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SELECTED IMPEDIMENTS TO THE SUCCESS OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA (AfCFTA) AND THE EFFECT ON AFRICA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Regionalism is seen as pre-requisite for reducing the vulnerability and dependence of African economies to external influences. During the colonial era, African economies were geared at mineral extraction and the production of tropical crops for colonial industries. The study was guided by the following objectives; to analyze the issue of trust among member states and its effect on the AfCFTA, to determine the effect of sovereignty on the AfCFTA, to analyze how political goodwill among member states affects the AfCFTA and to come up with recommendations that can be adopted to make AfCFTA successful. Data was collected through interviews. The data collected was analyzed thematically. The study found out that; challenges that are likely to be faced by AfCFTA include; lack of political commitment, sovereignty and national institutional weakness. Solutions to the challenges are; political commitment, clear AfCFTA objectives and elimination of the trade barriers. The economic benefits of AfCFTA are; boosting of trade within Africa, growth in the investment and manufacturing within the African continent, agreement has the ability to ensure that there is the elimination of trade tariffs is within the continent. Political instability has also been linked to the AfCFTA success. Any act of political instability in Africa will likely affect AfCFTA. The study recommends the following; AfCFTA signatory states should factor in the solutions that have been adopted in the current study. The adoption of the solutions by the members will ensure that there is smooth implementation of the agreements and thus reaping the economic benefits that are associated with it. The AfCFTA members should ensures that there are proper measures that are adopted in order to prevent any political instability. This can be done through collaborating with the AU security organs to mitigate such issues from ever happening.

Keywords: impediments, economic development, AfCFTA, recommendations

1.1 Study background

Rollet (2019) has noted that the African Union, as an economic bloc, occupies a very low position on the global economic chart. It has 14% of the global population; accounts for less than 3% of the world's GDP and only 3% inflow of foreign direct investment, in terms of merchandise, Africa accounts for only 1.8 % of imports and 3.6 % of exports. Africa was incorporated into the global economy from a disadvantaged position, as supplier of raw materials to the industries of the North and as a market for their finished goods within the logic of an already established global economic division of labour (Menyah, Nazlioglu and Wolde-Rufael, 2014).

In Africa's quest for development through concerted action, the Lagos Plan of Action's state-led, inward-looking collective self-reliance model of the 1980s and the emergent market driven and more pro-liberal New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) appear to be the most ambitious continent-wide initiatives (Bayne, 2016). It has translated into a series of resolutions and treaty agreements, creating a myriad of institutions for economic cooperation and integration across the continent (Heidhues and Obare, 2011).

In 2018, African Union member countries took a major step by establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to boost regional trade and economic integration. They agreed to remove tariffs on most goods, liberalize key services trade, tackle non-tariff barriers to intra-regional trade and ultimately create a continental single market with free labor and capital movement. The AfCFTA was ratified by 22 nations, and was expected to come into force in 2019, while discussions are still underway on particular aspects of the agreement. The AfCFTA, once operational, will set up a market of 1.2 billion people with a combined GDP of US\$ 2.5 trillion. This may be a continent-wide economic game changer (Lungu, 2019).

Stimulating industrialization and sustainable economic growth in Africa is the main impetus behind the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) by the tariff lines of individual countries by 90% and the non-tariff measures (NTM), the agreement is being followed on its ability to improve intra-African trade and aims to promote industrialization, infrastructure development and economic growth. African countries have relied on foreign capital for their growth and recognized the need to make their investment markets more attractive, particularly in terms of a reasonable return on capital expenditure (Lungu, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There are various scholars who have been able to attempt to study the possible role and importance of the AfCFTA in Africa's economic development. Mbengue (2018) analyzed the potential impacts of the implementation of AfCFTA, in the analysis, it was indicated that the implementation of the AfCFTA will ensure that there is effective integration that would ensure that there is the growth of trade and free movements of people and goods and thus building the economy of the continent. Additionally, Lungu (2019) has indicated that the implementation of the AfCFTA will be beneficial for the African integration and this is due to the commitment that have been shown by the head of states. However, the study cites that there might be some challenges that were faced by the previous economic integration plans such as the LPA and the Abuja Treaty.

This study sought to conduct an analysis of selected impediments to the success of the AfCFTA and the effect on Africa's economic development. With the backdrop of the Abuja Treaty and the

Lagos Plan of Action, the study sought to understand what differences, if any, have been put into the AfCFTA that would ultimately make it succeed where the other initiatives failed. In this way, the study looked at certain challenges that the AfCFTA might face that would possibly lead to its failure. This understanding and analysis however is not to be confused as a comparison; given the AfCFTA is only starting. Instead, the analysis looked into the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, against the backdrop of the previous initiatives as well as the steps that have been made so far.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Functionalism Theory

Functionalism theory was founded by Mitrany (1966) who considered the dominance of economics in international studies and studies on integration. This theory, though initially not meant to address regional integration has been refined further into variations like neo-functionalism. Mitrany (1966) considered national sovereignty as a key concern for integration attempts as regional organizations are seen as likely to result in inter-regional conflict and consequently goes against the vision of a non-territorial global organization (Øhrgaard, 2018). Functionalism as a philosophy arose primarily from the aftermath of World War II, which raised fears that the state as an agency for social organization had become moribund. The philosophy of functionalism in international relations was against power-politics, and state-centeredness. Their view is that power-politics and state-centeredness in the international system contribute to conflicts and wars as states struggle to pursue their varying and conflicting national interests while simultaneously maintaining and preserving their sovereignty. Therefore, functionalism is a theory which seeks conditions which foster peace and prevent disharmony between states (Øhrgaard, 2018).

Functionalists argue that mutual trust and co-operation patterns between governments are more likely to develop by sharing discrete public-sector responsibilities or functions (e.g., collecting meteorological data, coordinating international air traffic control, pandemic disease prevention, and promoting sustainable development), rather than by attempting to cooperate on more. The central feature of the functional approach is the establishment of international agencies with limited and specific powers, defined by their function. Functional agencies operate only within the territories of States that choose to join them and thus do not threaten the sovereignty of the state (Øhrgaard, 2018).

Functionalism highlights the consensus and order in society, with a focus on social stability and shared public values. From this perspective, system disorganization, such as deviant behavior, leads to change because it requires that societal components adjust to achieve stability. When one part of the system doesn't work or is dysfunctional, it affects all the other parts and creates social problems, leading to social change. Functionalism interprets every part of society as to how it contributes to the stability of society at large. Society is more than the sum of its parts; rather, every aspect of society is functional for the overall stability. In reality, Durkheim conceived society as an organism, and just as in an organism, each component plays a necessary part, but none can work alone, and if one experiences a crisis or fails, other parts will adapt to fill the gap in some way (Woldegiorgis, 2013).

Within functionalist theory, the various parts of society are composed primarily of social institutions, each of which is designed to fill different needs and each of which has particular implications for the form and shape of society. The parts are all mutually dependent. The core institutions identified by sociology which for this theory are important for understanding include family, government, economy, media, education, and religion. According to functionalism an organization exists only because it plays a critical role in society's functioning. If it doesn't serve a role anymore an institution will die away. As new needs are changing or developing, new organizations are developed to meet them (Kuhn, 2019).

Functionalism theory resonates well with this paper and this was based on the components that it is promoting. The first link that the functionalism theory has with the paper was based on the role that the governments have when it comes to promotion of sustainable development through international cooperation among countries regionally. The paper was attempting to show how the AfCFTA can foster sustainable economic growth through the partnerships made by the member states of the AU. The second importance of the theory was that it was able to allow the researcher to understand the concepts behind the formation of the AfCFTA based on the themes that have been covered. This made it easier to conceptualize the findings obtained.

Neo-Functionalism Theory

Functionalism supporters such as Hass (1958) identify proposals on the common pursuit of welfare needs through interstate cooperation with the functionalists but consider the process as basically political. Like the functionalists, neo-functionalists agree that national government authority is gradually eroded as people transfer loyalties to supranational bodies. To the neo-functionalists, "interests are the driving force behind the integration process rather than common ideals or identity, but actors can learn and develop common ideals and identities." Consequently, the neo-functionalism model points out that sovereignty issues and frequent conflicts between states are bound to arise in the integration process. Long-term stability is likely to fail when the process of integration entails conflicts of national interests, for example, conflicts between political forces such as parties and interest groups, and conflicts arising from the behavior of political leaders. In such situations, supranational institutions are needed which can propel the process of deeper integration. In this respect, neo-functionalism involves the political elements in the process of incorporating previously autonomous entities (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016).

Neo-functionalism provides no single concept of integration which is authoritative. Over time its practitioners revised their definition. Both Haas and Lindberg believed that integration was a process rather than a result, or (end-) state. They also accepted that integration entailed establishing and expanding the position of regional institutions. In addition, they both emphasized changes in expectations and activities on the part of participating actors. While Lindberg limited his study to the European Economic Community (EEC), Haas based his analysis on the ECSC, but extended its findings to both the EEC and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). He (1958: 16) laid down integration as (Gehring, 1996):

“the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states. The end result of a process of political integration is a new political community, superimposed over the pre-existing ones”.

In relation to this paper, neo-functionalism attempts to be practical in explaining the process of regional integration when it comes to the LPA, Abuja Treaty and the AfCFTA. Its view is that regional integration is an inevitable process that political leaders of states interested in participating could initiate. In this way, neo-functionalism acknowledges that states are important actors in the integration process but stresses that various interest groups and political parties make up the states. In the view of neo-functionalists, the diverse interest groups in society would benefit from the process of integration, as there are supranational institutions that would facilitate economic and technical interactions between states under the AfCFTA. These explications portray the role and influence of supranational institutions as crucial in the integration process. Such bodies should be conscious of their duties so as to have the right path for the progress of the AfCFTA.

1.3 Literature Review

The LPA was Africans' first on-continent attempt to create a systematic, cohesive approach to the continent's economic growth. It was the offshoot of the idea that "Africa's development could not be merely a passive result of the world system to which the continent had been bound by the historical legacies of slave trade, colonialism and the various neo-colonial associations and agreements such as the Lome and Yaounde Conventions with the European Economic Community. The LPA was adopted against the backdrop of two decades of stagnation in output; worsening balance of payments brought about by deteriorating terms of trade; increasing payments for the import of high-level skills, capital goods, spare parts and equipment, raw material inputs, marketing, shipping and insurance services; widespread unemployment and mass poverty (Lima Sakr, 2020). More importantly, it emerged in response to the realization that past policies were not viable and sustainable for the realization of the objectives of self-reliance, poverty eradication, reduction of unemployment, and equitable distribution of the benefits of development and economic growth, sovereignty over natural resources and equitable participation in international decision-making processes (Nhema and Zinyama, 2016). African Heads of state and Government summarized the background under which the LPA was formulated in the following words:

"The effect of unfulfilled promises of global development strategies has been more sharply felt in Africa than in the other continents of the world. Indeed, rather than result in an improvement in the economic situation of the continent, successive strategies have made it stagnate and become more susceptible than other regions to the economic and social crises suffered by the industrialized countries. Thus, Africa is unable to point to any significant growth rate, or satisfactory index of general well-being, in the past twenty years. Faced with this situation, and determined to undertake measures for the basic restructuring of the economic base of our continent, we resolved to adopt a far-reaching regional approach based primarily on collective self-reliance".

Formulated against the backdrop of dissatisfaction with past approaches to African development, the LPA was understandably conceived as an instrument for redressing the imbalance inherent in African economies, including their excessive external dependence. Thus, the philosophy underpinning the LPA and the Final Act of Lagos (FAL) was self-reliance, at the national and inter-country levels (Oloruntoba, 2020). It called for the development of capacities and capabilities at the national and inter-country levels, to formulate and apply autonomous decisions, to generate and implement independent ideas, to identify problems and analyze them in terms of domestic, African and extra-African requirements for their solutions. It also emphasized the need to develop capacities and capabilities at national and inter-country levels to meet, albeit progressively, the greater parts of the region's needs in terms of factors of production and of final goods and services

(Nhema and Zinyama, 2016).

The Abuja Treaty took place in 2001 in Abuja. The African Economic Community (AEC) is an association of African Union states that among the majority of African states provide grounds for mutual economic development. The organization's stated objectives include the creation of free trade areas, customs unions, a single market, a central bank, and a common currency (see African Monetary Union) thereby establishing an economic and monetary union. The first stage of this process came to a close in June 1999 (Alvarez-Jimenez, 2017). The first stage of the Treaty calls for the establishment of all regional economic communities. Though they are in place, their functioning has been having problems. It raised the question of the attainment of objectives. The Abuja Declaration ended up turning out as more of a political initiative, one that would require its own dedicated research and one that the researcher, at this moment, chose not to delve into. This however does not cancel or erase the role it has played in as far as steering integration efforts in the continent (Mburu, Folayan, and Akanni, 2014).

At the dawn of the new millennium, African Heads of State and Government pledged – through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)-to take responsibility for the future of their continent and also to establish a new relationship with bilateral development partners and multilateral organizations based on mutual trust, respect and accountability (NEPAD and African Union, 2001). NEPAD was adopted in 2001 and ratified in 2002, however its origins can be traced to three independent but related initiatives on the continent, namely: the Omega Plan, initiated by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal in January 2001; the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP), spearheaded by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa in 2001; and the New African Initiative, which emerged out of a merger of the Omega Plan and the MAP and was subsequently transformed into NEPAD. NEPAD is the first comprehensive development approach initiated, implemented and owned by African governments, with the full support of the international community. It provides a vision of the kind of society and economy that African governments want to build. Furthermore, it is not only a development framework, philosophy or vision, but also a development programme with concrete projects geared towards addressing Africa's development needs and challenges. The broad long-term objectives of NEPAD are to eradicate poverty, put Africa on a sustainable development path, and halt the marginalization of Africa (Ilorah, 2014).

Assessing the overall performance of NEPAD is challenging, because it is difficult to isolate NEPAD's contributions to observed economic outcomes from those of other programmes and policies. Nevertheless, the available data indicate that Africa's economic growth performance in the decade that NEPAD was introduced (2000–2009) was significantly better than in the decade before its introduction (1990–1999) (Ilorah, 2014).

In January 2012, the 18th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted a resolution to create a Continental Free Trade Area by an indicative date of 2017. However, this time-limit was not reached. The Summit also endorsed the Intra-Africa Trade Boosting Action Plan (BIAT), which identifies also priority clusters of action: trade policy, trade facilitation, productive capacity, trade-related infrastructure, trade finance, trade intelligence, and market integration factors (Ntezilyayo, 2019).

1.4 Methodology and Data Analysis

The paper was based on getting information regarding the analysis of Lagos Plan of Action and

the African Continental Free Area with the main focus being the possibility of AfCFTA succeeding where LPA failed by looking at the steps that have been taken by the AU since LPA's inception and the processes of arriving at each. To achieve this, the paper used a descriptive method which examines a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context; where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not obvious; and where multiple sources of evidence are used. The data collected data was analyzed thematically. Themes were drawn from the data that has been collected in order to identify the patterns of the data gathered. The themes that were used were in line with the objectives of the study and also the overall theme that governs the study as captured in the research topic.

1.5 Findings

From the findings of the study, it is clear that there are challenges that are likely to affect the implementation of the AfCFTA. The challenges include; lack of political commitment, sovereignty and institutional weakness. There are solutions that have been captured in the study that can be able to solve the challenges. Political commitment is one of the key issues that was mentioned to be crucial when it comes to ensuring there is effective performance of the AfCFTA. This is based on the role that the political leaders within the continent are in a position to effectively handle the issue of the new integration. Secondly, the presence of clear economic integration objectives was mentioned during the interview as one of the key aspects that can be adopted in order to ensure that there is proper formulation of the objectives that are used. This is key in ensuring that there is clarity when it comes to the economic integration within Africa. It was noted that in some of the cases, there is the lack of clarity when it comes to the integration process because the member states later feel that the goals that have been set are not clear in terms of how they are going to be achieved. Thirdly, the information obtained from the interviews indicated that the creation of free trade area is crucial when it comes to ensuring that there is the success of the AfCFTA and this is through the elimination of trade barriers among themselves while maintaining their individual national barriers against other countries.

There are various economic benefits of the AfCFTA that were mentioned during the interviews that were conducted. The first economic benefit is boosting of trade within Africa. This was mentioned based on the fact that it will be able to increase the trade activities among African countries. AfCFTA will ensure that there elimination of the reliance that African countries have on countries outside the continent. The second benefits that the AfCFTA has based on the data that was collected is the growth in the investment and manufacturing within the African continent. AfCFTA will ensure that African countries are investing heavily within the continent and contributing raw materials within Africa and thus leading to the emergence of various industries to enhance manufacturing activities. The third benefit of the AfCFTA based on the data that was collected is that the agreement has the ability to ensure that there is the elimination of trade tariffs is within the continent and thus leading to trade liberation. This they mentioned is captured within the policies that have been captured in the agreement. The fourth benefit is when it comes to the creations of employment opportunities to the African youths. AfCFTA is projected to produce jobs for this bulging youth population.

Political Instability and AfCFTA Success; from the analysis and discussion done, it can be interpreted that any act of political instability in Africa will likely affect AfCFTA. This is because

political instability discourages efficient negotiations between partner countries, and makes it difficult to implement trade agreements. Additionally, even after trade agreements come into force, there still exists possibility of termination or, at the least, of the agreements becoming virtually dead.

1.6 Conclusion

There are solutions that can be adopted to mitigate the challenges that the AfCFTA is likely to face. The solution involve; political commitment, clear AfCFTA objectives and elimination of the trade barriers. The solutions are deemed to be effective because they have been employed to other agreements within Africa such as the regional integration policies.

There are economic benefits of AfCFTA will be able to bring to African countries. The economic benefits are expected to boost the growth of the African economy in various ways. The first effect on Africa's economy is through boosting of trade within the continent. The second impact is the growth in the investment and manufacturing within the African continent. The AfCFTA agreement has the ability to ensure that there is the elimination of trade tariffs is within the continent and thus leading to trade liberation and lastly the creation of employment opportunities to the African youths.

The Agreement establishing the AfCFTA has for the most part covered the concern that might arise ranging from Political will to Sovereignty and Institutional Weakness. However, what remains to be seen is the implementation process and how each country will, in its own capacity, ratify the Agreement. The Institutions that have been mentioned are only as good as the work that they will do individually and collectively. This study can only delve so deeper into the success or failure of the AfCFTA, the real obligation and challenge lies with each Member State and the Heads of States to ensure proper implementation of the agreement. Africa stands to benefit united in one trade area. Political instability has also been linked to the AfCFTA success. Any act of political instability in Africa will likely affect AfCFTA. Africa as a continent is known to be one that is characterized with constant political instabilities. This is one of the key issues that might hinder effective economic activities the continent such as the political instability in a country might make it for goods to pass through its borders and thus affecting trade.

The possibility of success for the African Continental Free Trade Area lies on recognizing the shortcomings that we have experienced before, with other integration efforts and meeting those shortcomings. Africans need to be included in the process of AfCFTA and made aware of just what they stand to gain as citizens and not just as countries. The only way this would be possible is through informed media houses that can further interpret this information to citizens. If time allowed, I would want to delve deeper into the institutions of the AfCFTA so as to see how each would work with the national governments and further look into the implementation of the Agreement. This would enable me understand if there is anything we are doing different and if our governments are taking keenly participating in the process. I would also be curious to know how the issue of similar trading goods would be solved in order to ensure each Member State enjoys the full benefits of integration.

1.7 Recommendations

First and foremost, AfCFTA signatory states should factor in the solutions that have been adopted in the current study. The adoption of the solutions by the members will ensure that there is smooth

implementation of the agreements and thus reaping the economic benefits that are associated with it. This will also require conscious and careful consideration of RECs and how they can help. Further, the Union needs to address the “spaghetti bowl” effect within RECs and how that might affect the Continental Free Trade Area. Proper guideline should be put in place that ensure member states are complementing each other instead of competing in the market and service provision.

The AfCFTA members should ensure that there are proper measures that are adopted in order to prevent any political instability. This can be done through collaborating with the AU security organs to mitigate such issues from ever happening. To achieve this, the AU and member states need to look at other initiatives and the implementation efforts made in comparison to how AfCFTA is being implemented. This will aid in avoiding a repetition of failed attempts and instead focus on what works. The policy makers and AU member states should consider looking into previous integration attempts that may or may not have been successful and sieve out what worked from what did not work. This will ensure that AfCFTA does not repeat the same mistakes, but only pick what works. The implementation process should be actively measured and each of the member states given deadlines that they must adhere to.

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