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# Overcoming the Development Problem of the Nation-State in Africa through Regionalism

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## ABSTRACT

Regionalism, of which the European Union is a successful example, has also been adopted by several African countries. The economic problems to be overcome here, more often than not include a sparse population, small internal markets, deficient infrastructure and economies vulnerable to fluctuating world prices. A further rationale for regionalism is more explicitly political in nature. Meeting the challenges of African development through a strategy of regionalism has been an enormous task in the past, and while there may be grounds for pessimism, this paper views the future with guarded optimism.

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## I INTRODUCTION

Regionalism, which has been adopted by a large number of African countries as a strategy for meeting the development challenges of the nation-state, has become such a world-wide phenomenon that the post-World War period has been to some extent described as an "era of regional integration" or, as scholars like Haberler would have it, "the age of integration". So much is this the case that nowhere in the world today, do the policy makers and economists tackle any problem of economic development without first taking into consideration theories and trends of economic integration both at home and abroad. For economists and social scientists today, regionalism is an essential aspect of the dynamics of modern society in its continuous process of transformation. Moreover, it is acknowledged as an important factor of economic development in the developing countries and of more rapid growth in the industrial ones.

Linking the concept of regionalism with development has become so important that scholars like John Sloan would prefer to substitute the term "developmental regionalism" for that of regional economic integration, because the latter, they contend, is imprecise, static, and irrelevant to the development issue (Sloan, 1971: 142). In recent economic literature, the terms "integration" or "common

market" have tended to become nearly synonymous with "rapid economic growth", "acceleration of economic development" or "big push". Regardless of the terminology used, there can be no doubt that the process of regional integration is now inextricably linked to that of economic development.

It is against this background and, particularly, following the success of experience of the European Union, that the strategy of regionalism has been regarded by policy makers in Africa to be a highly desirable objective. It is considered to be highly crucial in attaining economic development, promoting regional stability and guaranteeing African influence in international negotiations. Regional aspirations as shared by African leaders and thinkers, academic theoreticians and pragmatic activists alike, reflect a general desire to break the confines of the nation-state, and a denial of all that divides the regions of the continent, including the multiple barriers to the free movement of goods and services, people and capital among countries, and differences in legal, governmental, and educational structures. These regional aspirations also constitute a response to the manifest incapacity of the state to generate development. They thus include a search for solutions extending beyond what existing nation-states appear capable of providing, including better regional infrastructure, better management of the region's resources, increased intra-regional trade and promotion of autonomous regional industrialization.

The strategy of regionalism was given a new lease of life with the adoption, in April 1980, of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos (FAL), which is a historic document that constitutes the first comprehensive continentwide formulation and articulation of Africa's preferred long-term development objectives. The *Plan* is a response to the elusiveness of postcolonial development in Africa, to the shattering of "the African dream", and to the dismal development prospects for Africa in the 1980s. It is in the *Lagos Plan*, described as Africa's economic Magna Carta, that African leaders committed themselves to the "creation, at the national, subregional and regional levels, of a dynamic and independent African economy" and thereby pave the way for the essential establishment of the African common market leading to an African economics community (OAU, 1981). Regionalism, which is discussed in virtually every chapter of the *Plan*, constitutes an integral condition for its implementation.

Ironically, however, experience has made many students of the history of regionalism in Africa pessimists or even cynics. For by 1980, when the *Lagos Plan* was adopted, almost all the regional economic cooperation and integration schemes optimistically launched in the 1960s had become largely moribund. Besides, those groupings established in the 1970s and 1980s have not made

much progress. Thus the first phase of regionalism, which was boosted by the creation of the European Community, did not flourish in Africa.

The striking contradiction between general emphasis on the need for regionalism and the scanty evidence of practical success has raised some crucial questions and provoked debates and exchanges on the concept of regionalism in Africa. Why is there so little progress and such faltering steps in the process of regionalism in Africa? Is it because the African states have failed to see the advantages of regionalism or collective self-reliance? Or, are there some undercurrents which rock the very foundation of regionalism in Africa? What has, in short, gone wrong?

Despite the setbacks in the past and clear indications of current uncertainties the idea of regionalism continues to be popular, while enthusiasm for it is high and actually appears to be rising. Many still believe that the establishment of larger political and economic units in Africa would enhance development and that regionalism is inevitable for the long-term, sustainable and self-reliant development of the continent.

It is not surprising therefore, that following the second wave of regionalism in the early 1990s, the question of economic integration is once again at the top of the policy agenda in almost all the subregions of Africa. This is partly in line with recent worldwide trends towards increasing globalization and liberalization of the world economy and the formation of new, powerful economic and trading blocs such as the single market of the European Union (EU), the US-Canada-Mexico North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the increased momentum of cooperation efforts within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Regionalism in Africa is being looked at again as a way to overcome the marginalisation of the continent in the world economy, to minimise the costs of African market fragmentation, to achieve faster, more diversified and sustainable economic growth that would enable Africa to effectively respond to the challenges of the emerging world of trading blocs, rapid changes in technology, liberalization of the world trade and the globalization of world production. Will the regionalism of the 1990s prove more durable than the regionalism of the 1960s, or will it run the risk of becoming "the latest international fad"? To what extent has regionalism in Africa become an effective instrument of economic decolonization? Or, how has it contributed to the reduction of the age old dependence of the nation-states in Africa on the outside world and created conditions that will make self-sustained autonomous development possible?

This paper does not pretend to provide exhaustive answers to these questions. Neither does it attempt to provide solution to all aspects of the African

development problem through regionalism. Particularly is this the case, as "development" is a loaded, complex and imprecise term which, as David Apter argues, "means many different things to many different people" (Apter, 1987: 7). Regionalism should not be regarded as a single, all-inclusive means of meeting the development challenges of the nation-state in Africa, for there are limits, very great limits, to what it can contribute or accomplish. Economic integration, it has been stressed, is not a panacea for the complex problems of the African subregions. A number of bottlenecks to development cannot be directly affected by regionalism. Accordingly, this paper seeks to examine the extent to which regionalism, as one of the political, security and monetary challenges of the nation-state in Africa. Following this introduction, section II seeks to focus attention on the rationale for regionalism in Africa. Section III provides a critical assessment of the failure of the regional integration schemes. In section IV, policy measures towards the twenty-first century are provided. Section V concludes the paper with a brief summary of the chances of survival of the new regionalism in Africa.

## II THE RATIONALE FOR REGIONALISM IN AFRICA

Let us begin by clarifying some conceptual ambiguities to enable us better appreciate the differences between four major concepts: those of regionalism, regional integration, regional cooperation and economic integration, which have been used almost interchangeably in this paper. Regionalism is taken to represent simply a regional approach to problem solving, including regional integration, regional cooperation or both. The terms "regional integration" and "regional cooperation" have in common the involvement of neighbouring countries in collaborative ventures.

On the other hand, the term "economic integration" is used more restrictively to refer to increased trade and factor flows between neighbouring countries, as a result of trade liberalisation or the coordination of economic activities. The concept of regionalism takes on a predominantly economic slant in the literature, to the point of confusion with that of "economic integration". However, it should not be viewed exclusively in such terms. For regionalism is a multidimensional process which includes not only coordination of economic policies but also political, social, regional security and natural resource management. Simply put, therefore, regionalism is a package rather than a single policy, as Hettne has recently highlighted (Hettne, 1998: 1999-220). It has been aptly said that in Africa regionalism must be sufficiently elastic to accommodate political aspirations and that it is important to marry economic propositions with political dogma (Asante, 1997: 27-8). Why has regionalism been adopted as the strategy for meeting the challenges of African

development? What is the nature of the development challenges that are to be overcome through regionalism?

The case for regionalism in Africa is indisputable and has long been recognised. Since the massive movement towards independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was immediate recognition that, while independence has been the primary goal, African countries were largely artificial by-products of the colonial scramble of the era of the 1984-85 Berlin Conference. The present fragmentation and small African markets emanate from the specific political and economic conditions in which the continent found itself at independence. Africa has the most of the world's mini-states: 9 countries with a population of less than one million and 35 with a population of less than ten million. Only 5 African countries - Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa - have a population of more than 30 million. As Ruth Morgenthau stated a few years ago, "the typical developing African nation has a sparse population, small internal market, limited infrastructure, new and fragile borders, and economies vulnerable to fluctuating world prices" (Morgenthau, 1977: 87). Domestic production for such small markets will be at extremely high cost if economies of scale are of any importance. Without access to the larger market area that could be created by measures of economic integration, it is impossible to see how the economies of these small countries could be developed and diversified. Without access to a larger market for new productive activities, these countries will remain tied to the world economy as producers of primary commodities and importers of manufactures.

Development requires the organization of social and economic activity on a much larger scale than is evident in the African situation. Increased scale brings with it opportunities for a wide range of benefits associated with lower unit costs of production, increased specialisation and competition, access to a wider range of technology, and greater sharing of ideas and experience in all areas of endeavour. Thus the political balkanization of the continent into arbitrary nation-states elicits from Africa the understandable impulse to restructure the fragmented region into a more coherent and stronger economic and political entity. It should be stressed, however, that country size, as Lavergne rightly argues, is "not the sole consideration". A large country that is weakly integrated internally due to poor infrastructure, ethnic rivalries, or socio-political factors may provide fewer opportunities for development than a small country that is well integrated (Lavergne, 1997: vii).

A further rationale behind the adoption of the strategy of regionalism has been more strictly political in nature. It involves the bargaining power of African states *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world. African states have long recognised that acting together in economic groupings enhances their bargaining power with

foreign governments, international institutions, and transnational corporations. Together, they have more to offer or to deny others in terms of size, economic potential, and political weight. Alone, their small size, narrow range of exports, poverty, and reliance on external financing combine to make them weak and vulnerable to the pressures from external powers. Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania, brings this home when he counselled in 1970:

Together, or even in groups, we are much less weak. We have the capability to help each other in many ways, each gaining in the process. As a combined group we can meet the wealthy nations on very different terms, for though they may not need any one of us for their economic health, they cannot cut themselves off from all of us (Nyerere, 1970: 12).

Nyerere re-echoed this important statement in his speech in Accra at the 1997 celebrations marking 40 years of Ghana's independence:

Together, we the peoples of Africa will be incomparably stronger internationally than we are now with our multiplicity of unviable states. The needs of our separate countries can be, and are being, ignored by the rich and powerful. The result is that Africa is marginalised... Unity will not make us rich, but it can make it difficult for Africa and the African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated... (Anyaoku, 1997).

Given this background, it is not surprising that regionalism has been seen as a means of helping the nation-states in Africa to overcome the disadvantages of small size, low per capita incomes, small populations and narrow resources bases, and of making possible a higher rate of economic growth and development. It has also been seen as a means of consolidating the political independence of African countries and thereby strengthening their overall position *vis-à-vis* that of the developed countries, especially the former metropolitan powers. In brief, therefore, regionalism in general is not only desirable, it is necessary if Africa is to industrialise, develop intra-African trade, develop the capacity to participate effectively in the evolving global linkages and interdependence, reduce her vulnerability to fluctuating overseas markets, mobilise and maximise scarce resources of capital and skills, and finally forge the way to effective African unity, both political and economic. It is no wonder therefore that African countries continue to adopt resolutions and declarations on regionalism, as reflected not only in the *Lagos Plan of Action* but also in virtually all recent internal or external action programmes or guidelines for sub-Saharan Africa, such as Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) 1985, the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic

Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) 1986, the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) adopted in 1991 and the Cairo Agenda for Action (1995).

By 1990, 49 African states, with a total population of 465 million, had already regrouped themselves in broader subregional economic communities (Asante, 1997: 34-44), such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) 1975 (Asante, 1986); Southern African Development Community (SADC) 1980; Preferential Trade Area of Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) 1981; Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) 1983; and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) 1989. At present, Africa accounts for about half of the 30 or so subregional and regional cooperation and economic integration arrangements existing among developing countries. How have these regional groupings performed? To what extent have they achieved their objectives of meeting the challenges of African development?

### III AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION SCHEMES

A critical appraisal of the achievements of the existing economic cooperation arrangements should focus attention on the extent to which they have contributed towards meeting the development challenges of the nation-states in Africa. At the purely economic level, the key objective of the economic integration schemes is to expand the opportunities for investment that will profit the African peoples and that will contribute to the mobilization of their underdeveloped resources. To this end, the primary goal should be to reduce the dependence of the African states on the outside world and to create conditions that will make self-sustained, autonomous development possible. In the African setting, such development can only come about through the transformation of productive structures. Have the subregional groupings such as ECOWAS contributed to this type of change? To what extent have they played a vital role in the socio-economic transformation of the African economies and helped alleviate mass poverty through sustained recovery and growth? Why has the success of African economic groupings so far been rather limited, with little or no impact on the economic growth of the co-operating countries? Several issue-areas emerge as particularly relevant to an understanding of the limited progress of regionalism in meeting the challenges of African development.

The first issue-area relates to the approach to regionalism adopted in the majority of the regional integration schemes. The focus of these schemes has been on market integration or, specifically, trade liberalisation, which is

modelled on the classical European Union prototype designed for developed countries, and whose underlying assumptions are far from relevant in the African context. Emphasis is placed on trade integration without addressing adequately the infrastructure and institutional framework which is necessary to facilitate the trade integration process. Since all the African states have primary products to offer with no complementarity between them and since there are no manufacturing or processing industries in Africa to absorb the raw materials, will the mere formation of a payments union or a common market necessarily enhance the flow of trade in Africa? Evidently the traditional or European model of economic integration with its emphasis on integration of markets rather than physical infrastructure and production is inappropriate because of a virtually non-existent industrial base in Africa. It is like "putting the cart before the horse".

The extent of commitment of African governments to the concept of regionalism constitutes a second important issue-area. For economic integration in Africa to succeed in its role as an instrument for fostering the development of the partner states, requires that these countries have a clear sense of their own development objectives and strategies and are fully committed to the pursuit of these goals. In the case of regionalism, the most crucial factor is strong and sustained political commitment to keep to the agreed regional agenda. This makes the African political leaders key figures in cooperation and integration. It is their decisions and commitment to succeed which determine the role of the regional organisations and institutions, as well as that of the private sector and the response of the international community.

Since the establishment of ECOWAS, PTA or SADC, how many member states have drawn up national development plans, strategies or programmes with regional considerations or the regional market as their point of reference? What measures have been introduced by governments as incentives for their business communities to venture into cross-border investments and transactions, and what encouragement are ordinary people offered to think in West, East or Southern African regional terms? Evidently, an integration culture is "not yet conspicuous" in Africa nor is integration accorded the high priority it deserves on national economic agendas (Bundu, 1997: 38). Cooperation agreements have not been internalised in national administrations and development plans. In most African countries, cooperation does not go far beyond signing of treaties and protocols. The objectives of the treaties are not integrated in national development plans or in the sectoral programmes of appropriate substantive ministries.

Besides, no African state has the essential well-structured or viable institutions and managerial skills at the national level for the implementation of the large



and increasingly diverse number of conclusions and recommendations formulated within regional cooperation and integration schemes. Nor is there relevant institutional machinery in place to enable the people, civil societies, employers associations, trade unions, the business community, professional associations, the private sector or agents of socio-economic activity and their organized associations, like the chambers of commerce and industry to find appropriate and adequate channels of participation in economic development activities at the subregional and regional levels.

The institutional deficiencies of the economic communities such as ECOWAS to formulate and carry out policy making functions effectively constitute another disturbing issue-area. The list is impressive. It includes overlapping and often conflicting integration scheme memberships; lack of regional-level monitoring of the implementation of decisions; inadequate resources for independent, practical cooperation and integration activities; poor choice of personnel of the secretariats of the communities with professional positions usually filled on political and geographical representation grounds rather than on experience, technical and administrative competence; poor preparation before meetings, often participation by the wrong people, and little internal consultation between officials and ministers on decisions taken at the regional meetings; and, finally, the lack of follow-up by sector ministries on decisions taken at the summits by Heads of State and Government.

What progress, then, can be expected in this context of weak and ineffective policy instruments and institutions? Even with the necessary political commitment the results of regional cooperation efforts will remain poor if the institutional machinery is not in place. To be sure, unless these issues are addressed, the frequently asserted objective of closer regional cooperation and integration to effectively meet the challenges of development will remain exactly that - an assertion without implementation.

The colonial heritage that continues to influence national institutions and attitudes in political as well as in other fields constitutes yet another important issue-area. The colonial legacy has left many African countries dependent on their former metropolitan countries which tends to work against viable regional groupings as well as maintenance of regional unity. Commercial and political links with Europe, as evidenced, for example, in the European Union Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Lome Convention continue to be more important than links within Africa. Such preferential arrangements undermine the commitment of African countries to integration, as individual countries pursue their more immediate interests through the perpetuation of export-import relations with their former colonial masters (Asante, 1986: 183-221; Asante, 1981). The Lome factor, which constitutes one of the most important

constraints, at least in the long run, on the degree of economic cooperation schemes attainable in Africa had been seen by President Kwame Nkrumah long before the emergence of the Lome regime in 1975. Nkrumah had as early as July 1961 described the Common Market as:

A European scheme designed to attach African countries to European imperialism, to prevent the African countries from pursuing an independent neutral policy, to prevent the establishment of mutually beneficial economic ties among these countries, and to keep the African countries in a position of suppliers of raw materials for imperialist powers (Asante, 1986: 10).

On close analysis, Nkrumah's prophetic statement is not far off the mark. For the linkages of the Lome Convention have to some extent impeded the realization of the self-reliant objectives of the African economic communities and their goal to function as independent autonomous units to overcome the problem of development. There is the difficulty, among other things, in promoting collective self-reliance while the Lome regime is critically geared towards institutionalisation of North-bound vertical orientation of the African economy or Euro-Africanism, symbolising the continuity of an unequal division of labour between Europe and Africa (Asante 1997: 128).

On the whole, except perhaps the modest achievements in the integration of physical infrastructures in the case of ECOWAS and SADC respectively, regional peace and security provided by ECOWAS during the Liberian civil war and the subsequent crisis in Sierra Leone, and the political benefits derived from annual meetings of the political leadership of the various communities which offered opportunities to deal with regional issues of importance that could not easily be dealt with in the much larger annual meetings of the Organization of African Unity or at the bilateral level, it is safe to say that the regional integration arrangements established in the first three decades of independence have not been particularly successful. They have been unable to effectively meet the challenges of development confronting the nation-states in Africa in the area of intra-regional trade expansion through trade liberalisation; cooperation in agricultural and industrial development through harmonisation of sectoral policies; and monetary and financial integration through the establishment of viable clearing houses.

Despite the little progress in promoting regional integration, the emergence of trading blocs in Europe, the Americas and Asia since the early 1990s have created a renewed interest within Africa in revitalising and resuscitating regional groupings. Hence was established the all-important African Economic Community (SADC) in 1992; the revision of the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty in

1993 to enable the Community to adjust itself to the rapidly changing economic landscape in different parts of the world; the transformation of the PTA into the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in 1994; the creation of the French-speaking West African economic and monetary union (UEMOA) and a similar union for Central Africa (CEMAC) in 1994; and finally, the establishment of the East African Cooperation in 1996. What is required are necessary policy measures that would enable these regional groupings to move towards a new direction in order to effectively meet the interlocking development challenges of the brave new world of the twenty-first century.

#### IV POLICY MEASURES FOR THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

To meet the challenge posed by the changing international trading environment of the twenty-first century and to become an active partner in the world economic system, Africa has to move fast towards pursuit of subregional, regional or continental constituency as the best guarantee of its survival in the increasingly competitive world. To this end, new initiatives to speed up the process of regionalism that would enable Africa to participate in the global trends that are going to shape the future of international economic relations, would be required.

##### **Policy Responses to the Emerging Regional Age**

As one of the "best responses" to the growing regionalism in the world, and the increasing liberalisation and globalisation, there is great need for Africa to consolidate and strengthen its programmes for regional cooperation and integration. With a large number of mini-states which collectively account for only a very tiny proportion of world trade, a proportion which has declined even further in the past two decades, there is little doubt that Africa needs regionalism more than other regions. This explains why the strengthening of the integration mechanisms occupies a central position in the *Cairo Agenda for Action* adopted by the African leaders in March 1995 to relaunch Africa's economic and social development (OAU, 1995: xvii). The rationalization and strengthening of the integration organs in the subregions will enhance the capacity of the African countries to respond to the global changes, and arrest the current trend towards their marginalization in the world economy.

New initiatives in the process of regionalism should involve, among other things, first, speeding up the liberalization provisions of the subregional economic communities as well as those of the African Economic Community, so that the objectives of complete liberalization of intra-African trade can be

achieved much sooner than the year 2000 targeted in the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community; and second, promoting new efforts to achieve the harmonisation of macro-economic policies at the subregional level. These responses to the emerging regional age should be buttressed by the removal of internal deficiencies facing the African economic groupings in the broad areas of approach and institutional arrangements and emphasising objectives, policies and instruments as highlighted below.

### **Measures Towards Removal of Internal Deficiencies of Regional Groupings**

#### *i New Approach to Regionalism*

As the market integration approach has proved to be inappropriate in the present African setting, a new approach that would place emphasis on infrastructural integration and integration of production structures rather than on markets would be required. The low levels of development and the limited possibilities for profitable intra-subregional exchange simply do not provide the basis for market integration. There is little purpose in liberalizing trade when the parties have nothing to exchange: regional cooperation, *inter alia*, must create the basis for trade. Otherwise, market integration in Africa will merely be for promoting non-African goods and services.

#### *ii Greater Role for the Private Sector*

Of particular significance is the greater role which enterprises or the private sector should play in the integration process in Africa. With a view to promoting and increasing a more active participation of the business community in the integration process, particularly in trade and industrial cooperation, mechanism should be established in all the economic communities to encourage the participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of regional trade production programmes and products. The experience of Latin American Integration Association and the Association of South-East Asian Nations in involving the regional business community in trade cooperation activities, could be of benefit to economic groupings in Africa. It is encouraging to observe that such new post - 1990 economic communities as COMESA, SADC and the revised ECOWAS have established mechanisms for this purpose.

#### *iii The Need for Action at the National Level*

However important the role of the private sector, there can be no effective regionalism without effective national participation. For the economic schemes to be effective, regional economic relations must be given a central role in the activities of governments, which must adopt an administrative structure that gives to those responsible for pursuing integration the weight and power they must have if they are to succeed. Thus if regional economic schemes are to

yield the expected results, regional cooperation must become an integral part of the national policy making and planning processes. The importance of regional integration requires that a key ministry be established in each country to act as a focal point. It should be mandated to assume the coordination of all forms of regional integration and cooperation and should ensure that national development policies and decisions are cast in a regional perspective.

Regionalism, integration and cooperation, whatever it is called, will not succeed if it is seen as a matter of secondary importance, secondary, say, to the important concerns of relationships with the US, with Britain, with France, with the European Union - and, particularly in recent years, with the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund.

*iv The Need for Strengthening the Institutional Capacity at the Regional Level*

a) Rationalization of the Institutional Framework

The first step to strengthening the economic communities appears to lie in the genuine rationalization of the present institutional framework, with a view to harmonizing the activities of the different subregional groupings and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). This would not only prevent costly duplication, but also establish certainty and a better investment climate.

b) Importance of Community-owned Resources

A second crucial step is to ensure that the institutions of the regional economic communities have enough autonomy and own resources to undertake the tasks assigned to them. An organization to promote integration should have a certain independence from the participating governments so that it can effectively pursue "community" interest rather than the sum of national interests. This independence requires a claim to own resources to carry out the community tasks. "Own" or autonomous resources may take different forms: either a percentage of duties levied on goods traded within the subregion, or a specific tax for economic integration purposes, or a portion of duties levied on goods originating from outside the subregion.

c) Training in the Technology of Regional Integration

Training in the technology of regional integration or human resources development constitutes the third crucial step towards enhancing the capacity of the community institutions. Training of government officials and technocrats at both the national level and the level of secretariats charged with implementing regional policies as well as finding ways to motivate them, are key factors that may help to achieve the objective of regionalism of the new century.

d) Harnessing Information for Regionalism

Information management constitutes the fourth crucial step towards strengthening the institutions of the economic communities. There is an acute lack of awareness of what other African countries can offer to substitute the products presently being imported from developed countries. Institutionalised access to and quick transmission of information on rules and regulations implemented in partner countries and on bureaucratic procedures, publications of standardised statistical data and so on are needed to lay the groundwork for effective regionalism.

## V CONCLUSION: TOWARDS SURVIVAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL REGIONALISM

To enable Africa to move towards sustainable developmental regionalism so as to effectively meet some of the crucial challenges to development, policy measures should be initiated towards the strengthening of the popular base of the process of regionalism. For beyond actions on policy, infrastructure, and institutions lies a more fundamental need: to mobilise the media and educational and cultural institutions to promote the concept that cooperation within Africa is likely to enhance the progress of all African societies. Strong non-governmental participation is a key factor in achieving the goals of regionalism. Successful regional cooperation or integration schemes in Europe and elsewhere have not been the work of governments alone, as Laporte has recently stressed in an illuminating study (Laporte, 1993: 72). They have all benefited from active participation by a wide variety of groups such as trade unions, employers' organisations, and private entrepreneurs, and these groups have ensured that issues of regionalism remain at the top of the political and economic agendas.

To this end, there should be deliberate efforts on the part of the African economic communities to create active, supporting integration constituencies among, in particular, socio-economic groups in the population, chambers of commerce, professional associations, academic bodies, women's and peasant organisations. Of special importance is the instrumental role which the media and the press should play in the popularization of the schemes of regionalism to increase the level of awareness of the largest section of the population about the contribution which regionalism can make to African economic and social developments. Given the requisite enabling environment, the media and the press should inculcate into all segments of the population what one may term an "integration ideology" to stimulate responses from the industrial, commercial, agricultural, labour elite and student leaders.

Trade unions and employers' associations, which are the fundamental social partners in development and democracy must be given adequate recognition in integration matters at national, subregional and regional levels. Their support will be dictated by the fact that it is through common economic effort at the community level that the standards of living may be raised and full employment secured.

Above all, the economic communities in Africa must encourage and devote some of their resources to the foundation of integration journals and promotion of research and seminars in the field of regionalism. Such an undertaking would in no small measure contribute to the broadening of outlook of socio-economic groups in the subregions as well as the enlargement of their regional understanding, all of which would help to create a favourable nationwide climate for the development of integration movement. As a corollary of this, in order to infuse among the younger generation of Africans a tradition of integrative spirit and thinking, a course on regionalism should be taught as an independent branch of study in all research institutes, schools, colleges, and higher institutions in Africa. And to facilitate communication between the various cultural and linguistic groups, the study of French and English, and possibly Portuguese, should be made compulsory in all high schools and colleges. All this would help to create a long-lasting intellectual foundation for the movement towards African Economic Community.

There are indications that the new regional initiatives should succeed where previous attempts failed. The regionalism of the 1990s had several advantages over the previous one. Indeed, the most obvious advantage is that policy makers today have the benefit of hindsight. Many of the new regional initiatives aim to be more outward-oriented and pragmatic. They also appear to be more sensitive to the context in which implementation must take place. A case in point is the provision of a West African Parliament in the 1993 revised ECOWAS treaty and the establishment of the SADC Parliamentary Forum in 1994 to promote grassroots involvement and popular participation in the integration process. This democratic element is essential for the health and survival of the communities, by preventing them from degenerating into mere technocratic and almost bureaucratic construction. This is an important step forward since, to date, issues of regionalism have been left to governments.

The second most obvious advantage of the new regionalism is that both the national and international contents are more conducive to success. At the national level, the widening influence of democracy has created new possibilities for African populations to take more active part in shaping the economic and political landscape. The rise of constitutionalism since the early 1990s, the flourishing civil society and the emergence of parliaments, after years of

marginalization, as key institutions in African governance have provided the much-needed enabling environment for the progress of regionalism in Africa. Recent liberalization measures are lowering the profile of government in the economy and encouraging its adoption of a more positive and supportive role in its dealings with the private sector. This should have a positive effect on the regional integration process, through the reduction of administrative barriers and restrictions to international trade, investment, and migration. More democratic rule should bring about a more stable and congenial political atmosphere, which is a *sine qua non* for regionalism. The establishment of liberal democracy in Africa would also enhance free enterprise, freedom of association, and the free flow of information and ideas, all of which are fundamental to the viability of the economic communities.

On the international level, there is now a more supportive environment for regional endeavours. The first wave of regionalism in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s basically went against the prevailing mood and was generally considered to be inimical to the philosophy of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Today, even traditional sceptics of regionalism are beginning to seriously consider its merits as an instrument for advancing the cause of multilateralism. Another decisive element stems from the intensification of regional links in other parts of the world, which has reinforced the conviction of African leaders that they must unite in order to enable the continent to participate more fully in the new international relationships and to achieve its development objectives.

It should be stressed, however, that regional efforts alone will not be sufficient to meet the development challenges of Africa and to improve its economic prospects. They can certainly not be considered to be a substitute for national economic adjustment, good governance and the strengthening of the human resources. It is, however, clear from the analysis of experiences in Africa and elsewhere that regional efforts can, under certain conditions, yield significant benefits. It is also clear that many development issues not only transcend national development efforts but also induce positive reactions at national level, particularly by creating a more favourable trade and investment climate, and can thus be an important part of the solution to the African development problematics.

Meeting the challenges of African development through regionalism has been an enormous task, and while there may be grounds for pessimism we prefer to view the future with guarded optimism. We would like to conclude that Africa's present efforts at regionalism will succeed, but instead we choose to say that they **must** succeed. To achieve this objective, the people of Africa will have to prove to an increasingly sceptical and cynical world:



... that we have the grit, the will and determination to turn Africa from being a dark continent into a beacon of light; from an economically backward and vulnerable continent into a self-reliant, self-sustaining and prosperous one; and from being the citadel of political instability and social conflict and unrest into one of stability, democracy, social cohesion, national unity and regional integration (Adedeji, 1991: 211).

This constitutes a historic challenge that all of us face. It is a sacred duty that we owe to Mother Africa.

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