AFRICAN UNION AND THE CHALLENGES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

ABSTRACT

Despite the timely creation of African Union as continental front towards alleviating the multifaceted sufferings of Africans and poster an avenue for a concerted effort towards achieving developmental goals, the continent remains cocooned to almost all indices of underdevelopment. The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that was considered toothless bulldog that lacks the capacity to catapult the continent to greatness to form the more capable African Union fashioned in line with European Union, was expected to institutionalize systemic reforms that will enable giant strides to be achieved – yet the outcome leaves much to be desired. This research work utilizes documentary analysis to use the objectives of establishing OAU and the reasons for transforming it to AU as yardstick for measuring the achievements of the continental organization. The outcome of the study reveals that the has institutionalized and empowered relevant commissions, signed new charters and resolutions that empowered those institutions to achieve tremendous feat in the discharge of their responsibilities such as the mobilization of armies for the settlement of dispute in Burundi and placement of weapons and travel embargo on Eritrea. However, the Union stills faces problems ranging from multipolar ideological leanings of its member states to its ability to create a strong Intra African alliances and friendships capable of lessening dependence on former colonial powers. The paper recommends inter alia, that African resources should be adequately used to combat health challenges, ecological challenges and infrastructural inadequacies so that Arica will be a better place for all Africans; friends of Africa and posterity.

Key Words: African Union, Organization, Unity, Development, Political, Africa, Colonial Powers

INTRODUCTION

The need to form an African unity oriented organization came as a result of the quest to create a collective anti-colonial struggle on a continental level. This quest brought about a manifestation of the age-long search for an institutionalized body which led to the formation of organization of African unity in 1963, some black Africans, who gained the required political and socio-national consciousness to champion the struggle for freedom and improve social-material life for the people of Africa, held series of conferences in London, Paris, Lisbon and Manchester respectively (Nkrumah 1962).

The priority of these black Africans in diaspora was to solve two key problems. One, to address the problem of colonialism and imperialism which had reduced the continent and its people to mere instruments of trade in the hands of colonialist/imperialist powers of Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium; to ameliorate the problems of poverty and loss human of dignity as a result

of imperialist domination, oppression, dehumanization and exploitation of the resources of African people

The African nationalist saw the need to liberate Africa even from within using viable means available and in so doing, free press as a sin-qua-non needed to train the people towards full independence and development. It was viewed as machinery that will express the anti-colonial view, awaken a true African consciousness and assist in the spread of African nationalism (Nkrumah 1963).

Consequently, having been systematically exposed to these and other ills, the emerging African political leaders resolved to take the political and social-economic disparity of Africa into their own hands. And in order to do this effectively and in the spirit of brotherhood and African unity, it was thought necessary to form a continental political body.

PROBLEM OF STUDY

The unity and prosperity of Africa after several political and economic experimentation in initiative and policies, seems to be elusive. Notable among problems bedeviling Africa is the issue of imperialism and neocolonialism. The political independence of post-colonial African state from their colonizers has not been able to completely eradicate the imperialist interference in the internal affairs of African states. In fact, by accepting the territorial arrangements made by the respective colonial powers, the continental political body itself tended to have compromised neo-colonialism and the process of imperialism in Africa (Rodney 1972, Ake 2001)

Political instability in Africa is like a hydra-head monster that resulted into civil wars, boarder-clashes, refugee problems, assassination and interference in the internal matters of member states of Organization of African Union (OAU) or to what is now called African Union (AU). African leaders

and intellectuals held as they are in the grip of colonial ideology have been unable to see or fully to appreciate the path to African political and economic unity and development. (Frank 1969).

In respect to crises, the African Nations suffer a lot of setback particularly the situation where both political and social crisis thwart the developmental path of the nations. Instances of skirmishes and full blown wars abound in the continents, prominent among which is the crisis in Sudan (Darfur, Janjawid and Sudan Liberation Army), Rwanda (Tusi and Hutu), Ivory Coast, Chad, Niger (recent coup by the

Military), Madagascar, Nigeria (Religious and ethnic crisis in Jos, Kaduna, Borno and Yobe states), Somalia (Al-Shabbab and the fragile government backed by the AU), etc (Ibrahim and Cheri 2013). Post -colonial African states also suffer from poor economic foundations and debt crisis. This is as a result of imperialist exploitation of the economic resources of the continent, and the corrupt financial mismanagement of African resources by African political leaders and bureaucrats, the continent has been thrown into a situation of vicious circle of poverty and disease; and infrastructural deficit.

Despite the timely creation of African Union as continental front towards alleviating the multifaceted sufferings of Africans and poster an avenue for a concerted effort towards achieving developmental goals, the continent remains cocooned to almost all indices of underdevelopment. The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that was considered toothless bulldog that lacks the capacity to catapult the continent to greatness to form the more capable African Union fashioned in line with European Union, was expected to institutionalize systemic reforms that will enable giant strides to be achieved – yet the outcome leaves much to be desired.

In addition, the continent's political body either as OAU or now as AU has not been able to manage its internal conflicts either by peaceful means or without external interference. The Congo (now

Zaire) crisis, the Nigeria civil war, the Chadian crisis, Liberia, Guinea, Southern Sudan, Tunisia, Libya, CAR and Somalia etc. imperialist continued to fuel internal conflict in the continent, for example, the Angolan civil war, Apartheid South Africa and the Mercenary caught in Zimbabwe.

Therefore, the whole idea behind the formation of AU/ OAU was to bring all its members together to confront the challenges ahead of them. But with all the efforts by the AU or OAU to put its house to order in order to have the requisite for security, peace and economic sustainability to have the needed development have had failed. Instead, African societies possess unique features which provide the platform for understanding them as a geo political entity. One dominant feature of the African societies is extreme poverty. On nearly every count the nation of Africa are worse off than the industrialized world. Compared with Europe, Australia, and America, inhabitants of Africa experience higher rate of infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition, unemployment, illiteracy and disease, while their income levels, life expectancy and access to welfare services are far lower (Ibrahim, 2013).

CONCEPT OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The concept of underdevelopment is defied of single universally accepted definition. Underdevelopment sees by some scholars as the direct opposite of development while others compare the level of development of two or more societies and to some is absent of development. Notwithstanding, underdevelopment is neither opposite nor absence of development (Alanana 2006).

Giving the fact that every society have experience a certain level of social progress in the process of its social evolution. This is to say that underdevelopment is a situation or a process in which a society has not sufficiently developed (Alanana 2006). Dependency theorist believed that this status

of insufficient development was acquired under certain historical process, that among other things include centuries of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism.

Rodney 1972, rightly observed that, at each of these historical periods, links were made to the extra ordinary exchange of human beings for European assorted rubbish like mirror, perfumes and wine. This continued under the colonial and neocolonial production systems. Under this arrangement Africa was assigned the role of primary producers. Europe fix prices for agricultural produce in their favor. And oriented the Africans production away from the domestic needs.

Underdevelopment is synonymous with exploitation and plunder of one country by another. Outcome of which was the gross unbalance in wealth and development at all levels.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

This study adopts the dependency theory as theoretical framework of analysis. The central thesis of the theory is that relationship of the satellite with the metropolis is always to the detriment of the former. The satellite in this context is the African state while the metropolis is the states of Western Europe and Northern America.

According to a proponent of this theory, Andre Gunder Frank, the failure of the satellite is as a result of the incorporation of satellites into world capitalist economy which led to international division of labour whereby the less developed nations like African states provided food and raw materials for the great industrial Centre. This relationship led to the perpetual exploitation of both human and material resources, hegemony and subjugation of African state.

The advanced capitalist society through eventful regime of colonialism and neocolonialism altered African pace of development. Post-colonial African states were colonies for over a century; this

therefore, altered their value, their psyche and above all, their path of development (Alanana, 2006). This alteration as a result of external interference led to pervading sense of uncertainty among African state and their instrument of change which gave rise to pyramid of insecurity, diseases, squalor, helplessness, bewilderment, withdrawal, cynicism and apathy.

However, the weakness of the theory is based on the fact that;

It ignored internal factors that may play crucial role either to facilitate development or distort it. For example, values of leadership, indiscipline, corruption, marginalization of minority group, primordial sentiments on ethnicity and religion; looting of resources by African leaders which could generate political, economic and social crisis.

Dependency theory also ignored concepts such as mode of production, means of production and relations of production. It also raised a follow up question; that at what level is a particular country exploited? Is it at the level of production or exchange?

HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN UNITY

Prior to the establishment of the Organization of African unity, there were three main Pan African groups in the continent of Africa, they are as follows;

Casablanca Bloc: this bloc consists of Morocco, Ghana, Mali, Guinea, United Arab Republic Egypt and Libya. This group was a radical group headed by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure of Guinea. During the formation of OAU, Casablanca bloc advocated for Pan-Africanist and Super National Organization for the people of Africa. In other words, members of the group advocated for a central or unified African government which will take over the sovereignty and powers of all independent Africa States and exercise it on their behalf.

Monrovian Bloc: this bloc consists of countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Liberia, Tunisia, Togo and Somalia. This group was regarded as moderate or conservatives and strongly opposed to the Casablanca group. While the Casablanca group supported the formation of one central government for all the independent states and their complete delink from their erstwhile colonial masters and also retaining their newly won political independence. The Monrovia group wanted the new organization to be formed, to be simply a forum where African Heads of state can meet and discuss common interest and problems of their countries.

Brazzaville Bloc: this group or the African and Malagasy Union comprises all French speaking African states or the twelve (12) Ex-French colonial territories. This group completely supported the suggestion and ideas of the Monrovia group to hence they teamed up with the Monrovia group to defeat the Casablanca group during the formation of OAU and its structural formation

(Shillington 2005, South African History Online 2015).

FORMATION OF ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNION

The Organization of African unity was formed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 25th May, 1963. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia arranged for the inaugural meeting of the organization which lasted from 22nd -25th, May 1963. At the end of the meeting, thirty two (32) heads of States of African countries who attended the meeting signed a charter that establishes the organization and Emperor Haile Selassie was chosen as its first chairman (South African History Online 2015)

OBJECTIVES OF ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU)

- ✓ Promotion of unity and solidarity of the African State.
- ✓ Defense of their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

- ✓ Eradication of all forms of colonialism.
- ✓ Co-ordination of efforts to improve the living standards of Africans.
- ✓ Promotion of international cooperation within the frame work of United Nations.

(South African History Online (2015)

OBJECTIVES OF THE AU

The Constitutive Act of African Union, Article 3, and Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of South Africa (2002), stated the objectives of AU as follows;

- ✓ To achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa.
- ✓ To defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member states.
- ✓ To accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent.
- ✓ To promote and defend African common position of issues of interest to the continent and its people.
- ✓ To encourage international cooperation, taking due account of the charter of the united Nations and the universal declaration of human rights.
- ✓ To promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and governance.
- ✓ To promote peace, security, and stability on the continent.
- ✓ To promote and protect human and people's rights in accordance with the African charter on human rights and other relevant human rights instruments.
- ✓ To establish the necessary conditions which enable the continent to play its rightful role in global economy and in international organization.

- ✓ To promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as integration of African economies.
- ✓ To promote cooperation in all human activities to raise the living standards of African dwellers.
- ✓ To coordinate and harmonized the policies between the existing and future regional Economic Communities for the gradual attainment of the objective of the union.
- ✓ To advance the development of the continent by promoting research in all fields, particularly in science and technology.
- ✓ To work with relevant international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and the promotion of good health on the continent.

THE MAIN ORGANS OF OAU

The assembly of Heads of State and Government: The council of Ministers; the General Secretariat; the Commission of mediation, reconciliation and arbitration; the Liberation Committee.

Specialized Agencies/Commission

The Economic and Social Commission; Educational and Cultural Commission, the Health, Sanitation and African Development Bank with headquarters at Abidjan.

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF OAU

(Gboyega 2005, Joseph 1991) out line some of the achievements as follows;

Resolution of Conflict: the OAU facilitates peaceful settlement of dispute among member states. Indeed, it has encouraged the peaceful settlement of dispute between member states, example, Somalia and Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, Morocco and Algeria.

Eradication of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa: the organization also supported liberation movements in Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia.

Economic co-operation: OAU encourages economic cooperation among member states. The African development bank (ADB) which renders assistance to member states is one of the economic cooperation initiatives of OAU.

Promotion of African Culture: the OAU support efforts to project African Culture to the world. The festival of arts and culture (FESTAC) held in Lagos is a case in point. Similar festival had been hosted by Ghana.

Settlement of Refugees: the OUA provides assistance to people displaced by war and environmental disasters. Such assistance includes provision of relief materials to the refugees.

Common voice: common voice on issues that affect African trade and disarmament was projected by OAU member states to international community.

It also provides African leaders a forum for discussion on issues of importance to Africa and the entire world.

FAILURES OF ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNION (OAU)

The African state did not emerge through a gradual process of aggression of indigenous societies. Africa is a product of foreign conquest and domination. The coercive, arbitrary and absolutist character of the colonial state manifested in its domination of the colonial political economy. The colonist controlled education, trade, labour, land allocation and social services. Thus, all the countries named underdeveloped like OAU member states were exploited by others, and the development with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of colonial, neocolonial and imperialist exploitation. Therefore, the failure of Africa was premeditated to make her dependent

and helplessly incarcerated in the grasp of neocolonialism and imperialism (Rodney 1972, Frank 1969).

According to (Gboyega 2005, Joseph 1991, Nwankwo 1996 Mangena 2012) the followings are the failures of Organization of African Union (OAU)

- **Problem of external influence:** many African countries are still attached to their former colonial powers. Sometimes, there is divided loyalty by member nations to the organization and their former colonial powers.
- **Ideological diversities:** member states of OAU have different ideologies. Some practice capitalism while others practice socialism or mixed economy. The ideological diversity makes it difficult for the member states to have a common stand on certain major issues.
- **Financial problem:** due to economic crisis and debt burden that characterized most African states, they defaulted in making their contribution to the organization. Hence, insufficiency of funds also impedes the activities of OAU.
- **Lack of powers for enforcement:** OAU lack the requisite force to sanction member states that breach it resolutions. Added to this, it lacks a high command such as OAU standing army to enforce most of her resolutions.
- **Dependence on foreign powers:** most of the member states are economically dependent on foreign powers especially on their former colonial rulers. It is common knowledge that foreign aid is seldom given without strings attached.
- **Political instability:** constant changes of leadership due to military coup in some member states resulted in policy changes and this affects the degree of support for the organization's decision. More so, inter- state rivalry and suspicion leads to supremacy struggle between

leaders and different motives are read to suggested proposal. Frequent and reoccurring wars and conflicts internally and externally have impeded peace and security of the continent.

THE ORGANS OF AFRICAN UNION (AU)

The assembly: This is composed of Heads of State and Government or their duly accredited representatives. The assembly is the supreme organ of the union.

The executive council: This council is composed of ministers or authorities designated by the government of member states. The executive council is responsible to the assembly.

The commission: composed of the chairperson, the deputy chairperson, eight commissioners and staff members. Each commissioner shall be responsible for portfolio.

The permanent representative committee: composed of permanent representatives of member states accredited to the union. The permanent representatives committee is charged with the responsibility of preparing the work of the executive council.

Peace and Security Council (PSC): by decision AHG/ Dec 160 (37) of the summit of Lusaka, July 2001, a decision was made for the creation within the African union of the peace and Security Council.

Pan-African parliament: a Pan-African parliament and organ to ensure the full participation of African people in governance, development and economic integration of the continent. The protocol relating to the composition, powers, functions and organization of the Pan-African parliament has been signed by member states and is in the process of ratification.

ECOSOCC: the economic, social and cultural council, an advisory organ composed of different social and professional groups of the member states of the union. The statues determining the

functions, powers, composition and organization of economic, social and cultural council, have been prepared and will be submitted to Maputo summit.

The court of justice: a court of justice of the union shall be established. The statutes defining the composition and functions of the court of justice have been prepared and will be submitted to the assembly in Maputo (Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of South Africa 2002).

ACHIEVEMENTS

The first AU's military intervention in a member state was May 2003 where the Union deployed peace keeping force of soldiers from South Africa, Ethiopia and Mozambique to Burundi. Also to Sudan, Somalia and Uganda.

The AU has adopted a number of important new documents establishing norms at continental level, to supplement those already in force when it was created. These include the African Union Convention on Preventing and combating corruption (2003) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007) as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and its associated Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. This new development is helping Africa to tour the path of Africa's political, economic and social development and importantly unity and peace.

AU has also been able to impose sanction on erring member states and sub regions e.g. Madagascar was suspended after 2009 Malagasy political crisis. Niger was also suspended after 2010 coup d'état. Cote d'ivore was also suspended after the 2010 – 2011 Ivorian political crises. More so, on 22 December 2009 AU called United Nation Security Council to impose Sanction on Eritrea who was accused of supporting Somalia Islamist attempting to topple the Traditional Federal government of

Somalia. Security Council passed UNCR 1907 which imposed an arms embargo on Eritrea, travel ban on Eritrea leaders, and asset freezes on Eritrean officials (Mangena 2012).

CURRENT CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN UNION

Health Issues such as combating malaria and the AIDS/HIV epidemic; lack of portable drinking water; malnutrition and sanitation.

Political issues such as confronting undemocratic regimes and mediating in the many civil wars and political crisis of different coloration, examples, Guinea, Niger, Cote d'Ivore, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and other African Arab states

Economic issues such as improving the standard of living of millions of impoverished, uneducated Africans, low GDP and Debt burden of most African States, regional currency debate

Ecological issues such as dealing with recurring famines, desertification and lack of ecological sustainability.

Legal issues regarding Western Sahara.

(South African History Online 2015)

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS ON AFRICAN UNION (AU) AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

It is obvious and crystal clear base on the earlier analysis that efforts towards peace, unity and development in the continent political bodies has incessantly been punctured by;

On-going governance crisis coupled with attendant failure of their hegemonic project base on meaningful development. (ii) African states virtually inherited all the salient features of their colonial fore bearers, including lack of legitimacy and capacity to deploy violence in the civil society

. African Union (AU) member states, particularly African leaders have grossly failed in changing the character of the colonial state as a coercive force unable to transform power into authority and domination in hegemony (Ake 2001).

The research's theoretical tool of analysis has been able to x-ray the notorious effect of the unequal relationship that African states are into with the metro poles. Andre Gundre Frank in his hypothetical analysis of the unequal relationship between the satellite and metro pole asserted that;

1. Satellite states experience great economic development when its relationship with the metro pole is weak.
2. Development of satellite is choked as soon as the relationship between the satellite and metropolis is normalized.
3. The regime that was underdeveloped, feudal and backward had close tie with the metro pole.

Therefore, the unequal relationship between African Union member states and metropolis had rather ensnared them in heavy debt burden or rather massive political and economic crisis. For example, the policy of Structural Adjustment Progamme led to a situation where African states deepened its authoritarianism, they brazenly violated citizens' right and increasingly became high-handed in its dealings with society (Animashun 2009).Therefore, at any rate, SAP could not have mitigated African economic crisis in any significant way since it was consciously designed to manage African crisis more in a way that served the economic interest of the West than in exiting the continent from crisis and its attendant underdevelopment.(Animashun ibid)

Africa's political, economic and socio-cultural crises are consequences of the activities of the alien forces from the West (Metropole) whose desire for self-sustenance and preservation is connected to African resources. As such, it is deliberate for them to distort the social formation of Africa and to

make her quest for unity and development elusive. Furthermore, Africa has become killing-field due to proliferation of weapons from the West; the intention of the West behind all these is to stampede any effort towards reconciliation and peace as requisite for economic development.

{Tendon1998, cited in Ibrahim 2013} states that the cold war which was born out of the process for globalization has had significant consequences for Africa. During its height in the 1960's and 1970's, the cold war witnessed the emergence of authoritarian regimes in the form of one-party or military regimes. This was largely a result of the support of the two blocks to keep African countries in their respective camps. This has in turn, substantially reduced Africa's international negotiating power and its ability to maneuver in the international system. In sum then, the cold war and its demise has worked against democracy and economic development in Africa.

The international divisions of labour where Africa produced raw materials for industries in Europe and America was deliberately orchestrated to make Africa perpetually dependent on the metropolis. It is not just enough for African Union (AU) and African leaders to come up with new continental political organization, protocols, legal instruments and charters to champion the course for African development, a lot has to be done on our psyche or orientation- decolonization of the mind.

Consequently, A.G Frank suggested de-linking from the metropole as a viable means of economic growth and development of developing economies just like the Casablanca group headed by Kwame Nkrumah also suggested. This is rather myopic in effect because a viable alternative after de-linking has not been clearly defined. Mobilization of internal resources, independently for the overall development of the society as suggested by Frank is not just enough without partnership from the west. The world is interconnected and interdependent in terms of trade, transportation, policies, technology, commerce and finance, telecommunication, etc. due to the effect of globalization. Therefore having acquired substantial human capital development both among indigenous Africans

and those in Diaspora; African should maintain the link with the west. Africa owns the resources and also knows what she wants; Africa should dictate the pace of her political, economic and socio-cultural growth and development as she interacts with the west. Asian Tigers did the same likewise Latin American countries like Brazil and Argentina who are currently experiencing exponential economic growth and development.

Objectives of the Research

1. To trace the origin of AU/OAU and its primary objectives.
2. To examine role of AU/OAU in the development of its member countries.
3. To assess the extent to which AU/OAU affected the development of African Countries.
4. To assess the challenges and prospects of AU/OAU
5. To identify and recommend some solutions to the problems facing African Countries in relation to the AU.

CONCLUSION

The realization of a New Africa need not be through bloodshed or disorder. The spirit of co-operation must abound. The realization of New Africa demands the regeneration of individual state – the agitator; (Azikiwe 1968). Therefore, true and complete independence of Africa can only be achieved as a united people with a common goal (Nkrumah 1962). African Union is beginning to bring meaningful development to the continent; however, there is more that is needed to be done by African leaders and intelligence in curbing and curtailing the effects of neo-colonialism and imperialism in all its manifestations and ramifications; particularly paying allegiance to African Union and de-colonization of the minds of Africans.

SUGGESTIONS

1. For African Union to be able to build and sustain African development, it is imperative that African Union must encourage state to embrace Nationalism and Patriotism. It guarantees total liberation – political liberation with complete and absolute independence from the control of any foreign government. Democratic liberation from political tyranny and establishment of democracy in which sovereignty is vested in the broad masses of the people. Social reconstruction; i.e. from poverty and economic conditions of the people.
    2. The need to sanction erring African leaders and possible prosecution at African Union court of justice is of paramount importance. The same could be applied to a member state.
    3. There should be respect for rule of law and human right.
    4. The fight against corruption should be made a continental affair supported by charters to be signed by member states.
    5. Member states should support the continental organization – AU as a confederate unit so that policies of African Union (AU) can be implemented and the continent becoming a formidable entity, politically, economically, socio-culturally, etc.
    6. Unity, cooperation and support should be extended to all member states to ensure peace and stability in the continent.
    7. Total moral and value re-orientation is of great essence. African states must learn to be the captain of their destiny by doing what is right and wiping off any relic of inferiority complex and repressive colonial culture. Added to this, African resources should be adequately used to combat health challenges, ecological challenges and infrastructural inadequacies so that Arica will be a better place for all Africans; friends of Africa and posterity.

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