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African Developments: Continental Integration in Africa – AU, NEPAD and the APRM

Africa has seen political and institutional change over the last decade, yet in the 50th year of independence of numerous states, the profundity of change remains unclear.

The prospect of successful continental integration has arguably suffered a loss of political drive with the absence of authoritative, clear minded political leadership - two of the key champions of the 'African renaissance', Olusegun Obasajano of Nigeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, have both exited office. There is a dearth of energetic leadership with the drive to promote integration - and arguably an even greater dearth of strong and viable institutions on the continent.

New institutions have been created: in 2001, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was established,

the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was transformed into the African Union (AU) in 2002 and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was created. However, while these institutions share an intertwined history, interaction between them is often poor. Organisational mandates overlap while the conflicting interests of African states stifle delivery on Africa's governance and development agenda.

Despite similarity in names, the AU is not comparable with the EU. External partners should thus avoid overly ambitious expectations towards a fundamentally still intergovernmental international organisation. Regional organisations will have to be considered when looking for partners in Africa. External partners should, however, measure the AU on its declarations and engage with it, as it is the best bet on integration there currently is.

Changes in Africa over the last decade

At the turn of the century, Africa's geopolitical situation had changed profoundly. The end of the Cold War and the fall of Apartheid in South Africa had both finalised liberation of Africa and resulted in the World turning to other regions and political developments. Often beyond the Western "radar", a noticeable quest for democracy emerged in many African states. After ten years of robust economic growth more regular elections, constitutional reforms and freer media in most African states materialised, with regressions in fewer others. Political changes in a number of countries (e.g. South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Namibia, Zambia) also led to the emergence of a new continental-level agenda on good governance and socio-economic development at the turn of the century.

In 2001, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was established, initially under two names that were combined: the New Africa Initiative and Omega Plan. Almost parallel to the evolution of NEPAD, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was transformed into the African Union (AU) in 2002. In the same year, as a part of NEPAD, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was created to monitor the compliance of African governments to standards of good political, economic and corporate governance and their progress toward greater socio-economic development. Over the same period, one can also construe a noticeable revival of Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs). And donors, not least those in the G8, pledged to support these new structures. Yet, how profound is the change and how viable are these structures?

Internal and external challenges: Changing incentives for African integration?

African states and their intergovernmental institutions face formidable contextual challenges. It is widely expected that African and other developing states will encounter tougher times ahead in the global economic crisis' aftermath. The IMF expects substantial losses in trade revenue totalling in excess of 25 billion dollars, heightened unemployment, and a significant 2 % decline in economic growth from the 5–6 % achieved over the last decade. In addition, rapid population growth is widely expected to undermine whatever modest economic gains the continent may realise. Africa is also widely expected to bear the brunt of the human impact of global climate change, resulting in forced migration and the potential of conflict rising. The continent's institutions are also confronted with having to manage increasing tensions between population growth and food security. The economic prospects of the entire continent are thus unlikely to be rosy. Yet, social pressure of numerous better educated Africans entering the labour market will increase internal pressure for reforms within African states. And economies can develop, if managed and connected to markets wisely.

Africa's states and institutions also contend with fast paced change in the make up of the global political economy. Emerging markets play an increasingly critical role in determining the stability or lack thereof of the global economy. The same applies to Africa where emerging actors in the global economy - China, India, Brazil, Malaysia, Korea and others - play an increasingly important role and tap into Africa's strategic resources to fuel their economic growth.

2010 is an important year for Africa. The year is marked by the 50th anniversary of independence for 17 African countries, including heavyweight Nigeria. It is also a decade into the Millennium Declaration and around a decade since steps towards creating the AU und NEPAD. And the world's attention will be on the first football world cup on the continent. In a series of Briefing Papers, the DIE looks into African Developments a decade after the revival of the African Agenda.

Handled well, this renewed interest in Africa creates more political space for African states to influence their terms of engagement with foreign powers than a decade ago. Yet, external powers' interests in Africa need to be carefully managed by states that have very limited capacity. The implications of these global changes are also likely to be significant on Africa's institutions and agenda. This pronounced re-ignition of interest raises a new set of concerns and questions, not least whether these actors will boost the growth of Africa's integration agenda by using continental institutions as alternative entry points. The critical challenge, however, is for Africa to create functional, well coordinated and sustainable institutions to equip its states with better means to engage effectively on the global stage.

Internal and external factors considered pressure on African states for a coordinated continental agenda to manage a rapidly changing global economic and political context increases. At question is whether Africa's continental institutions are adequately equipped to respond to the imperative for integration under these conditions?

The African Union (AU)

The AU is supposed to be the key continental organisation, building on an almost all-encompassing membership of 53 African states. Morocco is the only African state that is not an AU member, due to Western Sahara – which Morocco considers part of its territory – being a member state.

The AU's name-similarity to the European Union is misleading. The AU remains an international organisation with some innovative features taken from the UN. It is, however, far from its European namesake in structure. The AU Commission, unlike the similarly named EU institution, functions as a secretariat with no powers of its own. The African approach to integration is not based on supranational law, commonly practiced norms or supra-state institutions and this strongly limits the authority of its legal and judicial bodies. In general, integration in the African context is based primarily on resolutions, statements and protocols as opposed to (supranational) legislation; African countries have not ceded sovereignty to the AU or the regional communities to any measurable degree (see Box 1). Fundamentally, the AU is (still) an organisation of states, even though features like the Pan-African Parliament and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights – to be merged with the African Court of Justice – have been added. Notionally, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are building blocks of the African Union – yet, the linkages between AU and RECs are often unclear and rivalry persists.

Despite shortcomings, however, the AU constitutes a paradigmatic shift from the predecessor OAU: sovereignty of states is no longer sacred in part due to events such as the 1994 Rwanda genocide that underscored the need to veer away from non-interference. The AU Charter of 2002 provides for interventions in cases of grave human rights violations, genocide and war crimes (Art. 4h). Provisions in the Charter also support interventions in weak and fragile states that might call the AU to support them. Peace and security have also become key functions of the AU.

Conceptual changes have also lead to action: some states have seen their membership suspended after unconstitutional changes in government. Contrary to its predecessor, the AU

was quick to react to unconstitutional changes in government in Guinea and Mauritania in 2008, and in the case of Guinea-Bissau in March 2009. It has, however, been less successful in addressing root causes for conflict or in enforcing peace in Somalia, Sudan/Darfur and the DRC, or mediating after poor elections in Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Box 1: PanAfricanism vs. gradualism – restaging Gaddafi's push for a Union government a decade later?

The thinking of Pan-Africanism since the onset of African independence has always had two strands: radicals and gradualists. However, since the 2007 Accra session of the African Union, the concept of a "United States of Africa" has been discussed with renewed interest. Radicals are calling for an immediate leap into continental integration with an AU equipped with an appointed president and continental-level ministers. Muammar Gaddafi, Libyan President and chair of the AU in 2009, is widely identified as the leading proponent of a radical approach to continental integration. Gaddafi is a flamboyant figure in African politics, whose support by about a third of African states is largely attributed to his role as a grand sponsor of African states and organisations.

The AU's Executive Council of Foreign Ministers is – in its majority – rather pursuing a gradualist approach. African Foreign Ministers seem to support the strengthening of continental integration by building stronger regional economic communities. A smaller proportion have touted the idea of a Union government by 2015 with executive powers and a cabinet, opting to tie integration to a systematic, time bound schedule. The previous chair, however, more ambitiously, presented the (unrealistic) option of an immediate establishment of a "United States of Africa". To achieve this vision, he called for a continent-wide referendum to democratically usher in the establishment of a "United States of Africa." An African Union Authority, with power over regional policy would act as a precursor to a more integrated continent. The Libyan proposal was received with widespread scepticism within Africa, indicating a preference to selectively approve of proposals.

NEPAD – whither the partnership initiative?

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was initially a parallel agenda to the AU. Closely linked to the stewardship of Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo, as well as Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade was the creation of NEPAD which was a merger of individual plans of these leaders in 2001. Instead of creating an Pan-African Parliament by 2000, as the Sirte Declaration on the reform of the African institutions pledged in 1999, NEPAD and its governance agenda were created before the foundation of the AU and was only (cumbersomely) coordinated with it afterward.

NEPAD describes a vast agenda rather than a well-sequenced action plan for Africa's development. The broad range of activities embraces various initiatives on Peace, Security, Development, Democracy and Political Governance and wide plethora of other issue areas: food security and common agricultural policy, infrastructure, regional integration, business promotion, etc. However, the relationship between these initiatives is not always clear. Overlap prevails and the will or capacity to carry through an agenda is often questioned.

While there are obvious conceptual linkages between these various African initiatives – little coordination happens. Instead, an overlapping web of activities was created and little care was given to build on existing structures or to tie activities more closely together – although a few recent developments are worth noting. Efforts are currently underway to place NEPAD more firmly under the AU, the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the AU has also been tasked with determining the structures of NEPAD and the APRM. The operational distance between AU (based in Addis Ababa) and NEPAD (in South Africa) might change.

As an international outreach of NEPAD, the ‘Africa Partnership Forum’ was established in 2003. It is a way of broadening the existing high-level G8/NEPAD dialogue with members from Africa, G8, OECD and other development partners all to work together as equals and to ensure coherence with other international bodies. The APF has become a key forum at a senior political level for discussing and monitoring policy issues in Africa’s development and a key external support for the programme.

Added to NEPAD’s broad agenda is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), NEPAD’s flagship governance initiative. The peer review mechanism is widely viewed as a significant innovation to Africa’s continental governance architecture – and is the most visible effort to promote good democratic governance practice from continental to domestic level. Its function, however, is mainly served at national level with the continental structure acting as a (limited) corrective of national procedures (see Box 2).

Conclusion: African integration stuck at higher level?

At present, it is questionable whether the African integration agenda is compelling enough, not only due to a collective action problem of a rather loose ‘Union’ of 53. Whether the social capital and commonly shared practices upon which African institutions are built are substantial to sustain the trust needed to build a robust continental agenda is also doubtful. Adherence to common political principles or standards of good governance varies significantly from state to state – making African institutions a grouping of curiously strange bedfellows that often lack enough commonly shared interests or principles to sustain long term partnership. Continental structures – despite some changes to the texts – might indeed often follow a ‘Gulliver rationale’, i.e. aspiring to tie down the continental giants (economically: South Africa, by population: Nigeria) rather than to create integration dynamics; the continent still operates by the smallest common denominator.

Furthermore, the AU’s internal funding mechanism does not reap required results: states frequently default on payments as outlined in a recent audit of the AU – which strongly suggests weak political will. While African governments should, and will, play a critical role in driving this agenda forward – African civil society and Africa’s development partners are crucial partners to providing the prerequisite skills, knowledge and will needed to sustain Africa’s continental agenda.

Capacity and the design of structures is also a key issue: While Africa is not short of visionary leadership and great political figures, African institutions often lack the required

Box 2: The APRM

With the African Peer Review Mechanism, Africa has for the first time deviated from the consensual approach with a voluntary-membership organisation: 29 member states have signed up to the agenda (Mauritania also has, but is currently suspended due to a coup d’état in 2008). In order to join the club, APRM participating countries have to sign up to APRM principles, which are based on core principles also elaborated by NEPAD and the AU: e.g. commitment to improve governance and the rule of law. The APRM is based on the AU’s 2002 key document on “Democracy and Good Political Governance, Economic and Corporate Governance”. These three keywords – and a fourth, socio-economic development – became the four “thematic areas” of enquiry. The APRM aspires to measure countries on an individual basis, i.e. taking into account their greatly varying levels of development. Thus, the mechanism cannot be expected to deliver quick-fixes, but might build a long-term monitoring and discussion culture.

The APRM has developed a continental network of institutions overseen by an African Peer Review Forum, which is populated by signatory country Heads of States and Government. The forum is currently chaired by Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Arguably, however, the APRM’s ‘Panel of Eminent Persons’ – a group of prominent African personalities that oversees the process – is the most significant continental organ of the APRM.

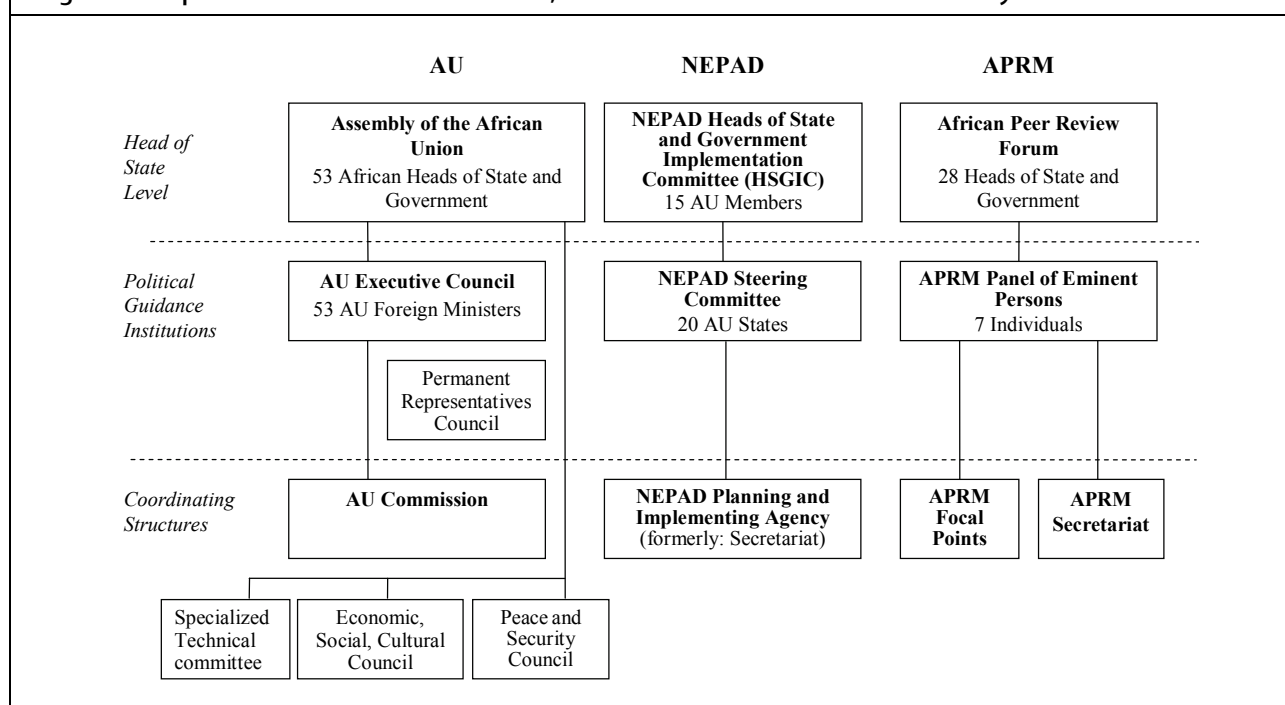
The core of the APRM, however, lies at national level. Various ministerial-level governance monitoring focal points and African professionals and policy think tanks engage with the APRM; little of their expertise is shared across borders. The APRM is new in that, unlike donor driven assessments, it builds on African professionals and practitioners with a technical grasp of issues pertaining to governance through its extensive structure of institutions, including partner institutions such as UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Their expertise is meant to substantiate the country assessments. However, the APRM’s activities often take place to the exclusion of actors from related Pan-African institutions and initiatives – including the Pan-African Parliament and various Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

Little systematic and compelling monitoring has yet materialised. The mechanism, however, has sparked debates – and has contributed to popularise the need to improve governance in several African states. Yet, political actors will have to deal with the recommendations of the APRM beyond unlikely quick fixes – and the record might be less impressive with regard to delivery.

technical expertise to pursue the mundane work involved in the implementation of its goals. Combining weak partners does not automatically make a strong union. It is the nitty-gritty steps of policy implementation, for which a functioning administration based on merits is required.

Given the lack of a supranational and technocratic push – as difficult as crucial with 53 member states – strong leadership by individual states in their sub-regions is required for successful integration in Africa. Most capable candidates for

Diagram: The parallel structures of African Union, NEPAD and the Peer Review as of February 2010



Source: own illustration

continental leadership are currently locked up in internal agendas, such as South Africa or Nigeria – limiting their influence even beyond what one would expect with a view to the general suspicion by fellow-African states due to their size and potential domination of the region. RECs, for their part, are currently not strong enough to pull off a continental agenda, either; suspicion of big powers will – if anything – be more pronounced in their regions than at continental level. The issue of suspicion towards the regional power might indeed become more pronounced, once they are “home alone” in their region. Other states, such as Libya or Ethiopia are eager to fill the political gap, but have more limited capacities or fewer international credentials.

The AU and the NEPAD agenda – albeit not sufficient in themselves and admittedly mired with internal coordination challenges – might be instrumental for a better co-ordinated approach to tackling Africa’s most pressing political, economic and developmental challenges – even if most of the drive will have to come from within sub-regions.

External partners need to manage their expectations – too often, exaggerated expectations lead to undue frustration with African actors. No miracles are to be expected from the AU, and it is a far cry from EU capacities. Yet, at least in matters of

security policy and continental standard setting, the AU, and it is a far cry from EU capacities. Yet, we should remember that the EU developed incrementally, too, and at least in matters of security policy and continental standard setting, the AU and NEPAD are the best bet around at the moment.



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This paper is a collaboration between DIE and the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). Located in Johannesburg and with offices in Cape Town and Pretoria. SAIIA is an independent, non-government think-tank whose purpose is to encourage wider and more informed awareness of the importance of international affairs. It is both a centre for research excellence and a home for stimulating public debate on global issues as they affect Africa. SAIIA’s Governance and APRM programme has conducted extensive research and provided training on the APRM and critical African governance and democracy issues in several African countries.

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