The New Pan-African Passport and the Politics of Integration in the Continent

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Abstract: Africa’s development process was highly distorted as a consequence of colonialism. This scenario created a very serious problem in the process of bringing African countries together. When the Organization of African Unity (OAU) came on board in 1963, it adopted a state-centric approach as her major concern then was to ensure independence of African Countries that were still under colonial rule. However, in 2002, the OAU transformed into African Union (AU) that attempts to balance the principles of sovereignty with the need to accelerate political rights and socio-economic development and cooperation in Africa. Despite this objective, little had been achieved by African states in terms of development, as less attention was paid to the vexed issue of closer cooperation. Utilizing the theory of Regional Integration as a framework for this study, this paper is a bold effort at finding out if the new Pan African Passport can lead to closer cooperation among African states for better economic and socio-political fortunes. The paper avers that taking the poor economic standings of majority of African states coupled with increasing security challenges and the lack of political will among African leaders, the possibility of wholistically implementing the dictates therein in the Pan-African Passport may not be feasible. Equally the fear of influx of citizens into the few African states with relatively good economy with its concomitant negative impact can mar this laudable innovation. Also, it is the belief of the paper that cognizance of current happenings in the European Union (EU) especially with the exit of Britain (Brexit) from the EU, there is the palpable fear that some African countries might opt out of the Pan-African Passport agreement. To this end, it is avowed opinion of this paper that African leaders should brace up to ensure the successful implementation of all the protocols embedded in the new Pan-African Passport for the good of the continent.

Key Words: African Union, Pan-African Passport, Integration.

I. INTRODUCTION

The sad colonial history of African countries did not only affect the development process in the continent, but equally had a very big impact on cooperation among the African states. The division among African states was manifest in the build-up to the formation of the organization of African Unity (AU) in 1963 where emerged severed groups along ideological lines over the guiding philosophy on which the OAU ought to be formed. According to Mathews (1984:51): Between 1958 and 1962, a number of regional African groups had emerged, notably the Brazzaville Group, the Union of African and Malagasy States, the Casablanca Group and the Monrovia Group, to reflect two of the leading approaches to continental unity. On the one hand, there was the so-called moderate group, comprising Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and most of the Francophone countries, which advocated a gradualist, neo-functionalist approach in form of loose association of states to African Unity. On the opposite side was the so-called radical group, led by Ghana, Guinea and Mali, which advocated immediate continental political union in the form of United States of Africa.
This is obvious disagreement at the formation of OAU eventually to the formation of a loose union which did little to bring about African integration. Agubuzu (2004:22) lends credence to the above position when he states thus:

> What the OAU charter provided for was a loose confederation or association of states, whose members undertook to coordinate and harmonize their general policies through cooperation in the political, diplomatic economic, communications, health, sanitation, nutritional, scientific and technological spheres as well as cooperation in defense and security but there was not specific mention of political union or even of Pan-Africanism.

This development can also be seen as the reason for the state-centric nature of the seven principles as stipulated in Article III of the OAU charter which suffice to include the followings:

- The sovereign equality of member states;
- Non-interference in the internal affairs of states;
- Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for the inalienable right to independent existence;
- Peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration;
- Unreserved condemnation in all its forms, of political assassination as well as subversive activities on the part of neighbouring states or any other state;
- Absolute dedication to the total emancipation of African territories which are still dependent; and
- AFFIRMATION OF A POLICY OF NON-ALIGNMENT WITH REGARD TO ALL BLOCS (OAU CHARTER AND RULES OF PROCEDURE, 1992, p.5).

Going by the state-centric nature as embedded in the guiding principles of the OAU, little was in actual terms achieved in the area of integration that would have brought that needed cooperation in socio-economic and political development in the continent. However, with the OAU having achieved its major objective of decolonialization of the continent, there was the need to have an organization that will principally focus on African development and this led to the formation of African Union (AU). According to Agubuzu (2004:45):

> A major criticism of Africa’s cooperation and integration under the OAU was that the pursuit of this important goal was almost the exclusive responsibility of governments and political leaders, whose practice of unquestioning solidarity among themselves and non-interference with national sovereignty were not conducive to the realization of the goal. The process of African cooperation and integration was not sufficiently people-oriented and most African governments were so occupied with the problem of political survival as to pay adequate attention to economic matters. Under the African Union the linkage between peace, security, stability, cooperation and economic development has been recognized and will be tackled through Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) which is the brain-child of president Obasanjo.

Bearing this in mind, its major objective of increasing the economic fortunes of Africa that will foster regional cooperation and integration, the African Union set up some people oriented organs such as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC) and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). The Economic, Social and Cultural Council will consist of social and professional groups of the member states to foster partnership between governments, the private sector and the civil society. On the other hand, NEPAD is anchored on the key principles of “African ownership and partnership (partnership between African governments and the peoples and between Africa and its development partners)” (Agubuzu, 2004: 45-46).

In this connection, NEPAD is a strategic policy framework of the African Union with the ambitious aim of eradicating poverty, placing member states, both individually and collectively on the path of sustainable growth and development, in a globalizing world we live in.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the two organs have not been carrying their lofty tasky assignment to the best interest of AU and the African people. However, there exist certain policies that will foster integration which the organs have not implemented among which is the African single currency. It is also important to note that economic development cannot thrive in a continent where there is obvious restriction of free movement of her citizens to member countries within the continent. In realization of this and cognizant of the realities that discussions on Africa single currency is at advanced stage, the AU as a good economic strategy and the need to allow free and unhindered movement of citizens within the continent launched the Pan-African Passport, a development which will allow citizens within the regional grouping to enter African countries without visas. It is believed that this will not only foster cooperation but will ultimately lead to integration.

II. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The quest for unity among African states that will further economic development and integration within the region has continued to occupy a premium place in the regional organization. The launching of the Pan-African Passport
is a step in this direction. It is in this connection that the theory of regional integration becomes an apt framework in analyzing the relevance of the Pan-African Passport toward African integration. Integration in the words of Mintzberg (1979) refers to “the process of maintaining the territorial integrity of a nation and the degree of fit or compatibility among members of an organization which is essential for its survival”. This definition essentially shows that for integration to be meaningful and functional there must be compatibility among members desirous of such unity.

The theory of regional integration is a process in which neighbouring states enter into an agreement in order to upgrade cooperation through common institutions and rules. The objective of the agreement could range from economic to political to environmental, although it has typically taken the form of a political economy initiative where commercial interests are the focus for achieving broader socio-political and security objectives, as defined by national governments. (Goldstein and Perchouse 2010: 354).

For Haas, E. (1971: 44), regional integration has been defined as “the process through which national states voluntarily mingle, merge and mix with their neighbours so as to lose the factual attributes of sovereignty while acquiring new techniques for resolving conflicts among themselves”.

Lombaerde and Langenhoure (2007: 377) gave eight important functions which regional integration initiative should fulfil and they include:

- The strengthening of trade integration in the region;
- The creation of appropriate enabling environment for private sector development;
- The development of infrastructure programme in support of economic growth and regional integration;
- The development of strong public sector institutions and good governance;
- The reduction of social exclusion and development of an inclusive civil society;
- Contribution to peace and security in the region;
- The building of environment programmes at the regional level;
- The strengthening of the region’s interaction with other regions of the world.

From the foregoing, it becomes crystal clear that must come into play, when integration is sought after. With the theory harping on the need for mutual trade relation, development of infrastructural programmes, building strong public sector institutions, creating a conducive environment for private sector participation and having an inclusive civil society etc, it becomes apparent that the theory of regional integration is a germane explanatory framework in discussing the Pan-African Passport and integration in Africa.

The relevance of the theory to the subject matter of this discussion can be seen from the realities that when OAU came on board in 1963, the organization was pre-occupied with efforts at ensuring that African countries still under colonial rule then gain their independence, hence at that time the enabling environment was not created for trade liberalization and other policies that might lead to unity and integration. The failure of the organization to bring the needed unity among African states saw the transformation of the OAU to African Union. The African Union came up with organs that will drive the unity and integration among African states. In this regard the African Union has organs like the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), financial institutions like the African Development Bank (giving credence to African common currency), the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank under Article 19 of the Constitutive Act. The presence of these organs clearly shows the willingness and readiness of member states to give up some of their sovereignty to the Union. It is also of relevance to note that as a way of ensuring greater economic development through unhindered participation of all citizens in the region, the Pan-African Passport becomes very important in this direction. The passport which allows citizens to enter other countries within the region without visas will bring about brotherhood among Africans which is the most important factor in the process of regional integration.

### III. THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF PAN AFRICAN PASSPORT

While it is an undebatable fact that the OAU was state-centric in its operation, its struggle and the eventual decolonialization of Africa is commendable. The African Union thereafter came on board to bring about processes for a faster and durable integration process within the continent. So, realizing that economic cooperation will go a long way in driving and consequently leading to integration, the union came up with economic policies that brought into existence the African Development Bank, the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund, the African Investment Bank, etc. Equally, not forgetting the realities that the private sector will genuinely and effectively bring about robust economic cooperation and taking cognizance of the fact that the private sector will thrive when there is unrestricted movement of her citizens within the continent, the union courageously brought to bear the new Pan-African Passport with the sole objective of opening up the private sector in the continent.

One of the important benefits of the new Pan African Passport is its capability of opening up the boarders within the African continent. Mukeredizi (2016: 20) lends credence to this view when he observed that:

*With the launch of the new Pan-African document, the continent moved up a notch towards the free cross border movement of goods and people in direct opposite to Brexit, the decision by British voters to exit the European Union.*
Many thought the move was well overdue, since one of the AU’s regional blocs, the 15 members Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has been offering 90-days visa-free entry to member states’ citizens since the late 1990s.

He further stated that integrationists are of the view that restrictions on movement across borders go against the continent’s goal of becoming “one Africa” and further negate the spirit of AU’s Agenda 2063, the continent’s long-term economic blueprint as they maintained that visa-free regimes promote intra-African trade and investment, facilitate business and create employment opportunities.

Equally on the same page, Yves Bureta, the spokesperson of the Rwanda Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration posited that, the idea of an Africa with seamless borders is the way to go. Africa is endowed with vast natural resources, including minerals and rich soil. If we can combine our strength, then we could live without financial help from the western European countries (The Nigerian Voice, August 6, 2016, p.8).

The bold step of Africans in charting a new path to economic integration and the free movement of people through the Pan African Passport initiative which is visa free and gives access to the 54 member states was hailed by Mataire (2016: 28) when he stated that:

*The common passport is undoubtedly one of the most progressive moves by the African Union in years. The move clearly proves the serious intent of the continent’s leadership in pragmatically dealing with issues of economic integration through the removal of obstacles that hitherto hinder intra-continental trade. Besides easing access restriction for travel within the continent, it is also envisaged that the common passport will work as a deterrent for people embarking on dangerous migration route to Europe.*

The Chairperson of African Union Commission, Nkosazana Olamini-Zuma equally commended the coming into existence of the Pan-African Passport when she asserted thus:

*We’ve been overwhelmed by requests and enquiries of other ministers, officials and African citizens to share in this privilege of holding an African Passport. It is hoped that the new document will facilitate the seamless mobility of Africans and ease trade across the continent, consequently leading to the continent’s economic transformation. ([www.indepthnews.net](http://www.indepthnews.net) of 25 July, 2016)*

IV. PAN-AFRICAN PASSPORT AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA

In her twenty seventh (27th) ordinary session of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the 17th day of July, 2016 held at the Kigali Convention Centre (KCC), Rwanda, the AU took a very symbolic and ambitious stand with the launching of the African Union passport with the aim of facilitating the free movement of people and goods within the continent. The passport which allows for a visa-free entry into the 54 countries in the continent is expected to enhance the much needed integration among Africans. Though, at the launch, the passport was only made available to the Heads of States and Governments within the continent, it is expected that by 2018, the Pan-African Passport would be made available to the citizens.

While the visa-free Pan-African Passport was seen as a bold step by African leaders towards integration, there exist divergent views as to the capability or otherwise needed integration.

In his view about the capability of the Pan-African Passport to bring about unity and integration among Africans, the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame noted that:

> When people gather together on the basis of what unite them, there is a peaceful solution to every problem faced. The unity of our continent, with an emphasis on integration, among other things, should never be subject to preconditions or exceptions because lasting solutions always involve everyone. Africa is rising, but as a result of impersonal forces, over which we have no control, Africa is being raised actively by us, the people of this continent. Our job is simply to raise Africa even higher ([http://au.int/en/summit/27](http://au.int/en/summit/27) retrieved: 07 August, 2016).

Fruge (2016: 16) opines that the launching of the Pan-African Passport coming at the same time the British citizens voted to exit the European Union implies that there are derivable positive benefits for the good of the continent. In her words:

>*The e-passport is a step towards eliminating borders on the continent, aiming to enable deeper integration, increased trade and further development. Just as important, the passport is a powerful symbol of unity across Africa and simultaneously a step towards connecting African countries economically and politically. ([www.washingtonpost.com/news](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news) culled: 01 July, 2016).*

The unity and subsequent integration which the Pan-African Passport will usher in the continent will also be of benefit to African in diaspora who had for long been tracing their ancestral origin. Kachipande (2015: 20) enumerated the benefit derivable from the Pan-African Passport as follows:

- Common passport would mean that everyone in Africa will be issued the same centralized passport affirming the continent of Africa as their point of origin;
- It will help solidify a common identity for all Africans who currently live in a continent which is home to 54 nations and 3000 distinct ethnic groups;
- It will break the colonial borders forced on Africans thereby establishing stability in the continent as most of the conflict in Africa are border related;
- Devoted Pan-Africanists, who have been calling for continental unity since the establishment of OAU, will also see this as a positive move towards achieving Pan-Africanism;
- It will make it easiest for Africans to travel within the continent, cross border traders to conduct business, employers to live across borders, and Africans to migrate to different parts of the continent for economic purposes;
- Politically, it will have the potential to lay the foundation for the thousands of Africans that remain stateless or are in refugee camps to have some form of permanent and legal status on the continent;
- It also has a potential to include members of the Africa’s Diaspora who have long been seeking to obtain dual citizenship in Africa for decades.

The joy that herald the launching of Pan-African Passport is unprecedented especially given by the avalanche of positive comments amid the expectations that this ambitious move by the African leader will bring about the much desired economic emancipation and regional integration. Be that as it may, there are others who are of the belief that the Pan-African Passport cannot achieve much in terms of bettering the African economy and leading to functional integration in the region. Their assertions are based on the numerous problems that confront the continent. The fears that the Pan-African Passport may not afterall achieve the main objective, it is meant to achieve ranges from the following:

a. Not all countries in the region have the technology to key into the Pan-African e-passport.

b. The loss of revenue accruing to countries through the issuance of visas.

c. Fear of domination of powerful countries over the smaller ones in the region.

d. High unemployment rates among African countries.

e. Security concerns especially with the rise in terrorism.

f. The impact of Brexit.

Technological advancement is not even among the 54 countries that make up the African Union. This is a major impediment of most of the countries especially taking cognizance of the fact that the Pan-African Passport is electronic in nature. A development where only 13 countries out of the 54 countries that make up the African Union offer biometric passport points to the poor technological advancement of the African continent and calls for concern. D’Orsi (2016) expressed this fear when he opined that “the big obstacle to Pan-African e-passport is that many African countries lack of basic measures to roll out the initiative as they do not have access to the biometric system needed to register the passport”.

So, judging from the pronouncement of the African Union the Pan-Africa Passport be made available to all citizens by 2018, the big question remains how many of these African countries that do not have the basic technology to produce the passport will cope? Whether the African Union has the resources to lend helping hands to these countries is another important decision for the AU.

Another area where the Pan-African Passport which guarantees free visa; is revenue loss that hitherto accrues from the issuance of visa. It is known fact that most African countries are poor, a development which will make them quite uncomfortable should any avenue through which they generate even the least revenue be blocked. A development where the revenue most poor African countries generate from the issuance of visa to fellow African citizens will be lost leaves much to be desired especially giving the poor entry into African countries by citizens of other continents. It is envisaged that most of the African countries may frown at this except the AU brings out policies that might cushion the effect of this revenue loss.

There is yet another but very important area that might present problems for the implementation of the Pan-African Passport. It is the fear of smaller countries within the regional equation that they may be subjugated by the stronger and bigger African members. Poor African countries with weak economies may likely entertain the fears that the Pan-African countries will not only dictate their economies but might even influence their political spheres. This development, it is feared might bring a development where powerful African countries will interfere in the internal affairs of the poorer ones thereby infringing on their sovereignty. The resultant effects would be the colonialization of African by Africans.

The high rate of unemployment as a consequence of weak economies among most Africa countries, if not all is another factor that challenges the realization of the objectives of the Pan-African Passport. The high level of unemployment among African countries is a sine qua non for the high emigration rate in the continent, therefore, the Pan-African Passport that allows for free visa entry into countries within the African by their African brothers and sisters will bring about a situation where the few countries with semi-developed economies will witness the influx of citizens from their African neighbours. This scenario may bring a high competition for jobs existing in such countries that might be detrimental to their own citizens and reaction from the locals as a consequence that not be ruled out. This is already playing in South Africa where the South African citizens attacked citizens of other African countries accusing them of taking over jobs that legitimately belong to them. Okoth (2016) agrees
with this when he states that we witnessed cases of xenophobia in South Africa; that citizens of Uganda and Kenya are regularly attacked and mistreated in South Sudan and that there are teething problems and constant suspicion by Tanzania citizens of Kenya who live and work there. This obviously is not a welcome development and needs a lot of education among African citizens to remove these prejudices.

The impact of Brexit may likely have spill over effect in the African continent and might jeopardise the much talked about integration which the Pan-African Passport may fast track. With immigration control and the economy as the major reasons for Britain exiting the European Union, it is predicted that with the visa free Pan-African Passport, the influx of African citizens especially into the big African countries, the problem of immigration and immigrants might adversely affect these affect these economies. This situation may likely in the on run make some countries within the African countries to consider withdrawing from this fundamental African initiative and policy thereby rendering useless the road to African integration.

V. CONCLUSION

The balkanization of Africa among European spheres of influence during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 was a watershed in the distortion of the stages of development in Africa. With the independence of African countries, expectations were that the African continent would be on the threshold of development, but this was not to be as the colonial masters only gave political independence but still hold-on to the African economy. Given this Neo-colonial scenario African countries were more subservient to their ex-colonial masters and other aid-givers than having the initiative to forge common brotherhood and eventual integration.

The formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 was not only for decolonializaition but to foster African Unity. However, the state-centric nature of OAU coupled with the fear of losing grip on power among African leaders then jettisoned the idea of forging a united and formidable African front. It was therefore the desire for African Unity and functional integration that saw OAU metamorphosed into African Union (AU) which not only preaches unity and integration but put in place institutions aimed at ensuring the realization of its set objectives.

The Pan-African Passport which ensures visa-free entry of African citizens into the 54 countries within the region is yet another milestone achievement in the drive to regional unity and integration. With the launch of the Pan-African Passport and the 2018 set target for it to be made available to all citizens, a new dawn in African Unity and Integration is already being realized. Though, there exists some teething problems in the implementation of this African project as is normal with all human endeavours, it is recommended as follows:

- That the 2018 date for the Pan-African Passport to be made available to citizens seems ambitious judging from the fact that most African countries do not have the technology to key into the biometric system required, it is recommended that incentives be given to poor African countries to key into this requirement or alternatively the AU takes the task of producing for countries without the required technology.
- While it is understandable that member countries stand to lose revenue as a consequence of the Pan-African Passport, a programme of action should be put in place by the African Development Bank in cushion the effect by giving out interest-free loans to these poor Africans countries.
- The fear of domination by some of the countries within the regional grouping is out of place. This is because given the peculiar colonial legacy of African countries, none will ambitiously or otherwise try to impinge on the soveregnty of another but it is recommended that the AU should guard any form of domination.
- One distinct feature of Africans is the spirit of African brotherhood xenophobia is alien to this way of life among Africans. But all the same, given the high unemployment in Africa, the AU should embark on a lot of political education to nip this trend on the bud.
- Border security should be tightened to curb terrorism in any form. Transparent electoral process and good governance will drastically curb terrorism in Africa.
- AU should put in place a committee to monitor the compliance of member countries to the dictates of the Pan-African Passport.

VI. REFERENCES