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African Nations and the Drive for Unification: The Case for the United States of Africa   *(Pp. 13-23)*

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Abstract

Regional integration and international cooperation is a fundamental goal that most countries in the world strive to achieve. In Africa, the struggle for unity and integration has been on for many decades with mixed results. The

defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU), now transformed to African Union (AU) is a manifestation of such struggles. However, the most recent agitation for greater unity is the quest to create a supranational political union to be called the United States of Africa (USA). Advocates of the supranational political union believe that, it will immensely promote peace and development in the crisis ridden continent. This paper argues that, though the 'United States of Africa' vision stands to benefit the African continent because it will give Africa a strong voice in international affairs and promote development within the continent, there are unfortunately several factors that make the realization of the unification agenda currently not feasible. The reason being that, African states which place high premium on protecting their sovereignty, will be reluctant to surrender their treasured possession to a supranational body. More so, the continent is replete with cases of internal conflicts, structural poverty, and bad governance, among others.

Key words: Unification, Pan-Africanism, Integration, Cooperation

Introduction

Africa is the world's second largest and equally second most populous continent after Asia. The continent is made up of about 12 million square miles (31.2million km2) and a population estimate of about 1.2 billion people. The African continent is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the North, both the Suez Canal and the Red Sea along the Sinai Peninsula to the North-East, the Indian Ocean to the South-East and the Atlantic Ocean to the West. Whereas Africa is endowed with abundant human and natural resources, and constituted by 55 independent countries, it does not occupy an assertive and dominant position in global affairs. That is, Africa is not a force to reckon with in world politics.

There is no denying the fact that, even the roles of relatively big African states like South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria are inaudible in strategic international organizations. Coupled with the fact that Africa remains the least developed continent in the world and crisis-ridden, several efforts have been made to unite the continent and promote development. These have yielded mixed results. The latest of such efforts is the vision to form or create the "United States of Africa". This paper therefore, seeks to interrogate past regional unity efforts in Africa, the prospects and challenges of creating the United States of Africa, and the way forward. To achieve the above

objective, the paper is structured into five parts. This include: Introduction; Pan-Africanism; Unity efforts in Africa; United States of Africa: Why it is presently not Feasible, and lastly, the Concluding Remarks.

Pan-Africanism

Pan-Africanism is the genesis of the quest to unite Africa and Africans in this modern era. As the name implies, "Pan-Africanism" is a movement that seeks to unite African people or people living in Africa into one African community. Pan-Africanism actually reflects a range of political views. At a basic level, it is a belief that African people, both on the African continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny. This sense of interconnected pasts and futures has taken many forms, especially in the creation of political institutions (Ackah, 1999).

The aim of Pan-Africanism, though initially an anti-slavery movement, has evolved through the ensuring decades. Pan-Africanism grew out of the 19th century efforts to end slavery and slave trade. During that period, blacks worldwide suffered a great degree of oppression and exploitation as slaves. The period also witnessed the scrabble for Africa and the Berlin Conference of 1884-83 which partitioned Africa to European colonial enclaves, by the balkanization of nations to different colonial territories. Therefore, some unity-minded and exploitation conscious Africans felt that black people in the world face common problems (slavery, colonialism and underdevelopment), and that it would be to their benefit to work together in an efforts to solve these problems. The founding fathers of Pan-Africanism include: Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugoano, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Casely Hayford, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Frantz Fanon, Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, etc. Though the Africanism philosophy contributed immensely in the fight against colonialism in Africa from 1950-1970, not much has been achieved in terms of unity in the continent.

Unity efforts in Africa

Africa was colonized by Western Powers for many decades. The continent suffers colonial rule under Western power such as Great Britain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and France. As most countries in the continent attained independence status in the early 1950's to 1960's, efforts were made to unite the continent politically. One major step taken in this regard was the

formation of a political organization called the "Organization of African Union" (OAU).

The Organization of African unity was formed in 1963. Their objectives among others are to promote the unity and solidarity of the Africa States and act as a collective voice for the continent of Africa. It was also dedicated to the eradication of all forms of colonialism (Adeniyi, 2003). One salient point to note is that whereas after independence, a plethora of African states expressed a growing desire for more unity within the continent, there was a wide disparity as regards the means of achieving such unity. During the build up to the formation of OAU, two basic opinionated blocs emerged in this respect. These include:

1. The Casablanca bloc led by Kwame Nkrumah (the first president of independence Ghana), opted for a federation of all African states and was supported by Algeria, Guinea, Morocco, Egypt, Mali and Libya.
2. The Monrovian bloc led by Senghor of Senegal, advocated unity for Africans driven by economic cooperation. The members of the Monrovian bloc were Nigeria, Liberia, Tanzania, Ethiopia and most of the former French colonies.

The fact is that the Casablanca bloc championed the idea of an African federation as a restoration of Africa's might against the colonial demarcation of the continent into artificial bits and pieces. The argument was that, the post-colonial states in Africa will be too vulnerable in the world system hence, the need to form a federation of African States. The Monrovian bloc on its part opposed the formation of a political federation and rather settled for economic cooperation and the building of regional unions, and then the gradual improvement and integration to create the United States of Africa (Bayo, 2005). However, after intensive deliberations, the idea of radical unity via the path to a large federation was jettisoned for the gradualism philosophy of economic cooperation and regional integration. Therefore, the idea of forming the United States of Africa with a federalist philosophy was frustrated in the formation years of the Organization of African Union.

The Organization of African Union existed from 1963 to 2002. Whereas the union succeeded to some degree to achieve unity in Africa, it was bedevilled with lots of problems. One basic reason why the OAU failed was its inability to solve the problems that confront Africa. The OAU was basically a bull dog

that can only bark but lacks the capacity to bite. For instance, the OAU in one of its articles, *The Association,* opposed the external interference in the internal affairs of member countries. Therefore, Africa became a continent constituted by states with bad, corrupt, autocratic and sits tight leaders. In essence, the OAU was only but a powerless ceremonial union without the political will to foster the much needed unity and development in the continent.

As Cervenka (1977) puts it, one identifiable cause for the relative degree of the failure of the OAU among others, is traceable to tripartite ideological divide that perverted Africa in the formative years of the organization.

Therefore, due to the widespread lapses of the Organization of African Unity, the organization metamorphosed to the Africa Union in July 2002. But before its inception, several efforts were made at the sub-regional level to promote peace, unity and development in the continent. Such efforts were expressed with the formation of regional and sub-regional bodies to promote peace, unity and integration. Some of such bodies are:

I. Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC), established in 1964, now Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC).
II. The East African Community (EAC), established in 1967, now East African Cooperation
III. West Africa Economic Community, established in 1972
IV. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established in 1975
V. The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), established in 1994
VI. The Preferential Trade Area (PTA), established in 1981, now known as, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
VII. The Southern Africa Development Conference (SADCC), established in 1980, now Southern African Development Community (SADC), established in 1992
VIII. The Union of Maghreb Arab States (UMA), established in 1988.

The sub regional bodies mentioned above have contributed in their own ways to promote unity and development in the continent, but only to a limited degree. There was therefore, the need to establish a regional body that will be powerful to an extent to proffer solutions to the teething problems of Africa;

hence, the idea of creating the African Union as a replacement of the now defunct Organization of African Union.

The African Union is presently a union consisting of 54 African States. It is the only political organization with all African States (except Morocco) as members. The AU is made up of both political and administrative bodies. In the African Union, the highest decision making organ is the Assembly of African Union, made up of all the Heads of States or government of member states of the AU. It also has a representative's body, the Pan African Parliament, the Executive Council, the Permanent Representatives Committee, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, etc. Be that as it may, the objectives of the leading institutions of the African Union are:

- to accelerate the political and social economic integration of the continent
- to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people
- to achieve peace and security in Africa, and
- to promote democratic institutions, good governance and human rights (Africa Union, 2012).

The African Union no doubt has lofty objectives, and the organization has also been proactive in terms of conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the continent. For instance, the non- recognition of government that comes to power through military coups has helped to stem the tide of previously very rampant military coups in the continent. African union troops are also involved in peace operations in Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, etc. Again, other AU initiatives such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), are contributing in no small measure to foster accountability, good governance and development in the continent. If this is the case, what then is the rationale for the United States of Africa? Is the United States of Africa possible in contemporary times? What are the supposed benefits of a federation of African states? The next section will attempt to answer such questions.

The United States of Africa

The United States of Africa was first mentioned by Marcus Garvey, one of the founders of Pan-Africanism, in his poem "Hail, United States of Africa"

in 1924 (Pheko, 1999), and the argument for a United States of Africa is based on the philosophical idea of Pan – Africanism (Londsdale, 1968).

There is no denying the fact that the most recent development in the history of the African Union is the proposal for the establishment of the United States of Africa, which was extensively discussed at the 19th African Union Submit in July 2007. Part of the argument is that, the idea is a contemporary expression of the age long Pan-Africanist aspirations for African Unity. Again, it is factual that the African Union is the institutional manifestation of the desire for integration in Africa (Okhonmina, 2009). However, Africa is beset with difficulties rooted in its inability for united territorially. The artificial borders that separate the national territories in the region are divisive of people united by history and divisive of regions united by geography to the extent that, they are subjects of disputes and conflicts between African States (Pheko, 1999). Therefore, the rationale for the United States of Africa is anchored on the belief in the capacity of integration, to enable the continent in the need to effectively meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Africa should not be left behind in the global trend of regional integration. That is, integration as mentioned earlier, will increase the bargaining power of Africa in the global scheme of things. And that Africa must come together to be able to resist external influence and pressures (African Association of Political Science, 2002).

Whereas arguments for the AU to transform to the United States of Africa has been on for quite some time, but just like the ideological divide and orientations which coloured the formation of the defunct OAU, there is presently lack of consensus on when the United States of Africa should be formed and how it should be administered. The above stalemate has reinvented a division between the 'radicals' and the 'gradualists'; the reason being that the call by the radicals for an immediate federation was opposed by the gradualists who support the creation of the United States of America. For instance, prominent gradualists such as South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and Umaru Yar'Adua of Nigeria seem convinced that issues that require immediate attention are: improved regional economic integration, the greater challenges facing the countries and the need to focus more on the urgent task of strengthening and consolidating internal governance and growth structures. The crux of their argument was that, if such problems cannot be addressed through the African Union, how can commitment be made to more demanding issues such as that of the United States of Africa?

Put differently, the renewed debate on African integration is on whether the objective of building the United States of Africa should support the processes of socio-economic and political formation of African states and societies either through a process of immediate creation of a central government or through 'gradual instrumentalism' or functional evolution of African states system. We wish to opine that, if the former is achieved, it will automatically transform the way African societies are integrated into the world economic system. More so, it must determine the degree of power and authority, and whether such power and authority are revocable or irrevocable. The argument in essence is that, such a shift in sovereignty to a supranational authority would entail some versions of federalism in which states or other political unites recognize the sovereignty of a central government while retaining certain powers for themselves. Hence, the prospects for the creation of the United States of Africa will call for, not only a redefinition of the roles of African state- system within the grand design process based on confidence and capacity- building as a long term strategy to intra–African cooperation and integration (Francis, 2008).

We wish to assert categorically that, there is a general consensus by African leaders that their continent is becoming increasingly powerless on a tough global economic and political environment. According to Phillips (2007), unless Africa can talk and act with greater cohesion, it will continue to be virtually ignored by the richer countries. While Pheko (1999) opined that, only a united Africa can redeem its past glory, renew and reinforce its strength for the realization of its destiny. We are today the richest and yet the poorest of the continents, but in unity, our continent could smile in a new era of prosperity and power.

The United States of Africa no doubt remain a constant theme, the great dream cherished from the earliest days of pan-Africanism, but with the existential reality on ground, USA is presently not feasible.

United States of Africa: why it is presently not feasible

It is imperative to state that, the unification of the African continent failed to materialize in the early post-independence era simply because most African states prioritized the achievement and consolidation of national independence over African unity. The above scenario still captures reality in Africa. This is because, most African countries place high premium on their sovereignty and are therefore, very reluctant to transfer such sovereignty to a supranational

body. For instance, some of the internal divisions created at the wake of independence in most countries are becoming more pronounced, resulting in legitimacy crisis on the part of national governments, hence a pact to surrender a sovereignty that is threatened internally seems not to be in the agenda.

Poverty is equally a militating factor why the United States of Africa is presently not feasible. Africa is bedevilled by structural poverty. There is lack of structures in Africa, both concrete and ideological, that function to ensure social continuity. It is a glaring reality that sub- regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established to promote regional economic cooperation have not been able to register tangible success due to structural deficits. Africa is thus, replete with cases of policy failures, administrative incapacities, and the general failure of the public realm. A good example is failure of free movements of peoples across national boundaries at the sub- regional levels. This, points to the fact that the level of acceptance among African countries is at a very low ebb, consequently, not a positive indicator that will encourage easy acceptance of a supranational authority.

Another reason why the United States of Africa is presently not feasible is the fact that, there is a low degree of organizational maturity as regards the African union, which is expected to herald the birth of the United States of African. This is because, European Economic Community for instance, achieved a lot before adopting an incremental framework to transform to European Union, but that is not the case in Africa. The above position gives credence to the fact that, economic cooperation should precede political integration.

There is also lack of good governance and rule of law in Africa. The continent has lots of sit-tight autocratic leaders that have continued to suffocate democratic development in their countries. It is common knowledge that you cannot give what you don't have, therefore, what leadership pattern will such undemocratic leaders export to build the United States of Africa? More so, most states in Africa are variously being referred to as: rogue states, prebendal state, predatory state, failed state, authoritative state and more. This scenario obviously affects forming a new super powerful entity to be constituted by all the states in the continent. To be candid, the dilemma of African post-colonial states is that they have not really abandoned the colonial logic of oppression and domination as well as

the exploitative and predatory policies that are inimical to Africa unity and development (Francis, 2008).

Apart from the problems of the lack of a common culture, and language that divides Africa, there is a more fundamental problem of the lack of an effective leadership in the search for unity. For example, the late maximum ruler of Libya, Moamar Gadhafi until his death was the leading advocate for the United States of Africa but he was not trusted by most leaders in the continent due to his leadership style at home and strong opposition to Western powers, which African countries solely depend on.

The other identified reasons why the United States of Africa is presently not feasible include low level of investment friendly public, absence of organizational harmony, overlapping membership of sub- regional groupings, financial limitations, and inadequate mechanism for equitable sharing of the costs and benefits of regional apparatus and arrangements, among others.

Concluding remarks

The idea of establishing an all embracing continental supranational political institutions called the United States of Africa has been on the drawing board for decades. Whereas, there is general consensus that such a body or states craft will transform the poverty- ridden, vulnerable, conflict prone and underdeveloped African continent, there is presently lack of agreement as regards the mechanism through which the United States of Africa can be realized. The benefits of USA are quite enormous because, it will promote development; give Africa unneglectable voice in global affairs and a dominant player in the international system. To Nigeria in particular, it will help to promote employment generation, good governance, better trade opportunities, etc.

We wish to conclude that, despite the supposed benefits of the United States of Africa, Africa as it stands is not structurally and economically ready for such an adventure. Therefore, what is urgently needed is to encourage sub-regional integration and subsequently via gradual incrementalism, graduate to become the United States of Africa. There is the need to encourage trade within sub- regional countries, free movement among borders, regional common currencies, etc; before transforming to a supranational organization.

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