregionalism, eclectically using perspectives from neorealism, liberal institutionalism and constructivism. These are *balancing,* which is further classified into power balancing and institutional balancing. This function is based on the realist perspective of balance of power in international relations. That interregionalism serves as a means of attaining balance in power relations between nation states and, or, a group of nation states. While institutional balancing is the development of institutions to exert influence in international relations. Interregionalism also creates bandwagon opportunity (*Bandwagoning)*, where actors in international relations can get involved in ventures that will bring benefits to them. *Institution-building:* this is the creation of new level of policy making in a multilayered international system and subsidiary institutions, such as regular summits, ministerial and senior officials' rounds, business dialogues, based on the need to harmonize and develop common positions by regional groupings. Another function is *rationalizing* complex and technical interests of different actors representing diverse interests in global multilateral relations. For instance through interregionalism, the Africa Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries can develop common position in their relations with the EU. Interregionalism thus serves as a clearing house for decision making process involving diverse groups and interests. *Agenda-Setting*, this function is closely related to rationalizing. It entails identification and projection of issues for discussions in multilateral relations. *Identity-building,* based on constructivist perspective, it is argued that interregional relations can foster sense of identity in regional groupings and thereby enhance intra regional integration. The idea of self v others is created in functional relations between regions. Other aspects of the function of interregionalism identified by Ruland are Stability Projection and Development Promotion. The two functions are said to be interrelated in that economic development and prosperity can enhance security. Hence, regional groupings use interregional relations to enhance their security by extending assistance to other regions. For instance, EUROMED, a pact between Europe and the Mediterranean countries seeks to establish stability in the latter's quarters for the extended benefits of the former. Development promotion function of interregionalism relates to objectives EU's relations with the ACP countries. That is helping the ACP countries to integrate and benefit from world economy (Rüland, 2002).

Although, not all these functions of interregionalism are empirically determined, they are however, theoretically tenable. We have here further surmised another function of interregionalism. That is interregionalism as a *problem-solving mechanism* to the challenges of multiplicity of regional integration projects in Africa. We argue here that it is capable of solving some of the problems associated with Africa's integration by promoting the harmonization and coordination of multiple sub integration schemes on the continent.

'Multiple Regionalism' in Africa: A Challenge to the Creation of AEC

Regionalism in Africa is a matter of strategic policy drive to fulfill the ambition of uniting the continent and manage its developmental challenges by enhancing its prospects for growth and development. However, the continent faces a crisis of management of regional integration schemes. The African Economic Community Treaty (popularly known as the Abuja Treaty), which came into force in May 1994, is the crystallization of the African leaderships' commitment to cooperation and integration in economic, social and cultural fields, as contained in the Lagos Plan of Action and The Final Act. The Treaty provided for the African Economic Community (AEC) to be established through a gradual process, which would be achieved by coordination, harmonization and progressive integration of the activities of existing and future regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa (AEC). In other words, the RECs are the building blocks of the AEC. The recognized RECs for this project are AMU (The Arab Maghreb Union); ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States); COMESA (Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa); SADC (Southern African Development Community); and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States).

The six-stage implementation process of the Abuja Treaty, which started in 1994, envisages the creation of the Union over a period of 34 years, i.e. by 2028: STAGE 1: Strengthening existing RECs and creating new ones where needed (5 years); STAGE 2: Stabilization of tariff and other barriers to regional trade and the strengthening of sectoral integration, particularly in the field of trade, agriculture, finance, transport and communication, industry and energy, as well as coordination and harmonization of the activities of the RECs (8 years); STAGE 3: Establishment of a free trade area and a Customs Union at the level of each

REC (10 years); STAGE 4: Coordination and harmonization of tariff and non-tariff systems among RECs, with a view to establishing a Continental Customs Union (2 years); STAGE 5: Establishment of an African Common Market and the adoption of common policies (4 years) and; STAGE 6: Integration of all sectors, establishment of an African Central Bank and a single African currency, setting up of an African Economic and Monetary Union and creating and electing the first Pan-African Parliament (5 years). (www.uneca.org). Although these stages are not discretely pursued and with less than 17 years to the targeted date the implementation process is fraught with some challenges. A major obstacle in the way is the existence of multiple institutions pursuing the similar goals of integration within the focal points/building blocks of the continental union. That has created multiple centers of authority demanding cooperation, support and compliance with their agenda of integration. The problem has invariably become one of regional governance, where there is absence of one strong center for building solid blocks. A number of examples can be cited here.

West Africa: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and West African Economic and Monetary Union (known by its French acronym as UEMOA) are two rival regional groupings within the West African sub region each working to build economic and monetary community. These organizations have separate but interestingly similar organizational and governance structure. They have overlapping membership in that the eight members of UEMAO- Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo are also members of ECOWAS. They also have similar organs and specialized institutions: they both have Authorities of Heads of State and Government, Council of Ministers, Commissions, Parliaments and Courts of Justice. In addition they each have special agencies such as Banks, e.g. the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development and the UEMOA's West African Development Bank, and Central Bank for West African States, and so on. This existence of myriad integration institutions has no doubt caused difficulties in the administration of the sub region's integration process, as both ECOWAS and UEMOA pursue market integration.

Although ECOWAS is recognized by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as the building block, for its wider membership coverage, the activities of UEMOA can not be overlooked. UEMOA has surpassed ECOWAS in building a monetary union and a customs union. The eight member states of UEMOA with the assistance of France have an established single currency, the CFA, managed by the Central Bank of West Africa. They have also a unified external tariff regime. They are working toward greater regional integration by pursuing the creation of a common market that is based on free mobility of persons, goods, services, and capital, and on the right of setting up a business by citizens of the member states, as well as common trade policy (www.uemoa.int). ECOWAS has yet to establish a common currency. It is also working towards a common market, with its protocol on free movement of persons, residence, and establishment at various levels of implementation by the member states. Differences in the technical application of the programmes on common market pursued by the two organizations compelled their leadership to harmonize and coordinate their policies. Their trade liberalization programmes are harmonized. ECOWAS has adopted the UEMOA Common External Tariff (CET); it is also working towards establishing of a second monetary zone, the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) to be merged later with the CFA to form an all West African currency, called the ECO.

In addition, there is crisis of representation of the region in relation to the outside world. Although ECOWAS is the recognized building block for African Economic Union, it has had to coordinate its external relations with that of UEMOA. For instance, in negotiating the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the European Union both ECOWAS Commission and UEMOA Commission are involved. The process of the negotiations was complicated by the lack of clarity as to the role of the two different institutions. The two organizations needed to work on common positions, as they are on different footing on some of the matters under negotiation. For example, ECOWAS regional economic community has had to agree to work towards adopting the UEMOA common external tariff, so that the two communities can negotiate the EPA from a common stand point on customs duties (Mangeni, 2007).

Central Africa: Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are the major contending regional organizations in Central Africa. Although ECCAS is recognized as the pillar of the AEC from that locus, it nevertheless faces contention from another equally influential player in the regional economic integration of the sub region, i.e. CEMAC. The two organizations have overlapping membership as well. Members of CEMAC- Chad, CAR, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tomé and Principe- are also members of ECCAS. ECCAS has a broader membership however, with Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda as members in addition to all the members of CEMAC. Some of these countries are additionally members of other regional economic groupings, such as Common Market for

Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), *Communaute Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs* (CEPGL) and the East African Community (EAC). Thus, it becomes difficult to delimit the Central African region, and to have a cohesive regional economic block for the eventual establishment of an African Economic Union. Co-coordinating the activities of ECCAS and CEMAC is one the main issues of the integration process of Central Africa.

CEMAC, which replaced UDEAC (The Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa), Africa's oldest integration body, has outpaced ECCAS on economic and monetary integration. CEMAC has established a monetary union and a customs union, while ECCAS is pursuing the same. It started playing a political and diplomatic role in the sub region through its fight against transnational crime, with CEMAC Executive Secretariat providing assistance to the Central Africa Police Chiefs Committee from its creation in April 1997; the deployment of the CEMAC Multi-National Force to the Central African Republic (CAR)-FOMUC and; the recognition of General François Bozizé's government, which came to power through coup, in June 2003 in clear contravention of the OAU doctrine of non recognition of any regime which overthrows a democratically elected government (Awoumou, 2008).

ECCAS's, on the other hand has popular support and recognition as the pillar of African Economic Community in Central Africa, from its international partners, particularly the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). ECCAS signed the Protocol on relations between ECA AND RECs in October 1999, and in January 2001, Resolution 55/22 on cooperation between the UN and ECCAS was adopted by the UN General Assembly. In July 2002, it was granted observer status at the UN. Due to its recognition by the AU as the pillar of ECA, ECCAS was made a focal point for the implementation and monitoring of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) in Central Africa. ECCAS also received institutional support from African Development Bank (ADB) to the tune of 2.59 million UA to help in building the institutional capacities of the general secretariat of ECCAS in May 2003 (Awoumou, 2008). In spite of this external support, CEMAC was recognized by the European Union in their regional economic partnership agreements-the EPA. This confusion as to the real representative of Central Africa vis a vis other regions and the wider world has no doubt created a crisis of identity for the sub region.

Moreover, both ECCAS and CEMAC maintain different, but similar, sub regional organs and institutions, which add to the duplications in the integration process. ECCAS has a Conference of Heads of State & Government, Council of Ministers, Secretariat General, Court of

Justice, Consultative Commission. Similarly, CEMAC has an Executive Secretariat, Commission, Council of Ministers, Court of Justice, Community Parliament and similar specialized agencies.

Given the multiplicity of institutions, overlapping membership, which contributes to an amorphous geographical region called Central Africa, and competing regional agenda between the two leading Central African regional groupings, there is undoubtedly little prospect for the emergence of a single sub regional block in central Africa for the AEC.

Southern Africa: Just like in the other sub regions, in Southern Africa the problems abound. Here, South Africa Development Community (SADC) and South African Customs Union (SACU) exist irreconcilably side-by-side. They also have overlapping membership. Five member states of SADC (Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland) are also members of SACU. SACU is the oldest customs union in the world. Its aim is to maintain the free interchange of goods between member countries. It provides for a common external tariff and a common excise tariff to this common customs area (www.worldlingo.com). Similarly, the goal of SADC is to further socio-economic cooperation and integration as well as political and security cooperation among its 15 member states.

SADC has eight institutional bodies namely, The Summit, comprising heads of state or heads of government, at the top; Organ on Politics, Defense and Security (OPDS); the Council of Ministers; Tribunal; SADC National Committees (SNCs); and the Secretariat. SACU has four institutional organs: the Council of Ministers; Commission, Tribunal and; a Secretariat. Within the South African sub region therefore, 13 different institutions are involved in one form of integration programs or the other. This is quite challenging considering the demands these institutions make on the member states.

One significant challenge in the southern African integration process is that member states also participate in other regional economic cooperation schemes and regional political and security cooperation schemes that are beyond its geographical location. These schemes may compete with, or even undermine the aims of those in the sub region. For example, South Africa and Botswana both belong to the Southern Africa Customs Union, Zambia is a part of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and Tanzania is a member of the East African Community (EAC). That was why in October , 2008, SADC joined with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the East African Community to form the African Free Trade Zone. The leaders of the three trading blocs agreed to create a single free trade zone, the African Free Trade Zone, consisting of 26 countries with a GDP of an estimated

$624bn (£382.9bn). It is hoped the African Free Trade Zone agreement would ease access to markets within the zone and end problems arising from the fact that several of the member countries belong to multiple groups (wikipedia, 2011).

With all these complications, SADC is the recognized pillar for the AEC and also the platform for negotiations of the EU-APC partnerships for the southern African region. The challenge here, as in the other sub regional communities analyzed above, is to find a workable solution to the problem of duplications and scope delimitation in the integration process of southern Africa. Here, again interregionalism can be a panacea. Creating, expanding and deepening synergy between competing economic groupings will help in building a solid block. In that the best resources of the sub region can be harnessed under an interregional arrangement to advance a broader vision and agenda for the sub region.

East Africa: The East African Community is supposed to be the pillar of AEC in the East African sub region. The member states- Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Rwanda- are working towards the establishment of Common Market, Monetary Union and a Political Federation of the East African States. These member states are also working towards achieving similar objectives as members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). COMESA's main focus is in the formation of a large economic and trading unit. The EAC has seven institutions (the Summit, the Council of Ministers, the Coordinating Committee, Sectoral Committee, the East African Court of Justice, the East African Legislative Assembly and the Secretariat) working to achieve its objectives. Similarly, the decision-making structure of COMESA has at the top of which are the Heads of State, then the Council of Ministers, 12 technical committees, and a series of advisory bodies. The duplication of programmes, overlapping memberships and multiplicity of institutions is further complicated by the presence of IGAD. Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is another designated pillar of the AEC, with headquarters in Kenya. Established initially to overcome the issues of drought and desertification, its mandate has expanded to include Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution and Humanitarian Affairs; Infrastructure Development (Transport and Communications); Food Security and Environment Protection. However, IGAD has collaborated with COMESA and the East African Community to divide projects among themselves so that there is no duplication and to avoid approaching the same donors with the same projects ((http://www.africa-union.org/recs/igad_profile.pdf)

North Africa: In North Africa, the case of the Arab Magreb Union (AMU) as the pillar of AEC is a staggering one. The Treaty establishing the Union was signed in1989, after two decades of efforts by the member states-Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The main objectives of the AMU Treaty are to strengthen all forms of ties among Member States (in order to ensure regional stability and enhance policy coordination), as well as to introduce gradually free circulation of goods, services, and factors of production among them. Although, AMU has no relations with the African Economic Community (AEC), and has not yet signed the Protocol on Relations with the AEC, It has, however, been designated a pillar of the AEC. The AMU is currently dormant, but attempts are under way to revive it.

The Community of Sahel-Saharan States or CEN SAD, as it is also known, has now also become a role player in the North African Region. Established in February 1998, with a Secretariat offices based in Tripoli, Libya, among the aims and objectives of CEN SAD is the removal of all restrictions hampering the integration of member states through the adoption of necessary measures to ensure a) Free movement of persons, capitals and interests of nationals of Member States; b) Right of establishment, ownership and exercise of economic activity; c) Free trade and movement of goods, commodities and services from Member States and The promotion of external trade through an investment policy in Member States. With exception of Algeria, all the member states of AMU are members of CEN SAD. However, the challenge of CEN SAD is its overlapping with the envisioned Customs Unions of ECOWAS, ECCAS and COMESA and other trade blocs more advanced in their integration (Ncube, 2009). It is, therefore, more than ever, urgent that the two organizations start working towards institutional harmonization based on interregioanlism

Interregionalism: A Mechanism for Solving Mutiple Regionalism in Africa

Interregionalism can be seen as both and approach and a mechanism for resolving regional governance and integration problems in Africa. As an approach, it gives theoretical support for a direction, already pursued by some of the RECs in the continent, of migration of power and authority from the member states and the sub regional institutions. It sort of provides a perspective and light into the nature of this new governance structure emerging between the RECs. As a mechanism, interregionalism provides a framework for the rationalization of multiple RECs in Africa. This framework will involve gradual institutionalization of relations between the RECs, through regular exchanges, establishment of joint committees or secretariat, harmonization of economic and monetary projects and programmes, mandating joint institutions to implement and monitor common projects and programmes, meeting of Chief Executives of the RECs and Heads of States and Governments of the RECs. Exigencies and possibly pressures to succeed may provide impetus for further expansion and deepening of relations, invariably increasing reliance on, and expansion of authority of, these new supra regional institutions.

A number of factors already in place constitute a basis for interregionalism in Africa. For instance, UNECA and AU have been supporting rationalization of the RECs on the continent. Some legal frameworks are already in place: the Abuja Treaty (which came into force in 1994, dividing the continent into five sub regions: West Africa, East Africa, North Africa, South Africa and Central Africa) and the Protocol on Relations between the AEC and the RECs (which was signed and entered into force on 25 February 1998). The objectives of the protocol is to strengthen the existing RECs in accordance with the provisions of the Abuja Treaty, treaties and the Protocol; to promote the coordination and harmonization of the policies, measures, programmes and activities of RECs and; to promote closer cooperation among the RECs (Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of South Africa, 2003). Article 15 (1) of the Protocol provides for joint programmes and closer cooperation between the RECS. It says that RECs may enter into cooperation arrangements under which they undertake joint programmes or activities or more closely coordinate their policies, measures, and programmes. Taking the Abuja Treaty and the Protocol, a legal-political base therefore exists for advocating interregionalism in policy circle within the states and RECs.

Further, the Treaty of some of the RECs provide legal basis for furthering interregionalism. Chapter XVIII of ECOWAS Revised Treaty on Relations between the Community and other Regional Economic Communities provides that 'the Community may enter into co-operation agreements with other regional economic communities' (ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993:44). Similarly, the very first opening of the revised treaty of UEMOA expresses the loyalty of the members to the objectives of ECOWAS (Traite Modifie de L'UEMOA, 2003). Moreover, Chapter II, Article 2 of ECOWAS Revised Treaty on Establishment and Composition carries the high contracting parties' affirmation and decision that ECOWAS 'shall ultimately be the sole economic community in the region for the purpose of economic integration and the realization of the objectives of the African Economic Community'(ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993:4)

Consequently, some of the RECs have already started experimenting with the new mechanism. In West Africa, ECOWAS and UEMOA have, based on the advice of the regional leaders at the 1999 Lomé Summit, signed a general agreement in 2004 to enhance the coordination and harmonization of their programmes. A joint technical secretariat saddled with the responsibility of enhancing the coordination of their joint activities was created by the two organizations. To function effectively the two organizations would have to cede more powers to the supra-regional secretariat (GNA, 2004). This joint secretariat now serves as the centre of gravity of authority toward an inter regional level of governance in the sub region. This form of interregional arrangement is helping to overcome the administrative challenges related to the implementation of the community programmes in West Africa. It is also helping in pooling the resources of the two organizations, and in streamlining their common activities. ECOWAS/UEMOA partnership is presently building around such issue-areas as the creation of West African Common Market. In this regard a Joint Border Post (JBP) Programme is being implemented. There is also the convergence of economic and financial policies, particularly the sub region's project of establishing a single currency, ECO, on the existing UEMOA CFA zone and the non CFA Anglophone West African Monetary Zone. Other areas of cooperation are statistical harmonization, harmonization of sectoral policies (agriculture, transportation and energy) towards preparing one of Africa's regional building blocks (ECOWAS Bulletin, 2011). The joint secretariat is facilitating the cooperation programmes and projects. It can be argued that it is the strong understanding between the two organizations that made politically motivated decision to sanction the former President of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo, effective when ECOWAS directed Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) to freeze financial deals with the regime.

Similarly, within central, southern and eastern Africa an interregional collaboration is crystallizing. The leaderships of COMESA-EAC-SADC have also realized the need to chart the course of interregionalism through the framework of a Tripartite Task Force. The framework is aimed at addressing the problems of duplication and competition in the pursuit of regional economic integration. The Tripartite Task Force thus seeks to forge collaboration and harmonize their programmes in the area of trade, customs, civil aviation, free movement of people and infrastructure development. The efforts of the Task Force saw the draft of a Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) by the Chief Executives of the three RECs Secretariats, and a Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Tripartite RECs in Kampala, Uganda in 2008 resulted in far reaching decisions in the areas of Trade and Customs (FTA); Joint Competition Authority (JAC) for air transport; Infrastructure development; Legal and Institutional Framework and; Merger of the RECs. Progress is currently being made in the agreed areas. The FTA document is presently considered for ratification by member states. And it is hoped to take off in 2012 (Mwapachu, 2010). Given that it is the Task Force that is managing the process, to be effective more power and authority will be accorded to it, eventually it may assume supra regional posture. Already the Task Force is establishing relations with outsiders, such as development partners of the RECs. It has signed MOU with DFID, for the establishment of the North-South (trade) Corridor (NSC), and with Development Bank for Southern Africa. The DFID has contributed UK£ 67 million to the NSC project account. An investment committee was established by the MOU to consider and approve financing of proposals of the Tripartite projects. In its first seating, the Committee considered and approved a budget amounting to US$ 10 million for 2010 (Mwapachu, 2010). This power of allocation of resources, if it is sustained, will no doubt enhance supra regional institutions to take up the global administration of harmonized programmes and projects of the RECs.

Interregionalism as an approach will no doubt provide a theoretical support for the ECA, AU, and the RECs- ECOWAS-UEMAO and EAC, COMESA, SADC Tripartite Task Force-to mobilize resources and support for their actions. It also suggests a procedure for attaining their goal of building stronger, effective and efficient RECs/ building blocks for the AEC.

Conclusion

'Multiple regionalisms' constitute an obstacle to integration of Africa. It has caused disruption in Africa's quest for an economic Community. The solution to this problem lies in adopting and promoting interregionalism. Already, some legal instruments exist for that: the Abuja Treaty and the Protocol on Relations between the African Union and the RECs, and Treaties and initiatives in some of the RECs, such as ECOWAS/UEMOA and COMESA-EAC-SAD Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) project. These have provided the foundation for the adoption and implementation of interregionalism, both as a strategy and a mechanism for effective regional governance and integration of Africa. It is the position of this paper that pursuing interregionalism will help promote integration of Africa. This is important in view of the fact that the consensus within Africa is that integration is a strategy for pooling resources to overcome the problems of economic dysfunctionalism, security challenges and political instability facing the continent.

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