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AFRICAN REGIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESS: SOME KEY ISSUES

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I. INTRODUCTION

Economic integration can be broadly defined as the process by which a group of neighboring countries with comparable levels of development, in a spirit of mutual solidarity and the commonality of their interests vis-à-vis the global environment, decide to gradually intensify and deepen their cooperation with a view to accelerating their economic and social development.

Thus, economic integration while allowing the concerned countries to better articulate their individual and dispersed resources often utilized in a contradictory manner, will reinforce the efficiency of their development actions within their combined economic space and thereby increase the countries' economic independence vis-à-vis the rest of the world.

Within this broad definition, theories about economic integration spell out systematic stages of the process. These are the establishment of:

(i) Free Trade Area by eliminating quantitative restrictions to trade and customs tariffs;

(ii) Customs Union whereby the tariffs of the member States in relation to third countries will be unified;

(iii) Common Market where all restrictions on factor movements within the integration space are abolished;

(iv) Economic Union whereby economic, monetary, fiscal, social and all sectoral policies are totally or to a large extent harmonized; and

(v) Supra-national union where the respective governments completely subordinate sovereignty over economic policies to a supra-national authority.

Against this background, this paper discusses in general the imperatives of Africa's economic cooperation and integration, developments or experiences in pursuing this process highlighting some of the major problems being encountered, with particular attention to trade liberalization schemes, which constitute the theme of the workshop. The paper also proposes some measures to address the constraints and highlights immediate priority actions to undertake, in the context of the first stage of the Abuja Treaty so as to strengthen the subregional/regional economic communities which are the building blocks for achieving the African Economic Community.

II. THE IMPERATIVES FOR ACCELERATING AFRICA'S ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

(i) The still unsatisfactory stage of development of the Africa region

The Africa region as a whole remains beleaguered with development problems. Although, gross domestic product(GDP) of the Africa region grew by 2.4% in 1994, compared to only 0.9% in 1993 and -0.35 in 1992, income per head is still on the decline, falling by 1 percent, the same rate as in the 1990s, as GDP growth is yet to keep pace with population growth. The African economy as a whole continues to fall behind those of other developing regions. The quality of life remains generally stagnant if not deteriorating against a backdrop of much unimproved educational and health infrastructure, substantial levels of malnutrition and poverty and unemployment and underemployment. The UNDP Human Development report continues to show the majority of African countries among the lowest ranking of the human development index. In addition, thirty-two of the forty-seven least developed countries of the world remain from Africa.

A major problem contributing to the less than expected growth of the economies of the Africa region as a whole is the lack of integrated and diversified production of goods and services. Taken each African country individually, it can be observed that they produce almost the same goods for export to world markets such as minerals, coffee, cocoa, cotton/textiles, timber/wood products and other primary commodities. For example, 77 percent of the exports of the countries of the North African subregion are made up of fuel, minerals, metals and other primary products. For the same products, countries within the ECOWAS, ECCAS, COMESA and SADC subregions export over 80 percent to world markets. The pace of growth in the industrial and manufacturing value-added sector has been very slow, constrained by the inability of the agricultural sector to supply vital raw material inputs to industry and vice versa. Furthermore, with respect to consumer goods (sugar, fats and edible oils, beverages, food and tobacco, etc) each African country can be seen to be basically producing for domestic consumption as production units are often limited to the size of the national markets.

The state of infrastructural development and networks particularly in terms of transport and communications and energy also leaves much to be desired. Inadequate transport and communications networks have contributed to weak cross-border economic and trade links of which the very low level of intra-regional trade and sectoral cooperation is the most obvious manifestation. For example in the North African subregion, the countries of the subregion import most of their oil requirements from the United Arab Emirates rather than from the oil producing countries of Algeria and Libya, although it is estimated that the two countries together could supply almost 75 percent of the sub-region's oil requirements.

(ii) The impact of the international economic environment

The international environment is witnessing tremendous changes that have profound impact on Africa. The growing trend is towards inter-dependent and integrated international production of goods and services, in particular through the operations of the trans-national corporations. Such a trend has also been an instrument for facilitating the development and transfer of technology and an expansion of international trade. Rapid technological development especially in areas such as information and communications technology and transport and communications have contributed to this phenomenon. It is important to observe therefore that within the present global scheme of things, the attainment of high levels of productivity more than ever before now requires that production be organized across national boundaries. The advent of the Uruguay Round Agreements basically liberalizing world trade is bound to intensify global competition and thereby further accelerate the process towards integrated international production.

It is no surprising that the biggest world players are rapidly consolidating themselves into regional economic and trading arrangements such as: the European Union, the US-Canada Free Trade Agreements; the US-Canada-Mexico (North Atlantic Free Trade Area-NAFTA); the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum). This must indeed serve as a poignant signal and lesson for Africa to accelerate its own integration process. In this context, there is a need to promote intra-regional investments and production structures with inter-sectoral and inter-country linkages as a means of improving production and productivity and encouraging greater intra-regional trade as well as preparing African countries to face the competition of the global economy.

III. EXPERIENCES AND WEAKNESSES OF AFRICA's INTEGRATION PROCESS

The idea of economic cooperation and integration among countries in Africa has been part of the region's development aspirations over more than three decades. Examples of past experiences before the 1970s include: the South African Customs Union (SACU) whose origin dates as far back as 1910; the Southern Rhodesia Customs Union established in 1949 between South Africa and present day Zimbabwe; the Ghana-Upper Volta Trade Agreement between Ghana and Burkina Faso(the then Upper Volta) created in 1962; the African Common Market linking Algeria, United Arab Republic(Egypt), Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Morocco formed in 1962; the Equatorial Customs Union and Cameroon composed of Central African Republic, Chad, Congo and Gabon established in 1962 and which may have formed the origins of the present Customs Union of Central African States; and the East African Community(EAC) comprising Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda created in 1967 and which, until its demise, was perhaps the most developed of all the integration experiences in Africa.

With the exception of SACU, none of these earlier experiences of integration in the continent exist at present, at least in their original form. New groupings have since been established reflecting the continued belief by African countries in the virtue and importance of economic cooperation and integration. New integration arrangements were therefore created during the 1970s. In West Africa, three economic communities emerged in succession within a span of three years:Community of West African States-CEAO(now Economic and Monetary Union of West African States-UEMOA) established in 1973; the Mano River Union(MRU) in 1974; and the Economic Community of West African States(ECOWAS) in 1975; UDEAC was given a new treaty in 1974; and the Economic Community of the Great Lakes(CEPGL) came into being in 1976.

The early 1980s marked the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action/Final Act of Lagos which also reemphasized the promotion of economic integration as a prime mover of Africa's individual and collective socio-economic transformation and gave further impetus to the formation of integration groupings such as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa(now Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa-COMESA); the Economic Community of Central African States(ECCAS); the Indian Ocean Commission(IOC) and; the South African Development Cooperation Conference(now Southern Africa Development Community-SADC).

Without going into the detailed developments of these experiences, it is sufficient to make the following two principal remarks about them: The first is that all these experiments have tended to have market integration as their basic orientation, although their treaties generally include sectoral development as well. Perhaps based on the example of the EEC, the various groupings aimed ultimately at attaining a common market. It is paradoxical to observe that in spite of all these earlier market integration experiences, none of the African subregional markets has been able to reach the level of a total free trade area. After decades of integration experiences, most if not all of the African subregions are still struggling to implement trade liberalization schemes. Tariff and non-tariff barriers have continued to present major obstacles to trade. The second important remark is that there can be no market integration without addressing production. The paucity of intra-African trade is largely also attributed to insufficient production of goods to trade in, besides deficiencies in transport and communications, energy and production.

The Lagos Plan of Action/Final Act of Lagos pioneered by ECA had as far back as 1980 recommended the creation of the African Economic Community by the 2000 with policies and strategies addressing all major sectors. It is hoped that the entry into force in 1994 of the Abuja Treaty seen as a reaffirmation of Africa's determination not to relent on economic cooperation aiming at the ultimate integration of the continent will provide the impetus for accelerating not only the market integration within each subregion and at the continental level, but also sectoral integration.

In the ensuing chapters, some major problems facing Africa's integration process are discussed: These include constraints facing the implementation of trade liberalization schemes which constitute a significant part of the programmes of the subregional economic communities(RECs) and infrastructural and production weaknesses.

Within the regional economic groupings and in line with the initial stages of the Abuja Treaty, the development of trade has been a major objective pursued through programmes aimed at achieving a free trade area and customs union based on the adoption of a gradual scheme for the elimination of customs duties and non-tariff restrictions to trade, the establishment of a common external tariff vis a vis third countries, and the harmonization of customs procedures and documents aided by a computerized system.

The African subregional treaties(Economic Community of West African States-ECOWAS; Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa-COMESA; West African Economic and Monetary Union-UEMOA) provide in the main for the total exemption from import duties and taxes on local and traditional handicraft products. For industrial products, the system is generally more cautious in scope and time-frame for implementation. Thus, graduated tax-relief measures(COMESA), negotiated preferential regimes(UEMOA) or as in the case of ECOWAS, a gradual reduction of tariffs on industrial products over a period of between 6-10 years depending on the grouping of the countries into three categories by level of their industrial development, are adopted.

The basic instruments of the liberalization programmes are the Rules of Origin and nomenclatures and compensation mechanisms, and other trade promotion and facilitation measures. Under the "rules of origin" the criteria normally applied are: quantities and/or value of raw materials used; percentage of value-added relative to the ex-factory selling price of the product and; the distribution of capital between nationals and foreigners. The first two criteria are found in the treaties of the subregional groupings, with the "raw materials" criterion reflecting a concern to encourage the development of the natural/raw material resources of member States while that of the "value-added" reflects an attempt to promote greater integration of a product in the community's industrial fabric. Equity participation by nationals in the capital of enterprises is in certain communities(ECOWAS, COMESA, ECCAS) combined with the first two factors to determine the eligibility requirements for tariff preferential treatment. market.

With regard to compensation mechanisms, the rationale for its adoption by some groupings (ECOWAS, UEMOA) is to provide a means for assisting member States that are consistently net importers within the regional market to compensate for fiscal revenue losses and terms of trade imbalances arising from the application of preferential systems. However, the operations of the compensation funds have been constrained by lack of contributions from the net-exporting member States.

In general, progress in the implementation of trade liberalization programmes has been slow. ECOWAS is not making much headway in its trade liberalization scheme. The plan initiated in 1981 has been subject to several revisions, the most recent one being put in place in 1992. COMESA's trade liberalization scheme has been subject to a number of revisions as a result of problems in implementing it, in particular restrictive rules of origin in the beginning and a lack of compensation mechanism. COMESA has, however, made considerable progress in other trade facilitation and promotion measures such as the institution of the PTA traveller's cheques, ASYCUDA(automated system for custom declarations) and TINET(trade information network).

The trade liberalization programme of ECCAS has been put on hold as the Community is currently not operational. In the Union of Arab Maghreb (UMA), the existing trade subregional trade liberalization protocol is yet to become fully operational as bilateral trade arrangements among the members of the group constitute in large part the basis of trade in the subregion. The SADC region has also recently adopted a trade liberalization protocol of its own, which can complicate the programme of COMESA for the elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers as the majority of SADC members belong to the former.

The factors affecting the effective implementation of Trade Liberalization schemes can be summarized as follows:

(i) Implementation of different and uncoordinated trade liberalization schemes adopted by different RECs within the same subregion

Different trade liberalization schemes and implementation schedules are evident even in the same subregional space as in the case of West Africa where UEMOA and ECOWAS coexist with different schemes in spite of their overlapping membership. The Southern Africa Development Community(SADC) has also recently adopted a trade liberalization protocol of its own although all but two of its member States belong to COMESA. This is not conducive for maintaining a cohesive subregional market space, essential for the smooth implementation of the liberalization programmes.

(ii) Restrictive rules of origin

The basic flaw with the national equity participation consideration is that producers in certain member countries are mainly owned by non-nationals or expatriates. This makes it difficult to fulfil the requirement that for enterprises to benefit from the regional trade preference, they should be between 30 and 51 percent owned by nationals(ECOWAS, ECCAS, COMESA). Besides, it prevents the inclusion of a range of goods and thus make the preferential arrangements pointless. For these reasons, COMESA decided to abandon the national equity participation criterion, but ECOWAS and ECCAS still maintain it. In respect of the former, an industrial base predominantly controlled by nationals in certain of its countries could be the reason for insisting on the national equity factor.

(iii) Lack of compensation mechanism or its inadequate funding

Existing compensation mechanisms face funding problems in the absence of sustainable self-financing mechanisms for the RECs, while their absence as in the case of COMESA has constrained the effective implementation of trade liberalization programmes where there is a significant imbalance in the terms of trade of the participating countries arising from the regional preferences. For this reason COMESA has now decided to institute a compensation mechanism and requested ECA to assist it with the necessary study.

(iv) Lack of currency convertibility and ineffectiveness of existing Clearing and Payments arrangements

The lack of currency convertibility, except for the CFA among the countries of the CFA franc zone and the Rand Monetary Area(RMA) has restricted intra-subregional and intra-regional payments for goods and services with its attendant effects on intra-subregional and intra-African trade. The Clearing and Payments arrangements set up to facilitate payments of trade have not been effectively and correctly used by the member States. Lack of or slow settlement of net obligations, exchange control regulations, hard-currency payment requirements for some goods and services and a general lack of awareness of their operations have virtually rendered the clearing arrangements ineffective.

(v) External trade interests and need to earn more foreign exchange for development

Growth in the external indebtedness of member States and debt service obligations coupled with a severe lack of foreign exchange and macro-economic disequilibrium are some of the main problems which structural adjustment and reform programmes in Africa are designed to reverse. In this context, the need for member States to reduce or restrict imports irrespective of their sources of supply in order to save foreign exchange and to increase their exports in world markets to earn hard currency affects the degree to which they adhere to rules of the trade liberalization scheme that they have commonly adopted.

(vi) Structural constraints

The above difficulties experienced by the trade liberalization schemes are further compounded by structural problems to production and trade. Lack of adequate intra-regional infrastructures and strong and diversified production systems have limited the impact of trade liberalization programmes. Dependence on and production of a few and similar primary commodities by the member countries limits the potential of trade liberalization schemes to significantly enhance trade among the countries. The effectiveness of trade liberalization programmes can therefore be enhanced if accompanied by policies and the actual implementation of programmes to address structural imbalances and the production dimension of the economies as well as improve the general macro-economic environment.

(vii) Lack of mobilization of the private sector and the civil society in general in the design of trade liberalization programmes in particular, and in integration policies in general

The promotion of economic cooperation and integration within the subregions and at the African continental level in general is not and should not be the business of governments alone. To date, this process has been left to governments alone to the extent that the private sector and the civil society in general who are intended to benefit from policies and strategies of integration are completely left out of the picture. Currently, no mechanism exists at the subregional (with a few exceptions e.g. ESABO) that allows societal forces including businessmen, workers, the youth, women, political parties etc to reflect their views, concerns and interests in the course or in the building of their Community.

Existing statutory organs of the various RECs in Africa consist of the Assembly of Heads of State and the Council of Ministers which make policy decisions and give directives regarding the realization of the objectives of the communities, and the secretariat which is responsible for the day-to-day running of the affairs of the community including the design and implementation of programmes. As a result the integration process or the Community is either not largely known or is seen by the ordinary member of the civil society as a mere "talk-show".

IV. MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS IN GENERAL PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

(i) Ensuring pragmatism in the design of the trade liberalization system and accelerating the implementation of existing programmes

The removal of custom tariffs and other preferences within the community is designed to promote trade among its member States. However, inequalities among the countries in the gains arising from this arrangement can be a source of dissatisfaction and reluctance by net-losers(from the standpoint of both terms of trade and revenue losses) to abide by the rules of the game. It is therefore important that the determination of the market rules especially with respect to the tariff preferences and their time frame for implementation is subject to very serious negotiations among the member countries not only at the level of the policy makers, but also including the private sector/economic operators with a view to ensuring that they will be commonly accepted and willingly applied. This will also ensure that the special concerns of the countries involved vis-à-vis their levels of development and comparative advantages are taken into account in arriving at a commonly acceptable plan. The removal of tariffs and non-tariff barriers which continue to constitute major obstacles to trade within the RECs should thus be accelerated.

(ii) Harmonization of trade liberalization regimes and adoption of a unified approach to integrating the subregional space

There is a need to harmonize as a matter of urgency and priority different trade mechanisms and instruments existing within the same regional economic community with a view to removing contradictions and consolidating the community into a cohesive and unified integration space and regional market. Implementation of a single trade liberalization system will also help to resolve in a pragmatic and less political way the issue of rationalization of several IGOs devoted to integration within the same regional community, bearing in mind that in the other sectoral areas such as agriculture, industry and transport and communications there is a less likelihood for adopting and implementing duplicative and overlapping programmes.

(iii) Ensuring a sustainable financing of the integration process in general and the compensation mechanisms in particular

The financing of the compensation mechanisms is linked with the broad question of financing the integration process which is generally hampered by the lack, paucity and/or irregularity of financial resources required to pursue agreed objectives.

The operations of the RECs suffer from a lack of adequate and sustainable funding. Contributions from member States have either been irregular or inadequate to sustain their secretariats and activities including the financing of agreed community programmes. Therefore, the importance of finding a sustainable solution to the funding problem cannot be overemphasized. The objective of such a solution will be to ensure an adequate and regular means to support the integration process in terms of: operating expenses of the RECs; requirements of the compensatory fund which will thus help address concerns about the distribution of costs and benefits of integration among the member States; and community programmes and projects.

It is possible from the experience of the former CEAO(now UEMOA) to institute on the basis of a comprehensive study at the level of each REC a community levy on products originating from third countries to provide a basis for a self-financing mechanism for the RECs, in addition to other supplementary external and financial assistance they will be able to mobilize from regional development banks and other funding sources. The determination of the tax rate taking into account an analysis of its inflationary effect, the products to be considered, the collection and accounting procedures and the management of the funds are key elements of the study.

(iv) Raising the quality and level of output and trade through diversified and competitive production and infrastructural development

For Africa, economic cooperation and integration should not merely be a matter of liberalizing trade or removing customs barriers. An evidently serious action is needed in terms of not only unifying the markets, but also integrating the physical space, production and macro-economic policy formulation.

If the existence of preferential arrangements within the RECs is expected to boost intra-community trade, the lack of competitive production of many industrial products capable of enhancing trade diversion from third countries reduces the gains from these arrangements. Trade creation resulting from the incentives provided by the RECs can also be considerably limited by the rigidities of the productive forces and dependence on the production of a few primary commodities. Intra-community trade will therefore be enhanced if accompanied by measures to expand the diversification of production, improve the linkages between the primary sector and the manufacturing sectors and develop the weak technological base. Transport and communications networks need to be equally improved within the RECs in order to facilitate unrestricted movement of goods, people and capital within the RECs and thereby help unleash the full potential of their intra-community trade and production.

(v) Promoting Popular Participation in the Integration Process

In some subregions, attempts are being made to increasingly involve the business society in integration matters through the organization of trade fairs or workshops by the RECs involving business associations. The recent Eastern and Southern African Business Association(ESABO)'s Conference on regional integration held in Nairobi and the ECA Conference on Reviving Private Investments held in Accra in June 1996 which tried, among other things, to promote awareness of business opportunities in the context of regional cooperation and integration in Africa, are examples of efforts in this regard. While these are important steps in the right direction, there is still the need to institutionalize a mechanism towards the democratization of, and the full involvement of representatives of the private sector and the civil society in the subregional integration process. In this regard, due attention should be given as much to the liberalization of trade and integration of the economic sectors as to the establishment of community parliaments or a type of framework that can enable the creativity and energies of the private sector and the civil society in general to be mobilized to strengthen the integration process.

(vi) Building critical capacities for integration

Capacity building programmes should be one of the key ingredients to accelerate Africa's integration process. There is indeed much scope for pooling efforts at the subregional level to build critical capacities in this regard through, inter-alia, joint ownership and operation of institutions of higher learning and research facilities designed to provide training in critical areas of the integration process such as in subregional/regional policy formulation and planning and implementation of subregional ventures including the establishment of pan-African transnational corporations.

V. ECA'S ROLE, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON ADDRESSING SOME OF THE MOST URGENT PROBLEMS

One of ECA's main challenges is to promote economic cooperation and integration in Africa. To this end, ECA, over the years, has assisted member States in establishing the subregional economic communities(ECOWAS, PTA-COMESA, ECCAS etc) as instruments to spearhead the integration process within their respective subregions. ECA has also pioneered the establishment of subregional and regional development institutions in key sectors to support the continent's subregional and regional development and integration efforts in their respective specialized fields. These organizations popularly referred to as "ECA-sponsored institutions" can be found in such fields as: science and Technology(African Centre for Technology(ARCT); industrial development(the African Regional Centre for Engineering Design and Manufacturing); and economic planning and management(Regional Institute for Economic Development and Planning).

The ECA, at the level of the secretariat at the Addis Ababa Headquarters and/or through its field offices i.e the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres(MULPOCs) will continue to work closely with and support the efforts of the RECs through direct technical assistance in the implementation of their work programmes. Currently, ECA is undertaking necessary measures to strengthen its MULPOCs to serve member States and the RECs better in the field of economic cooperation and integration as well as in other areas of development.

ECA has also undertaken significant reforms of its work programmes by refocussing activities and structures into five main areas of concentration among which is the promotion of regional cooperation and integration. Deriving from the priorities of the Abuja Treaty the thrust of the programme will be to assist the various subregional groupings in: in strengthening and developing their cross-border trade liberalization; developing transport and communications networks as well as energy production; building and enhancing production capacities with emphasis on agriculture and industry and harmonizing economic and monetary policies and promoting regional convergence in the area.

As a first step and in accordance with the principal tasks of the Abuja Treaty during the first phase, ECA is addressing the problem of harmonization and rationalization of the various RECs operating within the same subregions through means other than recommending their simple mergers which has proven politically difficult to implement. ECA believes that harmonizing the market rules and instruments within each subregion can go a long way towards unifying the subregional market and thereby eventually paving the way for the rationalization of the various RECs.

The other immediate task is to help put these RECs on a sound footing financially so that their programmes some of which have reached an advanced stage of investments can be effectively implemented.

Recognizing the importance of an urgent resolution of these problems, the ECA Conference of Ministers, on the basis of a document prepared by the secretariat refocusing attention on these issues and making recommendations on practical solutions, adopted at its thirtieth session in May 1995 a resolution mandating the secretariat to carry out a comprehensive study on the two issues. This will be accomplished through a UNDP-assisted programme designed to support the implementation of the Abuja Treaty to be implemented with the OAU.

Provision and coordination of support for the integration process among the three African continental organizations, ECA, OAU, and ADB is also being fostered through their Joint Secretariat established to promote the implementation of the Abuja Treaty.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has tried to highlight some of the key issues regarding Africa's regional integration process and shown that this is a venture that requires not only addressing market integration per se but also tackling the production and infrastructural dimensions without which the former cannot succeed. To this end, cooperation programmes should be intensified in the fields of transport and communications and energy. On production, there is also a fundamental need to articulate and accelerate the implementation of policies for enhancing productive capacities particularly with regard to the development of agriculture and its influence on and linkages with the industrial sector, if the process should make a significant difference in the continent's development and thereby raise the level of satisfaction of the needs of its people, their well-being and quality of life.

The integration process should also take account of the full participation of the private sector and the civil society to make it a truly community undertaking. Strengthening the RECs as building blocks is a sine qua non to the success of the process. In this context, the need to harmonize the institutional framework to avoid dissipation of efforts and resources is a major prerequisite.

Furthermore, integration has a price and price has to be paid if integration can take place at all. The issue of mobilizing resources for integration needs to be addressed in a sustainable manner as the present system based on financial subscriptions from member States has proven to be inadequate and unreliable. Africa's integration process cannot also succeed if its financing is based on foreign assistance, which is becoming increasingly scarce and difficult to obtain. The future lies in finding appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the integration process is built on self-sustaining resources that will not only support the secretariats of the RECs but also existing and potential community programmes and projects.

With respect to the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, two important principles are worthy of mention. The first is that the Treaty has to be perceived not as an end in itself, but as a flexible framework or a plan within which well negotiated and thought-out plans and strategies consistent with its objectives and which equalize the concerns and interests of the participating states, are pursued at the level of each REC.

The second guiding principle is that no plan however well thought out or conceived is rigid and static enough not to adapt to changing circumstances and realities. Accordingly, Article 103 of the Abuja Treaty that provides for the possibility of its amendment and revision if so desired by the contracting parties in the light of changing circumstances should be confidently applied.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize the need for building networks among institutions in Africa to support Africa's development and integration process. This will ensure coordination and harmonization of activities and avoid or minimize unnecessary duplication of effort and resources. More importantly, agency individual or joint activities can be more meaningful and have greater impact in terms of responding to the concrete problems and needs of the communities if they are demand-driven.