

PRESENTATION TO TRID MEETING OF RECs

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Political Aspects of Regional Integration

- 1. Regional Integration is essentially a political process. It derives from the old but still strong idea of African unity or Pan-Africanism. This process is different from economic cooperation which you are more familiar with and which I will not discuss.**
- 2. African unity, Pan-Africanism and the current demand for political integration of the Regional sub-Groupings – the RECs – has a long history. It may be useful to look briefly at this history, before we discuss the current political aspects of Regional Integration.**
- 3. The idea of African unity is derived from the quest for freedom and equality by the Africans in the Diaspora during the last century. It developed into a struggle for independence from colonial rule and the forging of continental unity. This movement started in the US and Europe and culminated in the now famous Manchester conference of 1945 where both Diaspora and African leaders declared that their struggle was for both independence and African unity. The two most prominent Africans at this Conference were Nkrumah and Kenyatta.**
- 4. The struggle for Independence was the struggle for freedom, equality and dignity of the African people in their continent. The struggle for African unity was aimed at making Africa strong in order to acquire international recognition of the African people as being equal to others and for Africans to be able to protect their interest and to deal with others on an equal footing. Political unity (and its consequent economic**

and military integration) would thus make Africa strong and an equal partner in the international community.

5. These two objectives were thus essential ingredients of the nationalist struggle – a struggle which had two strands (a) a people’s struggle at the national level for effective removal of colonialism, and (b) a struggle for African unity at the leadership level; this second aspect of the African struggle culminated in the 1958 All Africa Conference in Accra. This Conference was very important – it strengthened the nationalist struggle taking place all over the continent, and at the same time gave impetus to those fighting for a united Africa.
6. The struggle for African unity reached a historic point in 1963 – culminating in the famous debate between Nkurumah and Nyerere. Nkurumah argued for immediate political and military unity of the continent. Nyerere argued for a different approach, slower and long term – that of consolidating national unity, and to move toward regional integration as building blocks towards eventual unity. While Nkurumah went to the founding meeting of the OAU in Addis Ababa ready to give up Ghanaian sovereignty to the OAU, others thought that this was too radical a step and preferred the Nyerere approach. Nyerere thus won the debate and the movement towards immediate political and military integration of the continent thus took a historic turn backwards. The political leaders at the time – particularly Emperor Haile Selasie (who played a critical role in support of the Nyerere approach) decided that consolidation of their power was more important than given it up to a continental supra-national body - the OAU (which could have been named the United States of Africa?).
7. From this point onwards the consolidation of the states became the basic objective of all political leaders throughout the continent and the OAU became an organization which focused mainly on supporting the liberation of those African

countries still under colonial/white minority rule, rather than focusing on developing African unity.

- 8. Yet the ideology and the movement for unity or Pan-Africanism did not die. It continued to survive in various forms. The ideology survived at the OAU level where the radical language of African unity continued and became the raison d'être for its existence; it also manifested itself in the emergence of political blocks –such as the Monrovia and the Casablanca political blocks;**
- 9. But the Nyerere route to Integration and eventual Unity implied the emergence of three forces which were to prove a major constraint to regional integration. These are:**
 - a. strengthening the disarticulated economies at the country level,**
 - b. strengthening the continuously expanding political elite and bureaucratic elite at the country level, and**
 - c. supporting the emergence of a nascent petty and national bourgeoisie or capitalists. Thus the longer each country strengthened its state and tried to develop its own economy, the deeper and stronger these three processes became in each country. And these forces are moving each country in an opposite direction to that of integration and unity. Clearly these three forces are at the core of the political and economic difficulties of regional integrations today. There are other constraints also which we will discuss below.**
- 10. The Nyerere approach not only consolidated the national state and national economies, but it also supported the idea of economic cooperation between countries as a means towards eventual integration and African unity. Hence from the 1960s emerged various attempts at economic cooperation of throughout the continent. Some of these**

were in fact started by the colonial powers and continued after independence; these are:-

- (i) South African Custom's Union – 1910
- (ii) South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) 1949
- (iii) Ghana-Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) Trade Agreement in 1962
- (iv) The African Common Market between Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Guinea and Mali in 1962.
- (v) Cameroun, CAR, Chad, Congo and Gabon also in 1962;
- (vi) The East African Community – Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in 1967

These countries came together to forge economic cooperation through customs union and other Trade Agreements. These groupings were an attempt to overcome the difficulties the disarticulated and externally oriented economies of African countries. But these efforts did not last long.

11. Given the real difficulties facing African economies, political leaders continued to grope for new forms of economic cooperation. Thus in the 1970s and 1980s, new groupings emerged. These are :-

- (i) The West African Economic Community (CEAO) 1973, which was transformed into Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA)
- (ii) The Mano River Union (MRU) 1974
- (iii) UDEAC (Central African Customs Union) 1974
- (iv) ECOWAS 1975
- (v) Economic community of the Great Lakes (CEPGL) 1976

And in the 1980s emerged ECCAS, PTA/COMESA, IOC, SADCC and UMA.

IGAD is a separate case – Development Cooperation rather than purely economic cooperation

In 1990 emerged the EAC – which is more advanced in terms of its projected political integrations than all the other Groups. But it seems to have caused some problems with COMESA – issue of duplication. The AU thinks this is a serious problem.

12. But Pan Africanism and research for African Unity didn't die-away. It is still very strong as an ideology at the OAU/AU level. Hence, the evolution of the OAU to the AU. More importantly the constitutive act of the AU is more stronger and explicit regarding the movement towards unity. At the non AU at non governmental level there is the Pan African congress – now based in Kampala – which still commands considerable supports amongst intellectual and some political leaders. Similarly, at the level of Civil Society there are many organizations both scientific and developmental which are operating at a PAN African level. These organizations are keeping the spirit of Pan Africanism and African Union alive.

13. However, if there are difficulties at the level of economic cooperation which the RECs are facing, there are even bigger obstacles to political integration. Let us now look at these political issues regarding regional integration.

- 11. Conflicts and Political Integration: Types of conflicts:
Ecowas as a case study;**
- 12. Constraints to Integration :**
- (i) Political – elite interest in state power
economic interest in a closed national
market – fearful of competition;
powerful group;**
 - (ii) Economic: constraints to implementation of
Protocols**
- 13. Big Country/Small country syndrome**
- 14. Multiple membership and rationalization: Constraints to
integration**
- 15. The missing Link: Absence of Linkage to Civil Society**

Why the quest for regional integration?

The root for integration is political.

**Political: Pan-Africanism – the quest for freedom from
colonialism and for international recognition and status. This
implied a strong Africa – politically, militarily and
economically;**

The Nkrumah/Nyerere debate –

Casablanca and the Monrovia Groupings – 1960s

Integration of States – face serious problems:-

- differences in inherited colonial systems;**
- elites and power – commit political suicide!**
- internal power points within each states which are
threatened by integration – the Ugandan kingdoms as a
good examples; but also other power points – ruling
ethnic groups, labour unions etc;**

- **Integration of economies – has its own complications, already known to you; But see argument above conflict between those interested in closed national markets and those interested in inter-territorial and expanded markets;**

Integration of people – a different proposition. See Fanon’s quotation on Senegal and Gambia.