African Union and the Economic Integration Policy of Africa: An Assessment of Agenda 2063

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Abstract

This paper assesses the role of the African Union in the economic integration of Africa with special focus on the Agenda 2023. African Union, since its formation -- from the days of the Organisation of African Unity(OAU) to its current form -- has taken several steps to ensure total continental integration and development. To this end, a number of frameworks have been earmarked to help lead Africa on the right track. The continent boasts of sub-regional economic commissions (RECs), all geared toward Africa achieving economic integration for a wider continental development. The current framework is the Agenda 2063 with multiple aspirations, hopes to propel Africa towards development. The attainment of these aspirations faces several challenges, which this paper tried to assess. The paper utilised the qualitative research method, making use of secondary source of data. It identified and analysed some challenges such as lack of inclusiveness and participation, high poverty rate, bad governance, demography, gender inequality, corrupt and insincere leaders, low financial capacity of member states, the negative

effects of COVID-19, human capital flight and external debt burden as factors threatening the attainment of the aspiration for Africa development. It equally looked at some derivable prospects that Africa stands to gain from such integration. The paper also made some recommendations on how to overcome these challenges.The paper recommended that African Union Commission (AUC) should explore other models of integration and that the contents of the Seven-Point Aspirations of the Agenda 2063 be communicated downwards to ensure maximum grassroots support.

Keywords: Africa, African Union, Agenda 2063, Integration, Economic Integration, Development, Challenges and Prospects

Introduction

Societies and the world economy are never static. Forces of change continually sweep through regions of the world and influence them in numberless ways. In recent decades one of the most important of these forces has been the on-going evolution of the world capitalist system, which has led to the rise of globally-integrated production and systems (Brunt, 1990: 4). Africa constitutes a coherent geographic mass teeming with resources – both human and material. In terms of landmass, Africa is the second largest of the world's seven continents, covering 23 per cent of the world's total land area (30 million square kilometres). Africa houses the major diamond-producing counties in both gemstones and industrial diamonds with an estimated 30 per cent of the world's base metals; approximately 15 per cent of the world's copper and 70 per cent of gold (Anold, 1997:7).

Since becoming politically independent, African countries have made efforts to, individually, address the economic and social challenges they all face, but with limited success. This limited success has been partly attributed to a number impediments, which include lack of good governance and an overall unfavourable international economic order. In order to improve their development performance, African leaders have increasingly been convinced that they must act collectively. A move towards bringing this dream into reality started with the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. The body was brought about for the sole purpose of emancipating Africa from the grips of colonial powers and to forge the unity of African States. As part of the reasons for

it establishment, Akindele said the establishment of the OAU was a significant advance for the African Revolution in so far as it erected what looked then like 'a firm' for a possible future take-off into the realms of Nkrumah's 'United States of Africa' (Akindele, 1988). The OAU was seen as 'the joy of transnational order-building in Africa'. In July 2002, however, OAU transformed into African Union (AU), once again with the major mandate of fostering regional integration for Africa. The major aim of founding the AU is to promote political and economic integration among its 53 member nations, enhance and development growth, eliminate poverty and bring Africa into the global economy (Ohia, 2009). The small, sparsely populated, fragmented, and often isolated economies across Africa make a compelling case for these economies to integrate regionally to reap efficiency gains, exploit economies of scale, and reduce the thickness of border (Melo and Tsikata, 2014).

The quest for Africa integration and development is not a contemporary issue. It began with the Pan African movement back in the days of struggles for independence. This movement, though, championed the struggle of Africans and peoples of African descent for emancipation and the restoration of their dignity, against slavery, colonialism and all forms of racism and racial exploitation. To that extent, the initial aim for the struggle was specifically geared towards decolonisation of Africa from the western grip and subsequent enthronement of self-rule. This force and passion for freedom led to the founding of the OAU in 1963. The OAU had a mandate to pursue in entirety political and socio-economic African independence with the hope of propelling development of Africa (AUC), 2015). Member States put their differences aside and focused on African unity which influenced the charter of the OAU. The policy organs and strategies of OAU consequently went undeveloped and not fully implemented. As a result of this and other challenges the African Economic Community (AEC) and OAU were transformed into the African Union (AU). (AUC, 2015).

Although the initial thrust of African struggles were aimed at securing political freedom, the subsequent integration efforts were geared towards economic integration with emphasis on propelling development. The AU, since its transformation has taken several steps to ensure total continental integration and development. The OAU had initiated commendable programs such as the Lagos

Plan of Action, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights drafted in 1981; Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) in 1985, The Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (EAC), known as the Abuja Treaty, in 1991; The Sirte Declaration of 1999; The 2000 Solemn Declaration on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation of the African continent; the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2000 and in 2013 the adoption of Agenda 2063, with its seven aspirations for the development of Africa.

These Seven Aspirations of the Agenda 2063 reflect the desire for shared prosperity and well-being of African people through unity and integration of the whole continent with citizens who are free to expand their horizons, where the full potential of women and youth are realised, completely free from fear, disease and want. The Africa of post-colonial era is sometimes seen as a conflict-ridden continent owing, some may say, to the legacy of colonial masters. Vestiges of colonialism and persistent economic, social and political crises have greatly contributed to the disintegration of public order. The collapse of functional governments in a number of countries in the continent, the personalisation of power and leadership and the manipulation of ethnicity and religion to serve personal or narrow group interests have fomented inequalities, grievances and conflicts. Naturally there can be no meaningful development in the face of perennial conflicts (ECA, 2004:67-68). Countries, especially in sub-Sahara Africa have experienced several conflicts – some intense, others less intense. A number of countries in West and Central Africa have become boiling cauldrons of tension and conflict. Development in countries such as Chad, Congo, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Zaire had been thwarted by economic, political and social crises for periods lasting as long as 10 years or more. Many of these countries have experienced or are experiencing situations of armed conflict and prolonged insecurity (UN, 2005:45).

Regional integration in Africa, it is believed, can play a vital role in diversifying economies away from dependence on the export of just a few mineral products; to delivering food and energy security; to generating jobs for the increasing number of young people; to alleviating poverty and delivering shared prosperity. The paper (with special attention to Agenda 2063) seeks to highlight the probable challenges that Africa might encounter *en route* economic integration as well as the

possible prospects derivable from such integration. The paper relied exclusively on secondary source of data, mainly published books, the Internet and journals articles related to the study. Qualitative evaluation was utilised to analyse the data collected based on which conclusions were drawn and recommendations proffered.

Literature Review

Africa is the second largest continent behind Asia with the total land area covering approximately over 30 million square kilometres. The continent is said to be one of the richest and well-endowed continents in the world, teeming with over 1 billion people (African Union, 2017). Despite these facts, Africa has remained marginalised in global affairs due to non-integrated and fragmented national borders with conflicting policies on matters of common interests.

Integration as a concept is the act of bringing together different smaller components into a single system that would function as one for the benefit of all the components. Regional integration allows countries to overcome these expensive divisions integrating goods, services and factors' markets, thus facilitating the flow of trade, capital, energy, people and ideas. Regional integration can be promoted through common physical and institutional infrastructure. Economic integration therefore could be described as the process whereby countries within a particular region come together and cooperate with each other to strengthen their respective economies through a variety of ways. Regional integration as a strategy of collective economic survival of nations around the world with the options of promoting the best areas of specialisation among participating nations Bala (2017: 24). The Asian Development Bank (2013) posits that regional integration embodies both geographical and political dimensions. It is geographical in nature as it pertains to a specific region, and political in essence as it encompasses the judicious allocation of resources across member states within the bloc.

The first major blueprint for Africa's development – the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, adopted more than four decades ago set out to achieve an integrated African market by the year 2000. It was given further impetus by the Abuja Treaty approved in 1991 but came into force in 1994. According to this Treaty, the African Economic Community (AEC) would be in place by 2028. Some

of its milestones would include strengthening of existing regional economic communities (RECs)and the formation of new ones (between 1994 and 1999); stabilisation of existing tariffs, and integration and harmonisation of economic sectors (1999 to 2007); establishment of a free trade area and customs union (2007 to 2017); harmonisation of tariff systems across various RECs (2017 to 2019); the creation of a common African market and harmonisation of monetary, financial, and fiscal policies; and the establishment of a pan-African economic and monetary union which was expected to come into effect between 2023 to 2028 (Qobo, 2007). In January 2012, AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government discussed the Framework, Road Map and Architecture for Fast-tracking the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Action Plan for Boosting Intra-African Trade. In their commentary on the establishment of the AfCFTA agreement, the Heads of State expressed their conviction that it would engender the most expansive free trade area globally. They articulated the aspiration that the number of nations participating in the initiative possessed the capacity to elevate 30 million individuals out of extreme poverty by 2035. However, realising its full potential would hinge on the implementation of substantial policy reforms and the establishment of robust trade facilitation measures (AU, 2012).

The establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) is seen as a major milestone in the long march to African integration. As foreseen in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (commonly known as the Abuja Treaty), which entered into force in 1994, the integration process was to culminate in the African Economic Community. The CFTA aspires to liberalise trade between African countries across the continent and to build on the considerable successes already achieved within Africa's regional economic communities (RECs). By doing so, the CFTA was set to facilitate intra-African trade; foster regional value chains that can facilitate integration into the global economy; and energise industrialisation, competitiveness and innovation, thereby contributing to African economic and social progress and development. These issues have been the focus of several earlier editions of the Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA) series, notably ARIA V, which made the case for a CFTA. (UNECA, AU and ADB, 2017:11)

Theoretical Framework

In the quest to understand the principle of integration in Africa, various scholars have anchored different theories to give a scientific perspective of the concept of integration. Among these theories are; Modernisation Theory, Dependency Theory, World Systems Theory and the Globalisation Theory.

For the modernisation theorists, the major challenge of the Third world countries is that of moving them from their traditional and rural level of development to the modern industralised stage. The rationale behind this assertion lies in the perspective of modernisation theorists, who contend that every society traverses distinct stages of development. Modernisation denotes a paradigm of progressive transition from a "pre-modern" or "traditional" state to a "modern" society. Modernisation theory posits that a significant challenge confronting many Third World countries is their deficiency in resources, skilled human capital, and the sluggish pace of economic growth. Additionally, these nations grapple with pervasive corruption, elevated rates of illiteracy, widespread poverty, rampant nepotism, a high prevalence of disease, and, crucially, the absence of a robust institutional framework. The myriad of challenges confronting them have led modernisation theorists to focus their efforts on devising strategies to elevate these societies from their current state of decline to a more advanced and developed condition (Mbah and Ojukwu, 2019: 18).

Dependency theory posits that the condition of underdevelopment of Third World countries is precisely the result of the incorporation of their economies into the capitalist world system which is dominated by the West and North America (Randall and Theobald 1998:120). Consequently, dependency signifies a scenario in which a specific nation or region is reliant upon another for sustenance or survival and advancement. The term "third world countries" refers to the economically underdeveloped nations of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America. These are regarded as a collective entity sharing common characteristics, such as pervasive poverty, elevated birth rates, and economic dependency on more advanced nations. Consequently, this designation suggests that the third world is subject to exploitation by the global North and that its future is inherently revolutionary (Emeh, 2013).

In his book *The Modern World System I*, Wallerstein (1974) ardently underscores the pivotal role of international trade in elucidating the entrenched injustices faced by less-developed societies. As a result, the interplay between the exportation of raw materials and the prevalence of non-democratic regimes, alongside economic underdevelopment, significantly undermines the developmental trajectories of nations that are predominantly raw material producers.

For the purpose of this paper, however, we shall adopt the Globalisation Theory. Globalisation is a developmental framework that emphasizes a global mechanism fostering enhanced integration, particularly within the realm of economic transactions. It is fundamentally an economic phenomenon characterised by interaction and integration, which is intricately linked to social and cultural dimensions. This theory presents a United States and Euro-centric perspective of development, specifically marked by the proliferation of capitalism across the globe. The primary focus of Globalisation theory lies in communications and international affiliations, with these connections aimed at cultural and economic factors within communication systems.

Globalisation Theory explains inequality by identifying the cultural and economic dimensions inherent in global interconnectedness (Reyes, 2001). Reyes posited that the term "Globalisation" encompasses two principal interpretations. The first pertains to the concept as an event, wherein a sense of interdependence manifests across various nations through diverse facets of communication, trade, and finance. The second interpretation regards Globalisation as a theoretical framework for economic development, premised on the notion of extensive unification among disparate countries. This dimension of integration is purported to exert a significant influence on economic advancement and the enhancement of social indicators. It is this second interpretation that is the focus of this paper.

Zineldin believes that globalisation tends to create, rather than solve problems in developing countries. He traces the origin of such problems to developing countries competing rather than cooperating with each other. Religion can affect Globalisation in exactly the same way that culture can, because some religions believe that cooperation is sometimes based on piety and goodness and advises shunning malice and devilish deeds (Zineldin 2002).

Globalisation Theory elucidates the reality that communication is proliferating daily, facilitating an increasingly effortless interaction among nations; this phenomenon transcends governmental affairs and permeates the public sphere as well (Reyes, 2001; Stiglitz, 2004).

Agara and Osawe contend that globalisation presents the potential for modernity by liberating market forces, enhancing electoral practices within democratic frameworks, facilitating technological transfer, and fostering international collaboration, thereby supporting global tranquility and the absence of warfare, as well as national self-determination liberated from the constraints of traditionalism. Such interrelations manifest not only at a high level among developed nations but are also increasingly intensifying among less developed countries. This form of communication empowers impoverished nations to adopt innovative technologies and seize opportunities to engage in global competitions. Further substantiating this theory, the issue of integration within Africa has become enmeshed with these indicators of globalisation, which encompass culture, norms, and the aspiration to embrace technology, among others. Our comprehension of the subject will be further enriched by identifying the existing gaps as we endeavor to analyse the cultural disparities that impede the attainment of cultural integration (Agara and Osawe (2012: 179).

Agenda 2063 of the African Union

To facilitate Africa's attainment of these ambitious objectives, it is imperative to fortify the sub-regional economic blocs. In alignment with the Pan-African vision, the Agenda 2063 delineates seven pivotal aspirations that are poised to propel Africa to new heights. These seven aspirations, along with their corresponding goals, are discussed below:

Aspiration 1: A flourishing Africa characterized by inclusive growth and sustainable development, with the objectives of:

- Achieving elevated living standards, eradicating poverty and disparities; generating employment opportunities, particularly for the youth; addressing the challenges posed by rapid urbanisation, and enhancing access to essential services such as water, sanitation, and electricity; ensuring social security and protection.

- Cultivating a well-educated populace and fostering a skills revolution underpinned by science, technology, and innovation, while developing Africa's human and social capital through an educational and skills revolution that emphasizes science and technology.
- Promoting the health of citizens by enhancing healthcare accessibility, particularly for women and girls.
- Transforming economies and employment landscapes in Africa through the beneficiation of natural resources, manufacturing, industrialization, and value addition to elevate productivity and competitiveness.
- Advancing modern agriculture to boost productivity and output; fundamentally transforming African agriculture to empower the continent to achieve food self-sufficiency and emerge as a significant net food exporter.
- Harnessing the Blue/Ocean Economy to accelerate economic growth by capitalizing on the vast potential of Africa's marine resources.
- Fostering environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities by implementing strategies to sustainably manage the continent's rich biodiversity, forests, land, and waters, primarily utilising adaptive measures to mitigate climate change risks (African Union Commission, 2015).

Aspiration 2: A cohesive continent, politically unified and grounded in the principles of Pan-Africanism alongside the vision of Africa's Renaissance, with the objective of attaining:

- A united Africa (Federal/Confederate) aims to expedite progress towards continental unity and integration, fostering sustained growth, trade, and the exchange of goods and services, alongside the free movement of people and capital through the establishment of a United Africa. This initiative seeks to accelerate economic integration via the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA).
- World-class infrastructure will traverse the African continent, enhancing connectivity through innovative and ambitious initiatives designed to link the continent by rail, road, sea, and air. Additionally, the development of regional and continental power pools, as well as advancements in information and communication technology (ICT), will be prioritized.
- Decoloniation will eradicate vestiges of colonialism, liberating African territories. Measures will swiftly end unlawful occupation of Chagos

Archipelago and Comorian Island of Mayotte, affirming self-determination for people of Western Sahara.

Aspiration 3: An Africa characterised by exemplary governance, vibrant democracy, unwavering respect for human rights, equitable justice, and the steadfast rule of law, with the ultimate objectives of achieving:

- Consolidating democratic values, practices, and universal principles of human rights by enhancing the quality of governance, fostering respect for human rights, and upholding the rule of law.
- Capable institutions and transformed leadership in place at all levels by building strong institutions for a development state; and facilitating the emergence of development-oriented and visionary leadership in all spheres and at all levels (AUC, 2015).

Aspiration 4: A peaceful and secure Africa, with the goals of attaining:

- Peace, security, and stability achieved through governance, accountability, and transparency are essential for a peaceful Africa. Dialogue-centered conflict prevention and resolution should lead to silent firearms by 2020. Peace education will promote a culture of peace and tolerance among Africa's youth.
- A stable and harmonious Africa will be realsed by reinforcing mechanisms for peace and reconciliation at all strata, while simultaneously addressing emerging threats to the continent's peace and security.
- The establishment of a fully operational and functional African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) will be achieved by devising strategies that enable the continent to finance its security requirements (AUC, 2015).

Aspiration 5: An Africa characterised by a robust cultural identity, a shared heritage, and collective values and ethics, with the objective of attaining:

- Africa's cultural renaissance is paramount in fostering the spirit of Pan-Africanism; harnessing the continent's abundant heritage and cultural wealth to ensure that the creative arts emerge as significant contributors to Africa's development and transformation; and safeguarding and revitalising Africa's cultural patrimony, including its myriad languages.

Aspiration 6: An Africa whose development is propelled by its populace, harnessing the intrinsic potential of its citizenry—particularly its women and youth—while fostering the well-being of children, with the ultimate aim of actualising:

- Full gender equality can be realised by empowering African women through the promotion of gender parity across all domains. This necessitates the eradication of discrimination and violence against women and girls. Every African citizen will engage in decision-making processes, fostering a continent that is inclusive, where no individual is marginalized based on gender, politics, religion, ethnicity, locality, age, or other factors.
- By actively involving youth through the creation of avenues for self-actualisation, healthcare, education, and employment, we ensure the safety of children and nurture early childhood development throughout Africa.

Aspiration 7: Africa as a formidable, cohesive, and influential global actor and collaborator, with the objective of attaining:

- Africa enhances its global stature by partnering in global affairs and co-existing harmoniously.
- Africa takes full accountability for financing its development by enhancing partnerships and aligning them strategically with African priorities. It is crucial for the continent to devise appropriate strategies to finance its own development and reduce reliance on external aid.

Historically, the initial notion of Africa's integration was predominantly of a political character. However, as the decades progressed, African leaders have increasingly become cognizant of the fact that to realize economic development, they must act in unison. Although the issue of economic integration that Africa has wrestled with has been pursued with fervor, it appears that the continent is ensnared in a relentless cycle of ambitious projects and ideas that may impede the realisation of the seven aspirations for Africa's development as articulated in the Agenda 2063 implementation document. These challenges are examined below:

Challenges of Economic Integration policy in Africa

(1) Insecurity: One of the most formidable challenges facing Africa's integration endeavors over the past decades has been the pervasive lack of security,

exacerbated by the prevalence of conflicts and political instability. Security transcends the mere absence of war or conflict; it encompasses the holistic well-being of individuals, touching upon all facets of life. Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 envisions a peaceful, secure, and stabilized Africa. However, given Africa's susceptibility to insecurity, any meaningful integration that neglects the imperative of addressing insecurity is destined for failure. Currently, numerous armed and non-armed conflicts persist across several African nations. Nigeria frequently garners attention due to its alarming rates of insecurity manifested through kidnapping, banditry, and the Boko Haram insurgency. The destructive and recurrent nature of these conflicts engenders an environment of perpetual insecurity that reverberates throughout the continent. To alter the current trajectory, leaders must transcend mere attendance at conferences, reliance on foreign aid, or superficial condemnations of violence and military deployments. It is essential to thoroughly evaluate and address the root causes of these conflicts, as no substantial development can be realized without ensuring the security of individuals and property (Onyema, 2019).

Africa is presently confronted with two distinct security challenges: one emanating from the ascendance of radical Islamic factions, and the other stemming from the burgeoning interest in natural resource extraction (Collier, 2015). African security apparatuses are inadequately equipped to address these formidable threats. The radical Islamic movement represents a global phenomenon that is fueled by the unchecked proliferation of extremist ideologies, which are sustained and bolstered by vast, unregulated private wealth originating from the Gulf region. This situation poses a unique danger to Africa, particularly because numerous African nations harbor significant Muslim populations who, in the light of the prevailing conditions of poverty and ineffective governance, may easily succumb to disaffection.

Lack of commitment to see a program through to its logical conclusion presents a significant challenge. For instance, Aspiration 4 of the Agenda 2063 introduced an initiative dubbed “Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020.” The year 2020 has come and gone, yet there seems to be no resolution in sight to quell the pervasive violence across the continent. This is evidenced by the escalating rates of terrorism and extremism throughout Africa, all of which have substantially

contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts across the region (Joseph, 2013). Furthermore, the unique nature of security threats in Africa necessitates that the African Union employs robust and sophisticated weaponry and strategies that exceed the capabilities of most African militaries.

The challenge of insecurity permeating the continent has been intensified by pervasive corruption, the lack of social safety frameworks in a multitude of countries, alongside ineffective administration of welfare initiatives. Additionally, flawed recruitment procedures, especially within public sectors, insufficient financial resources, and inadequate equipment for security personnel, as well as the scant adoption and implementation of technological advancements, coupled with widespread political turmoil, have all compounded this issue. Each of these factors adversely impacts the effectiveness of security operatives and the general state of security throughout Africa (Soest and De Juan, 2018).

In all four situations the Islamic terrorism is a spill-over from failing neighbouring countries in which Islamic militants have been able to build their military capacity. The meltdown in Libya, which is on-going, provided a base from which a rebel force could equip itself sufficiently to defeat the Malian army; the endemic insecurity of vast areas of the Sahel enabled a rebel force to defeat the army of Central African Republic (CAR) and to infiltrate North-East Nigeria; and Islamists in Somalia were able to mount terrorist attacks in Kenya. Geography, rather than policy differences, accounts for why these countries are facing the worst threats because they are bordered by neighbouring failing states and thus potentially prone to infiltration of terrorism from their "neighbours" (Onyema, 2019).

Natural Resources:

While natural resources possess the capacity to finance development, they also harbor the potential to incite violent conflicts (Collier, 2009). Precious resources have, at times, served as financial lifelines for insurgent factions, as exemplified by diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, they have escalated the stakes for acquiring power while simultaneously diminishing the necessity for governmental accountability to citizens by supplanting taxation as the primary source of state revenue. This dynamic has led to a profound corruption of political integrity, a phenomenon long evident in Nigeria. Additionally, given that

lucrative resources are rarely distributed equitably across a territory, they incentivise resource-rich regions to contemplate secession from the nation, as witnessed in the Katanga region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Biafra region of Nigeria. The localised nature of resource discoveries intertwines with robust sub-national identities, engendering significant security vulnerabilities, as exemplified by the agitation within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The realisation of the aspirations outlined in Agenda 2063 for the development of Africa has significantly been jeopardized by the outbreak of COVID-19. The ramifications of the pandemic differ markedly across African nations, both within and among various sectors. A primary concern for the continent is the decline in global demand for exports, coupled with a precipitous drop in the prices of essential commodities within the extractive industry. Furthermore, there has been a notable decrease in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which is intricately linked to the extractive sector and the cyclical nature of commodity pricing (World Bank, 2020). The plummet in crude oil prices—by as much as 60%—exerted considerable pressure on the revenues of net oil-exporting countries, particularly those whose fiscal health is heavily reliant on crude oil sales. Evidence indicates a staggering -11.4% contraction in Nigeria's revenue in 2020, with other significant fuel-exporting nations in the region experiencing comparatively smaller revenue declines: Algeria (-2.5%), Angola (-3.8%), Gabon (-2.4%), and Congo (-2.3%) (Gondwe, 2020). As such, the impact of COVID-19 on these countries is disproportionately higher than in the net fuel exporting countries. In the worst case scenario of a deep global recession, this paper estimates that food exports of African economies may decline by about -3% which could be accompanied by contractions in GDP. Although food exports are important for Small Island Development states (SIDS) like Comoros and Seychelles, the key COVID-19 related shock to their economies resulted from the collapse in demand for tourism services (Gondwe, 2020).

Revenue losses could also impede the capacity of African nations to import essential inputs for their domestic production. Overall, a protracted global recession, characterised by diminished demand for their exports and consequent revenue declines, may yield profound repercussions not only for the agricultural

sector but also for various other facets of their economies, and thereby exacerbating the specter of poverty and food insecurity in the foreseeable future. Recent food security assessments indicate that 73 million individuals in Africa are acutely food insecure. This disconcerting predicament has been further intensified by the recent COVID-19 crisis, which has had a direct impact on trade and logistical operations, as well as on production and value chains (WHO, 2020). Furthermore, despite favorable fuel prices for net fuel importers, the recession in least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) may also precipitate a decline in fuel imports as production in other sectors remains subdued. In summation, a potentially profound recession in the global economy could engender significant losses for Africa, culminating in a contraction of GDP (Gondwe, 2020).

Lack of Inclusiveness and Participation:

Aspirations 1 and 2 are challenged by the lack of total inclusiveness in Africa's integration efforts. Trudi (2011) argues that African regional integration is marred by ambitious schemes with unrealistic time frames towards deeper integration and in some cases, political union. The agenda advocates for participation, inclusion and empowerment of all citizens but does not seem to show how this would be achieved (AUC, 2015). Hardly would Africa achieve growth and sustainable development without concrete institutions. In addition, economic growth and prosperity are associated with inclusive economic and political institutions. What we experience in Africa is the reverse where extractive institutions enrich a few at the expense of many. They create a platform for extractive political institutions to persist. This explains why African nation-states are failing today. Extractive institutions do not create incentives needed for people to save, invest and innovate (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012).

Inclusive institutions catalyse the emergence of innovative energies, thereby fostering sustained growth, as exemplified by the Industrial Revolution. However, the critical question arises: does Agenda 2063 provide the foundational framework or elucidate the mechanisms through which this transformation will occur? Furthermore, the Agenda 2063 endeavours to treat Africa as a monolithic entity for analysis. This approach is inherently counterproductive, given the continent's profound diversity; the issues deliberated during the consultation and

implementation phases manifest differently for citizens across various regions. Such disparities are likely to complicate the design, execution, and even the monitoring and evaluation of the Agenda's strategic plan of action (DeGhetto et al., 2016). For instance, fragile states may hinder the development of robust, rules-based regional integration agreements (RIAs), as they often lack the capacity to formulate, manage, and implement a comprehensive regional integration strategy (Trudi, 2011). DeGhetto et al. (2016) further observe that numerous struggling nations may be marginalised, despite the necessity for country-specific actions inherent in the Agenda's implementation, owing to divergent levels of development, resource endowments, and national priorities.

The proposed course of action fails to incorporate measures for engaging with those member states that may require specialised assistance. For example, within the East African Community (EAC), although markets are relatively advanced, the quality of infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, and indicators pertaining to health and education remain substandard. Among the myriad challenges are insufficient access to financing, pervasive corruption, elevated tax rates, and a deficient supply of infrastructure (World Economic Forum, 2010 as cited by Trudi, 2011).

The ECOWAS countries though strong in institutions and innovation, are weak in health, education and infrastructure development. And although some African countries perform well on various Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) indicators, the whole of sub Saharan Africa lags behind other world regions in terms of competitiveness, and generally faces a more constrained business environment. Thus the need to improve competitiveness is a challenge Agenda 2063 plan of action needs to address (Trudi, 2011). Similarly Geda and Kibret, (2002) contend that an integration scheme, where countries are at different levels of development will suffer disproportionate gains from integration and their commitment to implement agreed upon treaties could be adversely affected.

This is an issue the Agenda action plan needs to address otherwise the Agenda 2063 will not be any different from its predecessors. Without shared values and common interest, the regional integration process will be complicated (Qobo, 2007). Although integration as proposed by Agenda 2063 is a perceived strategy

for overcoming individual weaknesses and developmental obstacles, it may, to the contrary, generate conflicts and tensions within and between states, especially when opposing ideologies and political systems are involved or when economic benefits are perceived to be uneven (Chingono and Nakana, 2009).

Level of Poverty:
The stakes are high for the realisation of the Aspirations of the **Agenda 2063** for Africa's development given that several economies on the continent remain fragile with underdeveloped infrastructure and economies that still rely on raw materials, with a limited diversification of their productive structures. Poverty rates remain unacceptably high. Inequality is also high. According to the United Nations, six of the ten most unequal countries in the world are African (United Nations, 2019**)**. Recent global food crises and continuing struggles with hunger in some parts of Africa stress the need for greater food security.

Africa's financial system is not well established. A number of the financial institutions on the continent are foreign-owned. They deny credit services to the local population due to their inability to match up the high transaction costs, difficulty in assessing and managing their risk profiles, lack of the required financial documentation as well as lack of collateral (African Development Bank, 2019).

The challenge for Agenda 2063 is how to ensure that ordinary citizens can imagine a more positive future while reconciling with past misdeeds and atrocities and simultaneously coping with the hardships and realities of the present. It is argued that when people are poor and preoccupied with the challenges of meeting immediate and pressing basic daily needs, they are less likely to focus on and imagine a more positive future (DeGhetto et al., 2016). Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) note that diseases in Africa are largely a consequence of poverty and of governments being unable to undertake the public health measures necessary to eradicate them. They articulate the fact that poor countries are poor because those who have power make choices that create poverty. The ruling class and the elites get it wrong, not by mistake or ignorance, but on purpose. Thus, the Agenda 2063 and the AUC have the uphill task of alleviating poverty and improving the living

conditions of its citizens. Unless this is done, commitment toward the agenda would follow the patterns of previous efforts

As contained in Aspiration 3 of *Agenda* 2063 the attainment of the above agenda could be challenged by the endemic lack of good governance on the continent. Adogamhe (2008) stresses that most African states suffer from a democracy deficit resulting from weak allegiance from citizens and this invariably creates a crisis of legitimacy for most of the existing state institutions. He also notes that integration in Africa tends to be an elitists' movement rather than based on democratic politics, rule of law and good governance. African leaders tend to concentrate more on how to consolidate their power than on citizens' welfare (Duthie, 2011). As such it is not surprising to find that many African leaders are reluctant to really yield their prerogative to regional institutions (Draper 2010). It also goes without saying that lack of regime continuity – a dominant feature in African politics and governance – manipulative and technocratic power of transnational corporations, all constitute impediments to the pursuit of serious integrative processes in Africa (Biswaro, 2011). Therefore, lack of good governance remains a major area of challenge for capacity building and attaining the aspirations for sustainable development in the continent.

Demography:
Aspirations 5 and 6 are challenged by the continent's demography. Africa's population is young and growing, and a rapidly expanding number of young job seekers flood the Africa labour markets (Africa Development Bank, 2019). Population growth rates are even higher in cities, where an estimated 40% of Africa's population live. According to the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) (Africa Development Bank, 2019), urban populations will increase by an additional 300 million people by 2030. The same document projected that 250 million Africans will be between 15 and 24 years old by 2022, with these youths are not being carried along by African leaders. The Agenda tends to, by design, exclude the majority of the population who may not have completed a high school level of education. As the document usually is translated into the four AU official languages (English, French, Arabic and Portuguese) it runs the risk of the majority of the population not being able to comprehend it, hence the necessity for it to be

translated into major African local languages. This exclusion undermines the consultative spirit of the Agenda (DeGhetto et al., 2016).

(6) Gender Inequality:
African traditional society is patriarchal as the male gender tends to hold positions of power characterised by social stratification on the basis of sex. The African social system fosters gender inequalities by relegating women to domestic and reproductive roles and restricting their access to finance, and other entitlements such as land (Aradeon, 2016). Hence, patriarchy and the social construction of gender roles in many Africa countries constrain women's autonomy and access to resources. These gender socio-cultural construct also play a great role in limiting women's capacity and participation which in turn could restrict the attainment of the **Aspiration 6** of the Agenda 2963 for development in the continent.

(7) Leadership:
Geda and Kibret, (2002), wonder whether the present crop of African leaders still have the spirit that animated the founders of OAU/AU. The Agenda 2063 pushes the question of Africa's political unity to 50 years to come, when most of these present leaders will obviously not be alive to see it, which makes some people think that Africa's current leaders are not sincerely ready for the holistic African unity, a concept to which they only pay lip service.

It is also likely that the implementation of the Agenda will face the problem of commitment. Given that the Agenda seeks to ultimately establish a political union and supra-national organs to act on behalf of African governments, it is unlikely that some African leaders will easily let go their sovereign power. One of the reasons cited for lack of progress in African regional integration is the unwillingness of African leaders to surrender or cede part of the control of their macroeconomic policy to a regional authority and face potential consumption costs that may rise by importing from a high cost member country, and accept unequal distribution of gains and losses that may follow an integration agreement, and discontinue existing economic ties with non-members. This lack of strong and sustained political commitment has hindered the progress of economic integration in Africa (Geda and Kibret, 2002). Geda and Kibret further note that African leaders are reluctant to create supra-national bodies and transfer power to them

as the sanctioning authority. Countries are also more committed to other multilateral and bilateral commitments than to regional agreements, a situation specifically explained by aid dependence and the conditionality attached to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of member states (Geda and Kibret, 2002).

(8) Financial Capacity of Member States:

Finance is needed in regional integration, especially where infrastructure, technology and scientific innovations are required for industrialisation and processing of local resources in order to obtain food security. The AU has inadequate financial resources to execute these programmes (Adogamhe, 2008). This financial inadequacy had been observed in the past when the AU was unable to manage its partnerships well (AUC, 2015). African member states do not fully and promptly pay the agreed financial contributions to AU (Maruping, 2005). The continent has failed to tap into its own vast wealth to finance its development agenda (Eyster, 2014).

(9) Small Market:

The question of markets might present a challenge to the integration efforts of the AU because some African countries have low per capita income levels and small populations which translate to small markets (Eyster, 2014). This contributes to high trade transaction costs and high costs of doing business in Africa. Another challenge related to markets is that transport costs in Africa are still among the world's highest because many roads, air and rail networks remain unconnected. This makes the cost of and real time movement of goods and services within the continent really cumbersome.

(10) Human Capital Flight:

Human capital flight or brain drain from Africa is one of the continent's major development constraints. The loss of trained and highly skilled Africans to the industrialised countries has intensified the capacity constraints facing both public and private sectors resulting in the deficit of skilled manpower, which African countries so badly need for sustainable development. The drain of medical personnel from Africa is the most striking (Sako, 2002). This can be attributed to the theory of "push" and "pull" as the socio-economic and political situations in

most African countries have "pushed" most talented and intelligent Africans (especially the youths) out of the continent to better climes, on the one hand. While the perceived favourable environment of the western world has equally "pulled" these set of manpower personnel to their countries.

Africa's emigrant population has continued to grow in absolute and relative terms with net migration increasing from 7 million to 12 million. In 2015, the population of migrants of African origin across the world was 32.5 million, a 53 per cent increase from 2000. Owing to their proximity to Europe and the Middle East, coupled with their colonial ties, North African countries dominate Africa's emigration and the former colonies still send significant numbers of emigrants to what used to be the "mother country" (UN DESA 2015). The continuous loss of capacity is attributed to socio-political instability, inappropriate economic policies, poor infrastructure and weak institutions. Thus, much of the brain drain that is occurring in Africa is traceable not only to poor economic conditions, but also to such other factors as political violence, repression of human rights, and the lack of a conducive professional and technological environment required for self-fulfilment.

(11) External Debt Burden:

Another major challenge bedevilling the attainment of Aspirations for Africa's development is its external debts burden. The huge external debts burden is a major constraint to growth and thus a significant component of the continent's growth. Africa is a heavily indebted continent, based on key debt ratios with 29 out of the 53 African countries being currently classified as severely indebted. The ratio of total external debts to GNP is approximately 75% for sub-Saharan Africa. According to the World Bank there are 19 African countries with debt/GNP ratios that are greater than 100%, and seven with ratios in excess of 200% (World Bank, 2020). The unsustainable debts problem for more than half of Africa's countries persists despite almost 20 years of debts relief efforts from the Paris and London Clubs, from bilateral aid donors, and, more recently, from the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank, 2020).

The way forward

There are positive prospects that economic integration could bring to Africa. We will now discuss a few of such hereunder:

Peace and Security

Security is a major concern for every institution and is equally at the heart of every endeavour. Among the benefits Africa is expected to reap from forming a continent-wide economic integration would be sustainable peace and security of lives and properties. To achieve this it is imperative that Africa maintains an African Stand-by Force (ASF) to help coordinate the work of the existing Peace and Security Council for rapid response to any conflict situation within Africa. It is believed that the ASF would function much like the UN Peace Keeping force ready to maintain and bring about peace in any troubled spot. According to Deane-Peter Baker (2007: 120-123), ASF is intended to be a body of multidisciplinary military and civilian contingent. The ASF would enable AU respond rapidly to situations of conflict in order to prevent a developing situation of conflict from becoming catastrophic. Most African nations grapple with significant economic challenges, rendering the establishment of formidable military capabilities prohibitively costly. However, through the African Standby Force (ASF), a coalition of African states would be poised for swift deployment to crisis zones across the continent.

Social-Cultural Impact

Integration in Africa would impact positively in many social and cultural ways. For instance, together Africa could build reliable rail and road networks connecting most regions together. Building such network would help to make travel easier for African citizens and help to grow the economy. There would no longer be immigration problems involving numerous roadblocks where people ordinarily have to part with money before they can move from one boarder to another (Warpmuk, 2009). In the area of building transport and communications infrastructure as well as electricity generation and distribution, providing such services on a regional rather than national scale would help to lower the cost as opposed to fragmented and divisive investments. Consequently, cost of transportation of humans and goods would be lowered and the overall African economy would be boosted. As a result development through common interest by

way of integration would bring about human progress in Africa; restore human dignity to the African people and give Africa a voice on the global frontier.
In the words of Chi (1984), integration could make Africa achieve the following, among others:

- Expand transportation and communication networks to reduce trade barriers between countries;
- Establish division of labour between nations/regions to promote economic interdependence;
- Reduce economic disparities between nations/regions to minimize jealousy;
- Promote free flow of human traffic for civil servants and teachers to work outside their birth region;
- Prevent brain-drain to Europe and the United States;
- Develop continent-wide media system to foster unity and encourage travel between nations. (Chi, 1984: 20-21).

Environmental Benefit:
African environment is prone to a number of environmental disasters such as coastal erosion, desertification and deforestation and the most threatening of all – global warming. Individual African States are grappling with significant challenges in their efforts to mitigate these pervasive threats. However, with joint efforts through integration, Africa would be able fight these hazards. Africa would be in a better position to organise the exchange of experiences among component countries on environmental issues that are of particular relevance to Africa. In addition, continent-wide campaigns against such natural disasters like flooding, land-slide, volcanic eruption, locust invasion would be easier to launch with mobilised international assistance than with segmented governmental efforts (ECA/AU, 2008)

Conclusion
The paper discovered that the attainment of economic integration could be threatened by several factors such as insecurity, lack of inclusiveness and participatory governance, poverty rate, lack of good governance, demography, gender inequality, present crop of Africa leaders, low financial capacity of member states, the negative effects of COVID-19, human capital flight and external debt

burden, among others. At Africa's current rate of performance, the continent would neither catch up nor be able to meet the rising expectations of her citizens, as many countries will not converge with the rest of the world but will remain fragile. Per capita incomes continue to rise at 1.9 per cent annually but given the growth in the rest of the world, Africa's per capita incomes would actually diverge further from those of other countries. The middle-class will increase, but after decades would still be only about a third of the population. Nearly one in five Africans would, correspondingly, still be mired in poverty.

Recommendations:

It is therefore, recommended that for the seven aspirations contained in Agenda 2063 to be attained, some concerns should be addressed which include:

1) the notion of continued adherence to sovereignty by some countries needs to be dissolved;
2) countries should be ready and committed to taking necessary steps to internalise socio-economic restructuring and ratifying of the various RIAs.
3) The AUC may need to explore other models of integration. For instance, certain elements of the EU may not be appropriate for Africa and going down the same path may lead us into damnation.
4) in place of hard-sovereignty, soft-sovereignty which will lead to inter-governmentalism not supranational structures that demand major sovereignty concessions.
5) It is also recommended that the Seven Aspirations be communicated downwards to ensure maximum grassroots support. In most cases, these projects tend to be known only by the elite in society, while the ordinary citizens are left to bear the burden of the decisions made for them. For effective commitment, the Aspirations need to be known by the citizens.

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