

Journal of African Union Studies (JoAUS)

ISSN 2050-4306 (Online) ISSN 2050-4292 (Print)

Indexed by: SCOPUS, IBSS, JSTOR, EBSCO,
COPERNICUS, ProQuest, J-Gate and Sabinet

Volume 11, (Number 1), April 2022

pp 5-12

Editorial: African Union and the Quest for “African Solution for Africa’s Problems”

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2022/11n1a0>

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The African Union (AU), a continental body consisting of 55 member states, was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity, (OAU) which was set up in 1963 as Africa’s first post-independence supranational and continent-wide institution.

The OAU had a mixed record throughout its existence - while it recorded impressive successes in the decolonization of the continent and in contributing to the development of international law, especially refugee and human right laws, it underperformed in several areas such as its failure to realize its key objective of bringing “peace, prosperity, security and stability” to the continent. It was also ineffectual in its responses to the endemic tyranny, despotism and kleptocracy that prevailed among African governments , including governments headed by those variously elected as Chairpersons of the continental body. The OAU was equally adjudged to have performed poorly when it came to dealing with internal and external threats, instilling good governance, defending human rights abuses and fighting poverty and underdevelopment in the continent (Mushkat, 1970; South African History Online, 2019; Legum, 1975).

Given the above, it was felt that the OAU was so feeble that the sort of reforms that would be needed to reposition it and make it capable of meeting the challenges of globalization would be so massive that it would be easier to start afresh. Hence, the African Union was launched in 2002 as a successor to the OAU. It remains however debatable whether the

African Union is a mere re-naming of the OAU or its transformation (Jahn, 2014).

Whether it was merely renamed or transformed, the jury is still out on whether the African Union is faring better than its predecessor, the OAU. Suffice it to add that the AU seems to have retained many of the genetic weaknesses of its progenitor, the OAU. For instance, following the failure of the international community to stop the issues of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, the then wobbly OAU, embarrassed by the situations and realizing (as it ought to have done even before the conception of the organization) that Africa had to take its own destiny on its own hands, resolved to craft its own solutions to the problems emerging from Africa. According to Apuuli (2012), this marked the beginning of the notion of ‘African solutions to Africa’s problems’, which was later to become one of the founding principles of the AU.

While what is really ‘African solution to African problems’ in an increasingly globalized world has not been robustly interrogated, what seems obvious is that, just like its predecessor the OAU, the African Union, which marks its 20th anniversary this year, has recorded some successes in some areas and some major and embarrassing failures in others. For instance while it will appear that some progress has been made in the operationalisation of the African Standby Force - the doctrine, command and control, force allocations, deployment scenarios, and logistics plans are said to be in place, and regularly exercised up to the brigade level (Nantulya, 2022), the norms of democracy, which were enshrined in its peace and security mandate, look increasingly under threat. Examples include an increase in the number of constitutional coup making in the continent (where African leaders change the constitution of their countries on term limits in a bid to extend their tenures) and the resurgence of military coups in countries like Mali, Chad, Guinea and Burkina Fasso. The response of the African Union to these waves of democratic reversals have been at best mixed.

Similarly, contrary to the vision espoused in its Constitutive Act, the AU’s legislative, judicial and technical organs remain ineffectual. In the same vein, its Pan-African Parliament and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council which are designed to give civil society organizations a voice within the AU institutions remain consultative bodies with no real power. The same can also be said of the African Court on Human and People’s Rights which has remained comatose (Nantulya, 2022).

Given the relative successes and weaknesses of the African Union in its quest for 'African solutions to Africa's problems', a number of questions become germane: What accounts for its successes and failures? And what is the role of context and themes in these successes and failures? These are some of the questions contributors to this issue of the volume seek to answer with their articles.

In the 'Determining Factors of European Union-African Union Members States' Cooperation:

A Case Study of Germany and Ethiopia' Bilate discusses the factors that drive the cooperation between the European Union and the African Union and their members. Using Germany (from the EU) and Ethiopia (from the AU) as a case study, the author also interrogates the effectiveness and depth of this cooperation as well as the challenges facing that cooperation. He noted why the cooperation is of importance to Germany:

Ethiopia's closeness to some conflict-ridden Horn of Africa countries gives a critical geopolitical implication as a security partner for the EU and its member countries particularly, Germany. The Horn of Africa region is also prone to terrorist influence and the extremists' networks are surviving recently in some parts of the country. This is due to the fragility of the states' security management systems particularly the weak governments in Somalia, failed North Sudan government, and current internal conflicts in Ethiopia... These trends are regarded as critical factors for the cooperation between German and Ethiopia.

On what is there for Ethiopia the author notes:

Ethiopia needs cooperation in areas like promoting the Agricultural, Educational, Climatic and environmental sectors. During Germany's G20 Presidency, Ethiopia Joined the Compact with African countries. German and Ethiopia's cooperation context is based on the 'Binational Commission' and both are reliable reform partners. The key areas of German cooperation are promoting investment and providing financial assistance mainly focusing on food crises and humanitarian emergencies in Ethiopia.

The author notes that the relationship is not without challenges which include finance and exchange rate problem because of the perennial shortages of foreign exchange in Ethiopia, the lack of enforcements mechanisms for rules in Ethiopia, insecurity and terrorism as well as

Ethiopia's weak technological base which undermines its capacity to fully exploit the benefits of this relationship.

In 'climate change and the African Union's role in the international system: a brief situational analysis', Obah-akpowoghaha, Bah and Tarro examine the African Union's participation in the climate change discourse. They argue that Africa's role in climate change debate is not a recent one but can be traced back to the inception of the OAU – though they argued that not much attention was paid by member countries until the foundation of the AU in 2002. As they noted:

The AU's contributions to mitigating climate change can be observed through the organisational structures it put in place to address the never-ending discussions on climate change. Amongst these sub organisations include: The Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), the African Ministerial Conference on Climate Change (AMCEN), and the Climate Change and Desertification Unit (CCDU) at the African Union. The African Union (AU) through the Division of Environment, Climate Change, Water and Land Management (ECCWLM), have partnered with United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA); New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); African Development Bank (AfDB); African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); and European Union (EU) in the implementation of its programmes. The ECCWLM has put efforts into combating and mitigating climate change. It has stipulated March 3 as African Environment Day, which is hosted rotationally in African countries....The Nairobi Declaration on the African Process for Combating Climate Change was overwhelmingly endorsed by the African Union in May 2009 at the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in Nairobi, demonstrating the AU's eagerness to respond to climate change.

The authors note that the AU remains resolute in its multilateral cooperation with the European Union on climate change agreement and recommend that the continental body should encourage all member countries to adapt mitigation techniques proposed by other climate change bodies in order to lessen the threat and calamity that climate change poses to the world. They further recommend that the AU should continue to negotiate compensation from countries that risk African lives and habitats as well as plead to other nations to cut their carbon emissions.

In ‘The AU’s role in the resolution of the current volatile political situation in Cameroon’, Shai; Legodi and Vunza discuss the African Union’s role in the resolution of the ongoing political violence in Cameroon. They note that the the regional organization was somewhat reluctant to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign state because it is against the AU Charter of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. They note that the AU’s ability to intervene in the internal crisis of member states is restricted by its “principles of national sovereignty (non-interference) and subsidiarity.”As they explained:

The principles of non-interference and respect for national sovereignty are important in the maintenance of peace and stability; but they should not be used as an excuse for not acting in the face of gross human rights violations on the continent. These principles pose a big problem to the AU because they recognize the role of sub-regional organizations to lead interventions while they limit the need for AU’s intervention.... The onus is on the AU Commission to galvanize all member states in order to come out with means to be more effective and efficient in conflict resolution on the continent. Africa cannot afford to continue to wait for non-Africans to intervene with African affairs. This is unsustainable and past conflicts are clear testaments of this.

While the focus of the journal is on the African Union as an institution, it also sees the regional economic communities which the AU recognizes as being integral to its work and a crucial part of its building blocks. This is our justification for including articles on regional economic communities as falling within the scope of the journal. The AU officially recognizes eight regional economic communities. These are:

- Arab Maghreb Union (UMA),
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD)
- East African Community (EAC)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)²
- Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Additionally, the journal sees the various bi-lateral and multilateral commissions in Africa as part of these building blocks at the sub-regional levels as they are usually driven by the same philosophy that the AU

champions at the continental level. This, again, is our justification for including articles within these areas as falling within the scope of the journal.

In ‘The Role of the Economic Community of West African States in the Promotion of Democracy and Good Governance in the Sub-Continent’, Kyirewiah examines the task of the sub regional organization in the promotion of Democracy and Good governance in the continent via its 2001 protocol for maintaining Good Governance and Democracy. He argues that the trend by some African leaders to tweak their constitutions to elongate their tenures as well as the recent military overthrow of constitutional order in three West African countries namely Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Guinea (September 2021), and Burkina Faso in 2022 has raised question marks about the capacity of the ECOWAS to enforce this ideal.

The author explained other factors that constrain the ability of the ECOWAS to promote good governance and democracy in the sub-continent as follows:

The first of the factors is the political will of member states on the quest for Good Governance and Democracy: One of the challenges that hamper ECOWAS's struggle against the unconstitutional change of governance and dictatorship is the lack of consensus among members on a critical decision that borders on protection of democracy.... An example of this is the community's failure to accept a two-term limit for presidents in the sub-region at the 2005 Accra Summit... Furthermore, ECOWAS did not have in place any protocol to deal with presidents who at the end of their mandated term forcibly changed the constitution to enable them to run for office again. If military overthrow of the constitution is unconstitutional, forcibly changing the constitution to run again at the end of their mandated term of office is equally unconstitutional - for this ECOWAS is silent.

He recommends that ECOWAS should, as a matter of urgency, improve its engagement with all countries in the region to enforce its role in the promotion of a political system of governance, the rule of law, and accountability in order to minimize the need for crisis response measures such as sanctions.

In ‘Regional Organisations in Peace and Security: A Case Study of Southern African Development Community (SADC)’, Olaya discusses how the Southern African Development Community (SADC), has, through peacekeeping missions and mediation attempts to play

mediatory and conciliatory roles among its member states. Using Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo as case studies, the author shows that while the SADC-engineered peace process in Madagascar could be seen as a success that of the Democratic Republic of Congo could not. He noted that the sense of 'brotherhood' among leaders of the SADC member states is one major hindrance to the SADC's peace initiatives: As he puts it:

A notion of 'brotherhood' that has emerged among member states has hindered interventions and criticism in cases where conciliation is required. Ruling parties for instance ANC in South Africa, ZANU PF in Zimbabwe, Frelimo in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia and the MPLA in Angola tend to protect each other whenever one fails to uphold peace and security in their respective regimes.... This way, some administrations tend to get away with atrocities that they commit.

The author recommends that leaders within SADC need to work toward the same agenda while upholding its citizens' democratic rights to prevent insurgencies from slowly cropping up and compromise the otherwise peaceful nature of the region.

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