

Full Length Research Paper

Encumbrances in African regional integration architecture

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Received 5 July, 2022; Accepted 6 September, 2024

Regional integration forms institutions whose primary objective is political economy cooperation. Governments often see the closer integration of neighboring economies as the first step in creating a larger regional market for trade and investment. This is contended to spur greater efficiency, productivity gain, and competitiveness, not just by lowering border barriers, but by reducing other costs and risks of trade and investment. Regional integration architecture is part and parcel of the present global economic order, and this trend is now an acknowledged future of the international global order. Regional integration arrangements are majorly the outcome of a necessity felt by nation-states to integrate their economies in order to achieve rapid economic development, decrease conflict, and build mutual trust between and among the integrated units. This scenario is, however, threatened by numerous encumbrances that this paper seeks to interrogate using Africa as a case study, hence the scholarly and policy *raison d'être*.

Key words: Encumbrances, regional integration, integration architecture, global economic order, economic development, nation-states, political economy cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The crisis of the post-World War II order led to the emergence of a new global political structure. This made obsolete the classical Westphalian concept of a system of sovereign states to conceptualize global politics. The concept of sovereignty became looser and the old legal definition of ultimate and autonomous power of a nation-state is no longer meaningful. All regional projects during the Cold War were built on the Westphalian State system and were designed to serve economic growth as well as security motives in their assistance to state-building goals.

What is the crisis of post-World War II?

Regional integration is meant to open up nation-states to the outside world and regional economic cooperation is pursued as a means of promoting development through greater efficiency rather than as a means of disadvantaging others. The partner states of regional integration architecture become optimistic that they will succeed in obtaining a free and open global (or regional) environment for trade and investment.

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They opine that regional integration is not an end in itself, but a process of supporting economic growth strategies, greater social equality, and democratization. This rather rosy picture painted about regional integration notwithstanding, this paper contends that African regional integration architecture has, over the decades, faced numerous encumbrances amidst opportunities. This paper is guided by the liberal intergovernmentalism theory. In essence, the paper is based on the following sub-themes: the conceptual and theoretical thrust of regional integration; the encumbrances of African regional integration, namely, the forces of globalization; state hegemonic market competition; xenophobic attacks; terrorism and state security threat paradigm; changing configuration of migrations in Africa; colonial legacy; multiple interests that result in ambitious undertakings; regional infrastructure development; rail, road and pipeline diplomacy; political leadership uncertainty and bad governance; international regimes' interference; COVID-19 pandemic; among others. In approach, the paper is both conceptual and empirical. Methodologically, it is based on document analysis from which conclusions are drawn.

THE CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL THRUST OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Regional integration, according to Nye (1971), is a formal agreement among governments and diplomatic fora to allow for functional cooperation. Feng and Gena (2003), on the other hand, contend that regional integration is an evolution of collective decision-making systems among nations that constrain the national actors from taking independent action. On their part, Kegley and Raymond (2005) posit that regional integration is a dynamic process involving emerging community ties and relationships among sovereign states.

Despite the different terms used to define the same concept, these three scholars and several others, such as Haas (1955), Deutsch (1958), and Punchala (1972), seem to agree on one principle that the effects of globalization stimulate regional integration. Regional integration requires the action of partner states to be brought into conformity with one another through negotiation to facilitate, modify, and influence the belief systems, behavior, and image of others. Thus, the role of partner-states of regional integrated groups in international politics albeit through modified behavior because the regional bloc formed is an autonomous international actor in the international system (Walt, 1998). Through collective action and cooperation among countries, states can obtain some goals and developments in international politics that transcend the traditional interests of diplomacy of the nation-states including the promotion of peace, security, stability, and economic development.

Early attempts at regional integration in Africa began in

the mid-1960s with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The pan-Africanism discourse at the time was about regional cooperation and integration that would transform Africa into a powerful political federation (Nyong'o, 1990). The discourse was an expression of continental identity and coherence, distinguishing regional integration in Africa from other regions in the Global South. However, the more pressing need for regional integration was for economic purposes. As a result, several regional groups were formed, such as the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In 1980, African states adopted the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) to create separate architecture but convergent and over-arching integration architecture in three "sub-Saharan" sub-regions (Okoth, 2015). The architecture was envisaged to lead to an All-African Common Market (AACM) by the year 2025 (Martin, 2002). Regional integration in Africa, however, is encumbered by contradictions stemming from the absence of a clear consensus on the benefits of integration, the lack of political will necessary to make it work, vested interests, the proliferation of a variety of groupings with multiple memberships (Ndung'u, 2003) and other encumbrances highlighted earlier on.

Theoretically, five categories of economic units inform economic integration, namely free trade area, customs union, common market, economic union, and total economic integration. In effect, these five categories are supposed to ensure the free flow of factors of production, harmonization, and unification of economic policies and political institutions for total integration to occur. Therefore, regional integration discourse is anchored on Andrew Moravcsik's theory of liberal intergovernmentalism whose tenets are three-fold. First, states that intensively desire the benefits of cooperation have to concede more to get them. Second, the credit threat of exclusion is likely to generate an even more powerful pressure on recalcitrant states than does the threat of non-agreement. Third, regarding the linkage strategies, the major encumbrance lies in the partner states' domestic distributional implications while concessions often create domestic losers (Moravcsik, 1993). These conceptual and theoretical exposes lead to an interrogation of the encumbrances of African regional integration. This is done according to the sub-themes as indicated earlier on.

THE FORCES OF GLOBALIZATION

The current phase of globalization that was triggered by the end of the Cold War reshaped the discourse on international relations leading to increased

interdependence, economic expansion with increased trade and trade routes, more international investment and production, and international aid and funding. The interdependence of states for commercial purposes requires states to cooperate at any level (Naim, 2009). Thus, globalization has made issues and events in the world today to be omnipresent. This is because it is reflected in many domains of life today. According to Ake (2001), globalization is the march of finance capital everywhere. This is one way of saying that globalization can be equated with imperialism. Finance capital is, indeed, imperialism – a global phenomenon with dire global consequences.

Ritzer (2011:2) defines globalization as, "...trans planetary process or set of processes involving increased fluidity and growing multi-directional flows as well as the structures, they encounter and create." The fluidity here refers to the ease of movement of people, goods, information, etc., to places in the global age. Additionally, many terms have been used to refer to or mean the same as globalization. They include internationalization and liberalization. Internationalism refers to the process of intensification of trans-border interactions and interdependence between states with a common border; for instance, between Kenya and Ethiopia (Shikuku, 2020) or Kenya and Uganda (Wakhungu et al., 2021). On the other hand, liberation refers to the process of removal of government-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods between states to establish an open market economy.

Bayllis and Steve (2001:14) define globalization as, "...processes whereby many social relations become relatively delinked from territorial geography so that human lives increasingly played out in the world a single place". The way people interact today is becoming more and more influenced by social activities taking place in different states. State location and, in particular, state boundaries, do not have many restrictions and meanings today. The globalization process is an ongoing trend whereby the world has become in many respects, and at an accelerating rate, one relatively borderless social sphere (Bayllis and Steve, 2001:15). However, negative aspects of globalization, if not well managed, can become an encumbrance to regional integration.

Indeed, globalization has had negative impacts on both the Global North and the Global South (Mangieri, 2006). Nevertheless, greater negative impacts are on the growing economies and socio-political environment of the Global South, especially African states. For this matter, globalization has made the rich richer and the poor poorer (Bayllis and Steve, 2001). For instance, when the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were prescribed to African states by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s, one of the conditions was to open doors to the free market economy. What African states did not envisage was that the Global

North was seeing markets for its goods and commodities in the African market. Immediately they complied, and their weak manufacturing industries collapsed. Cases in point were the Rivatex and Raymond textile industries in Kenya that closed down due to the flooding of secondhand clothes (Kinyanjui and McCormick, 2002). Unemployment levels rose while despair set in most African states.

International lobby groups in the form of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), human rights groups, and activists funded by the imperialist countries became destabilizers of political leadership in Africa. Leadership conflicts set in and the peaceful environment for the growth of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) was in disarray. Most African countries have not yet fully recovered from the impacts of SAPs (Obare and Heitchiles, 2011).

Encumbrances aside, positive aspects of globalization constitute opportunities for African regional integration architecture. They provide strategies for harnessing technologies that would enhance economies of scale that can be utilized by partner states to establish diversification of production. Through internet connectivity, consumers within the regional blocs would be able to pick their choices made in different countries of the REC and pay in a timely and more inexpensive way. Free trade is encouraged through the removal of trade barriers and the lowering of customs tariffs. This is an aspect of globalization that enables greater interactions between and among people via the trade of goods and provision of services in a situation of total regional integration. In the long run, Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) through multinationals are attracted and the economy gains while geopolitical cooperation flourishes (Ibrahim, 2013; Okoth and Wasike, 2018).

State hegemonic market competition

The influx of multinational corporations (MNCs) that engage in FDIs in some partner states creates competition that stifles relations among the partner states. The case of Kenya's economic performance within EAC makes its economy larger, more dynamic, and more liberal. Kenya's advanced human capital base, diversified economy, a leading edge in the information communication revolution in the region make it better to interlink other member states' economies in terms of investment flows and trade from MNCs (Kimenyi and Kibe, 2014). States compete in international relations to achieve and retain positions of dominance in whatever aspect. Consequently, Kenya has been viewed as fighting hard to retain its dominance in East Africa. This resulted in the aspect of the coalition of the willing in which the nascent troika among Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda could be understood outside the EAC architecture. Thus, Kenya used Tanzania's reluctant position about full integration into the EAC as an important

tool to protect its economic dominance (Tayari, 2013). In retrospect, MNCs are known to have the ability to exploit tax havens in other countries to avoid paying taxes. They are also known for social injustices, unfair working conditions (including slave labor wages, poor living, and working conditions) as well as lack of concern for the environment, mismanagement of resources, and ecological damage (Ahiakpor, 2016; Kedode, 2021). Although they are restricted to commercial activities, they are known to influence political decisions with some directly interfering with regional integration arrangement (RIA) priorities and hence creating poor relationships among partner states (Mwaura, 2016). To an extent, this has been attributed to some multinationals having larger investment budgets than the countries in which they operate.

Xenophobic attacks

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), xenophobia is described as attitudes, prejudices, and behavior that reject, exclude, and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society, or national identity (UNESCO, 2001). It is a global phenomenon.

Xenophobic attacks in the Republic of South Africa against other Africans from other African countries caused the deaths of over forty people and forced others to the tune of tens of thousands to flee from their homes in 2008 (Maathai, 2009:9). SADC is one region in Africa that has developed its institutions for region integration, close to those of EAC and ECOWAS. The economic giant, the Republic of South Africa, moved from apartheid rule three decades ago and joined the SADC. It was viewed as a mover and a hegemonic state by other member states. Its support and contribution to political leadership, economic problems, and security were viewed as promising.

The SADC region is working towards opening up colonial barriers by opening up its borders to encourage the smooth movement of goods, services, and persons within the Southern African region. Citizens of other partner states in Zimbabwe and Namibia for instance, saw economic opportunity in South Africa's booming economy. Thus, many people migrated in search of job opportunities in the mining, production, and service industries of South Africa.

The South Africans felt competition in the job market due to the migrants' inflow into their country, which prompted the Zulu king, Goodwill Zwelithini to declare that the foreigners should go back to their countries because they were changing the nature of South African society (Sikuka, 2015). The statement caused tension that resulted in another series of xenophobic attacks six years later. These attacks on foreigners had drastic effects on SADC's main

objectives of advancing its political and economic freedom in the region. They also had the capacity to derail some of the achievements gained in promoting mutually beneficial cooperation.

Terrorism and state security threat paradigm

The terror attacks in East African states' major capital cities of 1998 had devastating effects (Ploch, 2010:6). The Berlin Wall had come down a decade earlier marking the beginning of a unipolar world where the international regime in the world advocated for liberal democracy. The Al-Qaeda "forces" were building fast enough to stage terror attacks on the only hegemonic power in the world, the US, and in its interests in the world. The international terror group, Al-Qaeda, trained and distributed resources to affiliate Islamic militant groups in the world. They selected states with weak institutions and governance as their training bases. Somalia, ravaged by internal wars for many years, became a very convenient choice. Some states where the influence of the government was minimal were also targeted, especially the Sahel states of West Africa. It is in these areas where the Islamic Militant groups in Africa like the "*Al-Ittihad Al-Ismailia/Al-Shabaab*" in Somalia, *Gama'at Al-Ismailia* in Egypt, *the Boko Haram* in Nigeria, and the *Salafi's* in Sahel region of West Africa would flourish (Demeke and Gebru, 2014).

These terrorist groups, whether within or without the states, have brought about a form of security threat not envisaged by the African states. The Gama's attempted assassination of the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, in 1995 in Addis Ababa, the Al-Qaeda bombings in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam in 1998, the bombings in Kampala in 2010, and the indiscriminate Al-Shabaab's bombings in Kenya of Israeli and the US interests left the security forces disturbed on the approach mechanism. In this regard, the terror threats and attacks that are asymmetrical in nature gave a challenge to the conventional security forces. This is well captured in Kenya where Al-Shabaab has leverage on insecurity, high youth unemployment levels, Islamic religious extremism, radicalization, and some social-ethnic identity nexus (Opondo, 2010; Nzau and Guyo, 2018). Terror attacks make it a fearful and challenging security threat because it is a long-term plan directed at a group, people, or symbol that may not be directly linked to their real target, often the government, system, practice, or ideology (Masese, 2012).

Changing the configuration of mitigations in Africa

In post-colonial African states, peaceful migration patterns have always been known to affect the male gender as they seek employment in the emerging industrial cities of Africa and elsewhere. Feminization of migration is reflected by

the diversification of migration destinations, the transformation of labor flows into commercial migration, and the brain drains from one region (Adepoju, 2004). Notwithstanding human trafficking and the refugees, immigrant flows are the invisible increasing role of regional economic organizations in Africa which are fostering the free flow of labor among states. From the time South Africa gained independence in 1994, there have been influxes of migrants from almost all African regions. The majority of the unskilled labor is from the neighboring states and is mostly street vendors and traders seeking to capitalize on the relatively affluent market of South Africa.

Globalization aspects that give a boost to information flow, FDIs by MNCs attracted by African states, ease of cross-border movements, harsh economic conditions at home, and coupled with rising in girl-child education are contributing to feminist migration to enable support to the family unit (Adepoju, 2004). The cases at hand include the female nurses, doctors, and university lecturers recruited from Kenya to work in Seychelles, Rwanda, South Africa, the UK, and Saudi Arabia (Oyalo, 2015) while those from Ghana and Nigeria prefer migration to Saudi Arabia and European nations.

The man is left back home as the caretaker of the family. This pattern of migration creates new challenges for public policy both for individual states and regional organizations, since the phenomenon is changing the gender role in Africa. Accordingly, the emergence of migrant females as breadwinners exert pressure on the traditional roles within the African family (Adepoju, 2004).

Colonial legacy

The legacy of colonialism in the newly independent states of Africa left the people of Africa and especially the leadership chained to their colonial masters, politically, economically, and socially (Maathai, 2009:25-34). In this regard, the fear of the leadership being hooded from office makes them tend to seek protection by becoming compradors to the former colonial masters. Consequently, African leaders tend to engage their states with bilateral negotiations that see trade agreements that result in the siphoning of raw natural resources to the industries of the Global North. Failure to adhere to this, they are removed from power through covert or overt means. African states have thus remained indebted to the imperialists. They are not only poorly governed but also susceptible to manipulation by their former colonial masters and their MNCs. These imperialist machinations negatively affect African integration.

Multiple interests that result in ambitious undertakings

Regional integration agreements are generally very

ambitious undertakings. The time frames towards deeper integration and to an extent, a political union like in the case of EAC are viewed as a skeptical approach by some members who belong to other regional bodies. Most of the members are unsure which of the regional outfits offers the greatest benefit. This has resulted in a large number of overlapping regional integration groups in Africa to the detriment of the desired objectives (Nyong'o, 1990). In West Africa, the ECOWAS is overlapped by Union Economique et Monetaire Quest Africaine (UEMOA) whose members are largely Francophone states, less Guinea and Mano River Union (MRU). The large ECOWAS regional integration body has similar objectives as these small groupings. In the East and Southern African Region, the COMESA with a membership of twenty-two states has established a Free-Trade Area (FTA) of nine states while others are in the process of joining (Mistry, 2000). It is within this region that SADC and EAC exist. These overlapping sub-regional bodies encumber African regional integration architecture.

Regional infrastructure development

Connectivity challenges in Africa are specific to the region. Infrastructures focus on the transportation network, energy resources and distribution, and Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) resources that interconnect the partner states. The African Development Bank (ADB) views such concerns as the fragility of the country, insecurity, cross-border conflict, governance challenges as well as cross-cutting issues related to gender, the environment, and climate change that constitute encumbrances to regional connectivity (ADB, 2015). Political instability coupled with inadequate and poor regional infrastructure networks, water scarcity, and difficulty in managing shared resources poses integration challenges between the member states in the regional integration organizations in Africa. In this regard, the member states that have no access to the coastline have to depend on the littoral states that are their neighbors for cargo movement through the sea.

Rail, road, and pipeline diplomacy

Regional railway and road networks are not commercially administered to serve the hinterland including the land-locked states. Poor management and maintenance have also left these networks dilapidated over time. Above all, difficulties in trade logistics and regional variations in technical standards pose further transit challenges. In this regard, ADB (2015) observes that major seaports around Africa have dilapidated handling of facilities and equipment, have capacity constraints, and insufficient logistics infrastructure such as container freight stations.

Such challenges have a direct impact on transaction costs, operation costs, the turn-around time of vessels to cargo, and goods pilferage or damage.

During the 2007/2008 post-election violence (PEV) in Kenya, rail transport came to a standstill. Goods from the port of Mombasa en route to Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Eastern DRC, and South Sudan were delayed for several weeks (Opondo, 2014). The road and railway network in Tanzania are worse than the ones in Kenya, hence goods transportation could not be diverted through Tanzania.

The current multilateral agreements between Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda on the construction of a standard-gauge railway (SGR), a pipeline, and the sharing of the oil refinery in Kenya and one being constructed in Uganda have brought stress and strain on the EAC members. Other partner states that are not part of the deal observed the development within the community with a prism of non-exclusion; hence the new terminology in the EAC among members of the "Coalition of the Willing," which comprise Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, were invited as interested parties in the Northern Corridor Integration Projects (NCIP) (Were and Opondo, 2018:340).

This has resulted in Tanzania seeking multilateral agreements with Uganda on the railway and road interlink between Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala and the pipeline linking Hoima in Uganda and the Port of Tanga in Tanzania. Hence, this can be viewed as uncoordinated infrastructure network development within the region resulting in unnecessary competition. According to Booth et al (2007), each partner state has its ambition, which is not healthy for the EAC.

Political leadership uncertainty and bad governance

These are major encumbrances to deeper integration in most of the regions in Africa. Either there is political strife after presidential elections or there is a manipulated election to ensure that the status quo remains in political leadership (Nasong'o, 2017). Some state leaders have been clinging to power for a long period; a case study of such is Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who has monopolized power since the year 1986. Political and civil strife mark political elections in most African countries. These result in the consumption and destruction of resources that could otherwise have been channeled into productive national economic efforts, needless to say, regional integration efforts. It is not possible to be sure of how states in Africa will be without the incumbent presidents. This kind of uncertainty results in fear of other states engaging in bilateral and multilateral understandings. Indeed, as Wanyama (2017:37) has observed, "...authoritarian, autocratic and tyrannical tendencies in the political leadership adversely affect the development process." This means that development in

African countries are dependent on democratic governance which is a panacea for regional integration architecture.

Africa is considered to be among the richest continents in the world. It is not only endowed with mineral resources, oil, and gas but also flora and fauna. It is a vast continent with immense potential and with a large young population. However, even after gaining self-rule from the colonialists, African states are still among the most poverty-stricken in the world. This makes most of these states to be insecure from within. National security entails the safety of nations against threats such as terrorism, war, or espionage, which make people live in a state of fear and danger (Williamson, 1992). Conflicts within African states are just far too many for an effective continental response. The humanitarian crises that have been caused by these conflicts have left some states to be very weak, while others are failed states or are on the brink of being termed failed states. The basis for the collective action against genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity made Africa decide to develop the already mentioned African Standby Force (ASF) architecture that is regionally based. Its basis is the responsibility to protect given the unpredictable nature of conflicts and instability in the current African policy climate. The ASF architecture has been viewed as a sustainable continental security mechanism for Africa's development and positioning on the global stage (Farah et al., 2013).

The security architecture is based on regional organization (Onditi and Okoth, 2016). Unfortunately, the African Standby Force entity based on the region has a challenging management structure given the countries' multiplicity of regional organizational affiliations. These are detrimental to African regional integration architecture.

International regimes' interference

The African Union's goal is to achieve a continental integration agenda through the African Economic Community (AEC) by the year 2028. This will enable the African states to consolidate their resource power under one huge organization the AEC in the making, then the West-East economic power equations of dealing with African states will change.

Therefore, the West with its control of the international regimes like donor aid under the WB and the IMF may be used to maintain the economic equations status quo. The deepened and calculated use of international regimes is beyond the eyes of the African leadership. One aspect considered here is the application of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC is the first permanent international court established as a court of last resort to bring an end to impunity for the most serious crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and crimes of aggression (Majany et al., 2016:4248). In

this regard, the ICC has indicted several presidents and other dignitaries from Africa (Majany et al., 2016:4248). Contrary to the international norm, the seating presidents are neither exempted from the litigation process nor to be indicted while in office.

The case of the Kenyan president, his deputy, and a journalist, who got indicted by the ICC before assuming office, saw major international powers at play. A US diplomat in reference to election outcomes threatened Kenyans with the consequences of their choices (Brown and Radiate, 2014). On the other hand, the UK government is known to use the ICC to exert its powers and influence on Africa and in particular Kenya through the ICC cases (Griffiths, 2012). Britain colonized Kenya and is a major export of Kenyan agricultural products while Kenya is a choice of destination for British tourists. Above all, Britain is a signatory to the Rome Statue while the US is not. Currently, Kenya is an emerging hegemony in the EAC and is a leading nation in the EAC political federation. The stir by the Western powers' threat and a former colonial master caused unease in the EAC region. The jitters percolated into the regional integration when two nations Tanzania and Burundi dragged their feet to the EAC transport network major projects resulting in the coalition of the willing. The theory of hegemony suggests strong leadership from one of the states is necessary to drive the construction of a regional agenda. Thus, it can be argued that this was an opportunity for the EAC to realize its dream, but the Western powerful states had an opportunity to preempt the EAC agenda. In 2015, continuously the African Union and the African leaders discredited the retrospective application of *Rule 68 of the ICC* (Majany et al., 2016), which recanted statements of the witnesses were to be brought to the fore in prosecuting Kenyan ICC cases. The cases were terminated even though new filings to the ICC by Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, allege scuttling of poll-election violence (Menya, 2021a:8-9). However, the new accusations, grave as they are, add no prosecutorial value to the already terminated case (Menya, 2021b:8).

On a different front, the Paris Creditors Club under the IMF has continuously provided donor aid to African countries, but the funds have never had an impact on poverty reduction since donor aid has always been given with conditionality. The SAPs had conditions that left many African nations with devastated economies. On the other hand, in 2014, the Paris Creditors Club and the IMF released a report on debt relief referred to as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MLDRI) (IMF HIPC Initiative and MDRI, 2014). Thirty-five countries of the HIPC, most of them from Africa, benefited from this relief initiative but to the detriment of African regional endeavors.

In the realist theoretical view, the international system is anarchical where states compete for power through amassing resources in a self-help system. True to the

action of the most powerful nations was debt relief. However, this action had a negative impact on the regional organizations to which some of the nations belonged. The initiative resulted in some kind of ranking of countries within the regional blocs. Initially, the countries that got relief had negative feelings, thereby relegating the regional agenda to the periphery (Trademark East Africa, 2014). This is "How the First World Starves Africa" (Chesoli, 2021:16).

COVID-19 Pandemic

Although regional integration has long been seen as a cure for social, economic, and political imbalances, especially as weaker states benefit from the advantages derived from the large economies of scale, a scan of projects in the pre-corona virus disease pandemic, which hit the world in the year 2019, hence the acronym COVID-19 period reveals that the anti-integration narratives were slowly gaining traction. From President Donald Trump's "America First Approach" to the 2016 Brexit, disintegration talk has inevitably been thrust to the topic of the agenda of academic and policy discourses.

Integration projects in Africa, including the EAC, have not been insulated from such sentiments. These nationalistic tendencies have grown two-fold during the COVID-19 pandemic with states opting to look inwards as opposed to pursuing a cooperationist approach to addressing the immediate exigencies of the pandemic. Therefore, it is in this regard that the COVID-19 pandemic becomes an encumbrance in African regional integration architecture.

Tension among the partner states, largely due to competing national interests, is not new. The disjointed or uncoordinated response to the pandemic across the continent in general and the EAC bloc, in particular, has exposed deep-seated fissures that warrant immediate redress. Thus, in the post-pandemic context, African leaders should prioritize regionalization over parochial nationalism (Kwinda, 2021:15).

The European Union's (EU's) COVID-19 experiences show how cooperation is vital 'in sickness and in health'. It exposed just how dependent partner states and institutions are on one another's effectiveness. The EU Commission has been coordinating joint European procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) and procurement of vaccines and also enhancing the powers of the European Health Emergency Response Authority in stockpiling medical supplies.

The EU provides lessons for African regional integration blocs as far as rethinking their trajectory is concerned. Top on the list, by jointly testing for the coronavirus, joint implementation of the health and hygiene protocols, as well as vaccine procurement and collaboration in enhancing health emergency preparedness. Collective

action is therefore the way to go for African regional integration blocs in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic (Kwinda, 2021:15).

Besides, world leaders in late March 2021 pushed for a new international treaty to prepare for the next global pandemic and avoid the unseemly scramble for vaccines hampering the COVID-19 response (AFP, 2021:25). The treaty would aim to ensure that information, virus pathogens, technology to tackle the pandemic, and products such as vaccines are shared swiftly and equitably among nations. Without an internationally coordinated pandemic response plan, African countries, in particular, remain vulnerable. That is why it was realistic for the new Tanzanian President, Samia Suluhu Hassan, to acknowledge that the country's COVID-19 policy championed by her predecessor, Dr. John Joseph Pombe Magufuli, had isolated it from the rest of the world, thereby signaling a policy shift from that of her predecessor.

Tanzania's stance on COVID-19 has baffled not just its fellow EAC partner states, but the entire world. While many countries insisted on wearing masks in public spaces, washing or sanitizing hands, and keeping distances, Tanzania under the Late Magufuli, a scientist, did not make it compulsory, and sometimes those wearing masks were chided (Mutambo, 2021:40). Tanzania failed to publish data on infections, deaths, or recoveries, and did not buy vaccines despite a plea in February 2021 by the World Health Organization (WHO) to Dr. Magufuli to relax the rules. In the words of WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom:

I renew my call for Tanzania to start reporting COVID-19 cases and share data, I also call on Tanzania to implement the public health measures that we know work in breaking chains of transmission and to prepare for vaccination (Mutambo, 2021:15)

WHO argued that the policy laxity had meant that many Tanzanians traveling abroad unchecked were recording positive cases at their arrival ports, forcing neighbors like Kenya to tighten surveillance. The Kenyan government pronounced that although it would shut down its border with Tanzania, arrivals from Tanzania would, as a requirement, need a negative test in order to be allowed to enter Kenya, a scenario that did not bode well for EAC regional integration architecture. However, to the relief of the people of the two countries, the situation was rectified following the state visit of President Suluhu to Kenya in early May 2021, when the two Heads of State directed their responsible ministers to meet to discuss and establish simplified systems for facilitating the testing and timely issuance of COVID-19 results to ease the movement of people, goods, and services across the common border (Wafula, 2021). This is the direction all other partner states in East Africa in particular, and Africa generally, should follow in order to boost the regional integration project.

CONCLUSIONS

Encumbrances in African regional integration are real. They are both practical and tangible, especially with the phenomenon of globalization whose dynamics have transformed not only Africa but the entire world. This can be viewed via state security threats that originally emanated from other states regionally and globally. Threats to state security in the contemporary world especially in Africa have become asymmetrical, either due to resource-based conflicts, political grievances, nationality tensions, or extremist and terrorist activities within or without African regional integration blocs. These forms of asymmetrical threats to state security in Africa have caused a paradigm shift in the mitigation approaches. The establishment of Africa Peace and Security Architecture and the advent of peace and security sectors within the regional bodies explain this aspect.

On the other hand, the configuration of immigration in Africa which is reflected by the feminization of migration due to the diversification of migration destinations and transformation of labor, *inter alia*, is shifting from the traditional ways, hence affecting the African family gender role. However, migration within the African regional integration blocs has been boosted by infrastructural development as well as positive and negative globalization effects. These aspects negate efforts at African regional integration as partner states accuse one another of mishandling their citizens.

Besides, uncertainty in political leadership and bad governance, interference from external forces, and the COVID-19 pandemic aggravate the situation. The tendency of African leaders to cling to power by manipulating constitutions that permit them to continue the misrule of their countries does not help in the agenda of regional integration. This is especially in the case where those African states that practice a semblance of democracy via popular elections and smooth transfer of power feel jittery about cooperation with those whose leaders harbor dictatorial tendencies or are outright dictators who trample upon the human rights of their citizens and monopolize state resources via corruption, nepotism, marginalization of sections of their people, etc.

The situation is exacerbated by interference by MNCs, their national governments, the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the Paris Club which are composed of powerful states from the Global North. Their intervention fuels conflict, instability, dependency syndrome, and underdevelopment in Africa. Furthermore, of late, African regional integration architecture has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic via the nationalistic tendencies of African states and the vaccine imperialism of the Global North. Rather than African countries coming together through their regional blocs to address the malaise of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are taking different and disjointed directions in handling the pandemic. For example, every

country is importing vaccines from China, India, Russia, the UK, and the USA. In turn, the latter countries take advantage of the situation to determine the quantity of vaccines they can part with hence the vaccine imperialism. Not much is heard of joint efforts by African countries to develop and eventually use their vaccines and yet this is an area in which African scientists would team up through joint research and contribute not only to the African countries but to the entire scientific global community.

Finally, encumbrances in African regional integration architecture provide opportunities for the continent. This is especially true in terms of re-engineering the integration project from the bottom-up, rather than vice versa as is currently the case. Additionally, positive borrowing and learning lessons from the EU, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), among others, should form, the hallmarks of the revamped African regional integration blocs.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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