CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA: POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Ms R. Mukamunana
Dr. K. Moeti
University of Pretoria

ABSTRACT

Regional integration, which encompasses efforts by a group of countries to promote their political, economic, social and cultural integration and development, has been pursued in Africa since the early 1960s. However, there is near unanimous agreement that regionalization has failed in Africa to produce effective frameworks within which poverty and underdevelopment can be mitigated. While the resolution of a number of issues, such as, political instability and weak infrastructures is imperative, and holds prerequisite for the development of Africa, the focus of the paper is on institutional and administrative mechanisms that serve as the critical conduit through which the aforementioned issues must be addressed. The paper argues that effective implementation of regional programmes requires an institutional apparatus that is capable of dealing with the complexity of policy-making and implementation processes between a variety of state and societal actors at all levels of governance – supranational as well as national levels, which characterize regional integration.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant features of the world economy and politics from the second half of the twentieth century has been the widespread creation of regional groupings, which have been propagated by the creation, in 1948, of the European Economic Community (EEC). In Africa, regional integration ideology began to take root in the early years of independence (circa 1960s) and was perceived largely as both an instrument for safeguarding recently acquired political freedom, and a strategy to be used to facilitate economic development. Kwame Nkrumah, the greatest advocate of pan-Africanism captured this ideal goal in the following statement:

"In my view, a united Africa – that is, the political and economic unification of the African continent – should seek three objectives. Firstly, we should have an overall economic planning on continental basis, which would increase the industrial and economic power of Africa. So long as we remain disunited, so long as we remain balkanized regionally or territorially we shall be at the mercy of colonialism and imperialism… "(Anyang' Nyongo, 1990).

This continental approach, as advocated by Pan Africanists, did not however gain a significant support in African political and intellectual milieus as it was criticized for its demand for a high level of political integration and commitment, which was thought impossible to achieve at that time (Cheru, 2002:126). Consequently, the Pan Africanists did not succeed in uniting the continent through integration, as post-independence African leaders instead favoured a more cooperative approach to technocratic and functional matters focusing foremost on domestic issues, such as overcoming social cleavages and building national identity and economy.

In recent times, however, the growing trend in regional integration and the bargaining strengths of the more powerful economic and trading blocs, such as the single market of the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), have required countries, in particular of the South, to reconsider their regional strategies to deal better with this phenomenon known as globalization. In today's globalised economy, regional integration is viewed as a strategy to cooperatively position a state into global markets. Such a strategy is expected to provide for improved competitiveness, and increase negotiating capacities so that as a regional collective, countries can participate effectively in the world economy and politics.

Studies on regionalism have been consistent in arguing that regional cooperation and integration enable individual countries to achieve greater economic benefits (Vinter, 1950; Balassa, 1961; Nye, 1968; Asante, 1997; Lee, 2003). The proponents have maintained that the creation of regional markets provides larger markets and economies of scale and that the coordination of national economic policies enables more rational mobilisation and utilisation of factors of production and lead to an accelerated economic growth (Nye, 1968:288). However, regional attempts in Africa have failed to yield expected results as evidenced today by, among other things, poor economic growth, low levels of intra-regional trade and inability to attract investments.

At the dawn of the new millennium, African leaders have shown a renewed interest in regional integration through the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001. NEPAD is a continental development plan, the focus of which is to facilitate the provision of essential regional public goods (such as transport, energy, ICT, regional research capacity, etc) as well as to promote intra-regional and extra-regional trade, and attract investments. It is in this context that in 2002 the NEPAD's Short Term Action Plan on Infrastructure (STAP) was initiated.

This paper notes the underlying causes of African failure with respect to effective regionalism. These failures include a lack of political commitment to regional development agenda, political instability, and weak infrastructures. Whilst the paper accepts that the resolution of these impediments, is paramount, it is further argued that effective regional integration requires a paradigm shift in the concept of public administration towards the more complex decision making and policy making models that allow for greater latitude and space for autonomous action by various actors other than the state. In order for regional policies and processes to bear positive outcomes, there is a need therefore, for a revitalized institutional framework, which is capable of effectively dealing with the partnership challenges raised by regionalisation. This paper begins by defining and then highlighting the main theoretical approaches to regional integration. Thereafter, an account is given of Africa's integration efforts and challenges, and the paper concludes by examining the administrative implications and therefore imperatives of regional cooperation and integration.

DEFINING REGIONALISM AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The literature on regionalism is vast, and, as Hurrell (1995:38) argues, the concept is ambiguous and debate as to what regionalism exactly means, has produced little consensus. This confusion applies also to related concepts of regionalism such as regional integration and regional cooperation. In some of the literature, these terms are even used interchangeably to refer to bi-lateral or multi-lateral regional integration agreements whether these are purely economic or of a political nature. Thus, definitions range from strictly economic perspectives to any project involving groups of countries in a given region. Wyatt-Walter defines regionalism as a process consisting of a group of countries that implement a set of preferential policies designed to enhance the exchange of goods and/ or factors of production among themselves (Wyatt-Walter, 1995:78).

Bach (1999) identifies two types of regionalism. The first is formal regionalism, which is represented by institutional forms of cooperation or integration, and is defined as "the aggregation and fusion into broader units of existing territories or fields of intervention" (Bach, 1999:152). The second is network regionalism, which is represented by trans-state actors and "…results in the exploitation of dysfunctions and disparities generated by existing boundaries, with debilitating effects on state territorial control" (Bach, 1999:152). Therefore, regionalism may be formal by way of being adopted and driven by formal institutions of states, or informal resulting from a spontaneous process led by non-state actors, such as trans-frontier traders.

In contrast to regionalism, regional integration, refers to the process through which a group of nation states voluntarily, in various degrees, share each other's markets and establish mechanisms and techniques that minimize conflicts and maximize internal and external economic, political, social and cultural benefits of their interaction (Harloov, 1997:15). Similarly, Asante (1997:20) defines regional integration as a process whereby two or more countries in a particular area join together to pursue common policies and objectives in matters of general economic development or in particular economic field of common interest to the mutual advantage of all the participating states. Thus, although regional integration integrates the social, cultural, and economic dimensions, the basic and underlying element of it, is the economic dimension.

APPROACHES TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Regional integration has taken various forms from the more formal and deep integration that covers a wide range of policies such as the European Union, to purely trade driven cooperation as it is for instance in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Below are discussed, the three main approaches of regional integration which are market integration, development integration, and regional cooperation.

Market integration

The concept of "market integration" (see table 1 below) was crafted in the 1960s by Balassa, which he defined as "a process and a state of affairs" (Balassa, 1961:1). Regarded as a process, market integration encompasses measures designed to abolish discrimination between economic units belonging to different national states; and viewed as a state of affairs, it can be represented by the absence of various forms of discrimination between national economies (Balassa, 1961:1). Market integration consists of a linear progression of stages of integration. These are: free trade area, customs union, common markets, economic union, and total economic integration (Balassa, 1961:2).

In the first stage of integration, which is referred to as a free trade area (FTA), tariffs and quantitative restrictions to trade are removed among member countries, but countries maintain their own tariffs against non-member countries. The second stage is a customs union, which operates like a free trade area, but in which trade with non-members is governed by a common external tariff. From successful customs union, the region develops into a common market, which allows not only free movement of products (goods and services) but

Table 1. Progressive stages of market integration

	Free movement of goods	Common external tariffs	Free flow of capital & labour	Harmonisation of macro economic policies	Supranational institutions
Free trade area	implemented	N/A*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Customs union	implemented	Implemented	N/A	N/A	N/A
Common Market	implemented	Implemented	implemented	N/A	N/A
Economic Union	implemented	Implemented	implemented	implemented	N/A
Total economic integration	implemented	Implemented	implemented	implemented	implemented

** N/A means not applicable* *Source: Adapted from Balassa (1961:2)* also a free movement of factors of production (capital and labour). The final stage of the whole process of economic integration would be the formation of an economic union, in which there is a high degree of coordination and unification of monetary and fiscal policies along with the creation of a supranational authority that has the power to enforce decisions, which are binding for member states (Balassa, 1961:2). The European Union (EU) stands as a successful illustration of the highest degree of integration known at present.

Development integration

Development integration theory emerged as a response to problems and dysfunctions associated with the use of the market integration approach (which was essentially designed for use in developing countries) in under-developed countries. Development integration seeks to address problems in three areas: the objective of integration, the timing and level of interstate binding commitments, and the distribution of costs and benefits of cooperation (Haarlov, 1997:30).

According to development integration theory, the objective of integration is to accelerate the social and economic development of member countries, which explains the need for state intervention in market mechanisms. Political commitment is crucial and is required at the start of the integration process, as it is seen as the backbone for cooperation. It is assumed that such commitment will help countries work towards implementing policies that can correct the major problems resulting from the integration process such as the unequal inter-states distribution of costs and benefits of regional arrangements. Thus, mechanisms that are of a compensatory and corrective nature are to be implemented. These mechanisms may include (Haarlov, 1997:32-36):

- pure fiscal compensation by way of financial transfers from the countries that gain from the integration to the member states that bear the costs;
- improvement of conditions for development, such as roads, railways, telecommunications, human capital development, which give the poor areas the competitive edge and increase opportunities for investments;
- incentives to motivate economic agents to locate economic activities in lesser developed areas (e.g. loans with favorable conditions, favorable investment incentives, slower pace of tariff reduction, and use of certain internal tariffs favoring industry in lesser developed countries); and
- planning of new industries and agreements on distribution of production.

Although designed to correct the problems of market integration, development integration has proven difficult to implement, particularly because of the problems arising from the implementation of compensatory and corrective measures, and the fact that it requires a greater degree of political commitment and support from member states.

Regional cooperation

Regional cooperation has been defined as a process whereby neighboring countries with common interests cooperate to solve tasks and create improved conditions in order to maximize economic, political, social, and cultural benefits for each participating country (Lee, 2003:22). Such cooperative efforts can take various forms ranging from a systematic framework of cooperation done on continuous basis to deal with problems of common concerns, to sporadic kind of cooperation. Regional cooperation may involve, the execution of joint projects, technical sector cooperation, common running of services and policy harmonization; joint development of common natural resources; joint stand towards the rest of the world; and joint promotion of production (Harloov, 1997:16). What is distinctive about regional cooperation is its flexibility, allowing countries to cooperate in areas of their interest (judged important) without being forced to liberalise their trade regimes as is the case with market integration.

AFRICA' S EXPERIENCE WITH REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The literature on regional integration in Africa confirms that market integration has been the favorite approach of African integration strategies. This is illustrated by the adoption of various treaties that have embraced the market approach of regionalism with its associated stages of integration: the creation of free trade areas, customs unions etc. The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) adopted in 1980 by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and subsequent continental development plans adopted are a clear indication of this approach. The aim of the LPA was to form, within 20 years, a united African economic bloc with common tariffs, parliament, and eventually a common currency. A decade later (in 1991), because little meaningful action had been taken, the plan was formalised into a treaty to form the African Economic Community (AEC) commonly known as the Abuja treaty.

The Abuja Treaty, which came into force in 1994, provides for a gradual integration process, which would be achieved through coordination, harmonisation and progressive integration of the activities of existing and future regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa over a period of 34 years. The RECs referred to in the Abuja Treaty are regarded as the building blocs of the African Economic Community. The RECs are: 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 African States (COMESA), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). The Constitutive Act (of 2000) which established the African Union (AU) that replaced the old OAU, and the new blueprint for Africa's socio-economic development – the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted in 2001, both operate on the basis of achieving the objectives of the AEC so that by the year 2030 Africa will be "A united and integrated Africa" (see Vision of the AU, 2004).

A survey of the literature suggests that attempts at regional integration in Africa have been a failure (Asante, 1997; Ojo, 1999; Cheru, 2002; Lee, 2003). In general, African economic regions have failed to meet their objectives of achieving faster economic growth and development as expressed in most of their foundation treaties. Specifically, member states committed, in the treaties establishing these regional communities, to the following:

- developing infrastructures that promote intra-regional trade;

- harmonising political and socio-economic policies and plans of member states;
- developing policies aimed at the progressive elimination of obstacles to free movement of capital and labour, goods and services, and of the peoples of the region among member states; and
- creating appropriate institutions and mechanisms for the mobilisation of requisite resources for the implementation of programmes and operations (see SADC' Treaty of 1992).

Today, it is evident that few of these commitments/objectives have been achieved. Thus, poor economic growth, low levels of intra-regional trade, stringent control measures on movement of peoples, capital, goods and services, and the inability to attract investments are some of the main characteristics of African regional communities. This fact can be reasonably deduced by examining some of the data in three specific areas, namely – economic growth; terms of trade; and foreign capital inflows. In terms of economic growth, ECOWAS member states showed a 2.5 per cent real GDP growth rate in 1999 (ECOWAS, 2000). In the COMESA region the average real GDP growth rate was 3.1 per cent in 2001 (COMESA, 2002). This growth performance falls far short of the estimated 7 per cent annual growth rate, which is required for Africa to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), in particular the goal of reducing by half the proportion of Africans living in poverty by 2015.

In terms of trade, the participation of sub-Saharan African countries in world trade remains negligible. In 2003, Sub-Saharan Africa's share in world trade was estimated at 1.5%. This compares to developing Asia's share of world trade of 24.3 per cent; and Latin America's 5.5 per cent (UNCTAD, 2003). Furthermore, intra-regional trade remains at even lower levels. For instance, intra-community trade within ECOWAS was estimated in 2001 to represent only 11% of the total trade (ECOWAS, 2000), which means that the major share of trade is with the rest of the world. Similarly, foreign capital inflows to Africa have been very insignificant despite the continuing increase of FDI flows to developing countries. In 2004, capital inflows to Africa were estimated at US $20 billion. This compares to $166 billion into Asia and the Pacific, and $69 billion to Latin America and the Caribbean (UNCTAD, 2005).

This poor performance, based in part on the failure to reap the benefits of integration and globalisation, begs the higher order question – Why has regional integration been a failure in Africa? Several experts in regionalism have attributed the failure of regional schemes in Africa to the adoption of the European model of the market integration approach, which was modeled on economic conditions of developed economies (Asante, 1997; McCarthy, 1996; Harloov, 1997; Lee, 2003). Viner, whose seminal work on customs unions led to the development of market integration, sounds a note of caution about the use of the approach, in these terms: "customs unions… are unlikely to yield more economic benefit than harm, unless they are between sizeable countries which practice substantial protection of substantially similar industries" (Viner, 1950:135). Thus, competition among similar industries in different countries of the customs union is essential. Therefore, it can be argued that the customs union of Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which is composed of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland, is likely to do more harm than produce economic benefits to poor states such as Lesotho and Swaziland given their lack of industrial capacity to compete with the other members of the union. Although, there exist some compensation measures such as financial transfers that are used by South Africa (the union economic powerhouse) to compensate members of SACU, these mechanisms are said to not adequately address inequity created by trade diversion and investment polarization (Ostergaard, 1993:335). In addition to claims that Africa has pursued the wrong approach to regional integration, other factors have also contributed to the disappointing results of African regional schemes. The major impediments include a lack of political commitment to regional integration; political instability; weak infrastructures; and problems of distribution of costs and benefits of integration (see further – Mukamunana and Moeti, 2005:8-10).

POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

As can be gathered from the foregoing discussions, a number of policy and structural issues have hampered regional integration in Africa. In general, most studies have focused on trade regimes, political environment, physical infrastructure and macro economic policies, which have been found inadequate to lead to effective regional integration (Harloov, 1997; Asante, 1997; Lee, 2003). However, what seem to get little attention from African academics are the administrative consequences of regional integration processes. In the context of European integration where this question has been intensively debated (Kooiman, 1993; Knill, 2001; Carmichael, 2002; Demmke, 2002), there is a wide consensus that the integration process has certain political, administrative, economic, cultural and legal effects in the member states. As Demmke (2002:1) argues, through the transposition of European law into national law, national legal systems have been Europeanised over the years; this applies to national public law, administrative law, planning law, coordination obligations, as well as to information management systems and reporting obligations, to which all authorities at national level are subject. The literature on the impact of Europeanisation, suggests that European legislative and policy norms exert some adjustment pressure on national administrations. This has been evident with the recent European enlargement processes, in which the EU assessed the administrative capacity of acceding Central and Eastern countries (Tragl, 2004:4).

The other aspect that has been central in the European debate is the complexity in policymaking and implementation, which has resulted from multiple institutions, multiple actors and multiple processes characteristic of integrated Europe (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). Indeed the transnational character of regional policies implies that policy is produced by a web of interconnected institutions at the supranational, national, and sub-national levels of government, and, as policy takes place within these networks, national administrations need to adjust to these changes. It is within this framework, that the concepts of partnership and network in public administration have emerged.

The networks theory understands public policy to be made and implemented by networks of interdependent actors (public agencies, individuals, private businesses, non profit organisations, etc), often with conflicting rationalities, interests and strategies (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997:2). Formulation and implementation of policy, therefore, often require negotiation, bargaining and cooperation among various actors. Thus, forging cooperative partnerships raises some important policy and administrative implications with respect to their operation and effectiveness. This requires an institutional apparatus capable of effectively and efficiently managing cooperative policies and projects. Within this broader institutional and cooperative analytical framework, the discussion below makes an assessment of the NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan, which is NEPAD's key infrastructure development programme. The assessment is based in part on data reported by the NEPAD Secretariat one year into the programme's implementation.

The NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan for Infrastructure

Bridging the infrastructure gap has been identified in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as an important element in promoting regional integration in Africa and in reducing Africa's economic marginalization. NEPAD recognizes that meaningful development cannot happen without trade, and trade cannot flourish without adequate and reliable infrastructure. Thus, in July 2002, a NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan on Infrastructure (STAP) was produced. The plan was developed under the leadership of the African Development Bank, with the participation of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the World Bank and the European Development Fund. The projects, mainly in the areas of energy, transport, ICT and water, were identified and prioritized with the support of the countries and RECs concerned. The challenge faced by NEPAD in ensuring the successful implementation of STAP was reported to relate to (NEPAD, 2003:7):

- mobilizing political will;
- actions to implement policy and institutional reforms;
- harmonizing regulatory systems and ratifying agreements;
- facilitating the mobilization of resources; and
- facilitating knowledge sharing, networking and dissemination of best practice among countries, RECs, and technical agencies.

It can be gathered from the literature that additional policy and administrative imperatives that must still be addressed in the NEPAD STAP programme and similar regionally integrated programmes and projects include the following (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Ostergaard, 1993; NEPAD, 2003):

- institutional capacity;
- networks management;
- coordination and communication; and
- accountability issues.

Institutional Capacity

Successful regional cooperation requires a system of dynamic collective governance. This involves participation by an active and capable set of institutions from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors not only at supranational and national levels but also at local scales. The weakness of some of institutions and actors is likely to hold back the implementation process. Some STAP projects have failed to get off the ground because of the institutional weakness of some national administrations. An example is the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) Grand Inga Integrator Study. The project is one of the greatest SADC priorities in view of its importance in harnessing the hydro potential in the region. However, as reported, the successful realization of the project has been constrained by, among other things, a weak institutional framework in DRC (NEPAD, 2003:24).

Networks management

STAP activities involve various actors (private partners, donors, NEPAD, RECs, countries, etc), who must come together for cooperative implementation of projects. Evaluations have revealed difficulties in carrying out STAP projects, which may be attributed to their intergovernmental nature. For instance, it happens that the two or three countries concerned carry out the project that should be in the STAP domain without the concerned REC being aware or involved. Some RECs promote projects for which they do not have the buy in of their member states (NEPAD, 2003:36). While this might result from poor coordination and communication, it may further be exacerbated by the multiplicity of participants with different objectives and strategies. The pioneer work on policy implementation of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) revealed how the multiplicity of participants required in program implementation hampers the success of program implementation, as each of the many participating groups has a distinctive perspective from which it views the project operation, and its urgency. Thus, what happens is that countries will try to attract donor funding, involve private businesses and get their project implemented without necessarily involving regional structures. In identifying impediments to regional integration in Africa, Ostergaard (1993:37) has pointed to this fact and argued that often politicians negotiate for national interests overlooking regional interests.

Coordination and communication

Coordination and communication are the lifeblood, the thread that ties the system together, and the binding agent that cements all organizational relationships. The problems of coordination and poor communication are, to a certain extent, related to confusion and misunderstanding with regard to roles and responsibilities of various partners of STAP projects (RECs, countries, private contractors, donors, NEPAD Secretariat) (NEPAD, 2003:34). In fact, project implementation in networks implies the absence of a hierarchy among implementers, which causes even more complexity. Because implementers have different institutional homes, they thus deal with each other as equals, and potential allies or adversaries, and this creates competition, and bargaining among actors. With no single unit sufficiently powerful to force others to conform to a single conception of policy, coordination and communication become difficult and the effectiveness of operations compromised.

Accountability issues

In this connection, the literature is clear on the need for the accountability mechanisms in the implementation of cooperative partnership projects. Traditionally, accountability is inherent in the obligation owed by public officials to the public (the ultimate sovereign in a democracy) for explanation and justification of their use of public office and the delegated powers conferred on the government. However, with the complexity of cooperative policy making and the increasing delegation of government functions and powers to private structures, the line between the public and private institutions becomes blurred, hence blurring their responsibilities as well. Moreover, the fact that private actors are not subject to the same constitutional, statutory, and oversight controls as government actors, profoundly challenges traditional notions of accountability. This raises important policy and administrative imperatives for managing their operations and ensuring their effectiveness.

To these challenges, one can add the absence of administrative standards of good practice in member states due to the fact that national administrative practices are deeply rooted in the cultural history of individual countries. Furthermore, institutions whose functions would be to coordinate and ensure the effective implementation of regional policies and projects, while minimising red tape and inefficiency are imperative for successful implementation of regional projects and programs.

CONCLUSION

Globally, regional integration has shown great potential for accelerating growth and development. The African continent, however, has not shared positively in this experience for a number of reasons. One reason, as discussed in the paper, is that many African countries prescribe to market integration, which is more suited to developed and developing countries than it is to poor under-developed countries. It was argued in the paper that the more appropriate integration model, given the unique peculiarities and circumstances of under-developed countries (and of the African continent) is development integration.

The paper sought to look beyond the usual suspects in defining, and dealing with the causes of African failure in the regional development arena. Rather than taking a political and economic science approach, the current paper opted to examine the administrative and institutional aspects of the problem. The NEPAD STAP programme was used as a case study and "real-world" example of challenges of regional integration on the African continent. While the infrastructural programme is key for Africa's integration and development, addressing various administrative challenges raised by partnership ventures, including institutional capacity, networks management, coordination and communication, and accountability is paramount.

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