



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Governance and Public Administration Division

Theme:

*“Towards the United States of Africa
Issues, Problems and Challenges”*

A photograph of a woman in traditional African attire, including a large, textured headwrap. She is looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent map of Africa in the background.

African Governance Roundtable

Report of the Roundtable on “United States
of Africa: Issues, Problems and Challenges”

May 7th 2009, Addis Ababa

Introduction

The African Governance Roundtable on the theme “Towards the United States of Africa: Issues, Problems and Challenges” was organised by the Governance and Public Administration Division (GPAD) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) as part of its governance project. The Governance roundtable aims at promoting informed debate, discussions and policy analysis in an informal context and providing a platform for different stakeholders to engage in critical dialogue on contemporary but pressing governance issues without ascribing views canvassed to their institutional affiliations. The Roundtable on the United States of Africa: Issues, Problems and Challenges” took place on 7th May 2009 at the United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The necessity for Africa to unite has been expressed on several occasions by Africa’s political leadership and policy intellectuals. The issue has become central on the agenda of the African Union (AU) as evidenced by the debates that took place at the February 2009 summit. However, there is no unanimity amongst Africa’s political leadership and policy intellectuals on the pathway to be followed for the realisation of political and economic integration. As the institution mandated with undertaking research, generating knowledge and conducting policy analysis and advocacy to foster Africa’s development and integration, ECA consequently provided the forum for discussion on the issues, problems and challenges towards the United States of Africa.

Discussions at the Roundtable were led by five panellists who are recognised experts or practitioners in the field of Africa’s political and economic integration. They addressed different aspects of the theme and thereafter participants were invited to contribute to the theme; they then engaged in critical debate. Presentations made covered a broad range of areas, which included a historical approach to the current debate; an analysis of the obstacles and challenges faced in the creation of the union government; a discussion on the best ways to improve popular participation and involve civil society actors in the integration process; an assessment of economic integration processes and an examination of the possible shape of the future AU Authority.

The Chairperson of the Roundtable, GPAD’s Director, Mr. Okey Onyejekwe, started by thanking the panellists and participants. He then explained that the debate on African integration is part of an attempt to correct the consequences of the Berlin Conference and to transcend the paradox of fragmentation. Mr. Okey Onyejekwe noted that the debate between the Casablanca and Monrovia Groups remains topical. He concluded by stating that the Roundtable should result in concrete policy recommendations that would guide policy makers in furthering Africa’s political and economic integration. Mr. Said Adejumo (Chief, Public Administration at ECA) provided the context for the roundtable as ECA’s innovative contribution to public education and discourse, information and knowledge sharing and policy articulation on major governance issues. He noted that the roundtable cannot be timelier than now as Africa’s threads on a tortuous path of regional integration.

Panellists and Topics Addressed

1. **Prof. Adele Jinadu**- Former President, African Association of Political Science (AAPS), and leading African Political Theorist.
2. **Prof. Micheal Chege**- Advisor, International Development Policy, Ministry of Planning, Kenya
3. **Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey**- Director, Institute of Democratic Governance, Accra.
4. **Prof. Adebayo Olukoshi** – Former Executive Secretary, CODESRIA and Member, High Level Panel on the Audit of the AU Commission.
5. **Mr. Chrysantus Ayangafac**, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Addis Ababa office.
6. **Mr. Thomas Deve**, UNDP Millennium Development Goals Office, Nairobi, Kenya (Discussant).

All the panellists and participants spoke in their individual capacities.

Five panellists who have different spheres of expertise, background and experiences on Africa's regional integration introduced the discussion from their respective perspectives.

Adele Jinadu's presentation was entitled *"Linking the Past to the Present: Pan-African Ideals and the United States of Africa"*.

He made the following points:

- a) Pan-Africanism and its ideals are a continuity dating from the pre-colonial era in Africa till the present;
- b) The debate about political and economic integration should focus more on the issues driving the process, rather than on personalities;
- c) The political ideals of Pan-Africanism must not be disconnected from existential realities as they constitute social forces that assume new meaning, provide new interpretation and suggest new policy directions by attempting to frame political and socio-economic processes which would define the integration agenda;
- d) More than ever before, there is a stronger consensus now on the desirability of economic and political integration at the continental level in the form of a Union Government with the regional economic communities (RECs) as building blocks. However, a serious disagreement exists over the means towards, and the time-frame bound strategic and implementation modalities of such integration;
- e) The possible principles that may inform the sharing of competences between the Union Government and its member States are: (1) the principle of subsidiarity, according to which competence in a particular policy area should be reserved to the tier of government that can best perform it efficiently; the principle of subsidiarity would actually lead to most legislative competences being reserved for member States; and (2) learning from spheres of competence in which significant policy coordination, consensus and delegated authority have already been achieved, in the context of the AU Commission and the RECs; this would lead to a Union Government tasked mainly with economic policy and social affairs;
- f) Some protagonists insist that the devolution of power to the Union Government should be done in a precise and legally binding manner so as to avoid conflict of competence in the passing and enforcement of legislation, in the respective spheres of jurisdiction;
- g) The principle of variable geometry should be applied as a way out of the interminable delay in the creation of a Union Government; this principle would mean that allowance should be made for member States that are reluctant to transfer their autonomy in the proposed policy areas, to opt out of the Union Government so that those that are ready and willing can move forward without delay;
- h) A major step to be considered in a union government is rethinking of the executive organ of the Union as a step towards the United States of Africa, which implies amendment to the Constitutive Act of the AU and the integration of the RECs into a more coherent integration strategy and continental governance architecture.

Michael Chege spoke on “*Obstacles and Challenges to the Creation of a Union Government and United States of Africa*”.

Micheal Chege made the following observations.

- a) There are three major obstacles that must be overcome if Africa is to integrate (1) conceptual problems-of what the integration process is all about and for what purpose? (2) concrete economic, social and political obstacles and (3) the search for African dignity;
- b) There is need to bear in mind that the ultimate goal is to restore Africa’s dignity and freedom, as well as to fight balkanisation and neo-colonialism. This is important as it would serve as a guiding principal in furthering Africa’s integration and overcoming other obstacles;
- c) Some of the socio-economic challenges to integration include Africa’s marginal share of international trade, low intra-African trade and movement, high level of poverty and political conflicts and poor leadership;
- d) Popular consultation on the integration process is very important as witnessed in the experience of the European Union in which member-states had to consult with their people whether to join the EU or not, and some undertook referendum in their countries in doing so;

Emmanuel Akwetey’s exposé addressed the theme: “*Popular Participation and Civil Society in a Union Government and United States of Africa agenda*” .

His presentation dwelt on the following issues:

- a) All citizens in one form or the other belong to civil society. This in itself is an asset for the action towards a more effective participation of civil society in the debate on the Union Government;
- b) Some pertinent questions to be raised are: is the proposed AU Authority likely to lead Africa to a Union Government by 2011 and to the United States of Africa by 2015? (2) What has the AU achieved so far? What has it done with civil society? but more needs to be done in terms of formal and informal interactions with civil society and the inclusiveness of it;
- c) In order for these targets to be attained in an effective way there is need for finding a way of interacting with civil society in a more constructive manner. The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established for this purpose,
- d) Although the AU has been extremely productive in decision making, it has been unable to implement most of its decisions. This gap is due to the non- recognition or better integration of the civil society into Africa’s governance architecture;

e) The AU Authority in being established will have to overcome two major challenges- implementing decisions made by the AU, and involving the citizenry and civil society in its activities. The AU Authority should use other governance actors to deliver regional development goods. A way of doing so would be the establishment of the ECOSOCC Secretariat as an independent organ from the AU Commission and to amend article 14 of the ECOSOCC Statute;

Adebayo Olukoshi's presentation was on “*Economic Integration in Africa: where are we, and what future?*”

Olukoshi made the following points:

a) He recognised the efforts of the foremost pan-Africanists like Marcus Garvey who invested time, resources and energy in the Pan-African cause;

b) The debate about Africa’s economic integration is an old one, but political choices of the African leadership have not been in support of it. An illustration was the hitherto unsuccessful East African Community experience, which has just been recently revived;

c) The issues at stake in the debate about African economic integration is of political nature as it is up to the political leadership to commit truly to uniting Africa;

d) The nature of economic structures in Africa is still externally driven, which results in African economies being producers of primary products, poorly industrialised and weakly integrated with low level of intra-African trade and poor regional infrastructure;

e) The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, which were the most comprehensive integration agendas by

Africans and for Africa, were never implemented due to a confluence of internal and external factors;

f) The Washington Consensus that translated itself into structural adjustment programmes implemented in the 1980s and 1990s weakened the integration process in Africa;

g) The dependence of RECs and other integration scheme on external resources and donors’ conditionality constitutes a major challenge for Africa’s integration process;

h) NEPAD is a good initiative but requires a much inward looking and less externally dependent approach;

i) The choice between the market-path and the non-market path to integration is a false alternative. Both the state and the market are central to the development agenda.

Chrysantus Ayangafac made a presentation on; “ *The AU Authority: Between Intergovernmentalism and Supratechnocracy*”.

His observations are as follows:

- a) The AU Authority should be a good step towards a Union Government and continental integration provided that it avoids the shortcomings of the current AU Commission; otherwise, the establishment of the Authority would amount to “putting old wine in new bottles.”
- b) The proposed AU Authority should be built on political consensus and be granted a high level of independence. It should be both an inter-governmental organisation and a supranational technocracy by nature;
- c) The Authority should have the exclusive power to initiate and implement policies in the areas agreed in Sharm el Sheikh. These spheres of competence exclude areas that are deemed too sensitive in Africa and include domains of evident common interest;
- d) The domains in which the Authority would not assume exclusive power of policy initiation and implementation might include common security, foreign policy, international trade and commerce;
- e) Regarding the structure and size of the Authority, what matters most is in managing political sensitivity and ensuring efficient technocracy;
- f) The number of secretariats to be established by the AU should be in line with the areas in which the Authority has exclusive right to initiate policies. In the areas deemed too sensitive, special secretariats overseen by intergovernmental bodies should be set up;
- g) On the institutional implications of the transformation of the AU Commission into the AU Authority, there is the need for co-decision making at the AU. This could be done by the transformation of the Pan-African Parliament into a more legitimate and decision-making organ that represents the interests of the citizens of Africa. Also, there is need for an independent AU Ombudsperson and independent accounting and auditing mechanisms;
- h) On legal issues, there is need to amend several AU treaties and instruments. There is also the need to explore the possibility for the decisions taken by the AU Authority to be directly enforceable at the domestic level (community law).

Discussions and main issues raised

After the various exposés, the floor was opened to all participants. Many issues were raised and debated during interactive discussions.

1. **Conceptual clarity:** the need to construct a coherent and convincing discourse about the vision and purpose of the integration process;
2. **Leadership:** the issue of the type of leadership and intellectuals needed to take the integration agenda forward was discussed. Consensus emerged that the leadership that would be able to best advance Africa's integration should enjoy the highest standard of morals, ethics, commitment and legitimacy. These criteria should also apply to intellectuals.
3. **AU's Institutional capacity:** participants agreed on the need for a better staffed and resourced AU technocracy. They also agreed on the need that its powers should be clearly defined.
4. **Lack of implementation of AU's decisions:** on an urgent basis, there is need for redefining the African governance architecture with a view to making it more inclusive. This is indispensable if the decisions of the AU are to be implemented at the domestic level.
5. **Financing for integration:** concerns were expressed at the lack of resources for financing for integration. The consensus that emerged is that the apparent lack of resources is a consequence of the lack of political commitment. The need for reforming Africa's economic structures in order to make them internally-driven was shared.
6. **On the issues of integration schemes and RECs being donor-dependant:** the idea that Africa should sustain what it establishes was widely shared. The AU and the RECs should devise independent funding mechanisms in order to reduce their reliance on donor support.
7. **RECs as building blocks:** the need for reinforcing coherence and coordination amongst RECs themselves on the one hand, and between the RECs and the AU on the other, was expressed.
8. **Popular/Civil society participation:** a deep concern at the exclusion of African citizenry from the discussions and processes about integration was expressed. Participants called for the identification of ways and avenues to get the peoples of Africa to participate in the process.
9. **Selective union as a starting point:** some participants proposed that the Union Government becomes operational with those States that are ready and willing to engage into a more integrated system now.

10. **Africa's independence, dignity and freedom:** many participants proposed that Africa should evolve an internally-driven economic system aimed primarily at addressing the needs of African peoples rather than satisfying the wishes of the West.

11. **Debate between gradualists and maximalists:** participants did not agree on one approach, although more people seemed to be in favour of a gradual but rapid approach to integration.

Key issues and policy recommendations

From the rich discussions that took place during the Roundtable, the following concrete policy recommendations emerged:

1. **Clear Vision on the Integration Agenda:** There is need for a clear and concise vision of what Africa seeks or wants to achieve with regional integration. Regional integration is a means, and the end must be clearly defined;

2. **Leadership and commitment:** the Roundtable recommended strengthening Africa's leadership commitment to the integration agenda. Political commitment to the integration agenda is critical to its success. It also recommended that the legitimacy of Africa's political leadership be strengthened through conducting free, fair, transparent and credible elections and service to the people who elected them;

3. **Popular and civil society participation:** the Roundtable recommended that popular consultation be undertaken and that article 14 of the ECOSOCC Statute be amended. It also recommended that an ECOSOCC Secretariat independent from the AU executive be established;

4. **Implementation of AU decisions:** the Roundtable recommended that a more inclusive African governance architecture be designed with a view to involving other governance actors such as civil society, social movements and the Diaspora in the decision making and implementation processes;

5. **RECs as building blocks:** the Roundtable called for more coherence and coordination amongst the RECs and between the RECs and the AU;

6. **Establishment of the AU Authority:** the Roundtable recommended that pitfalls encountered by the AU Commission be avoided, by granting the Authority the necessary statutory capacity (including a strong mandate), the adequate resources, staff and legitimacy to discharge its mandate effectively;

7. **People Centred United States of Africa:** A people owned, people driven and people led integration process is very important to its success, hence the ordinary Africans have to actively involved in it and their voices heard. This requires adequate consultation with them, if not a referendum on the shape, form and direction the integration project should take.

Conclusion and the way forward

The participants thanked the ECA for convening the Roundtable, requested it to circulate and disseminate the report of the Roundtable widely and encouraged it to convene more of it in the nearest future.

UNECA/ GPAD
7th May 2009, Addis Ababa - Ethiopia