



Research Article

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## **COORDINATION BETWEEN THE AFRICAN UNION AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES TOWARDS ACHIEVING REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This working paper critically analyses the coordination between the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) towards achievement of continental integration. The AU and RECs have a common goal of achieving regional integration. However, little progress has been made, and one of the challenges and criticisms of the institutions' efforts towards achieving the African Integration Agenda, is poor coordination. The paper examines the AU and RECs' structures and role as regional integration bodies. Then, the research discusses and evaluates the regulatory frameworks governing coordination; the coordination mechanisms employed; and the principles governing coordination between the institutions. The research asserts that efficient coordination and harmonisation between the AU and RECs is essential to accelerate achievement of the continental integration agenda.

**Key words:** Regional Integration, African Union, Regional Economic Communities, Coordination

### **AFRİKA'DA BÖLGESEL ENTEGRASYONU SAĞLAMAK İÇİN AFRİKA BİRLİĞİ VE BÖLGESEL EKONOMİK TOPLULUKLAR ARASINDAKİ KOORDINASYON**

#### **ÖZET**

İşbu araştırma, Afrika Birliği (AfB) ve Bölgesel Ekonomik Toplulukların (BET'ler) arasındaki koordinasyonu kıtasal bölgesel entegrasyonun sağlanmasına yönelik olarak eleştirel bir şekilde analiz etmektedir. AfB ve BET'lerin bölgesel bütünlüşmeyi sağlama konusunda ortak bir hedefi vardır. Bununla birlikte, çok az ilerleme kaydedilmiştir ve kurumların Afrika Entegrasyon Gündemi'ni gerçekleştirmeye yönelik çabalarına yönelik zorluklardan ve eleştirilerden biri, zayıf koordinasyondur. Araştırma, AfB ve BET'lerin yapılarını ve bölgesel entegrasyon organları olarak rollerini incelemektedir. Akabinde, koordinasyonu düzenleyen düzenleyici çerçeveleri, kullanılan koordinasyon mekanizmalarını ve kurumlar arasındaki koordinasyonu yöneten ilkeleri tartışıp değerlendirmektedir. Araştırma, AfB ve BET'ler arasındaki verimli koordinasyon ve uyumun, kıta entegrasyon gündeminin başarısını hızlandırmak ve kolaylaştırmak için gerekli olduğu öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bölgesel Entegrasyon, Afrika Birliği, Bölgesel Ekonomik Topluluklar, Koordinasyon

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Regional integration in Africa has been sought by the African states since they gained independence from colonial powers. In this regard, intergovernmental bodies were formed and given authority by the States to implement the integration objective in the continent. The particular objectives of the intergovernmental bodies differed depending on the priorities and needs of the States. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was later replaced by the African Union (AU), was formed to pursue the continental integration agenda, whereas the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were formed to pursue sub-regional integration objectives.

The origins of regional integration in Africa lie in the need to meet common political and economic goals during and in the aftermath of colonization. Once some States started to attain independence, there was a call for regional support of the efforts of countries that were still under colonial rule and seeking independence. Additionally, there was also a need for collaboration among the newly independent States in their pursuit of economic development.

In contemporary times, regional integration has become a top priority for Africa as States seek both economic and political integration as a means of achieving sustainable development. Through integration, resource rich and resource poor countries; landlocked and coastal countries; lower and higher GDP countries; can all have access to the various resources that they require to attain development and improve the conditions in their countries. Regional integration is the most effective way that Africa can collaborate in harnessing the potential of the 1.2 billion people in the continent, most of whom are youth. Integration will allow Africa to bring together small economies and form a large economy, which will make them more competitive in the global market. Also, Integration will facilitate resolving some of the challenges that go beyond borders, such as conflict and security; movement of people, goods and services; climate change; and other economic activities such as pastoralism which require cross-border cooperation (Moyo, 2009).

Although it has been 6 decades since Africa's integration efforts were initiated through the formation of the OAU, very little progress has been made. There are various challenges that have been encountered in seeking integration, as well as various reasons why the manner in which integration is being sought is not giving positive results. Regional integration has been difficult to attain in Africa because State-building still needs to occur in some States; some African countries do not have basic infrastructure that would allow integration efforts to thrive; rivalries between states which prevent them from forming cooperation arrangements; lack of financial and other technical resources to implement the integration objectives; debt and dependence on the West which limits the manner in which the States' resources can be used; the unequal distribution of the benefits from integration resulting in some countries taking a bigger share of profits than the others and therefore discouraging integration; lack of good governance, good political and economic institutions in the States, which are essential for implementing integration objectives; uncontrollable population growth which makes it difficult for countries to keep up with provision of essential public services alongside implementing integration objectives; among others (Chingono and Nakana, 2000).

Another highlighted hindrance towards achieving regional integration in the continent is that more efforts have been put into developing the supranational bodies that govern integration than in actually implementing integration efforts. The paramountcy put on supranational bodies to manage regional integration, as well as the reliance and singular perspective that integration requires a vehicle in the form of supranational bodies, has resulted in challenges such as the creation of too many supranational bodies (especially RECs) and overlapping memberships across the various RECs.

Due to the mandate given to the AU and the RECs, the achievement or failure to achieve regional integration in Africa is highly dependent on these supranational bodies. However, there are various identified impediments faced by the intergovernmental organisation towards achieving regional integration, including structural, infrastructural and financial challenges. The most significant hindrance faced by supranational bodies towards achieving integration in Africa is the poor coordination between the AU and RECs, who have a similar objective of regional integration. The coordination challenges



among the supranational bodies are due to several reasons including existence of too many supranational bodies who are autonomous and have different powers and competencies.

The paper critically analyses the coordination between the AU and RECs in their efforts towards achieving regional integration. In order to do so, the paper discusses the regional integration theories in relation to Africa; explores the origins of the AU and its integration agenda for Africa; examines the RECs; and analyses the coordination mechanisms that are being employed by the AU and the RECs. The research asserts that the goal shouldn't be mere coordination, but coherent and effective coordination. This is the only way to accelerate and facilitate the achievement of regional integration in Africa.

## 2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The various Regional Integration Theories offer an understanding of regional integration by the different schools of thought. Theories are important because they allow us to understand the historical development and current status of an integration cluster, and also to predict the status of the cluster in future. The prominent Regional Integration Theories were developed to understand and explain the integration in Europe. The major theories of European integration are: Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism. However, a new theory known as the New Regional Approach (NRA) has emerged to explain contemporary regional integration. The NRA theory is the most .

### The New Regional Approach (NRA)

The New Regional Approach (NRA) aims to understand integration in contemporary times, taking into account modern-day settings and challenges. Distinct from the earlier theories of integration such as Neofunctionalism and Intergovernmentalism, NRA was developed in the 1990s unlike the other which were developed in the 1950s in the aftermath of the World Wars. The context and content of integration has changed vastly hence the need for a more relevant theory to explain integration (Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998).

The NRA theory explains integration in the *context* of globalization and the global structural transformations such as: the deterioration of US hegemony; shift from bipolarity to multipolarity; the advancement interdependence in social, economic and political aspects creating novel means of interaction between governments and increasing the role of non-state actors; and technological advancements which have affected every field. The *content* of regional integration has also widened beyond the free trade arrangements and security alliances that were central for earlier integrations. Therefore, the theory argues that the nature of integration is no longer simply a matter of creating supranational institutions and harmonizing policies, but also involves a wide range of issues and actors, such as security, trade, and environment, civil society and multinational companies (Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998).

The NRA Theory emphasizes the role of non-State actors, such as transnational corporations (Multinational Corporations - MNCs), private sector, and civil society organizations, in driving regional integration; and also highlights the impact of globalization on regional integration, arguing that increased economic interdependence and the spread of new technologies have made it easier for countries to cooperate and integrate. The other assumption is that the actors are not only motivated by economic interests but also by the political and social dynamics of the region. This theory recognizes that the traditional approach of understanding regional integration as a top-down process led by States is no longer sufficient to explain the complex and dynamic process of integration that is taking place globally, and especially in Africa today (Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998).

The NRA approach is the most relevant theory for explaining African integration under the AU and under the RECs, as well as the coordination between the AU and RECs in order to have more efficient and deeper integration. Apart from the States and the Supranational Institutions, the NRA approach in explaining African integration, shows that non-State actors have been given high importance in their role in integration. African States are also aware of globalization and one of the drivers for integration in the continent is to give them a more persuasive united voice and stance on the global stage, and make



them more competitive in the global market. Citizen inclusion in achieving integration objectives is highlighted also by State and supranational actors under this theory.

### **3. CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION: FROM AOU TO AU**

#### **3.1. The OAU**

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was formed in 1963 by the newly sovereign African States through enactment, signing and ratification of the Charter of the OAU of 1963. At its formation, the OAU had 32 Member States. The OAU’s main aim was to unite African States in the fight for freedom of the African States still under colonial rule. Promotion and protection of independence was the central motive for forming the Organisation. The OAU would consolidate the support that was being offered by the Independent African States towards attainment of independence of the non-independent African States and serve as a vehicle for the achievement of the common objectives for the Independent States.

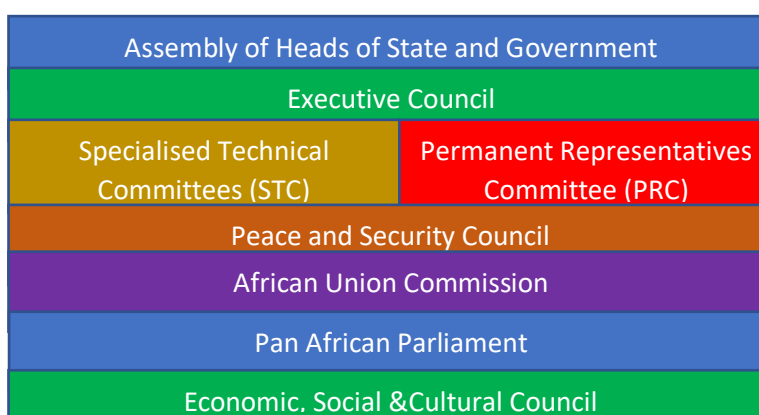
During its existence, the OAU made several achievements. Political achievements included the diplomatic, military and financial support offered to States seeking independence and the promotion for non-violent forms of attaining independence. Economically, OAU encouraged regional economic cooperation between African States towards achieving sustainable development hence the formation of several RECs. Social achievements included advocating for the advancement of human rights in the continent.

The OAU also encountered several challenges and criticisms including: the lack of funds and military power to enforce its decisions and make relevant interventions; it was criticised for making matters of independence and sovereignty of Member States central to their existence, whereas little to no attention was given to other important issues such as democracy, respect and advancement of human rights, and sustainable development; and the failure to achieve social welfare in the continent such as several Africans who were affected by diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS.

#### **3.2. The AU**

The African Union (AU) was created pursuant to the Constitutive Act of 2002, and as a replacement to the OAU. Despite its success in supporting several African States in achieving independence, the OAU was ridden with several limitations and was subject to several criticisms including that it had become irrelevant and outdated in the new world especially following the end of the cold war and apartheid in the 1990s (Maluwa 2009: 55). It was important that an organisation that would meet the challenges and requirements of the African States in the dawn of the new millennium be formed.

The objectives of the AU include attaining African Unity, solidarity, cooperation and integration; strengthening of the organisation as an international player; promotion of sustainable development; and promotion of rule of law, democracy and good governance (African Union, 2002: p.5-6). A coordination structure was created under the AU to facilitate the implementation of these objectives. The Institutional Structure of the AU includes bodies with executive, judicial and legislative functions. The Assembly of Heads of States and Governments of African States is the supreme organ of the AU, and makes decisions regarding the Organization. Figure 1 below shows the AU institutional structure.





**Figure 1:** Institutional Structure of the AU;

**Source:** Created with information from the AU Handbook, 2022

Since its formation, the AU has had several achievements. Politically, important steps have been made towards the promotion of peace and security in the continent for instance through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which helped stabilise Somalia. Economically, establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018 and the promotion of sub-regional integration through the RECs has led to deeper integration. Socially, AU has continued to be a symbol of unity and allowed for States to collectively solve common challenges such as disease outbreaks.

Challenges and criticisms of the AU include structural criticisms such as memberships are not based on any important criteria other than being an African State, in contrast with the EU's Copenhagen Criteria; infrastructural challenges such as lack of sufficient financial and technical resources; lack of political will; and delayed responses to crises. Despite these challenges and criticisms, the AU continues to exist and work towards fulfilling its objectives.

### 3.3. The African Integration Agenda

The matter of continental integration was central to the formation of the OAU and the AU. Understanding the continental integration sought by the AU requires referring to the Treaty of the Establishment of the African Economic Community of 1991 (The Abuja Treaty), which provides for the African Economic Community (AEC). The AEC is a structural outcome of full regional integration in the continent, as provided in Article 2 of Abuja Treaty. The aim is to achieve a single economic and monetary union within the 55 Member States of the AU. In evaluating the progress towards achieving the AEC, it can be concluded that the continent is not close to achieving the AEC, and the establishment of the AfCFTA in 2018 shows that the organisation is only on the third stage of the six stages, and is lagging behind on the set deadlines for achieving the AEC within 34 years, and not exceeding 40 years starting 1991.

More sector-specific integration objectives have been made such as those in the AU's Agenda 2063. The African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII) is an assessment tool that measures regional integration in the following eight dimensions: "trade integration, infrastructure integration, free movement of persons, social integration, financial integration, monetary integration, environmental integration, and political and institutional integration" (African Union, 2021a, p.12). The AMRII measures the Implementation of the African Integration Agenda as provided in the Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063.

## 4. RECS AS REGIONAL INTEGRATION BODIES

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are the most recognisable and direct means towards regional integration in the African continent. The RECs are formed by States as a means to meet their common objectives. Individual RECs have particular objectives for which they were formed, and so all RECs are not formed for the same reason. Some RECs were formed for trade purposes, others for peace and security, others for environmental purposes and so forth. However, despite their differing objectives,



the RECs have a common objective of uniting the countries in the region. They are the most apparent means towards attaining regional integration in the various sub-regions in the African continent.

The concept of regional integration is not foreign to Africa, which had some of the earliest cooperation agreements namely: the South African Customs Union (SACU) of 1910 and the East African Community (EAC) of 1917. SACU was formed in 1910 by the colonial powers in the southern African countries of South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland (present day Eswatini) and Botswana. The EAC of 1917 was a customs union that existed between Uganda and Kenya, with Tanganyika (present day mainland-Tanzania) joining in 1927. These RECs aimed at attaining economic growth in the regions.

#### **4.1. RECs in Contemporary Times (Recognised by AU)**

Since the formation of the earlier RECs, many have continued to be formed and others dissolved, for several reasons. Despite the continued formation of RECs, it is unclear how many exist in total. However, The AU made a decision specifying the eight RECs that it recognises namely: “The South African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)”; and further stated that other RECS apart from those listed would not be recognised (AU Assembly, 2006). Despite their identification AU-recognised RECs, these eight RECs were created and have evolved separately from the AU. The RECs are independent, have structures, functions, missions, visions and objectives that are not influenced by the AU. The major development in the purpose of contemporary RECs is that they are considered as essential vehicles or ‘building blocs’ towards achieving continental integration.

#### **4.2. Regional Mechanisms (Recognised by AU)**

While discussing RECs that are recognised by the African Union, Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (hereinafter referred to as ‘Regional Mechanisms’ or ‘RMs’) are also discussed in the same umbrella since they were officially recognised by the AU under the Article 16 of the “Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union”. Article 16 also states that the Regional Mechanisms are essential for the promotion of peace, security and stability in the continent, and they are a part of the security architecture of the AU (Djilo, 2021). The focus of RMs on the ‘peace and security’ objective is what differentiates them from RECs, which are mostly focused on economic integration.

There are three RMs recognised by the AU: “International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR); Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF); and North African Regional Capability (NARC)” (African Union, 2022). The criticism is that the recognised RMs do not cover all the five regions of the continent, with focus being in the eastern and northern regions.

#### **4.3. RECs and Regional Mechanisms (Unrecognised by AU)**

In addition to the 8 RECs that are recognised by AU, there are other RECs that are active in the continent. other unrecognised RECs include: “the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC); the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC); the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC); the Mano River Union (MRU); the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU); the Accra Initiative; the Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA); and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC)” (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). These unrecognised RECs are located in the various regions of the continent, which justifies their unrecognition by the AU since other ‘recognised’ RECs already exist there.

Also, there are RMs that are not recognised by the AU, such as the Western Africa Standby Brigade; the Central African Standby Brigade; and the Southern Africa Standby Brigade, which together with EASF and NARC form the African Standby Force. The recognition of some and not all African Standby Force members as part of RMs as defined by AU is interesting in terms of the new structures created within the AU (African Union, 2022).



The consequence of RECs and RMs not being recognised by the AU is that they exacerbate the duplication of efforts by these institutions as they work towards achieving similar objectives.

#### 4.4. Challenges and Limitations of RECs and Regional Mechanisms.

There are various reasons for the failure and delay of the RECs to meet their integration objectives. These include:

- The overlapping memberships in RECs has been attributed as a major obstacle to regional integration because of the problems it creates such as: duplication of efforts; misuse and/or abuse of the resources available to institutions; difficulty of member states to make sufficient contributions because they belong to several RECs and have to make contributions to all, among others.
- The infrastructural, financial and technical challenges facing RECs reduce their capability to meet their integration objectives. Also, they are forced to be reliant on external funding.
- Hegemonic politics derail regional integration in that countries that are considered most powerful in the region make decisions for the less powerful states, which impacts the level of commitment of the latter in implementing those decisions.

#### 4.5. Level of integration of the RECs

The eight RECs recognised by the AU have all reached different levels of integration, with some more integrated than others. EAC, ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA are the most integrated whereas AMU, IGAD and CENSAD are the least integrated RECs when evaluated against the economic integration scale as provided under the Abuja Treaty.

When measuring the level of regional integration in accordance with the African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII), it shows that EAC, SADC, ECOWAS and ECCAS, in that order, are leading in achieving integration according to the AMRII's 8 dimensions. Figure 2 below shows that: EAC ranks first in four dimensions; SADC ranks first in three dimensions; ECOWAS ranks first in three dimensions; and ECCAS ranks first in one dimension. The least performing RECs are AMU which ranks last in three dimensions; CENSAD ranks last in two dimensions; and IGAD ranks last in one dimension (African Union, 2021a: p.19-24). Analysing the level of integration of the RECs confirms the uneven performance by the institutions and raises concerns about why these low-performing RECs continue to exist, especially where little to no effort is being put towards meeting the integration agenda.

**Figure 2:** Ranking of AU Recognised Recs in Achieving Integration According to AMRII Dimensions

	EAC	ECOWAS	SADC	COMESA	ECCAS	IGAD	CENSAD	AMU
Trade Integration	1	2	4	3	5	8	7	6
Infrastructure Integration	1	8	1	3	5	6	3	7
Free Movement of Persons	2	1	6	3	4	7	8	4
Social Integration	1	1	4	3	5	7	8	6
Monetary Integration	1	7	1	5	6	3	4	7
Financial Integration	3	4	1	2	5	7	6	8
Environmental Integration	6	2	2	5	1	4	7	8



Political and Institutional Integration	2	1	8	3	4	6	5	7
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Ranking order: Most integrated (1) to Least integrated (8), in each AMRII dimension.

**Source:** Created with information from African Integration Report, 2021: p.19-24.

## 5. COORDINATION MECHANISMS BETWEEN THE AU AND RECS

The challenges in coordination between the AU and RECs are credited for the slow integration in the African continent. This is because poor coordination leads to: misuse of already scarce resources; duplication of efforts; creating contradictory policies; and difficulties in implementing common agendas, strategies and policies. In order to have effective coordination between the AU and RECs, it is important to have relevant regulatory frameworks, actions and principles that are created and implemented by all parties. This section analyses the various regulatory frameworks, actions and principles that were used by the OAU and those used by the AU towards achieving efficient coordination with RECs towards achieving continental integration. (It should be noted that whenever ‘RECs’ is used in this section, it shall include Regional Mechanisms as recognised by the AU.)

### 5.1. Reasons for Coordination between AU and RECs.

Coordination between the institutions is essential in order to attain the common objective of the institutions, which is regional integration in a more timely, efficient and effective manner. Coordination is necessary in order to resolve the challenges that the institutions face individually during implementation of objectives that are similar or related to those of the other institutions. Coordination is meant to align the policies of the institutions and make them more efficient. The goal is to have a more coherent cooperation between the institutions. The specific justifications for the promotion of coordination between the OAU/AU and RECs/RMs is as follows:

- Duplication of efforts by the institutions is a poor use of the already scarce resources available for the implementation of these activities. Considering that the institutions’ agendas and objectives in several sectors are similar, it is important that they align their policies to ensure that efforts are not duplicated.
- Coordination is necessary to resolve the challenge of Contradictory policies that are made by the AU and RECs, which are counterproductive to achieving the integration Agenda.
- Lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities creates challenges in creating and implementing important policies, projects and programs. Through coordination, the parties will have detailed information regarding each other’s functions, to avoid duplication of efforts and creating contradictory policies.

### 5.2. Relationship between OAU and RECs

#### 5.2.1. The Regulatory frameworks

The first link between the OAU and RECs can be traced to the Lagos Plan of Action for the Development of Africa of 1980, which envisioned continental economic integration. The continental integration vision of the Lagos Plan of Action was codified in the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) of 1991 (Abuja Treaty), which was created by the OAU for purposes of promoting economic integration in the continent. The Abuja Treaty, which is still in force today, was important in regulating the relationship between the OAU and RECs. The Abuja Treaty viewed the RECs as essential towards attaining continental economic integration in the form of African Economic Community (AEC).

The OAU Charter, despite being the central document for continental integration, did not have provisions governing the AU-RECs relationship. The “Protocol on Relations between the African Economic Community and the RECs of 1998” (which was replaced by the 2008 Protocol and then by





the 2021 Protocol) was the principal document governing the AU-RECs relationship. The main issue with legal documents that provided for collaboration, coordination and harmonisation between the OAU and RECs is that they neither defined nor detailed structures and procedures.

### **5.2.2. Coordination Mechanisms**

The 1998 Protocol of AU-RECs relationship sought to offer an institutional structure for coordination between the AU and RECs; and coordination mechanisms. Under the coordination structure, a Committee on Coordination and a Committee of Secretariat Officials were created; with the former's role being coordination and monitoring of RECs' progress towards integration, and the latter's role being more technical including organising meetings of the Coordination committee (1998 Protocol, chapters 3 and 4). The 1998 Protocol also promoted inter-REC cooperation (in Chapter 5); and called for RECs Member States to create coordinating ministries/authorities in their countries (in Chapter 8).

The 1998 Protocol failed to provide concrete coordination activities, frameworks and strategies, other than encouraging attendance to each other's meetings. However, there are still unregulated forms of coordination that were employed by the OAU and RECs including meetings and report-submissions by the RECs to the AU.

## **5.3. Relationship Between AU and Recs**

### **5.3.1. The Regulatory Frameworks**

The AU – RECs relationship is governed by several legal instruments. The Constitutive Act of the AU (2002, p.2) recognises the Abuja Treaty (1991) and implores Member States to adhere to and implement the Treaty. Therefore, the Abuja Treaty continues to apply under the AU as it did under the OAU. Other regulatory frameworks governing the AU-RECs relationship include: the “Protocol on Relations Between the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (2021)”; the “Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002)”; the “Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern African and Northern Africa (2008)”; and the “Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (2018)”.

A study of the regulatory frameworks governing the relations between the AU and RECs shows that the regulations are unsatisfactory in their content and create challenges in implementation. There is a need for more sector-specific regulations governing the relations between the AU and RECs, such as those provided for peace and security. This will resolve the challenges encountered while implementing generalised provisions.

### **5.3.2. Coordination Mechanisms**

#### **5.3.2.1. Creation of Rules, Regulations and Frameworks**

With regard to creation of rules, regulations and frameworks for coordination between the AU and RECs, the AU Assembly has enacted treaties to mandate the AU, RECs, Member States, and other relevant continental institutions to harmonise and coordinate their policies and activities in order to effectively and efficiently implement the continental integration agenda. The AU and RECs have made decisions, declarations, policies and strategy frameworks relevant to facilitate the coordination between the institutions. The regulatory frameworks establish the relationship between the AU and RECs; define the kind of relationship; provide the roles of the parties and principles governing the relationship; set out the objectives of the relationship; and lay out the manner in which the relationship is implemented.

#### **5.3.2.2. Coordination Meetings**



The Decision of the African Union Assembly (2017) provided that a Coordination Meeting will be held annually between the RECs and the African Union in order to harmonise and improve the coordination between these institutions. Prior to this decision, there were no specific meetings being held between the AU and RECs to coordinate and harmonise their policies, activities, and efforts towards achievement of common objectives, despite the important role that had been assigned to the RECs as building blocs for the African Economic Community (AEC).

Following the 2017 decision, Coordination Meetings have been organised annually between the RECs and the AU. The Coordination Structure in relation to the Mid-Year Coordination Meetings (MYCM), is provided in the Protocol on Relations Between the AU and the RECs (2021). The Committee on Coordination is composed of the AUC Chairperson, the Chief Executives of AU Financial Institutions, and the Chief Executive of the African Union Development Agency- New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD). The purpose of the Coordination Committee is to support the implementation of the Protocol through providing policy support. Also, part of the coordination structure is the Coordination Secretariat, whose objective report preparation and submission to the Coordination Committee. The Coordination Secretariat is comprised of AU and RECs Representatives (African Union, 2021b).

The participation for the annual MYCM includes: the executives and representatives from the AU, the RECs and the Regional Mechanisms, Heads of States of various Member States; and executives of other relevant continental institutions, as well as organisations with observer-status also participate. During the annual meetings, reports are shared regarding the status of sub-regional and continental integration; discussions regarding the challenges of continental integration and recommendations are made; consultations regarding the implementation of various policies and projects; and decisions are made regarding ways to improve coordination (ISS Africa, 2019).

In addition to the meetings held by the executive organs of the RECs, the AU and the Regional Mechanisms; other sector-specific coordination meetings were also organised by the institutions' organs that are responsible for those sectors such as between the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the policy organs of the various RECs and Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution.

### **5.3.2.3. Representatives**

Another coordination mechanism employed by the AU and RECs is assigning representatives to the Institutions. The African Union (2008) Peace and Security MOU also provides that personnel exchanges between the AU and RECs is essential in order to enhance the coordination between the institutions. Also, the African Union (2021b) Protocol on Relations Between the AU and the RECs provides that the AU and RECs are to establish permanent representations at their respective headquarters, aimed at enhancing coordination.

### **5.3.3. Principles**

In order to have a productive relationship and effective coordination between the AU and RECs/RMs, there are principles that have been proposed as essential to govern the relationship. The principles of subsidiarity, division of labour, comparative advantage, and complementarity will result in achieving the continental integration agenda when they are observed by the parties.

*The Principle of Subsidiarity:* It entails that the local actors are prioritised in responding to problems. The justifications for the principle of subsidiarity include: to attain greater effectiveness because the local actors are closer in proximity to the situation and are therefore better equipped to respond. With regard to the AU and RECs, the proposal is that the RECs should take priority in responding to matters in line with the subsidiarity principle (Djilo, 2021).

*The Principle of Division of Labour:* It entails all actors having clear roles during the implementation of the integration agenda. The African Union (2019a) in the Africa Regional Integration Report



highlighted there was still a need to clarify the division of labour between the AU and RECs. Clear roles allow for accountability, ownership, consensus and synergy among AU and RECs. Although the AU is the coordinating body with supervisory powers, lack of clarity of what this entails, the powers and limitations connected to this position, creates challenges in collaborating with the RECs, Member States and other continental institutions towards implementing the integration agenda” (ISS Africa, 2019).

*The principles of comparative advantage and complementarity:* These are applied alongside subsidiarity and division of labour principles, with the aim of maximising the institutions’ competencies.

#### **5.4. Impact of AU-Recs Relationships on Regional Integration**

The AU as a coordinating body has played an important role in offering platforms for RECs and Member States to congregate and discuss progress, challenges, solutions, and ways to deepen integration. Trade integration has deepened because in addition to promoting inter-RECs integration, the AU has collaborated with the RECs to promote continental trade integration through the AfCFTA. Also, with peace and security, the coordination and collaboration between the AU and RECs/RMs is ensuring that the efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts are supported at all levels, State level, REC/RM level and AU level, which increases effectiveness.

However, the AU has also negatively impacted sub-regional integration. The top-down approach, which reduces the RECs/RMs authority, reduces the impact of RECs in their sub-regions. This occurs especially where decisions and mandates of the AU are not aligned to the RECs/RMs, which results in the AU criticising and undermining the RECs/RMs.

Despite the sometimes-conflicting interests between the AU and RECs in implementing their integration agendas, deeper, efficient and effective integration can only be achieved through coordination and collaboration between the institutions rather than working separately from each other. Therefore, efforts towards better coordination between the institutions need to be increased.

### **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1. Conclusion**

The research on Coordination between the AU and the RECs for the purpose of achieving regional integration has discussed the regional integration theories in relation to Africa; explored the African Union and its integration agenda; examined the RECs; and critically analysed the coordination mechanisms that are being employed by the AU and the RECs.

An analysis of the coordination between the AU and RECs shows that, during the existence of the OAU, the regulatory frameworks called for coordination and harmonisation of efforts between the institutions but, ‘coordination’ was not defined and mechanisms were not created for this purpose. With the AU, more efforts have been made in defining ‘coordination’; establishing coordination mechanisms; and creating frameworks to elaborate and clarify the principles relating to efficient coordination, such as the principles of division of labour and subsidiarity. However, these efforts have only started within the last few years, with the first coordination meeting being held in 2019, and therefore it is difficult to measure the impact of the improved coordination on accelerating efforts towards regional integration in the continent.

In answering the research question regarding the effectiveness of the coordination between the AU and RECs towards achieving regional integration in Africa, the research has shown that the coordination between the institutions is still insufficient hence the delay in attaining the African integration agenda. The AU and RECs must increase, strengthen and quicken their coordination efforts. Integration objectives will only be attained through coherent and efficient coordination, meaning that regulatory frameworks, coordination activities, principles, and all instruments governing coordination, have to be well created and implemented.



## 6.2. Recommendations

Despite the regulatory frameworks and coordination mechanisms in place to govern the coordination between the AU and RECs, continental integration is yet to be achieved and the progress is slow. The following recommendations are made with the understanding that the goal is not just coordination, but rather coherent and effective coordination towards quickening the achievement of the African Integration Agenda:

- Creation of a comprehensive framework detailing the legal, operational, infrastructural dimensions of the collaboration to facilitate coordination between the AU, RECs and Member States.
- Guidelines for implementation of the principles governing the relationship and coordination between the AU, RECs and Member States. This is being attempted with the framework for division of labour. However, it should also be done for subsidiarity and comparative advantage principles as well.
- Operationalisation of the policies, strategies and legal frameworks governing the relationships and coordination between the AU, RECs and Member States. Coordination between the AU and the RECs needs to move from policies on paper to practice.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the coordination mechanisms being implemented is essential in evaluating their effectiveness, and recommending either: changing and replacing; increasing and intensifying; maintaining and continuing; removing and eliminating; and other decisions relating to the coordination mechanisms to achieve effectiveness in integration.
- The role of Member States should not be underestimated by the AU and RECs, as intergovernmental institutions with the coordination role. Deeper and faster integration is only achievable with the support and involvement of Member States.
- Alignment between the structures of the institutions, as understanding each other's institutional structures and each other's counterpart in the other organisation will allow for better coordination.

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