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LEGON CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND DIPLOMACY



**TOWARDS A PEOPLE-DRIVEN AFRICAN UNION: PROSPECTS AND
CHALLENGES AFTER 20 YEARS**

**BY
CHRISTABEL ASOMANI APPIAH
(11010392)**

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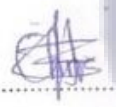
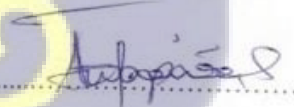
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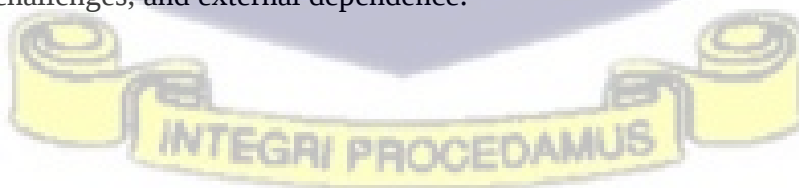
I, CHRISTABEL ASOMANI APPIAH, do hereby declare that this dissertation is the end product of my own research under the supervision of Dr. Juliana Appiah of the Legon Center of International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), at the University of Ghana towards the award of an Master of Arts (MA) in International Affairs, and that, to the best of my knowledge, it neither contains materials previously published by another person nor materials which have been accepted for the award of any other degree by this or any other university except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.



	
CHRISTABEL ASOMANI APPIAH	DR. JULIANA APPIAH
(STUDENT)	(SUPERVISOR)
	
28/06/24	28/06/24
DATE	DATE

ABSTRACT

Across the globe, integration has moved from the state-led to one driven by its people. The OAU, having been perceived as an elitist organization, became distant from the Africans for whom it was established. The AU, coming into existence in 2002, chartered a path to change the perceived elitist tag on its predecessor and to transition integration on the continent to one which is more people-driven. Integration should not remain static as a state-only initiative but spillover to include all Africans. This study delved into the African Union's efforts to advance a people-centric approach. Through qualitative research, this study revealed methods employed by the AU to promote its people-centric goals, utilizing legal frameworks, partnerships, digitalization, and strategic acknowledgment. Legal tools such as the African Governance Architecture and the Agenda 2063 establish a solid foundation, while collaborations with diverse stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations has encouraged inclusive decision-making. While the AU acknowledges the importance of digital platforms for citizen engagement, it also recognizes the necessity for enhancements. Towards the people-driven agenda, the AU has made significant achievements which includes engaging the African Diaspora as a crucial part of the continent and emphasizing partnerships as integral to realizing its people-centric goals. The study concludes that although there have been great strides towards the attainment of the people-friendly agenda, the African Union still encounters obstacles in its pursuit, including issues such as ineffective governance, implementation challenges, and external dependence.



DEDICATION

In humble gratitude, I dedicate this work to God Almighty, the source of all wisdom and strength. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Asomani Appiah, for their unwavering support and encouragement. Special thanks to my sister, Hannah Asomani Appiah, and my twin brothers, Herbert and Hubert Appiah, for being pillars of inspiration. To my colleagues, your collaboration and shared dedication have made this endeavor truly rewarding. Together, we have forged a bond that strengthens not only the project but also our professional camaraderie. Thank you for your collective efforts and unwavering commitment.



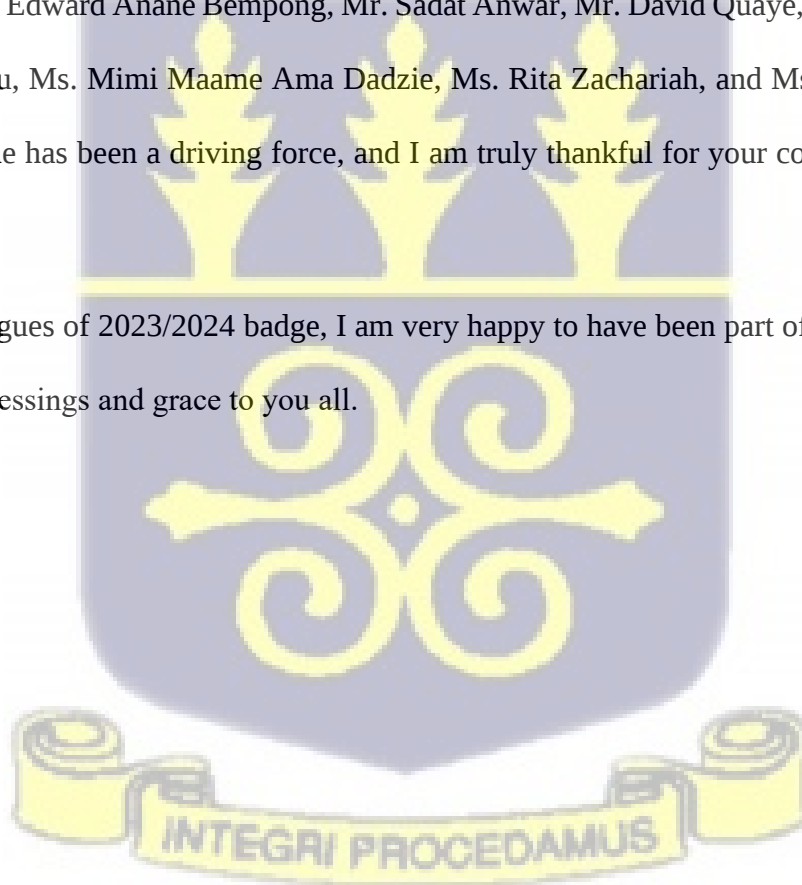
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ACRONYMS

ACJHR- African Court of Justice and Human Rights

AfCFTA- African Continental Free Trade Area

AICD- Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostics

AMRII- African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index

APRM- African Peer Review Mechanism

AU- African Union

AUC- African Union Commission

AU-YVC- African Union Youth Volunteer Corps

CSO- Civil Society Organization

EAC- East African Community

ECA- Economic Commission for Africa

ECOSOCC- The Economic, Social and Cultural Council

EU- European Union

FOCAC- Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

IPPF- Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility

NEPAD- New Partnership for African Development

OAU- Organization of African Unity

PAP- Pan-African Parliament

PIDA- Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa



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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Background of Study

Critical to the emancipation struggle and at the heart of the continent's integration process and the eventual independence of African states, were fundamental concerns such as the unification of black African races both on the continent and in the diaspora (Alexis, 2020; Drake, 1975; Edozie, 2012). The concept of regional integration of African states and their economies has become imperative. It was challenging for most African nations to compete with the industrialized world on the global market because of the continent's lower population and economies at the time of their independence. A little under 6 million people called Ghana home. Togo had a population close to 1.2 million. The country with the highest population was Nigeria with an estimated statistic of 43 million people. During the same era of political independence, nations like Guinea Conakry were insolvent due to the challenging circumstances after the French departed the nation. To provide Guinea with a startup revenue for its governance, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, had to provide the African nation 10 million dollars in aid (Boadu, 1994; Fuller, 2010; Umezulike, 2016). The issues both aggravated and supported calls for an integrated Africa.

Bringing nations together to promote collaboration, enable economic and political integration, and handle shared difficulties are some of the main goals of regional integration. It seeks to advance reciprocal advantages, accelerate economic progress, and forge a more cohesive and unified group of participating nations (Maruping, 2005).

The inception of the OAU in 1963, was Africa's first attempt at continental integration. The OAU aimed to foster unity and solidarity among African governments and peoples, as well as to rid the continent of the last remnants of colonialism and apartheid (Adogamhe, 2008). Regrettably, engagements within the regional integration organization were viewed as top-level interactions between the Heads of State of the different member states, and the Pan-Africanist dream that spearheaded the all-inclusive African integration was lost (Achieng, 2010). The organization's operations created a chasm that secluded the African people it intended to represent.

Aside the OAU's perceived negligible non-inclusion of grassroots Africans and civil society organization in its decision making, the OAU supervised an era of governance across the continent where Heads of State became dictators, and violators of the fundamental human right of their citizens. A minuscule of the broader picture across board were happenings in the Kingdom of Zaire (now DR Congo) from 1965 to 1997. Mobutu Sese Seko's administration recorded deliberate human rights violations, expropriation of private property, extrajudicial killings, and purge of perceived enemies (Maundi, 2006). Also, the unfortunate genocide in Rwanda, a member state resulted in the targeted killing of approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a span of just 100 days (Uvin, 2001). While the OAU remained silent owing to legal and administrative constraints such as the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Events as such begged the question as to whether the continental body represented the desires and aspiration of ordinary African's or served as a cult that institutionalized and supported these impunities.

As a result, the OAU no longer resonated with ordinary Africans, and this, combined with other challenges such as poor governance, conflicts, and economic crises afflicting member states, led to its replacement by the newly formed African Union in 2002 (Makinda & Okumu, 2007). The

African Union's Constitutive Act aimed to restructure the operations of its predecessor to speed the process of African integration, encourage the empowerment of African governments in the global economy, and solve the continent's numerous social, economic, and political concerns (Anyangwe, 2006). Most importantly, the Union's objectives towards an integrated, thriving, and peaceful Africa was to be driven by its citizens, while making the interest of the ordinary African paramount.

The AU's pursuit of sustainable development in Africa requires a people-centered and grass root catalyzed regional integration because it unites many nations and cultures around a common vision of development. The emphasis on people makes sure that, regardless of the prevailing demography, the economic, social, and political benefits of regional integration are fairly divided among all members. A better future for Africa can be achieved by such integration, which can promote cooperation, trade, investment, and the sharing of resources (Antonio, 2001).

The AU has taken several steps to right the wrongs of its predecessor and perfect integration on the continent. Some steps have been taken to deepen economic, security and political integration while changing the worldview of the organization. The AU has taken initiatives to bring the African integration agenda closer to the people of Africa, especially those living outside the continent. The African diaspora is designated as the AU's Sixth Region in Article 3(q) of the AU's Constitutive Act. This is to invite and promote the full involvement of the African Diaspora as an essential part of the continent, and to make the AU more inclusive than its predecessor. New organs such as the Pan-African Parliament as an entity distinct from the former OAU has been established to dispel the organization's reputation as a club of elites. Its primary objective is to guarantee Africans' full involvement in the continent's development and economic. Despite the rebranding, many Africans do not still feel close to the Union.

In the current global landscape marked by shifting political and economic priorities, the imperative for Africa's integration, particularly driven by the people, is no longer a mere option but a necessity. The continent must strategically navigate a path toward comprehensive industrialization, political stability, and holistic socio-economic development. This trajectory requires harnessing the energy and momentum derived from inclusive grassroots participation in regional integration efforts. In essence, Africa stands at a crossroads, compelled to chart a novel course that aligns with the changing dynamics of the international arena, emphasizing the pivotal role of its people in shaping a collective and prosperous future.

1.1. Problem of Statement

The joint functioning of the intricately crafted composition of regional integration elements enables the successful coming together of nations for either political, security, or economic reasons. The people, infrastructure to link integrated states, laws and regulations are crucial elements of integration. Africa's integration agenda has so far focused on infrastructure development, such as interstate road and rail networks, and integration regulations, such as tariff reduction measures (Adeyinka, A. S., & Onochie, 2020; Akinyemi, Efobi, Osabuohien & Alege, 2019).

Regarding the inclusion of all people, regional integration in Africa has had a discontented history. The OAU, the AU's forerunner, oversaw a period of integration during which the regional organization was perceived as elitist, autocratic, and disconnected from the average African. The African Union (AU), founded in 2002, aims to further the welfare and interests of the African people as well as promote solidarity, cooperation, and development among African states (Makinda & Okumu, 2007; Ibrahim, Ogbeidi & Adams, 2015; Omitola, B., & Peace Jiboku, P. 2009).

Although the AU clearly states in its founding documents that it will include the people, the people seem to have been left out again. This research sought to investigate the extent to which the AU involves its citizens in its operations and how it could make these operations known amongst Africans for their involvement.

This study critically assessed the prospects and challenges faced by the African Union in its journey towards effectively representing and empowering the African populace. The findings of this research contributes valuable insights to policymakers, academics, and stakeholders involved in African affairs, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive, representative, and people-driven African Union for the betterment of the entire continent.

1.2 Research Questions

The central question of this study is to assess the tools used by AU to bring the people closer.

Emphasis was placed on:

1. How have regional integration initiatives within the African Union contributed to its people-driven agenda?
2. What are the key achievements of the African Union in the past 20 years in promoting a people-driven agenda?
3. What are the major challenges hindering the African Union's progress in becoming a people-driven organization?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research sought to identify and understand tools deployed by the AU to include ordinary citizens in its policy making and implementation process. It also:

1. Highlight AU initiatives and how it has contributed to its people-driven agenda.

2. Analyze achievements of AU in promoting a people-driven agenda over the past 20 years.
3. Examine the challenges and obstacles faced by the AU in its efforts to become a people-driven organization.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

Since the OAU's reconstitution as the AU, the organization has looked at numerous approaches to improve Africa's integration in the areas of economy, politics, security, and social. One notion attributed to its predecessor was the elite attitude with which it conducted its activities, making it appear remote to Africans. Coming to being, the AU declared its intention to strengthen integration in many sectors, assuring progress, and, most significantly, becoming a people-driven regional organization. This vow has been made over the past 20 years. The organization has currently unveiled its future ambitions through Agenda 2063, which likewise claims to be people-driven. This study is crucial in establishing the AU's people-driven agenda's progress, policies and programs in place, and the challenges it faces. The findings of this research will essentially benefit and shape future decisions of the AU and its stakeholder engagement and add to the literature on the subject.

1.5. Scope of Research

This study investigated attempts, especially policies and programs made by the AU towards a people-driven integration in the last two decades. Specific attention was placed on the prospects such an endeavor has had on the continent and unearth challenges that the organization faces in this pursuit. It will also recommend strategies for the improvement of the work of the Organization.

1.6. Literature Review

Extensive literature has explored regional integration in Africa, spanning analyses at both continental and sub-regional tiers. These works emphasize challenges, prospects, and pivotal domains, including the continent's economic and political integration agenda. This section endeavors to conduct a thorough literature review, examining themes and subthemes such as Regional Integration in Africa, Regional Integration Challenges in Africa, and the interplay between People and Regional Integration.

1.6.1 Regional Integration in Africa

Since gaining independence, Africa has been striving towards integration. In his famous work "Africa Must Unite," published in 1963, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah made clear pronouncements and calls for a much-integrated continent by setting a historical context, highlighting the impact of colonialism (in expropriation and partitioning of the continent) and further averred that the only way out for Africa to fully recover from colonial legacies and overcome its challenges was to unite as a single entity. Most African leaders agree on the notion of African unity; the schism was whether the continent should unite politically into a union state or opt for economic integration. Nkrumah (1963) emphasized the necessity of a united continent and its people joining together, both on the continent and in the diaspora. Unfortunately, the focus of his discourse on a unified Africa was mostly on the unification of the leadership of the independent member nations rather than including ordinary Africans. This book is critical to review since it lays the groundwork for Africa's integration and acknowledges the collective efforts of all parties, including ordinary Africans.

Matthews (2003) in his work (what is the title of the work) discusses Africa's integration journey. The author used an elitist approach to integration, tracking the initiatives and contributions of heads of state and international organizations such as the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

According to the author, Africa's attempt to integrate was first attained when the OAU was formed in 1963. Not long after, the OAU had become a dictators' club which subverted their whims and caprices on their citizens creating a delink between the people they represented and the organization. The ineffectiveness of the OAU had caused a decision to rebrand and restructure the organization. Within the period of transition from OAU to AU, several RECs were formed to ensure smooth integration even at the sub-regional levels. The sprout of RECs had a resultant effect of overlapping membership. To address the issue of overlapping membership/spaghetti bowl effect in these REC, the OAU adopted the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980, which called for the creation of an African Common Market. The Lagos Plan was followed by the Abuja Treaty in 1991. It reaffirmed the OAU's commitment to achieving an integrated African economy, and finally led to the creation of the AU in 2002. The trajectory of Africa integration as narrated by the author and other authors in the field excluded the desires, efforts and inclusivity of the ordinary citizens creating the impression of an integration agenda which resonated solely with elite and bureaucrats. This is a gap in the literature and this study sought to fill that gap.

Murithi (2005) in critically perusing Africa's integration agenda and the operations of its continental body revealed in his work "The African Union: Pan-Africanism. Peacebuilding and Development" that, there is a notion that the OAU, and now the AU, and its numerous projects continue to be elitist or top-down in their development, rather than being founded on African people's experiences, knowledge, and demands. He additionally stated within the context of regional security that African governments without the help of the grassroots will be unable to fulfil the goal of building sustainable peace on their own. Every area of society has an essential function to play. According to Article 22 of the African Union's Constitutive Act, "the Economic Social and Cultural Council shall be an advisory composed of various social and professional

groups of the Union's Member states." This is a recognition by the AU's founders that the African society would have to be involved in the integration process for it to succeed. The author, however, expressed the general sentiment of lack of inclusivity which this work addresses.

Bangura & Mustapha (2010) in complementing the work of Murithi (2005) quizzed the irony of how continental decisions are made. The author contends that decisions impacting the future of ordinary citizens are often made at higher levels without consulting civil society, leading to instances where these agreements lack the broader community's support and face challenges in implementation. Drawing on the Sierra Leone case, the author illustrates the negative consequences of insufficient consultation and inclusivity (Bangura & Mustapha, 2010). In the context of the Peace Accord signed in Lome during the Sierra Leonean civil war, the process of granting amnesty to rebels, accused of numerous atrocities, proceeded without extensive consultation. This AU-endorsed action was perceived as condoning rebel impunity. Various groups and civil society organizations had alternative proposals on how amnesty could have been approached, avoiding the promotion of views that might encourage impunity and human rights abuses. The literature provided by Murithi (2005) and Bangura & Mustapha (2010) is vital to this study because it presents an illuminating picture of how the OAU/AU has historically ignored inclusiveness. There is, however, the issue of the period these publications were published as well as the rapid changing of the world due to factors such as technology (internet). Considering this, and the intensified campaign for people-driven integration throughout the world, further research must be conducted to comprehend and reveal the AU's progress on the subject, as well as the obstacles that persist. This is the gap in the literature that this research aims to bridge.

1.6.2 Challenges of Regional Integration in Africa

Jiboku (2015) places the challenges confronting the AU in its integration agenda within a political framework, focusing on governance deficits in African countries. The author persuasively argues that African leaders and policymakers frequently endorse regional agreements, articulate goals for establishing regional economic institutions, but lack political commitment to the principles of regionalism and the effective implementation of regional resolutions.

Bassole (2014) in his work “Infrastructure Development and Regional Integration: What Challenges for Africa?” views regional integration from three perspectives which are physical infrastructure (regional transport, energy, and telecommunication networks), intangible infrastructure (intangible barriers such as tariffs and trade policies) and collection of people, culture, and countries. The author paid particular attention to physical infrastructure. The significance of infrastructure development for integration in Africa has been widely acknowledged. In the early 1970s, African governments recognized that the attainment of regional integration for sustainable economic development hinges on the establishment of effective and accessible infrastructure (Bassole, 2014). Despite acknowledging the pivotal role of infrastructure in the success of regional integration and related initiatives, Africa grapples with a significant deficit that poses a formidable obstacle to the deepening and strengthening of regional integration efforts. This deficit highlights the considerable challenges that Africa faces in realizing these initiatives.

According to the Africa Infrastructure Country Diagnostics (AICD) quantitative research, the annual financing needs for infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa amount to an estimated US\$ 93 billion for both capital investment and maintenance. However, the mobilized funds fall significantly short at US\$ 45 billion annually, resulting in an alarming annual gap of US\$ 50 billion

(World Bank, 2015). This substantial deficit necessitates exploring alternative avenues for funding.

The AU has adopted a comprehensive approach to tackle this challenge. Initiatives such as the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (G8 Summit 2005), the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) established in 2009, considered an integrated continental vision and strategic framework for infrastructure development. The African Union Infrastructure Master Plan, the 2002 NEPAD Short-Term Action Plan, the NEPAD Infrastructure Project Preparation Facility (IPPF) hosted by AfDB, and the Belt and Road Initiative under the FOCAC arrangement are all measures instituted to address the infrastructure challenges (African Union, 2015; Lisinge, 2020).

1.6.3 Regional Integration and People Centeredness

In his work, “Dominatarian Theory of Regional Integration”, Onditi (2021) attempts to divert focus away from the conventional theorizing of regional integration that is state-led and towards a new institutionalized one that is mostly driven by people. The author emphasizes “personness”. Regional integration processes, in his opinion, have been impacted by material (economic and institutional) and political structure. This material structure, however, is entrenched in the "personness" of things, which is a system of ideas, culture, identity, norms, and values which is neglectably ignored. The author wishes to emphasize that international regional organizations should not be viewed as exclusionary of the people they represent. The author's approach to understanding integration has the potential to shift the focus away from the materialistic aspects of objects and politics toward the core of human society, which is the individual. He examines people from two perspectives: as heads of governments and as ordinary citizens. According to Onditi (2021), addressing the challenges of regional integration requires moving beyond macro

factors such as the economy, institutions, and politics. Instead, it should be approached through a functional analytical lens that considers personality and people as critical aspects of regional integration. This article is significant for review as it challenges the foundational assumptions of traditional theories of regional integration and proposes a more human-centered methodology, using the East African Community (EAC) as a case study.

Dlodlo and Christofides (2013) and Tetteh (2014) made arguments on the necessity of people-driven integration and how ICT may help. The significance of information and communication technology (ICT) in regional integration is crucial because it facilitates communication, cooperation, economic growth, and social development among member nations.

Tetteh (2014) focuses on ICT in trade facilitation and regional information exchange. According to the author, e-commerce platforms and electronic trade documentation systems make cross-border trading easier for enterprises in various nations. To facilitate and safeguard cross-border mobility, countries deploy technologies such as the ICAO Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) and E-gate. The authors argue that if ICT improves trade facilitation, ordinary persons who own businesses and engage in cross-border commerce would benefit.

Dlodlo and Christofides (2013) contextualize their claim on the relevance of ICT in social integration. The authors investigate how social media, and the internet may be utilized to bring regional policies to the people's attention, as well as to promote social integration and cultural exchange. He also puts up hurdles to the ICT-social integration objective, such as insufficient internet access.

In their work "Towards a People-Friendly Pan-African Parliament: Lessons from the European Parliament," Appiah and Ansaaku (2016) aim to scrutinize how the AU, modeled after the EU, fosters democratic principles, and ensures the active participation of Union citizens in the

integration process. Employing a constructivist approach, the authors compare the constitutive documents of the European Parliament (EP) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), concluding that both prioritize the interests of ordinary individuals. Despite this commonality, the approaches and commitments of the AU and the EU diverge in the full operationalization and functioning of their respective parliamentary bodies. Unlike the EP, whose members have been elected by universal suffrage since 1978, PAP delegates are chosen from national legislatures, resulting in a dual mandate and allegiance for each member. This structural difference, among other institutional, constitutional, logistical, technical, and financial obstacles, hinders the PAP's ability to fulfill the aspirations of African peoples for active participation in the integration process and the promotion of democratic principles at continental, regional, and national levels. The authors advocate for the PAP, inspired by the EP, to learn from its European counterpart. They propose that the AU decouples the PAP from the Assembly and the Executive Council, allowing it to develop its own plan for functioning as a complete legislative body with legislative powers and conducting timely and frequent direct universal suffrage elections.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of neo-functionalism, departing from the predominant reliance on liberal institutionalism within existing literature on regional integration. The literature encompasses various integration theories, including functionalism, neo-functionalism, and others. Liberals contend that even amid anarchy or the absence of overarching supranational institutions, cooperation persists in the international system, with order promoted by international institutions, norms, and regimes (Aniche, 2018). This conceptual shift leads liberal institutionalists to posit that sovereignty will gradually transition from states to regional and sub-regional bodies.

1.7.1. Proponents of Neo-functionalism

Neo-functionalism is a theory that attempts to reconcile the opposing principles of functionalism and federalism to explain the process of integration. This theory emerged in the late 1950s at a time when European integration was a pivotal issue in international affairs and regionalism. Proponents carefully understudy the European Union functions as a supranational body charged with promoting a deeper integration in Europe. The theory of neo-functionalism over the years have been perfected by different scholars, however the key proponent of the theory includes Ernst Haas, Leon Lindberg, Joseph Nye, and Keohane (McGowan, 2007; McCormick, 2005). Neo-functionalist theory of integration is relevant to this study because it sets the foundation for the establishment of regional integration bodies such as the AU.

1.7.2. Assumptions of the theory

The main assumption espoused by theorists of neo-functionalism is that no state can maintain its economic structures and can meet the insatiable needs of its people without cooperation with other countries. Based on this logic, countries come together to pull their resources and effort to achieve mutually beneficial outputs. Theorists of neo-functionalism, however, argue that integration is not done holistically and upfront but rather a partly approach is employed. First, countries cooperate to integrate specific sectors such as economies. The successful outcome of the integration invariably causes actors to deepen relations in the region by shifting to other sectors. Haas (1970) on this research on “European Coal and Steel Community” emphasized that when countries agree to cooperate in one sector, it generates incentives for them to cooperate in other and/or related sectors (Haas, 1970).

According to Wallace et al (2005), the very strategies of integration are developed, controlled, and supervised over by a regional body with some level of supranational authority. The body adopts strategies to further strengthen integration in already integrated sectors and then expand integration into other sectors. The AU, just like the EU, initially integrated sectors of the economy before further integrating in areas of security and politics.

One central concept that distinguishes neofunctionalism from other integration theories is the concept of “Spill-over”. The spillover effect, also known as functional spillover, is essential because it explains the gradual, incremental, and transitional tendencies of integration.

An additional intriguing assumption involves the rise of supranational organizations, with certain state powers relinquished to regional authorities. The supranational body responsible for overseeing integration starts formulating plans to deepen integration in already integrated sectors and extend integration into new areas (Rosamond, 2000). This process is facilitated by consistently highlighting the advantages of increased integration and establishing or supporting regional and domestic interest groups advocating for further integration.

Moreover, Neo-functionalists assert that economic integration inevitably fosters increased interaction among actors within the integrating region. Consequently, sub-state actors collaboratively engage in political endeavors across borders to influence their political authorities. Meanwhile, regional interest groups flourish, and on the domestic front, interest groups pressure their governments to pursue further integration (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2006).

Neo-functionalism has evolved conceptually over the years. Haas first attempt at dissecting the theory held that, integration is initially driven by elites, including politicians, bureaucrats, and business leaders, who recognize the economic benefits of cooperation and work to expand integration in pursuit of their interests (Haas ed., 2004). The changing nature of global affairs and

people-driven integration in some continents (specifically Europe) caused scholars to reconceptualize theory to meet today's change. Joseph Nye focused on the 'pull-effect' phenomenon, which develops process mechanisms. One such mechanism is regional bodies' ideological-identitarian appeal. According to Nye (1979), the deeper the sense of permanency and the larger the identity appeal, the less ready opposing groups are to fight an integration system directly. Policy spillover is emphasized as a component for identity appeal in Neofunctionalism, which can lead to individuals and civil society groups becoming more conscious of the interrelated nature of regional integration. Citizens may demand increased openness, representation, and engagement in decision-making processes when they realize how economic decisions influence their everyday lives and comprehend the potential advantages of deeper integration (Schmitter, 2013; Rosamond, 2005; Niemann, 2021). On this premise, the regional blocs value people inclusivity in areas such as labor mobility, social policies, and cultural exchanges.

1.7.3. Criticism against the theory

The theory of neo-functionalism has been criticized on both empirical and theoretical fronts. On an empirical level, the theory assumes a linear progression from economic to political integration, but integration processes can be uneven and reversible. Political and economic setbacks can disrupt or even reverse integration efforts. The theory does not envisage a "spillback" effect where countries can totally pullback from integration (Aniche, 2018; Niemann, 2021). An example is Brexit.

Theoretical critiques of neo-functionalism predominantly originated from intergovernmentalists who advocated a perspective of integration rooted in the realist theory of international relations, emphasizing the interactions between governments. Intergovernmentalists rejected the emphasis

neo-functionalism placed on non-state actors, asserting that states hold the ultimate and decisive stance (Kicha, 2021).

The core of the theory in this research cannot be overemphasized, notwithstanding the criticisms. The research adopts the neo-functionalist approach because of its relevance in understanding how integration can spill over into the lives of ordinary citizens. Also, the theory does not downplay the importance of non-state actors such as interest groups and ordinary Africans which is the focus of this study.

1.8 Methodology of the study

In accordance with the aims and emphasis of this research, this study used a qualitative design to get a deeper insight on the subject matter. Contrary to quantitative methods, qualitative studies are theoretical and interpretive in approach (Brennen 2017; Creswell 2007). Qualitative studies lead to the deconstruction of complex phenomena based on human experiences (Brennen 2017). As emphasized by Kvale, qualitative research is not “objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted.” (Kvale, 1996 Pp: 11). To complement the position of Kvale (1996), Creswell (2013) contends that qualitative studies are mainly concerned with examining, describing, and exploring meanings attached to social phenomenon other than pre-determined yardsticks that becomes the basis of measurement (Creswell 2013). The data collected from this research was analyzed inductively. The research employed the case study design of the qualitative methodology.

1.8.1. Research Design

Research designs serve as the comprehensive frameworks that encompass the entire research and its methodologies (Zikmund & Babin, 2007). According to Creswell (2013), these designs are tailored to align with the researchers' philosophies, research questions, objectives, problem

statements, and the overall rationale of the study. In this context, a suitable research design is the case study. A case study involves a specialized and in-depth examination of a single group, incident, or community (Harrison & Callen, 2013). This design is particularly fitting for understanding the AU's people-driven integration as it utilizes multiple data sources to thoroughly explore and explain the phenomenon under study.

1.8.2 Sources of Data

The main sources of data for this research were primary and secondary. Conducting interviews with key stakeholders who possessed knowledge and experience in the field of African regionalism constituted primary sources. These stakeholders included government officials responsible for policies and regulations, professionals securing critical infrastructure and networks, industry representatives implementing AU policy measures, and academics/researchers specializing in subject matter (Choejey et al., 2015; Basamh et al., 2014). A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized to elicit valuable insights and perspectives from the participants during the primary data collection procedure. Depending on the accessibility and availability of the stakeholders, interviews were conducted in person or via remote means. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that pertinent sectors and organizations involved in African integration were adequately represented (Choejey et al., 2015).

In addition to primary sources, secondary sources were used to increase the depth and extent of the research. These secondary sources included documents, reports, policies, regulations, and scholarly articles about people-driven integration in the AU. These sources provided a thorough understanding of the existing AU frameworks, best practices, achievements and initiatives, and challenges confronting the organization (Basamh et al., 2014).

1.8.3. Sampling Strategy and Size

Fraenkel et al. (2015) define a sample size as a subset of the complete population chosen to represent the population being studied. It is essential to ensure that the sample size is adequate to offer a reliable representation of the entire population. In this examination of the prospects and challenges of a people-driven AU, the determination of the sample size adhered to the saturation principle. This approach entails continuing data collection until no new information or insights emerge from the participants.

The goal was to ensure that a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter was achieved. Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling approach, was employed to select participants who possessed relevant expertise and experience in African regionalism. The sample consisted of 14 participants, including AU officials, government officials, foreign policy professionals, CSOs, industry representatives, ordinary citizens, and academics and researchers. The sample size was deemed appropriate to capture diverse perspectives and insights from key stakeholders involved in AU's agenda.

The participants were carefully chosen to represent different sectors and organizations. Government officials were selected from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration and its agencies. The selection of participants aimed to encompass a range of experiences and perspectives related to the subject matter. The sample size of 14 participants was considered adequate to achieve data saturation (Yin, 2018), ensuring that the study captured comprehensive insights into AU's people-driven agenda, practices, challenges, achievements, and initiatives. By selecting participants through purposive sampling and achieving data saturation, this study obtained a representative sample of stakeholders enabling a comprehensive analysis of the research topic.

1.8.4 Data Collection Techniques

Primary data was gathered via interviews, which are characterized as purposefully focused dialogues between individuals, typically involving an interviewer and an interviewee. The objective is to uncover people's worldviews, perspectives, opinions, and significant aspects of their lived experiences (Brennen, 2017). Primary data was collected through semi-structure interviews using an interview guide. Secondary data was obtained through the perusal of secondary sources of information related to the subject matter such as books, journals articles, and the AU website for documents. The process of desk review was applied for secondary data collection. This study employed a secondary data technique as well. Secondary data is the primary information that is available in secondary sources: books, journal articles, book chapters, online sources, and reports. Secondary data are people's original works that exist in a finished or complete form. This process was carried out via desk review.

1.8.5 Data Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was employed as a tool for analyzing data. Thematic analysis is “an interpretive process where data is systematically searched to identify patterns within the data to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon” (Firth 2011, p. 3). The interview audio was transcribed into text to facilitate the identification of themes and codes. Subsequently, the researcher meticulously read through the transcribed text, noting key issues raised by the interview participants. Reoccurring themes and patterns were discerned. The primary data gathered was then painstakingly complemented by secondary information available for productive analysis.

1.8.6 Ethical Considerations

Research work without ethical considerations poses challenges and makes findings null and void. The utmost consideration was placed on the physical and mental well-being of the participants. The consent of participants was sought before the commencement of the interviews. Also, privacy

and reservations were respected throughout the study. Confidentiality regarding the information given were upheld where necessary.

1.9 Organization of Study

This work is divided into four main chapters. Chapter one is Research Design, which involves an introduction to the study, Statement of Problem, Objectives of the study, Scope of Study, Rational of the Study, Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Sources of Data and finally the Organization of the Study. Chapter two was an Overview of the AU's Programs and Policies aimed at bringing the people closer. Chapter three assessed and analyzed the prospects and challenges of the AU people-driven integration over the last two decades. Chapter Four was the concluding part which encompassed the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.



CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF THE AU'S PROGRAMS AND POLICIES AIMED AT BRINGING THE PEOPLE CLOSER.

2.0. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the African Union as the new phase of Africa's regional integration. The chapter examines the AU's structural differences from the OAU, stressing the ideas, purposes, and organs that make the newly created AU a people-driven integrational body. Furthermore, emphasis is given on AU programs and policies aimed at bringing ordinary the African closer the Union, and how the resultant impact of these policies ultimately benefits the African people. The overview of the AU's programs and policies aids in tracking the organization's people-driven agenda.

2.1. Formation of the African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) was established as the successor entity to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the purpose of creating a more connected and forward-thinking continental organization that is people centered. The OAU-AU transition featured a series of conversations, negotiations, and agreements among African leaders. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded on May 25, 1963, under the Pan-African framework, with the primary goal of eliminating colonialism and encouraging unity and collaboration among African states and people. It became clear over time, however, that the OAU had limitations in addressing the continent's evolving challenges, such as conflicts, economic development, and political integration, as well as a negative perception of the organization as elitist, which resulted in a loss of trust in the organization by the peoples of Africa.

The idea of transforming the OAU into a more comprehensive and forward-looking organization gained momentum in the late 1990s and early 2000s. African leaders recognized the need for a more effective institution that could address not only political issues but also economic, social,

and security concerns and restructuring it to a people friendly one. The idea of establishing the African Union was formally proposed (Badejo,2008).

The process of establishing the AU began in July 2001, with the OAU Summit in Lusaka, Zambia. The "Constitutive Act of the African Union," which functioned as the AU's founding document, was adopted by African leaders during this summit. The Act established the new organization's aims, beliefs, and structure. The AU was intended to be more than just a political body. Its goal was to foster greater economic integration, peace and security, and social development throughout the continent, with a focus on citizen inclusion (Turner, 2013).

The AU has made key changes distinguishing it from its predecessor which includes the establishment of the African Union Commission (AUC) to replace the OAU Secretariat, as well as the creation of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) to address conflict resolution and prevention; and the establishment of a Pan-African parliament to directly include the African people in the AU's discussions and decisions.

The AU was formally founded on July 9, 2002, during the 37th Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly in Durban, South Africa. African leaders hailed the AU's founding and emphasized the organization's commitment to a more united and prosperous Africa at this historic occasion (Okumu, 2009). The transition from the OAU to the AU was not immediate. It took place in a phased manner, with the OAU continuing to exist alongside the AU during the early years. The OAU eventually dissolved in 2002 as the AU gradually assumed its functions (Makinda & Okumu, 2007).

Since its inception, the AU has evolved and expanded its mandate. It has implemented several projects and programs to address the continent's numerous difficulties, including the African Peace and Security Architecture, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and Agenda 2063.

The establishment of the AU marked a dramatic shift in the approach to solving Africa's problems. It signaled a commitment to increased integration, collaboration, and development throughout the continent, with an emphasis on the African people's well-being and aspirations.

2.2. The Coming into being of the Constitutive Act: The New Integration Agenda

The OAU, considered as a compromised regional body due to flaws that existed prior to its inception, had established measures in its Charter that created a perceived dissuasion of people-inclusive integration, protection of fundamental human rights, popular participation, and good governance. At inception, non-interference in the internal affairs of States was included as a principle that regulated the activities of the organization (OAU Charter, 1963). This was a means of isolating heads of state from supranational control and scrutiny. The Union's docility and abeyance were created by a severe blunder in the structuring of the legal document, the OAU Charter. Even in the face of tragic loss of life and property (genocide in Rwanda) and contempt for civil rights and institutionalization of authority (Mobutu's reign in Congo), the OAU was unable to intervene (Budeli & Vambe, 2010). The African people's view of the Union became that of a dictatorial club and a toothless barking dog, representing the selfish interests of heads of state rather than the greater Pan-African ideals that exists within the collectiveness of African people (Murithi, 2017). To inaugurate a new era that would instill confidence in African peoples, forge a closer bond with the regional body, and foster increased integration among people and nations, a revision of the legislative frameworks governing the organization's activities became imperative. This led to the inception of the Constitutive Act.

The African Union Constitutive Act serves as a legal document that outlines the framework within which the African Union (AU) operates. Signed on July 11, 2000, in Lomé, Togo, the Act came into effect on May 26, 2001, following the approval of two-thirds of the 53 signing countries (Packer, 2002). The Act formalizes the commitment of Africa's leaders to uphold the ideals of the

Organization of African Unity (OAU) and, subsequently, the AU. It aligns with the aspirations of generations of Pan-Africanists, both on the continent and in the diaspora, aiming to foster unity, solidarity, cohesion, and cooperation among African peoples and states (Kuwali & Viljoen, 2013). The Constitutive Act outlines the AU's objectives, emphasizing the pursuit of greater unity, cohesion, and solidarity among African countries and nations. It also underscores the promotion of democratic principles, institutions, popular participation, and good governance. Furthermore, the Act is committed to the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant human rights instruments. Additionally, it aims to establish the necessary conditions for the continent to effectively play its role on the global stage (Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2002; Packer, 2002). In a notable shift towards people-centeredness and people-driven ideals, Article 3 (a) (g) of the Constitutive Act specifically addresses the promotion of greater unity and solidarity among African countries and peoples. It also emphasizes the commitment to democratic principles, institutions, popular participation, and good governance, reflecting the AU's dedication to a paradigm that places the people at the forefront of its initiatives.

Preserving the sovereignty of member states for self-governance, the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2002) also conferred upon the Union the authority to intervene in a Member State under exceptional circumstances such as war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity. This adoption of the principle of non-indifference represents a significant stride by the AU, signaling its commitment to being attuned to the concerns of ordinary Africans and underscoring the organization's dedication to prioritizing the well-being of individuals across the continent (Langerud, 2016; Sarkin, 2016).

In its revision of objectives from its predecessor, the AU's Constitutive Act introduced new organs that directly and indirectly contribute to the organization's people-driven integration agenda. Notable among these institutions are the Pan-African Parliament, the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council, and the Court of Justice (Udombana, 2002).

2.2.1. The 'Pan-African Parliament and the Peoples' Agenda

Formally inaugurated on March 18, 2004, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the Pan-African Parliament was established with the aim of ensuring the active participation of African peoples in the economic growth and integration of the continent.

Van Walraven (2004) emphasizes the symbolic significance of parliaments as embodiments of democracy, representing the influence of "the people" on their governance. This perspective holds true not only for national legislatures but also for international organizations like the AU. The absence of a parliamentary body in the OAU highlights how the organization primarily addressed the needs of Africa's state elites, often neglecting the interests of the majority of the marginalized and powerless (Van Walvan, 2004; Magliveras & Naldi, 2002). Desmond Orijiako, an AU spokesperson, declared unequivocally upon the Parliament's inception that:

...the Pan-African Parliament, as envisioned, aims to serve as a platform for individuals to express their opinions, providing a forum where all persons can air their views, as highlighted by Orijiako. The parliament's potential effectiveness lies in its ability to actively facilitate and ensure grassroots participation among ordinary Africans. If successfully operationalized, it holds the promise of allowing civil society to exert influence on governance through their national representatives, as outlined by Murithi (2017, pp. 133).

The Pan-African Parliament, as mandated by Article 17 of the Constitutive Act, seeks to provide a platform for individuals from across the continent to actively participate in discussions and decision-making processes concerning challenges to the African dream. Presently, representation is through a designated quota of representatives from the national legislatures of member states (Magliveras & Naldi, 2003). Future aspirations include transitioning to a parliament where

members are elected through universal suffrage, mirroring the structure of the European Parliament, and advancing from an advisory role to a legislative body with full powers.¹

The objectives and functions of the Pan-African Parliament are delineated in the Protocol to the Abuja Treaty related to the Pan-African Parliament and its Rules of Procedure. These responsibilities encompass overseeing the implementation of AU policies, objectives, and programs, championing human rights, and reinforcing democratic institutions, as well as promoting good governance, transparency, and the rule of law across all AU organs and Regional Economic Communities (African Union, 2002).

2.2.2. The Economic, Social, and Cultural Council

Civil Society Organizations have become important non-state drivers of inclusive regional integration across the world. Since July 2004, the African Union's Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) has developed methods to include CSOs within the AU's larger framework. The AU General Assembly approved Zambia's bid to host ECOSOCC in 2016 (Adejumobi, 2009). However, the Citizen & Diaspora Directorate of the AUC is currently in charge of ECOSOCC operationalization. According to Article 22 of the African Union's Constitutive Act, "the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council shall be an advisory organ composed of different social and professional groups of the Union's Member States."²

In effect, ECOSOCC allows civil society, non-governmental organizations, professional organizations, trade unions, and other stakeholders to establish formal links with the African Union and participate in its projects and activity (Murithi, 2017).

It should be mentioned that the Assembly determines the functions, powers, and composition of ECOSOCC. The tasks allocated to this AU entity are largely in tandem with its responsibilities.

¹ African Union, <https://au.int/en/pap>

² AU Constitutive Act, 2002

The General Assembly is ECOSOCC's highest decision-making body, which is composed of all members, meet every two years (African, Union, 2004). Article 2 of the ECOSOCC Statute outlines key responsibilities, including fostering dialogue across African society on issues related to the continent's future, establishing strong partnerships between governments and various elements of civil society, encouraging active engagement of African Civil Society in implementing Union policies, advocating for a culture of good governance, democratic principles, popular participation, human rights, and social justice, and promoting gender equality.

The inclusion of an ECOSOCC among AUs new organs aims to bridge the gap between African governments and their peoples. If effectively implemented, the council could serve as a strong forum for varied civil society viewpoints (Sturman & Cilliers, 2003). ECOSOCC's framework includes a wide range of social classes. It is also designed in such a way that it will replicate the AUC's technical departments, special working groups, and other organs, making their advice and recommendations simpler to incorporate into the Union's functioning structure (Mbaya, 2023).

The structure of ECOSOCC ensures representation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at national, sub-regional, and continental levels. It consists of two CSOs from each Member State, ten regional CSOs, eight continental CSOs, twenty CSOs from the African Diaspora defined by the Executive Council across all continents, and six CSOs serving ex officio, nominated by the AUC based on special considerations in consultation with Member States. The ECOSOCC legislation further states that delegates from Member States, regional, continental, and Diaspora organizations would be chosen with 50 percent gender equality and 50 percent between the ages of 18 and 35 (African Union, 2004). Members are elected for four-year terms and are eligible for re-election once.

Within the CSO membership, there exists a diverse array of groups advocating for various societal interests, such as women, children, adolescents, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. This inclusive representation extends to associations covering a wide spectrum, including artists, engineers, health practitioners, social workers, media professionals, teachers, sports organizations, legal experts, social scientists, academia, business entities, national chambers of commerce, workers, employers, industry, and agriculture. The membership further encompasses non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), volunteer groups, cultural institutions, and social and professional associations of the African Diaspora. This broad and varied composition contributes to a comprehensive representation within the CSO membership.³ Actively working together, the ECOSOCC structure represents the brightest and greatest of minds from all walks of life, participating in the African dream.

2.2.3. The Court of Justice

The Constitutive Act establishes both the African Court of Justice and the Africa Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, with the permanent seat located in Arusha, Tanzania. Specifically, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is a continental judicial body created by African governments to safeguard human and peoples' rights across Africa. Its formation aligns with Article 1 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, which came into force on January 25, 2004, after receiving approval from more than 15 nations (Chella, 2021; Olugbuo, 2018).

Comprising eleven judges selected based on individual merits from African Union member states, these judges are appointed by the African Union's Assembly of Heads of State and Government

³ Statute regulating ECOSOCC <https://au.int/en/ecosocc>

for a renewable six-year term. The President and Vice-President, appointed for two-year terms with eligibility for re-election once, lead the Court. The Court's jurisdiction includes both contentious and advisory domains.⁴ The Contentious Jurisdiction of the Court pertains to all matters and disputes concerning the interpretation and application of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol, and any other relevant human rights document ratified by the involved States (Clarke et al, 2019; Olugbuo, 2018). Conversely, the Advisory Jurisdiction grants the Court authority to issue legal opinions on any legal matter related to the Charter or other pertinent human rights instruments. However, the subject of the opinion must not be under consideration by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Court's primary responsibility is to adjudicate a State Party's compliance with the rights outlined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other ratified human rights treaties. Individuals and non-governmental organizations have the option to directly file a case of human rights violation before the Court or indirectly through the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, subject to specific conditions.

In a significant development, the "African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Court of Justice of the African Union merged into a unified entity known as the African Court of Justice and Human Rights (ACJHR) in 2008. This consolidation was endorsed by decisions of Assembly/AU/Dec.45 (III) and Assembly/AU/Dec.83 (V) of the Assembly of the Union, adopted at its Third (6-8 July, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) and Fifth (4-5 July 2005, Sirte, Libya) Ordinary Sessions.⁵ The ACJHR was divided into two chambers, one for general legal concerns and the

⁴ <https://www.african-court.org/wpafc/welcome-to-the-african-court/>

⁵ Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-statute-african-court-justice-and-human-rights>

other for human rights issues. It had the authority to adjudicate cases involving African states, human rights abuses, and crimes against humanity (Martin & Jurgen, 2012).

The African Court of Justice and Human Rights complemented and strengthened the responsibilities of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.⁶ Envisaged as a critical player in advancing regional integration, the ACJHR aimed to ensure that African governments upheld AU ideals such as democracy, human rights, and good governance. By providing a channel for citizens to submit matters directly, the Court offered a platform for citizen engagement in the integration process. As of September 2023, only 34 African Union (AU) member states had ratified the Protocol establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, with just eight acknowledging the Court's competence in accordance with Article.⁷

2.3. Path towards a People-driven Integration: The AU's Policies and Initiatives

While revising its legal framework as a key step towards becoming a people-driven organization, the African Union has also adopted policies and programs targeted at encouraging people-driven integration across the Africa continent. These initiatives are designed to foster greater cooperation, unity, and development among African nations while involving and benefiting the people of Africa.

The initiatives of the AU may be classified as direct or ancillary. Ancillary initiatives are people-driven initiatives in which the people may or may not be involved in the process and decision-making, but the projects and final outcomes benefit the average African. As an example, consider the Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Direct initiatives, on the other hand, bring Africans closer to the AU through direct involvement in the organization's deliberations and

⁶ African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights <https://www.african-court.org/wpafc/>

⁷ Source: African Union <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-statute-african-court-justice-and-human-rights>

decision-making processes. Here are some of the key AU programs and policies that contribute to a people-driven integration.

2.3.1. The African Diaspora Initiative

Pan-Africanism, the motivating ideology behind the founding and reconstitution of the African Union, aims to unify the black race. Africans have been dispersed around the world because of the events of the Dark Ages, notably the slave trade, and today's globalization rush. The AU's primary goal is to establish greater unity and solidarity among African countries and peoples, not only on the continent, but among all people of African heritage elsewhere on the planet. The African diaspora, like Africans on the continent, is vital to the continent's growth. Murithi (2017) asserts,

...the Africa diaspora contributes towards accelerating development on the Africa continent. Already the amount of financial remittances sent to Africa by Africans living outside to family, friends as well as to business and development projects is more than combined Official Development Assistance (ODA) and foreign Direct Investment (FDI) coming into the continent from bilateral government loans and multilateral lending institutions.

Africa's Diaspora influence in politics, economics, and culture is becoming more widely acknowledged. Because of its significant contribution to Africa's growth, the African Union has symbolically included the Diaspora within its organization. Africa is divided into five regions (sub-regions), including the North (7 countries), the South (10 countries), the West (15 countries), the East (14 countries), and the Central (9 countries), and now the more than 170 African diaspora natives.⁸

The inclusion of the Diaspora act as a conduit for directing diasporic funds to the continent's desperately needed development, healthcare, and educational projects.

⁸ Source: State of the African Diaspora official website <https://thestateofafricandiaspora.com/the-6th-region/>

In the early months of 2002, Dr. Jinni Adisa, Coordinator of the CSSDCA Unit in the Office of the AU Chairperson, said that “AU leaders were committed to developing plans to tap into the power of the Diaspora”. Due to this, several talks were undertaken to ascertain the precise function of the Diaspora and the advantages that Africans living abroad may enjoy. The primary idea would be to use their knowledge of technology and education to help the continent's urgent need for peace and development (Murithi, 2017).

The inaugural AU-Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum was held in Washington, D.C., in December 2002, with participation from the diaspora in North America and the Caribbean. The AU-European Diaspora Conference and several such gatherings took place after it (Opoku-Mensah, 2006). The African Union finally decided to recognize the African Diaspora as an effective body contributing to the economic and social development of the continent in 2003, as stated in the closing statement of the AU Summit (14 (XVIII)). According to Yeboah and Appiah (2018), the African diaspora has been designated the "Sixth Region" of both present-day and future Africa.

The AU has several additional initiatives, such as the Diaspora Division, aimed at bringing the diaspora closer to the continent in addition to the establishment of the Sixth Region. By soliciting and promoting participation from the African Diaspora in AU operations, the Diaspora Division plays a crucial role in putting AU decisions into action.

The African Union also created the African Union Citizens & Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO) to further its interaction with the diaspora community. CIDO is created to act as a catalyst for the participation of African peoples in Africa and throughout the world in AU activities. Within the scope of Agenda 2063, CIDO actively supports ten results areas (Adisa, 2017).

The AU is supporting people-driven integration by recognizing the diaspora as the sixth region of Africa and encouraging citizens to actively participate in the integration process, advocate for their interests, and hold governments responsible.

2.3.2. The AU Initiatives on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

2.3.2.1. AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality

Gender related issues have a society at the center stage of making proper policies and ensuring inclusivity of all sects of the society. At the annual summit, which took place on July 6, 2004, the AU hosted its first discussion of gender-related issues. Femmes Africa Solidarite and other NGOs were its driving forces (Murithi, 2017). It is undoubtedly one of the most fruitful and revolutionary relationships between women from civil society and AU. Women and the girl-child are one of the most affected groups during conflicts. However, during conflict negotiations and resolutions, these critical segments of society are left out. The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality acknowledges structural shortcomings within the AU and proposes remedies.

According to the Declaration, the AU commits to actively expedite the implementation of gender equality across all its activities (African Union, 2004). This commitment encompasses various initiatives such as promoting the active participation and representation of women in peace processes, addressing, and preventing the plight of girl children in conflict environments, campaigning against gender-based violence, enacting legislation to enable women to own land and inherit property, enhancing literacy among women, and systematically mainstreaming gender parity in all aspects of its activities (Murithi, 2017).

The Declaration facilitates the establishment of the African Union Women's Committee within the AU Gender Directorate, providing policy advice to the Chairperson of the AU.

***2.3.2.2. Protocol to the African Charter of Human and People's Right
Relating to the Rights of
Women in Africa***

The Protocol to the African Charter of Human and People's Rights Relating to the Rights of Women in Africa is a legal instrument dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the rights of women across the continent. Adopted in 2003 during the Summit in Maputo, Mozambique, the Protocol became effective in 2005, representing the first international treaty specifically addressing the needs and rights of women in Africa (African Union, 2003). This reflected a commitment from African leaders to prioritize women's rights in the continent's development agenda, recognizing women as pivotal agents for overcoming challenges.

Covering a broad spectrum of issues, the Protocol addresses the elimination of discrimination against women, equal pay for equal work, the right to education, the right to health, and the right to participate in political and decision-making processes, among others (Murithi, 2017). Importantly, the Protocol establishes a monitoring mechanism to ensure that states fulfill their obligations outlined in the Protocol. The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), working through ECOSOCC, played a crucial role in advocating for the recognition of women's rights, contributing to the creation of the Protocol (Murithi, 2017). The Protocol serves as a significant tool for advancing people-driven integration by guaranteeing the protection and promotion of women's rights in Africa.

2.3.3. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want

Agenda 2063 stands as Africa's comprehensive blueprint and long-term strategy, outlining the continent's trajectory toward becoming a global force. This 50-year strategic framework is designed to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, embodying the Pan-African principles of unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity.

The idea of Agenda 2063, encapsulated in “The Africa We Want,” represents a shift from the OAU's historical commitment to political liberation towards addressing the contemporary and future needs of the continent. This ambitious agenda not only articulates Africa's aspirations but also introduces vital Flagship Programs poised to enhance economic growth and contribute to a rapid transformation (DeGhetto et al., 2016). Significantly, the success of this new vision for Africa hinges on the steadfast support of its people. The Agenda 2063 policy document is viewed as the AU's long-term strategy for the continent that has been developed utilizing a bottom-up approach (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018), an aberration from the AU policy development and enactment procedure. The bottom-up approach of the action plan is thought to represent the interests and aspirations of the African people.

Agenda 2063 aims for a prosperous, integrated, and politically united Africa with good governance, peace, cultural identity, and people-driven development. It emphasizes the strength and influence of Africa on the global stage, relying on the potential of its people, particularly women and youth.⁹ Significant focus is placed on Agenda 2063's sixth aspiration, prioritizing a people-driven Africa relying on the potential of its population, especially women, youth, and children. In alignment with this, the AU commits to ensuring comprehensive gender equality and empowering youth and children. With a substantial percentage of Africa's population being young (70% working class) (Kamaara, 2022), the AU seeks innovative approaches, exemplified by Agenda 2063, to actively involve and empower these segments of society.

Agenda 2063 outlines crucial steps within its 10-year Implementation Plans to yield both quantitative and qualitative transformative outcomes for Africa's people. By actively engaging

⁹ Source: Agenda 2063 framework document

citizens, advocating for their interests, and fostering governmental accountability, the agenda becomes a pivotal instrument in promoting people-driven integration.

2.3.4. African Continental Free Trade Area

The cornerstone of the Agenda 2063 Initiative is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), established in 2018 with its headquarters in Accra, Ghana. This ambitious project aims to unify various sub-regional free trade zones into the world's largest free trade area, connecting 1.3 billion people across 55 nations with a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion (Mugano, n.d.).

The AfCFTA seeks to enhance Africa's global commercial standing by eliminating both tariff and non-tariff barriers, providing a unified voice for the continent in global trade discussions. Beyond economic benefits, the agreement has the potential to uplift around 68 million people out of moderate poverty, fostering job creation and income growth (Woode, 2021).

Effective implementation will be crucial, requiring meticulous monitoring to assess the impact on all workers regardless of gender, skill level, or location and across various nations and industries. The aim is to eliminate restrictions hindering intra-African trade, promoting a more people-friendly economic integration.

2.3.5. African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) stands as an auxiliary initiative within the African Union's people-driven integration agenda, serving as a self-monitoring system voluntarily embraced by AU member states. Launched in 2002 and endorsed in 2003 under NEPAD frameworks, the APRM addresses governance deficiencies and misuse of state authority (Busumtwi-Sam & Dogah, 2014). Through a comprehensive review process involving all branches of government, private sector, civil society, and media, member nations engage in national discourse on governance and socioeconomic indicators, fostering consensus on future actions

(Grimm et al, 2009). Despite its potential, the APRM faces challenges, with Ghana's President John Agyekum Kuffour being the sole leader to undergo the peer review since its inception in 2002 (Grimm et al, 2009). This limited uptake raises questions about the initiative's effectiveness and its impact on promoting people-driven integration, potentially rendering it a dormant element in AU's endeavors.

2.4. Conclusion

The chapter provided an overview of the AU's programs and policies intended to bring the people closer. It looked at the new organs of the AU and how their operationalization promotes the people driven agenda. The Africa Union has implemented several initiatives, and this chapter tried to situate them in the context of a people friendly integration. The next chapter focuses on the prospects of a people-driven integration and the challenges confronting the AU in this stead.



CHAPTER THREE

NAVIGATING PROSPECTS AND OVERCOMING CHALLENGES: AN IN-DEPTH ASSESSMENT OF THE AFRICAN UNION'S PROGRESS TOWARDS A PEOPLE- DRIVEN AGENDA OVER TWO DECADES

3.0. Introduction

We all want a united Africa, united not only in our concept of what unity connotes, but united in our common desire to move forward together in dealing with all the problems that can best be solved only on a continental basis. – Kwame Nkrumah

The concept of regional integration is dynamic, evolving over time according to scholars, particularly Neo-functionalists who assert that integration should transition and expand across different fields. This study places a central focus on African integration within the context of regionalism, with the African Union (AU) serving as a pivotal subject. The AU exemplifies the continent's dedication to fostering unity among member states. This chapter explores the paradigm shift in integrational processes within the AU, moving from a perceived elitist approach to one driven by the people. It delves into the dynamics of a people-driven integration, analyzing mechanisms, and evaluating the impact of citizen engagement on the integration process. Recognizing the vital role of individuals and civil society in shaping the AU's trajectory is crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of regional integration in Africa. Additionally, the chapter examines the achievements and challenges of a people-driven integration within the AU, with a specific emphasis on how regional integration at the highest-level spills over to impact the ordinary African in aspects such as economics, politics, social, and personal representation.

3.1. Data Organization and Process

In the evaluation of the African Union's (AU) people-driven integration agenda spanning the last two decades, a qualitative research design was implemented. This research methodology aimed to provide a broad comprehension of how the AU distinguishes itself from its predecessor in terms of engagement with the African populace. To ensure a diverse array of perspectives, purposive sampling was employed, involving fourteen respondents whose opinions and experiences were deemed representative. The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated a guided yet open-ended exploration, allowing participants to articulate their views freely. The interview questions were meticulously crafted to elicit responses that aligned with the overarching research questions and objectives. Subsequent to the interviews, responses were transcribed and systematically organized for analysis. Adopting a thematic analytical approach, recurring patterns and themes were identified, affording a comprehensive understanding of the data. Complementing the primary data derived from interviews, secondary data were incorporated to enrich the analytical framework.

Crucially, the study contextualized its findings within the theoretical framework of Neofunctionalism, with a particular emphasis on the "spillover effect" and the pivotal role attributed to non-state actors, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and ordinary citizens. Neofunctionalism's significance in this study lies in its emphasis on sectoral cooperation and the ensuing spill-over effects. In relation to Africa's regional integration, this implies that collaboration in specific policy domains, such as economic matters or security issues, may lead to expanded cooperation in areas directly affecting individuals. As regional institutions deepen their collaboration in functional domains, the integration of policies that directly impact the daily lives of people becomes increasingly probable. This comprehensive research approach, rooted in

qualitative inquiry and theoretical framing within Neofunctionalism, contributes to an understanding of the AU's people-driven integration agenda. By engaging with the voices and experiences of respondents, and situating the discussions within a well-established theoretical framework, this research endeavors to shed light on the intricacies and dynamics of the AU's approach to regional integration, achievement and challenges.

3.2. Profile of Respondents

To garner in-depth and knowledgeable findings for the study, data was sought from officials of institutions such as the AU Commission, The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), AfCFTA Secretariat, Legon Center for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), Afrobarometer, Political Science Department of the University of Ghana, Cape Town University, as well as civil Societies like the African Women's Development and communication network (FEMNET) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration. Selection of respondents were solely based on the expertise on the subject matter. The themes from interviews and secondary data are discussed below.

3.3. Harmony in Vision: Unveiling the AU's Melody for a People-Driven Integration

Regional integration across the world has become critical in growing economies, improving collective security, and enhancing social cohesion. Since the 1960's regional integration has been an integral part of Africa's development strategies. The mode, inclusivity level and focal areas is what has been the bone of contention. Across the globe, regional bodies such as EU have led a paradigm shift of integration that is state led to one driven by the people within the region. Africa

has had a major challenge in its integration agenda, creating synergy between the organizational body and the people whose interest it represents. For this reason, the AU has indicated for a pivotal transformation of the organization to one that resonates with the ordinary African and people of African descent, hence the AU's people-driven integration. According to a Senior lecturer from the Political Science department of the University of Ghana:

The people-driven agenda emanates from the Pan-African dream that recognizes peoples of the continent and people of African descent. It resides within a deeper believe of E pluribus unum, Africans may be from different ethnicities and tribes, but we are one people and that our collective success is what guarantees our individual fulfillments – Ubuntu, I am because we are. An integrated Africa must exist not in isolation of the people whose interest it represents. Therefore, the people driven integration is embedded within the collective spirit of Africanness. It may also be a form of democracy at the regional level where integration is of the people, by the people and for the people.

Pan-Africanism is a deliberately conceived concept serving a distinct purpose. It acknowledges the fragmented condition of Africans, their marginalized and alienated status, both within their continent and in the Diaspora. This ideology aims to address the disadvantaged state of the continent and advocates for a collective resolution to its underdevelopment. Pan-Africanism urges Africans to tap into their inherent strengths and capabilities, fostering self-reliance (Murithi, 2017). The historical context of people-driven integration in the AU is rooted in the struggle for African independence and the quest for continental unity. The Pan-African movement, championed by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and Haile Selassie, laid the groundwork for a collective vision of a united Africa (Adebajo, 2016), and setting the stage for the AU's more ambitious integration goals later (Adebajo, 2012).

The ideational labyrinth of the Pan-African concept is not merely a united force to deal with the unfair structuring of the global system that makes Africa a periphery player. It is to further energize the grassroot base of Africa to take charge of their own destiny and not seek a united Africa whose

vision and aspirations are dictated by a few heads of state. Pan-Africanism within its letter and spirit of purpose is the force that drives the said people-driven agenda of the AU. African's integration is not a matter of choice, but a necessity required to push the continent towards a new epoch of growth and development. Similarly, a people's driven integration is not one to be achieved by accident but through deliberate efforts to include various stakeholders into the operations of the AU. This begs to ascertain whether the said people-driven integration agenda of the AU is evident or an abstract metaphysics.

A high ranking official of the AU Commission quizzed in line with public perceptions whether the AU people's-driven agenda was a mere sloganeering strategy or an actual policy. He stated that:

Is there really a document or policy framework that exist as a people-driven agenda within the African Union? I will say no because then we have Agenda 2063, we have issues of women, we have issues of youth, but we do not have an arguably specific key document with timelines and deliverables in terms of that agenda. What we can then do is to deduce from existing documents to say that because the organization intends to do one or two things, then it becomes more people-driven than its predecessor OAU. So, the AU may not have a specific document for its people-driven integration but there are a couple of documents that project the intention of the Union to be people-driven

Amao (2018) had reaffirmed the reaffirmed the schism in AU people-driven agenda by assessing the legal framework of the organization to deduce whether the AU is on a part to people inclusivity or a mere sloganeering. The African Union (AU) has consistently expressed its commitment to diverging from its predecessor through a plethora of documents. Article 4 (c) of the Constitutive Act explicitly states that the Union will function in adherence to the principle of involving African peoples in its activities. Significant transformations within the Union have contributed to strengthening the relationship between the organization and the African people.

In the 21st Ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, a solemn declaration was issued. This declaration explicitly emphasized that the implementation of the integration agenda would collectively be guided by the involvement of people, including the Diaspora, in the Union's affairs (African Union, 2013). Serving as the cornerstone for the articulated aspirations of the AU's Agenda 2063, the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration emphasize the commitment to a people-driven agenda. Notably, the policy framework of the Agenda 2063 itself is considered a product of a people-driven agenda. It deviates from traditional AU policies that adopt a top-down elitist approach, instead drawing its content and framework from broader consultations and inputs from various stakeholders. These encompass the younger generation, women, Civil Society Organizations, the Diaspora, African Think Tanks, and Research Institutions, government planners, the private sector, the African media, inter-faith leaders, the Forum for Former African Heads of State and Government, African Island States, and various other entities (African Union, 2015). Agenda 2063 not only embodies an integration that is favorable to the people but also acts to propel the new stage of the AU's people-driven agenda. This shows a pattern of commitment and consistency of the organization to pursue a people-driven agenda. The inclusion of this initiative into various declarations, policy and legal frameworks demystify a certain sloganeering perception to an actual agenda at hand. In recent times the people-driven agenda of the AU has become synonymous with Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want. A representative from Ghana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration expressing opinion on the people-driven integration agenda of the AU situated the discussion within the context of the Agenda 2063.

...I would assert that the African Union's people-driven integration agenda is an integral component of the broader Agenda 2063. This comprehensive framework aims to foster inclusive social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance, and peace and security, among other crucial

aspects. The overarching goal is to reposition Africa as a dominant player in the global arena.

The Agenda 2063 stands as the African Union's long-term strategic blueprint, spanning 50 years, with a primary objective of achieving inclusive and sustainable development. It represents a tangible manifestation of the pan-African ideals of unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity inherent in both Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. Aspirations 1 and 6 of Agenda 2063 underscore the organization's vision, placing significant emphasis on inclusivity, particularly the inclusion of women and youth (African Union, 2015). People-driven integration is intrinsically tied to the level of citizen engagement within both state governance and at the continental level. Achieving high levels of citizen engagement in an integrated region becomes significantly challenging if the member states forming the integration lack democratic practices, as highlighted by an official from Afrobarometer. Embedding democratic principles is crucial for the success of any people-driven integration. Notably, the European Union (EU) exemplifies this by imposing strict requirements for countries seeking membership. Among these prerequisites, a robust economic performance and a favorable democratic index are paramount. This stringent prerequisite has been the reason why countries in Eastern Europe such as Ukraine find it difficult in gaining membership into the Union.

The Africa Union has comparatively flexible admission requirements. This is one critical challenge affecting the progress levels of the AU to become fully people-driven. The member states by themselves are not democratic. This makes it difficult for them to promote democratic principles such as inclusivity of the ordinary African and CSO's at the continental level. The best way to ensure the smooth operationalization of the agenda is to advocate and promote democracy, popular participation, and human rights in member states. Considering this perspective, the African Union (AU), during the eighth ordinary session of the Assembly, adopted the African Charter on

Democracy, Elections and Governance (African Union, 2007). This move was intended to foster human rights and democratic principles, ensuring the active participation of citizens in democratic processes, development, and governance. The underlying expectation is that the cultivation of democracy at the state level will create a ripple effect, positively influencing the organization at the continental level.

The Charter came into force on 15th February 2012. Among the 55 countries on the continent, 46 have signed it, and 38 have gone a step further to ratify it. There is, however, a concern as there is indication that 17 countries are yet to ratify the Charter. This figure speaks volumes about the pace of progress and the level of commitment towards achieving a people-driven integration (African Union, 2023).

3.3. Progress in African Integration and People Inclusivity

For more than sixty years, Africa has contended with challenges related to continental integration. In 1963, Kwame Nkrumah posited that no independent African state could independently chart a course of economic development. He emphasized the imperative for a unified policy operating at a continental level, involving all stakeholders and Africans collectively (African Integration Report, 2021). The fragmented stance of African leaders at the time, represented by the Casablanca and Monrovia standpoints, impeded Africa's initial endeavor for proper regional integration. Instead, it resulted in the establishment of an elitist regional body that no longer aligned with the spirit and vision of Africans, ultimately fostering a perceived disconnect from its citizens (Murithi, 2017).

In the two decades since its establishment, the African Union has sought to rectify the negativist perceptions associated with its predecessor. However, an interview with an Emeritus Professor from the University of Cape Town indicates that Africa's integration and inclusivity efforts have progressed slowly, notwithstanding various attempts and initiatives.

Our integration agenda, specifically in relation to people-inclusivity have been slow and atomistic. One would have thought that since the demise of the OAU, the AU will, with speed, change the perception and we would have achieved more success than we have now. Look ideally, we shouldn't be at this level if from onset the integrational bodies both OAU and AU had pursued the Pan-African agenda championed by the likes of Kwame Nkrumah relentlessly and not their parochial interest. All other integrations be it economic, political or security will not be successful if the social and people integration is not properly and fully achieved...it will also be inconsiderate to suggest that nothing has been done. The AU especially have made appreciable strides in pursuit of people-inclusivity.

A Senior Research Fellow at the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD), expressing similar views with the above statements worriedly averred:

The status of progress regarding inclusivity and people-driven integration within the African Union (AU) remains ambiguous, with persistent institutional obstacles impeding the realization of the AU's initial vision. Civil society organizations increasingly perceive a shift from the AU's original enthusiasm for non-state participation in policy development processes towards a more closed stance. Nevertheless, the AU has achieved some progress.

Situating the views within the broader discussions, Tavares & Tang (2016) revealed that, with lessons from the OAU, the AU was deemed to be an engine of fast inclusive integration. Unfortunately, the organization has been faced with difficulties which has slowed the pace of its integration Agenda.

The Africa Integration Report of 2021 reaffirms assertions made by the above interviewees, "...we witnessed slow progress in African integration in spite of the many interventions and projects to advance regional integration over the years" blaming it on the levels of commitment and the cataclysmic effects of Covid-19 on the continent. The African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index (AMRII), outlined in the African Integration Report, provides a thorough analysis of the state of integration across the continent, utilizing eight dimensions and thirty-three indicators. These dimensions include Free Movement of Persons, Social Integration, Trade

Integration, Financial Integration, Monetary Integration, Infrastructure Integration, Environmental Integration, and Political and Social Integration. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have made notable progress in trade, the free movement of persons, infrastructure, and financial integration (Africa Integration Report, 2021). However, the dimension of Political and Social Integration, which aligns closely with the people-driven agenda, beckons for intensified efforts. Herein lies the imperative for the African Union (AU) to forge ingenious pathways that bridge institutional gaps and dismantle obstacles fostering a divide between its operations and the African populace. It is noteworthy that all other dimensions inherently possess the capacity for people-inclusivity. A prime illustration is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), situated within the trade integration dimension. While the overarching goal is clear, that is, fostering continental trade, it is essential to recognize that the realization of this objective hinges on the inclusive involvement of diverse stakeholders. As elucidated in the Integration Report, even within the realm of AfCFTA, there is a resounding call to deepen the inclusivity of women and youth (Africa Integration Report, 2021).

Moreover, the yardstick for gauging the progress of inclusivity of ordinary citizens within the African Union (AU) context is intrinsically linked to tangible projects undertaken by the AU for the benefit of Africans. As articulated by an official from the AU Commission, the advancement of the people-driven agenda and the perception of inclusivity hinge upon the physical deliverables of the AU.

Look at integration in the EU, the people vote to elect their representatives to the Union. This is visible to all, and one needs not to persuade the public into acceptance of a certain people-driven agenda. The people can see and feel it because they are part of the process. Also, go to the various member states, you will find tangible EU projects all over the place. Name it, EU schools, clinics, radio stations etc. Integration is brought to the doorsteps of the people. Juxtaposing it to what happens in the AU, this is not the case.

According to Appiah & Ansaaku, (2016) in the same light of views expressed above, when assessing the progress of the African Union (AU) in comparison to other regional integration bodies, such as the European Union (EU), it becomes evident that there is considerable room for improvement. Presently, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) appoints representatives from the parliamentary memberships of member states, leaving the constituents unaware of their representation. It is however a step towards inclusivity (Appiah & Ansaaku, 2016).

The AU could initiate a selection process within specific constituencies of member states to appoint representatives for the PAP. This process could gradually evolve into a national selection method, fostering a sense of inclusion among the populace in AU projects a lecture from the Political Science department of the University of Ghana suggested. Also, the financial constraints faced by the AU have impeded its ability to undertake projects under its name, limiting its capacity to enhance its image among ordinary Africans. Despite these challenges, the AU has demonstrated efforts, primarily on a policy level, towards advancing people-driven integration.

3.3.1. Tracing the trajectory of the People-driven Agenda

During the 1990s, a pivotal era coinciding with the full launch of the African Union (AU), the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa convened in Arusha, Tanzania. This landmark event led to the establishment of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation. The charter, crafted to delineate the role of people's participation in Africa's recovery and development endeavors, marked a significant milestone in the AU's commitment to inclusive governance. Following this historic development, the AU's institutional landscape underwent substantial evolution with the introduction of key documents and reviews. Notable among these were the Africa Union Constitutive Act and African Union Reviews. Through comprehensive assessments, the AU

scrutinized its functions and organs, including the Constitutive Act, the 2007 Adedeji Report on the Audit of the Union, the Agenda 2063 Framework Document, and the 2017 Kagame Report on AU Reforms (African Union, 2022).

The enactment of the Constitutive Act of the AU heralded the establishment of critical entities, including the African Union Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), the Pan-African Parliament, and the Maputo Protocol. Building upon this foundation, the AU continued to enhance its institutional framework with initiatives like the African Platform for Development Effectiveness, African Governance Architecture, and the current focal point, Agenda 2063. This evolution was accompanied by a heightened emphasis on Citizen Engagement, reflecting the AU's commitment to involving ordinary citizens in the decision-making processes that shape the continent's future (African Union, 2022). Navigating this intricate trajectory, the AU has witnessed an evolving relationship with ordinary citizens and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The dynamic interplay between policy frameworks, institutional reforms, and citizen involvement underscores the AU's commitment to fostering a people-driven agenda over the years. The AU's journey reflects a conscious effort to engage with the diverse voices and perspectives of African citizens, acknowledging their role as active participants in shaping the destiny of the continent.

3.4. AU's Relationship Building Over the Past 20 Years

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), antecedent to the AU, afforded limited space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participation in its proceedings. The OAU Charter, while not explicitly highlighting the role of civil society, did make certain declarations that laid the groundwork for a gradual acknowledgment of their significance. The shift from the OAU to the ostensibly more people-centric African Union (AU) coincided with the emergence of democratic ideals and experiments in good governance continent-wide, aimed at advancing the development of post-colonial states (Mbaya, 2023). This transition brought about a notable recognition of civil

society organizations as independent contributors to peace, stability, and development. These organizations emerged as vital contributors by introducing fresh perspectives to critical issues, advocating for governmental accountability, and enriching policy processes.

Recognizing that African governments alone cannot effectively achieve the ambitious goal of constructing sustainable peace, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, in Article 22, outlines the establishment of the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) as an advisory body comprising diverse social and professional groups from the Union's member states. This acknowledgment by the AU's founders underscores the imperative of involving society at large in the Union's initiatives (Murithi, 2017). According to an official of the Afrobarometer on the AU's relationship with various stakeholders of a people-driven agenda, he stated in summary:

Over the past two decades, there has been a discernible commitment on the part of the African Union (AU) to enhance its rapport with ordinary citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs). This dedication is evident through various initiatives aimed at fostering greater engagement. Noteworthy endeavors encompass heightened involvement of civil society in AU activities, outreach initiatives targeting the African diaspora, cooperative efforts with CSOs, systematic analysis of the dynamics characterizing the relationship between the AU and CSOs, and comprehensive assessments of AU member states' adherence to democratic governance commitments.

Neofunctionalists, departing from arguments made by intergovernmentalist on the relevant actors in regional integration, calls for more inclusivity in the processes of integration agenda (Bergmann, 2019). States key drivers of integration. However, today's evolving world has given a level of control to non-state actors such as CSOs, NGOs and ordinary citizens. Without the support of non-state actors, policies of regional bodies may be partly implemented (Gwaza, 2015). The AU's inclusiveness of CSO and ordinary citizens in its operations are a foundational assumption of the neofunctionalism theory that gives momentum to and of further integration (spillover).

Findings from analysis made by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) on AU- CSO relationships indicates an improvement over the last two decades. The AU departing from its predecessor has deployed several strategies to enhance relationships with ordinary citizens and Civil Society Organizations. Critical among them is creation of the Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO). The implementation of the African Union's vision, characterized by a people-centric and collaborative attributes among governments, civil society, and diasporas, falls under the purview of the Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO). Within CIDO, two integral components are discernible—the civil society and diaspora divisions (African Union, n.d.).

The African Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) is mandated to ensure the effective participation of CSOs in the activities of the AU. Through this initiative, the AU has established productive relationship with CSOs in addressing issues of conflict, human rights abuses and underdevelopment. In areas of security, the AU's PSC has facilitated its engagement CSOs and improved relations over the years through the Livingstone Formula and the subsequent Maseru Conclusions. There is, however, the challenge of how these CSOs are selected and cumulated. An official from the ECOSOCC in an interview expressed worry:

I worry about how these CSOs are sampled to represent the various nations and sectors. Take Ghana for example, we know the giants in the CSO space such as Ghana Center for Democratic Development, ISODEC, ACEP, WACSI and several others. Interestingly, none of these CSO represent the country either on the ECOSOCC or the PAP CSO advisory committees and its almost the same for all other countries. The CSOs on the committees are not actually known so how can they even properly represent the interest of the people..?

The broader literature of CSOs in regional integration emphasizes the important role such organizations play in ensuring the success of initiatives of regional bodies. Mbaya (2023) on AU-CSO relations indicate that CSOs are new players that bring fresh perspectives and ideas to the

policy making process of the organization. To ensure utmost benefit of CSO contributions to integration, the right CSOs from diverse background with the requisite experience and resonance of the people its represents must be selected (Finizo, 2018; Amr, 2012).

The ECOSOCC have a template for the set-up of the member of CSO committees. Even before that, an AU-Civil Society Provisional Working Group was established with members from all the six regions of Africa to prepare the criteria for accreditation and affiliation of African Civil Society Organizations to the African Union. There is the need to intensify and restructure the selection criteria to give meanings to the CSOs that represent the interest and voice of Africa. The AU has also established relationship with the African diaspora. Through the designation of the Diaspora as the sixth region and the subsequent creation of the Diaspora directorate the AU has bridge the gap that existed between the organization and its residents out its borders.

At the individual level, the African Union (AU) has undergone a substantial reconfiguration of its engagement with the youth and women. Through its flagship initiative, the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AU-YVC), the AU actively involves Africa's youth in the continent's development. This involvement is realized through meaningful youth participation, where the AU facilitates their contribution through service for the betterment of the continent. This initiative aligns with the principles outlined in the African Youth Charter and is further substantiated by the Decision of AU Heads of States and Governments in Assembly/AU/Dec.274 (XVI) in January 2010, which endorsed the establishment of a continental volunteer initiative. Since its official launch in 2010, the AU-YVC has imparted soft skills to numerous youths, providing them with a nuanced understanding of the intricacies of AU operations.

On the women's front, the AU through strategic gender equality pursuits have given room for active women participation in policy formulation and decision making. A respondent from African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) has indicated that unlike previously, women have a formidable voice in the AU, and it is expected to improve over the next decades. The AU has shown commitment to women inclusion through the launch of the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2028) framework. The former chairperson of AUC famously stated in support of women inclusivity that "If we don't put women in history books, they get edited out of history" (African Union, 2022). Relationship building with various stakeholders is most beneficial to the AU and the success of its policies. Therefore, AU has deployed several tools to connect the African people to the organization.

3.5. Tools Deployed for the People-Driven Agenda

Tools for a people-driven integration are the enabling factors, platforms, and mechanism to increase citizen engagement in the affairs of the AU. According to an interview with an official of the AfCFTA Secretariat, the people-driven agenda and inclusion of Africans, is driven by a collection of tools ranging from policies to legal frameworks and partnerships.

...the African Union has deployed several tools to pursue its people-driven agenda, including the Agenda 2063 Framework Document, civil society participation, engagement of the African diaspora, partnerships, digitization and implementation monitoring and evaluation. These tools are aimed at achieving inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development in Africa over a 50-year period.

The assertions presented above find resonance in the works of Levin (2018) and Ile (2020), providing additional support and depth to the discussion on the African Union's engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the utilization of Agenda 2063 as a pivotal tool for people-driven integration. Levin (2018) emphasizes the significance of Agenda 2063 as a crucial instrument for the AU's strategic planning. According to Levin,

Agenda 2063 has evolved into a vital tool for the organization, shaping its agenda and policies. The policy framework of Agenda 2063 places considerable emphasis on developmental evaluation tools, specifically population participation and diaspora inclusion. These tools are identified as instrumental in directing the trajectory of the AU's agenda in contemporary Africa. Levin's insights contribute to the understanding of how the AU utilizes Agenda 2063 to integrate the perspectives and voices of the people, reflecting the principles of people-driven integration. Building on Levin's perspective, Ile (2020) aligns with the notion that Agenda 2063 is a pivotal element in the AU's pursuit of people-driven integration. Ile not only supports Levin's views but also advocates for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems into the Agenda 2063 framework. Ile argues that technology, particularly digital technology, opens new avenues for incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into policy frameworks. By leveraging technology, it becomes possible to collect, synthesize, and integrate the skills, history, and culture of diverse communities. The outcomes of this synthesis are seen as reflective of the aspirations of the people. Ile's emphasis on the role of digital technology in shaping the people-driven integration agenda aligns with contemporary trends and dynamic nature of the tools employed by the AU.

The primary tool utilized by the African Union (AU) in the realization of a people-driven agenda is the strategic deployment of legal and policy frameworks. A paramount manifestation of commitment to any endeavor lies in the establishment of frameworks that propel the initiative forward. The AU, in this regard, has strategically employed legal and policy instruments, including but not limited to the African Governance Architecture, Agenda 2063, and the Constitutive Act. These frameworks serve as the fertile soil in which the seeds of citizen engagement are sown,

recognized, and cultivated. Notably, this tool has proven highly efficacious, functioning as the driving force and foundational underpinning for the AU's overarching agenda¹⁰.

Also, the African Union (AU), in its quest for people-driven integration, has strategically forged partnerships across various sectors to ensure a holistic and inclusive approach. One key ally in the AU's journey is the engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). These partnerships have empowered the AU to tap into grassroots insights and diverse perspectives, fostering a more inclusive decision-making process. Recognizing the pivotal role of the private sector, the AU has actively pursued partnerships with businesses and industry leaders. Examples include joint ventures with multinational corporations to enhance infrastructure and promote sustainable economic practices. On the international front, the AU has established partnerships with key organizations such as the United Nations and the African Development Bank. In the realm of academia, the AU collaborates with esteemed research institutions and universities. These partnerships contribute to evidence-based policymaking and the development of effective strategies for people-driven integration, exemplified by joint research projects and knowledge-sharing initiatives¹¹.

In this contemporary era, a pivotal tool with the potential to bring the African Union (AU) closer to its constituents is digitalization. For effective engagement of the populace on the continent, access to information is paramount. In this regard, the proliferation and advancement of digital technology play an indispensable role. The AU has strategically established its presence across various social communication platforms, boasting a substantial following on Twitter (1 million followers), Facebook (645,000 followers), YouTube (24,000 followers), and Instagram (24,000

¹⁰ Expressed by officials from AUC and Afrobarometer

¹¹ Partnership as a tool for people-driven integration was essential to the success of the "African Anti-Corruption Year." Under the leadership of the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC)

followers). While the AU's social media presence is commendable, a comparative analysis with the European Union (EU) reveals room for enhancement. The EU, with 1.8 million followers on X and 1.4 million followers on Facebook, surpasses the AU in terms of digital engagement. A broader comparison between AU's social media followership and there close to one billion population calls for more penetration. To truly maximize the potential of digital platforms for popular participation and inclusive governance, the AU must elevate its digital engagement efforts. Strengthening its presence in the digital space is imperative, acknowledging that it serves as a contemporary avenue for fostering a sense of belonging and active involvement in the AU's initiatives. The AU may also consider traditional media where its presence is currently woefully dormant.

The African Union (AU) strategically employs recognition as a powerful tool to propel people-driven integration across the continent. This deliberate acknowledgment of diverse voices and identities contributes to fostering inclusivity and active participation. The AU recognizes the immense cultural and linguistic diversity within Africa, actively promoting and preserving various languages and traditional practices. Indigenous communities receive recognition for their unique heritage, reinforcing cultural inclusivity. The AU extends recognition to the African diaspora, understanding their vital role in the continent's development. Efforts to engage with and acknowledge the diaspora contribute to economic, social, and cultural ties. The AU places significant emphasis on recognizing the pivotal roles of youth and women, empowering them to actively participate in shaping Africa's future.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are acknowledged as essential partners in the integration process. Recognition of CSOs fosters collaboration, ensuring that grassroots perspectives influence continental decision-making. The historical context of Africa's struggles for

independence and unity is also recognized, providing a foundation for the collective vision of a united Africa. The AU's importance on meaningful participation and representation, involving citizens in governance processes and ensuring representation at various levels. The recognition of human rights as a fundamental aspect of people-driven integration reinforces the AU's commitment to dignity and equality. Agenda 2063, the AU's 50-year strategic framework, stands as a manifestation of recognizing the aspirations and potential of the African people, reflecting a collective vision developed through broad consultations.

Capacity building is a pivotal tool employed by the African Union (AU) to advance the goals of people-driven integration. It serves not only as an approach but also as a crucial enabling factor for the success of enhanced citizen engagement initiatives within the AU. This comprehensive strategy encompasses diverse sectors, including government officials, AU Commission (AUC) staff, civil society, community groups, and AU organs. Capacity building occurs at either side of the engagement, that is the African peoples and leadership of AU or member states. In the 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration, the AU promotes the development of human capital on the continent through education and training (African Union, 2013). Once, people become well educated, their skills and abilities are improved making them meaningful contributors to continental develop. The AU through capacity building tools champion the study of African history while bringing the people closer. While tools of integration are essential for AU's people-driven agenda, they are not deployed in isolation. AU tools of integration goes in tandem with its unique approaches to include all of African people.

3.6. Approaches to People-Inclusivity in African integration

The African Union employs four approaches to enhance its engagement with African citizens: Informing, Consulting, Collaboration, and Citizen Feedback (African Union, 2022). Informing, the initial level, is crucial for empowering all citizens, especially vulnerable groups, by keeping

them informed about AU policies and initiatives through various channels such as public meetings and media engagement. Consultation, the second approach, involves a two-way communication process before decisions are made, often seeking expert opinions from civil society organizations (CSOs) through methods like public hearings and advisory group meetings. Collaboration occurs when the AU partners with various entities, including international bodies and CSOs, to undertake projects. However, this approach's full potential is yet to be realized, primarily relying on Advisory/Expert Group Meetings. The fourth approach, Citizen Feedback, serves as an effective means of monitoring and evaluating policies, allowing scholars and experts to participate actively by providing feedback through channels like research papers, thereby shaping AU policies¹².

3.7. Prospects of a People-Driven Integration and Achievements in 20 Years of the AU

The African Union (AU) stands at a critical juncture, poised to embark on a transformative journey towards people-driven integration. This paradigm shift offers a plethora of prospects that hold the potential to reshape the AU's engagement with its diverse member states and citizenry.

At the core of these prospects is the promise of enhanced legitimacy and public trust. A people-driven approach ensures that the AU is not perceived as an abstract entity but as an organization deeply rooted in the concerns and aspirations of the African people. This newfound authenticity can fortify the AU's standing, fostering trust among citizens and reinforcing the notion that the organization genuinely represents their interests¹³.

The fundamental prospect of people-driven integration lies in the potential for enhanced democratic governance within the AU. As argued by Smith (2019), involving diverse voices from civil society, grassroots organizations, and marginalized communities can contribute to more representative and participatory decision-making processes. This aligns with the AU's

¹² Source: AU Handbook on Citizen Engagement

¹³ Views from Emeritus Professor of Cape Town University.

commitment to democratization and inclusive governance as outlined in its Agenda 2063 framework (Levin, 2018).

According to Nardos Bekele-Thomas, the imperative for the African Union (AU) to embrace citizen-centered governance extends beyond a mere moral obligation; it stands as a strategic necessity for ensuring sustainable development. The recognition of citizens as active participants not only aligns with ethical considerations but also strategically positions the Union to leverage their collective knowledge, skills, and creativity. Empowering citizens to voice their perspectives equips the AU with a valuable resource, enabling a collaborative approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges confronting the continent (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022).

Moreover, a people-driven agenda enables more responsive policy formulation. By actively involving citizens, civil society, and grassroots organizations, the AU can gain invaluable insights into the nuanced challenges facing its member states. This, in turn, facilitates the development of policies that are not only tailored to specific socio-economic contexts but also resonate with the diverse cultural and political landscapes across the continent. People-inclusivity has the tendency of gathering momentum in support of the organizations policies. Often than not, the decisions made at the continental level are not ratified and implemented at national levels. The inclusion of people and CSOs in the policy making process creates awareness and citizens demand accountability and implementation of the policies¹⁴. The prospects ahead signal a departure from traditional top-down models, offering a vision where the AU becomes a true reflection of the diverse tapestry of Africa, driven by its people toward a future of unity, prosperity, and shared success.

While prospects of this agenda challenges the organization to fully engage citizens, the achievements speak to the impact of the agenda. The African Union (AU) has made significant

¹⁴ Assertions made by a respondent, an official from Afrobarometer.

strides in the past two decades towards fostering people-driven integration across the continent. Notable achievements underscore the organization's commitment to inclusivity, participation, and recognition of diverse stakeholders. In an interview with an Emeritus Professor from the University of Cape Town on the achievements of AU in the pursuit of people-driven averred that:

I will say one significant achievement is what we are doing right now. The AU has created a certain awareness of an organization which is accountable to its people. This awareness has drum home the desire and interest to see whether the AU is living by expectation. Today, research such as yours are being done on the AU's relationship with its people. What is more important than being aware you are a part of a bigger dream and so for me the awareness AU have created over the past two decades deserves accolades.

Tandeka (2021) corroborates the above assertions and emphasizes the importance of fostering open conversations among diverse stakeholders, including communities, policymakers, and experts. Such dialogues according to the author contribute to an informed citizenry, increasing awareness of the intricacies and opportunities associated with regional integration.

The conversation surrounding African integration is gradually evolving. The AU unlike its predecessor is welcoming of views from various stakeholders. It has created a sense of connection with ordinary citizens. Initiatives of the AU such as the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps, women inclusive policy under Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and CSO opportunities to operate in PAP and ECOSOCC signals to the African populace their stake in the continent's development. The AU's success in creating awareness contributes significantly to its people-driven integration agenda. By ensuring that citizens are well-informed and engaged, the organization fosters a sense of shared responsibility and commitment to the vision of a united and prosperous Africa. This achievement reflects the AU's dedication to building a continent where

people are not only aware of the organization's goals but also actively contribute to the realization of a more integrated and interconnected Africa.

Another milestone attained by the AU is the inclusion of traditional authorities, CSOs and the grassroots in resolving conflicts, promoting peace and development. According to Murithi (2016), People-driven integration in the AU has tangible effects on policy-making, particularly in areas such as peace and security, economic development, and human rights. The AU's involvement in conflict resolution, as seen in its interventions in Sudan and Mali, reflects a responsiveness to the concerns of citizens regarding stability and security.

Traditional authorities, often deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of African societies, possess valuable insights and historical knowledge that can contribute to conflict resolution. Most African have a stiff nexus between its formal and informal institutions therefore the ability to recognize the power informal institutions hold goes a long way in addressing the numerous challenges facing the continent. In Rwanda, the government made use of the traditional justice and reconciliation system known as gacaca to administer justice to some of those accused of being among the perpetrators of the genocide in 1994. The gacaca system, rooted in traditional Rwandan practices, represented a distinctive approach to addressing the grave offenses committed during the genocide, providing a platform for trials and reconciliation processes within local communities.

The AU's acknowledgment of their role reflects a departure from conventional top-down approaches, recognizing the importance of incorporating indigenous perspectives to foster sustainable peace. The grassroots and CSOs have contributed enormously to peacebuilding. Example are the community-led reconciliation in Rwanda, CSO-led peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, women-led peace initiatives in Liberia, local mediation in Sudan (Darfur), and grassroots peacebuilding in DR Congo and Chad. While not every example above may be directly attributed

to the AU, they highlight the broader effectiveness of inclusive approaches involving traditional, grassroots, and civil society actors in conflict resolution across the African continent.

Speaking on the achievements of the AU, a Senior lecturer from LECIAD responded that,

“The AU has achieved a lot over the last two decades which include but not limited to the Agenda 2063, AfCFTA, Civil Society Participation and the inclusion of the African Diaspora.”

Murithi (2016) and African Union (2018) elucidate on the above assertion. Economic integration initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), are also influenced by the aspirations of African citizens for increased economic opportunities and development (African Union, 2018). The AU's commitment to Agenda 2063, a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent, aligns with the aspirations of citizens for a prosperous and integrated Africa (African Union, 2015).

Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represent transformative achievements in the African Union's (AU) pursuit of people-driven integration, marking significant milestones in shaping the continent's future. The establishment of AfCFTA signifies a paradigm shift toward economic integration that actively involves various stakeholders. This trade agreement creates a single market, eliminating barriers and fostering collaboration among member states, businesses, and entrepreneurs. AfCFTA's success is intricately tied to the engagement of diverse economic actors, from small enterprises to multinational corporations. By breaking down trade barriers, it promotes economic growth and job creation, empowering people at various levels of society.

Agenda 2063 represents a visionary framework that places inclusivity at its core. Crafted through extensive consultations with diverse stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society organizations, and the diaspora, this agenda breaks away from traditional top-down approaches

(African Union, 2015). By incorporating the voices of ordinary Africans, Agenda 2063 ensures that continental policies align with the desires and dreams of its citizens. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership, commitment, and shared responsibility, marking a significant stride toward people-driven integration.

The AU's recognition and inclusion of the African Diaspora stand as a momentous achievement in its pursuit of people-driven integration. This inclusive approach aims to harness the skills, resources, and cultural richness of Africans living outside the continent, fostering a stronger connection and collaboration between the homeland and its dispersed communities outside of the continent. One notable project arising from this inclusive stance is the African Diaspora Marketplace (ADM). Launched in 2009 through a partnership between the AU and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the ADM serves as a groundbreaking initiative to engage the African Diaspora in economic development on the continent (USAID, 2009). The African Diaspora Marketplace provides a platform for entrepreneurs in the Diaspora to propose and implement projects that contribute to economic growth and job creation in Africa. Through a competitive application process, innovative business ideas receive financial support, mentoring, and networking opportunities. This initiative not only empowers individuals in the Diaspora but also establishes a tangible link between their expertise and Africa's development priorities. By actively involving the Diaspora in such projects, the AU goes beyond rhetoric, creating avenues for meaningful contributions from a global community of Africans. This is one major achievement of the people-driven integration that cannot be overemphasized.

3.8. Challenges to the People-Driven Agenda

While the AU has made enormous progress towards a people-driven integration, there are obstacles that hamstringing the full realization of the agenda. An official from the African Union Commission in an interview stated that:

The African Union (AU) has faced several challenges in its journey towards a people-driven integration. These challenges include dependency on donor funding, draconian laws restricting civil society, economic informalization and high unemployment, constraints on civil society organizations, challenges in financial management, leadership, human resources, operations, and communications, and the authoritarian desire for power.

Also speaking to the challenges confronting the organization in its people-driven pursuit, the Senior Research Fellow from LECIAD stated that;

AU has been hamstrung by numerous challenges. But for me, the most eminent challenge is the AU Constitutive Act and the rules of admission of members into the organization. A regional body, whether progressive, developed, inclusive and effective is but only the reflection of the attributes of its member states. Once the organization has a lot of its members to be in good economic standings, the regional bodies financial will not be in down drains because countries can afford to pay financial contributions...if you have dictators all over the continent, how do you expect the AU to be democratic.

The broader literature and research from other scholars affirm assertions made by respondents on challenges facing the AU.

The African Union's (AU) people-driven agenda faces multifaceted challenges hindering its realization. Governance issues, including dictatorships in member states, limit political will for citizen empowerment (Murithi, 2020). Security concerns, driven by coups and political instability, hamper the establishment of stable environments conducive to civic engagement (Diallo, 2017). Laws restricting civil societies in some member states curtail the space for grassroots movements, hindering the agenda's inclusivity (Makumbe, 2014). Financial constraints pose a substantial barrier to implementing policies that enhance citizen participation (Emmers, 2015). These challenges collectively impede the AU's goal of fostering people-driven integration.

Elucidating the discussions on the difficulties AU faces, a major challenge to the people-driven agenda is the criteria for admission as a member of the AU and the levels of democracy in member states. As stated previously, AU has very flexible admission policies. By virtues of being an independent African state, every country on the continent has the privilege to be a member. Not

until recently, there were no formidable laws against dictatorial governance and unconstitutional change of governments. Even with the introduction of the Charter on Democracy, how effective have the implementation been in member states and how have the AU punitively responded to countries that practice otherwise.

According to a report from the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021), out of the 55 countries on the continent, only one, Mauritius is a full democracy. Undemocratic regimes have taken wave over governance on the continent. The continent in recent time have experienced democratic deceleration as a result of ongoing coup d'états. Democratic principles are in decline and in several jurisdictions, African governments have imposed greater constraints on civil society organizations that seek to promote democracy and human rights. The overview of regional bodies is underpinned by attributes of individual states. Once the individual states restrict popular participation, inclusivity, and respect for human rights in their home states, it becomes very difficult to advocate otherwise at the continental level. The challenge of undemocratic governance has hindered the people-driven agenda.

Also, current security situation has become a major impediment. Ranging from political instability, intra-conflicts, and terrorism the security situation in areas such as the Sahel has exacerbated. This has affected the smooth implementation of people-driven policies since priority is redirected to other issues.

There is also limited awareness and engagement among citizens, particularly in remote areas, pose hurdles to achieving widespread participation. Language barriers and uneven access to information also contribute to disparities in engagement levels (Tegbaru, 2019).

However, these challenges present opportunities for the AU to enhance its outreach strategies, utilizing technology and grassroots networks to bridge informational gaps. Strengthening civic

education programs and promoting media literacy can empower citizens to actively participate in the integration process, fostering a more inclusive and informed populace (Van de Walle, 2018).

3.9. Conclusion: Towards A People-Driven African Union: A Theoretical Reflection

The theory of neofunctionalism holds key assumptions essential to situate the findings of this research into proper theoretical perspective. Neofunctionalism, posits that integration is propelled by functional spillover, fostering cooperation in one policy area, which, in turn, promotes collaboration in related domains. This theoretical lens provides insights into the intricate dynamics of the African Union's (AU) people-driven agenda. One key aspect of neofunctionalism is its emphasis on sectoral cooperation and the subsequent spillover effects. In relation to the AU's regional integration efforts, collaboration in specific policy domains, exemplified by Agenda 2063, can lead to increased cooperation in areas directly impacting individuals. This aligns with the AU's commitment to a people-driven integration agenda, evident in various declarations, policy frameworks, and legal instruments.

The study's findings affirm neofunctionalism's predictions, illustrating that the AU's commitment is deeply rooted in Pan-African ideals and historical struggles for independence. Despite challenges, the AU has made considerable strides, as reflected in tangible projects such as the African Diaspora Marketplace and strategic initiatives like Agenda 2063. The research traces the evolution of the people-driven agenda from early conferences to landmark commitments like the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation.

Furthermore, neofunctionalism places importance on non-state actors, particularly civil society, as drivers for integration. The AU's initiatives to enhance relationships with ordinary citizens, increased CSO participation, and outreach to the diaspora echo neofunctionalism's recognition of

the role of non-state actors. Legal frameworks and partnerships, highlighted in the study, align with neofunctionalism's emphasis on structured foundations and inclusive decision-making processes. The study also unveils the challenges and ongoing struggles, akin to neofunctionalism's acknowledgment of potential resistance. Despite critiques and setbacks, the overall impact on people-driven regional integration remains significant, showcasing a positive sum game with prospects for enhanced legitimacy, public trust, and sustainable development.

In conclusion, the symbiotic relationship between neofunctionalism and the AU's people-driven integration agenda is evident. Neofunctionalism provides a theoretical lens through which to understand the intricacies of the AU's efforts, emphasizing sectoral cooperation, the role of non-state actors, legal frameworks, and positive-sum outcomes. As the AU navigates the complexities of regional integration, neofunctionalism serves as a guiding framework, enriching the understanding of how theoretical principles complement and validate the practical strides toward a truly people-driven integration.

3.9.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the AU has embarked on a multifaceted journey towards people-driven integration, marked by progress, achievements, and challenges. While initiatives like Agenda 2063, AfCFTA, and inclusivity policies reflect commendable achievements, challenges such as undemocratic governance, security instabilities, and financial dependencies require strategic attention. Addressing these challenges will be pivotal in realizing the AU's vision of a united and prosperous Africa, actively shaped by its people. The AU's commitment to building awareness, fostering inclusivity, and recognizing diverse voices positions it on a transformative path, where citizens play a central role in shaping the continent's destiny.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Summary Of Findings

This research study sought to assess African Union's people-driven agenda by looking at the various intricacies including but not limited to assessing whether the AU is pursuing a people-driven integration agenda, tools facilitating it, achievements and challenges.

The AU's pursuit of a people-driven integration agenda is rooted in Pan-African ideals and historical struggles for independence. While critics question the existence of a specific document outlining this agenda, the AU's commitment is evident in various declarations, policy frameworks, and legal instruments. Notably, Agenda 2063 embodies the people-driven agenda, emphasizing inclusive development and citizen engagement. However, challenges arise from the AU's comparatively flexible admission requirements, hindering the establishment of democratic practices within member states. The adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance reflects efforts to promote democracy, yet the slow ratification by some countries underscores the ongoing struggle for a truly people-driven integration.

The research discovered that Africa has grappled with challenges in achieving continental integration. Despite Kwame Nkrumah's early vision of a unified approach, initial fragmentation hindered progress. The African Union (AU) has sought to address this, but progress has been criticized for being slow and atomistic. Concerns echo sentiments that a people-driven integration agenda should have progressed further since the demise of the OAU. The AU acknowledges challenges in inclusivity, with civil society organizations noting a shift away from non-state participation. The African Integration Report of 2021 highlights slow progress, attributing it to commitment levels and the impact of COVID-19 in recent times. The African Multidimensional

Regional Integration Index outlines notable progress in several dimensions of integration, but political and social integration, critical for people-driven goals, requires intensified efforts. The AU's progress is evaluated against tangible projects benefiting Africans, and comparisons with the EU reveal room for improvement.

The study also traced the evolution of the people-driven agenda from International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa, held in Arusha, Tanzania. This event led to the establishment of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, a landmark commitment to inclusive governance. Subsequently, the AU underwent significant institutional evolution with the introduction of key documents and reviews, including the Constitutive Act, the 2007 Adedeji Report, the Agenda 2063 Framework Document, and the 2017 Kagame Report on AU Reforms. The Constitutive Act laid the groundwork for critical entities such as ECOSOCC, the Pan-African Parliament, and the Maputo Protocol, while subsequent initiatives like the African Platform for Development Effectiveness and Agenda 2063 continued to enhance the AU's institutional framework. This trajectory reflected a conscious effort to engage citizens and Civil Society Organizations, reverberating the AU's commitment to a people-driven agenda.

The African Union (AU) has exhibited a discernible commitment to enhancing its relationship with ordinary citizens and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Initiatives include increased CSO participation, outreach to the African diaspora, collaboration with CSOs, systematic analysis of AU-CSO dynamics, and assessments of member states' commitment to democratic governance. The creation of the Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO) is a pivotal strategy, focusing on people-centric and collaborative attributes. CIDO ensures effective CSO participation, addressing issues like conflict, human rights abuses, and underdevelopment. The AU's engagement

with CSOs in areas like security, facilitated by the Peace and Security Council (PSC), has shown improvement. However, concerns exist regarding the selection and representation of CSOs. The ECOSOCC acknowledges the need for restructuring selection criteria to better represent the interests of the people. Additionally, the AU has established relationships with the African diaspora, designating it as the sixth region. At the individual level, the AU has reconfigured its engagement with youth and women through initiatives like the African Union Youth Volunteer Corps (AU-YVC) and the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

The study also brought to light tools deployed to advance its people-driven agenda, utilizing legal frameworks, partnerships, digitalization, and strategic recognition. Legal instruments like the African Governance Architecture and Agenda 2063 provide a structured foundation, while partnerships with various stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations, foster inclusive decision-making. The AU recognizes the significance of digital platforms for citizen engagement but acknowledges the need for improvement. Strategic recognition, encompassing diverse voices, cultural diversity, and historical contexts, reinforces inclusivity. This comprehensive toolkit reflects the AU's commitment to fostering a people-driven agenda, with legal frameworks and partnerships as primary drivers.

The study found that an effective people-driven agenda offers prospects for enhanced legitimacy, public trust, and sustainable development. Beyond the prospects, AU has made considerable strides in the pursuit of people-driven integration. Awareness creation, Recognizing the importance of traditional authorities, grassroots, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in conflict resolution and the launch of strategic projects such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Another achievement is the inclusion of the diaspora and

subsequent creation of the African Diaspora Marketplace, stand as momentous achievements in the AU's pursuit of a truly people-driven integration.

Finally, the research showed the ideational and intrinsic challenges which has persisted since the formation of OAU and AU in recent times. It looked at the surrounding factors that have hamstrung the progress of the people driven agenda.

4.2 Implications of Study

The findings of this research have significant implications for the realms of literature, practice, and policy, offering insightful understanding of AU's people-driven integration agenda.

4.2.1 Implications for Literature

This study significantly contributes to the evolving discourse of people-driven integration in the African Union. The research emphasizes the need for a conceptual refinement in existing literature to capture the evolving nature of the people-driven agenda (Murithi, 2020; Ile, 2020). Scholars should document the AU's institutional evolution, emphasizing the role of key documents and reviews in promoting citizen engagement. Additionally, the identification of persistent ideational challenges suggests avenues for deeper exploration of historical and intrinsic factors influencing regional integration in Africa. While this study provides a comprehensive examination of the AU's people-driven integration, there remain avenues for further research. Deeper exploration into the effectiveness of specific initiatives, such as the Pan-African Parliament, and longitudinal studies tracking changes in citizen engagement over time can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. Finally, comparative analyses with evolving regional organizations can offer insights into adaptive strategies for sustained success.

4.2.2 Implication for Practice

Effective Civil Society Organization (CSO) engagement emerges as a critical practice implication. Practitioners within the AU should address concerns regarding CSO selection and representation, considering a restructured selection process for enhanced effectiveness. Furthermore, the study advocates for the implementation of policies recognizing diverse voices and cultural nuances, ensuring true inclusivity in the people-driven agenda.

The deployment of legal frameworks and partnerships by the AU serves as a practical approach to advancing the people-driven agenda. Practitioners should leverage and refine these tools for inclusive decision-making and collaboration with various stakeholders.

4.2.3 Implication for Policy

At the policy level this research plays a significant role in reshaping policies at both continental and AU level. Challenges arising from the AU's flexible admission requirements, impacting democratic practices, necessitate policy interventions. Policymakers should revisit these admission criteria to strengthen democratic governance, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the people-driven integration agenda. The slow ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance signals a need for policy interventions to expedite these processes. Policymakers should explore strategies to encourage timely ratification and implementation of key instruments promoting democratic values. The African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index highlights the importance of prioritizing initiatives that foster political cooperation and social cohesion. Policymakers should address identified gaps critical for achieving people-driven goals in political and social integration.

4.3 Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it is possible to infer that, AU unlike its predecessor have made substantial strides towards the inclusivity of the African people in its integration agenda. Major policies of the AU indicates that, the people driven agenda is not a mere sloganeering agenda but an actual pursuit that intends to galvanize the support of African for its self-development. The AU uses a variety tools and approaches to push this agenda. Over the past two decades, the AU has made some achievements however challenges still persist. This calls for restructuring to ensure that, integration moves from the state-monopolized pursuit to one inclusive of the people.

4.4 Recommendation

Considering the identified challenges and opportunities for people-driven integration within the African Union (AU), the following recommendations are put forth:

- The AU should strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and responding to democratic backsliding in member states. This includes active collaboration with regional bodies and implementing consequences for non-compliance with democratic principles.
- To overcome security challenges affecting the smooth implementation of people-driven policies the AU must adopt a holistic approach to address security challenges, especially in regions like the Sahel facing political instability and terrorism. Collaborate with regional bodies, international partners, and local communities for effective conflict resolution and prevention.
- Revisit and reform the criteria for selecting Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to ensure a more representative and impactful involvement. Address concerns about the visibility and influence of selected CSOs.

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch targeted public awareness campaigns to inform citizens about the AU's initiatives, achievements, and opportunities for involvement. Build a sense of belonging and active participation.

4.5 Areas for Further Research

While this study provides a comprehensive examination of the AU's people-driven integration, there remain avenues for further research. Deeper exploration into the effectiveness of specific initiatives, such as the Pan-African Parliament, and longitudinal studies tracking changes in citizen engagement over time can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. Additionally, comparative analyses with evolving regional organizations can offer insights into adaptive strategies for sustained success.



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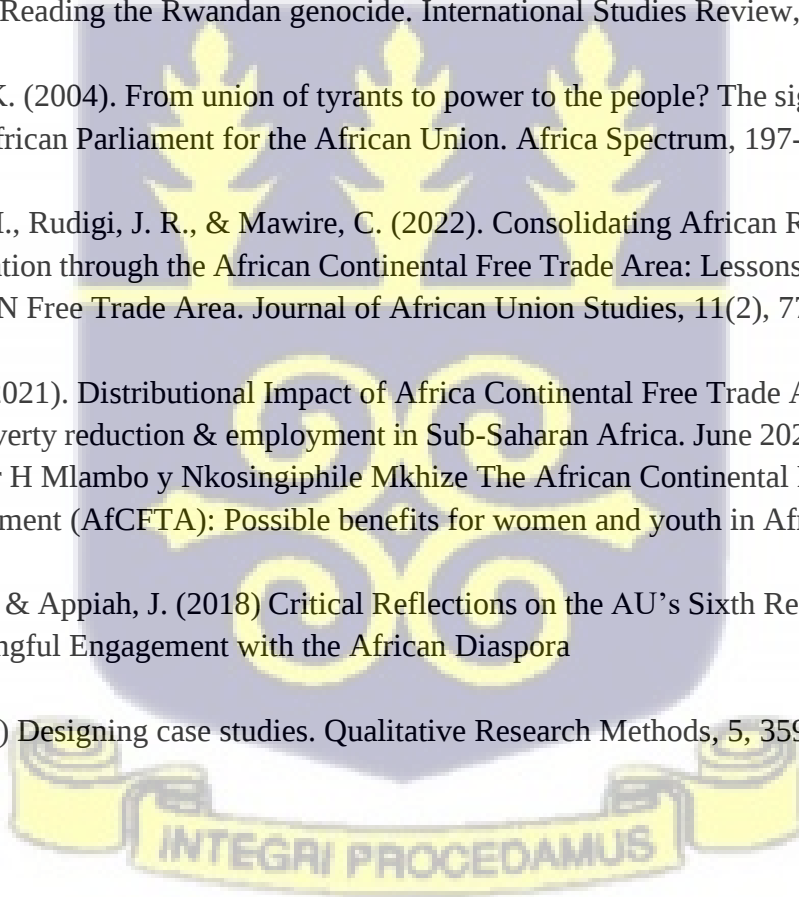
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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE

University of Ghana

Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy

Topic: Towards a people-driven African Union: Prospects and challenges after 20years.

1. What are your views on African integration? Are we making progress with respect to people inclusivity? And people driven integration?
2. How has the African Union courted and improved its relationship over the past 20 years? Especially with ordinary citizens and CSOs.
3. What is AU's people driven agenda and what are the focal areas?
4. What tools have been deployed by the AU to pursue its people-driven agenda?
5. How does the AU include people pre, during and post policy making and implementation?
6. Highlight AU initiatives and how it has contributed to its people driven agenda? How has the AU ensured that its continental policies resonate with the grassroots in member states?
7. What remarkable achievements have the AU achieve in the 20-year journey? Especially toward people driven integration.
8. What challenges hamstrung the agenda?
9. How can the AU deal with the challenges and change public perception of the organization?
10. How can the AU get closer to the people even with these challenges?
11. What does the future hold for AU vision of becoming a people-driven integrational body?
12. Final Comments.

