

Africa's Regional Integration and Participation of Member Countries in the African Union as a Recipe for Growth and Development

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Abstract

The paper examines the contribution of regional integration and participation of African member Countries in the area of economic, technological and socio-political spheres of the African Union. As a geographical formation, Africa comprises extraordinary and significant territories enriched with colossal resources and opportunities. Despite this, the continent still struggles to address the challenges affecting its economic, social and political developmental models. These factors are all connected and shape the future of the continental and regional agenda rooted in the Pan-African Idea, which seeks to promote the unity, solidarity, and integration of African States as a basis for facilitating their development and gaining voice and power in the international arena. The study employs qualitative and empirical analyses, reviewing literature and policy documents from regional and international institutions. The research utilises the economic theory of modernisation as its theoretical framework. The research reveals that most African countries that have an abundance of natural resources have not been able to leverage their advantage to augment production and exportation of goods and services compared to their developed counterparts. Diversification is aimed at increasing productivity, creating jobs and providing a base for sustained poverty-reducing growth. However, this has not been achieved, and the situation is even becoming worse in Africa. Developed countries use external aid as a strategy for the development of developing countries, but this has not made much sense in African countries, as many aids have been received without being used for development, thereby increasing infrastructural deficits, weak institutional capacity and lack of cooperation among member states. The paper concludes that the members of the African Union should create a conducive environment for interactions between member nations that will enable them to work together for a greater Africa. The study recommends harmonised trade regulations that will bring inclusive development and ensure equitable benefits in the African sub-region among African States.

Keywords: *Africa, Integration, Panacea, Growth, Development.*

Introduction

Africa stands as a continent of rich diversity which was shaped by a complex history, and distinct cultural identities (Raji et al, 2024). It is a continent positioned to play a key role in global development, considering its abundant natural resources, youthful population, huge agricultural capacity, and the prospects for renewable energy to bolster its global aspiration for regional integration and growth. However, since its colonisation Africa has been practically in a state of upheaval with considerable stress situation (Polte, 2023). Africa presents a peculiar developmental crisis not only does the continent hold the status of being the poorest region, experiencing a decline in income per capita from 1980 to 2000 (Sachs et al, 2004). Africa contends with a high poverty index, with a substantial segment of its populace living below the threshold. Despite Africa being home to only 10% of the world's population, about 30% of the world's poor people are Africans, living on less than US\$1.90 per day (Brukner, et al, 2022; Le Pere and Ikome, 2009). Therefore, an array of economic, social and political hurdles has been reported as profoundly influencing the development trajectory in Africa (Grinin and Korotayev, 2023; Miller, 1999).

A major hurdle that Africa grapples with is the issue of governance and political stability. Many African nations struggle with corruption, lack of transparency in government and frail institutions, which pose barriers to effective governance and sustainable development (Prince et al, 2023). More so, political unrest, internal conflicts and reluctance to enact transformative reforms further complicate efforts towards progressive advancements (Muma, 2013). Furthermore, limited access to quality education, healthcare, and essential services impedes overall developmental strides (Kanayo et al, 2013). In addition, the deficiency in infrastructure development stands out as a critical impediment facing Africa, as an inadequate infrastructure, such as good roads, energy facilities, water supply systems, and telecommunication networks, curtails economic expansion and hinders connectivity both within and between African nations, thereby hampering service delivery, obstructing trade flows, and stifling investment opportunities (Arimah, 2017).

While one has to be careful not to be carried away by the optimistic “Africa Rising” narrative, there have indeed been dramatic changes in the continent's fortune since 2000 as a result of internal and external factors. First, many African countries have put in place appropriate macroeconomic, structural, and social policies, which have contributed to improved GDP growth rates and some progress that have been made.

Concept of Development

Liberal scholars explain development strictly in financial and economic terms. Accordingly, Meier (1989) defined development as the maximisation of the GNP (Gross National Product) through capital accumulation and industrialisation. In this sense, development

means achieving a sustained rate of growth of income to enable a nation to expand outputs, investments, savings and consumptions. In the same vein, Thwall (1983) defined development as the capacity of a national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static to generate and sustain an annual increase in its GNP at rates of perhaps 5% to 7% or more. These definitions represent development as a factor of financial and capital accumulation.

In a different twist, Marxist development scholars have provided a human-based definition of the term. Guzman (2011) defines development as the accumulation of human capital and its effective investment in the progress of an economy. Todaro (1989:826) defines human capital as “productive” investments embodied in human beings. These include skills, abilities, ideas, health, etc. that result from expenditure on education, on-the-job training programme, and medical care. Thus, human capital refers to those attributes the possession of which makes a person a useful member of society. Anyone who possesses these attributes, such as a mechanic for instance or an honest accountant for another is more in demand than one who lacks them.

Handerson (1989) writes that the way of conceiving development is the consequence of strange thinking which forgets that economic conditions are made for man, not man for economic conditions. Therefore, it must be insisted that the goal of development is the upliftment of human persons and the bettering of their conditions (Udoms, Atakpa, & Ekanem, 2017; Udoms & Atakpa, 2021). Technological advancements, economic prosperity, etc. that are said to be indices of development are not just desired because they are monuments to be admired. They have worth simply because they make contributions to the advancement of the human person. Furthermore, Umoh (2012) defines it as a process by which a high degree of self-reliance on economic growth in a society sustained over time is associated with a substantial reduction in poverty, unemployment, inequality and external dependence.

For development to make sense, it must be primarily man-centred. It can also be discussed on a sectorial basis, including industrial, technological, urban and rural development. Development should therefore lead to an increase in the quality of life of the people which it is intended for. For this paper, development is viewed in terms of economic factors such as GDP and Per-Capita Income (PCI) as well as human development factors such as education, health, life expectancy, employment creation, and general standard of living.

Economic Theory of Modernisation

The theory is an economic model of the modernisation theory stemming from the works of development scholars like Walt Rostow (1916-2003), Everett Hagen (1906-1993), Simon Kuznet (1901-1985) and Charles Kindleberger (1910-2003). The theory opines that the most essential missing component of development which causes the underdevelopment of some countries is economic (Ekpe, 2013). In extension, developed countries experienced economic

development because they were able to identify the different stages of development and practically pursue goals of economic development sequentially. Conversely, the Less Developed were ignorant of the existence of those stages and did nothing to transform their societies from primitivity to modernity. Rostow (1960) also contended that if developing countries are provided with comparable historical data and the presumed traits associated with the Western development process, they would be transformed into development (Ekpe, 2013).

Specifically, the theory proposes five (5) stages of development: Traditional, transitional, take-off stage, the stage of maturity, and the stage of high consumption. Furthermore, Rostow (1960) argued that the movement from primitivity to modernity entails the removal of obstacles to development at each stage of the development process. In addition, it is also dependent on raising the living standards of the citizens as well as the adoption of modern cultural values and ethos. The theory is relevant for the study in that it first emphasises the disparity between development and developing or underdeveloped countries. This disparity also provides the means through which the developed countries reached their current state, and which could also serve as strategies for the developing/underdeveloped countries of Africa as applicable to their diverse ecology (Udofa & Ekeuwei, 2023).

Africa's Development Trajectory since Independence

Africa's current economic and political predicament is intimately linked to its colonial past. Starting with the slave trade in 1650 and continuing under colonial rule after the Berlin Conference of 1884, the continent had been heavily drawn into the centers of capitalist accumulation, but always as a subordinate partner whose primary role was to contribute to the development of rival capitalist powers (Rodney, 1982; Amin, 1973). Not only the colonial system stunted basic economic and political structures, it also shaped the nature of social and ethnic relations that continues to bedevil the continent until the present. As Adedeji (1996:208) reminds us of dispossession and dependence, which amount to more than five hundred years, have left a heavy imprint on Africa. Fifty years of independence is a very short time in which to reduce their impact, let alone transcend this legacy.

Upon the attainment of political independence, African countries embarked on programmes of nation building and national development designed to bring the fruits of social and economic development to all sections of the population. Underpinning the “nationalist project” were a number of erroneous assumptions. The first was the belief that “industrialisation by invitation” (or modernisation through imitation) is possible by maintaining intimate links with the former colonial powers. Implicit in this assumption was also a belief in the theory of comparative advantage whereby Africa continues to export unprocessed raw minerals and agricultural products which will enable it to earn the necessary foreign exchange in order to import manufactured goods from the West. The second was the assumption that, as economics

grow, market forces would allow the benefits of growth to “trickle down” to the rest of the population and thus there is no need for deliberate state action to address income inequalities. The third assumption was the belief that social programmes will be instituted in order to mitigate the ill effects of the initial inequalities brought about by economic growth (Rostow 1960; Adesina 2007).

In addition to expanding export-led agriculture, African countries were urged to take on large amounts of loans to finance large-scale infrastructure and import-substitution industrialisation to kick-start their economies and pave the way to industrialisation. And as their economies grow, so it was argued, countries will be able to pay these loans without any difficulty. Finally, the nationalist leaders set out an ambitious regional integration strategy that would eventually pave the way for a “United States of Africa”. Therefore, in concrete terms, the “nationalist project” was oriented toward achieving a more equitable appropriation of the productive forces at the local, national, and continental levels (Zezeza, 2008:37-53; Mkandawire, 2007).

Indeed, during the first decade and a half of independence, African economies registered impressive growth rates, given the initial conditions at the time of independence. Over the next 15 years, physical infrastructures were greatly improved, particularly in the areas of health, education, and communication. New universities, agricultural research centres, national transport networks, and local government structures were established to facilitate the national development project. Since there was no domestic private sector, the State played a major role in the planning and execution of major infrastructure and investment projects within the context of a five-year planning cycle. Where the private sector operated, it was usually foreign and exclusively in the extractive sector.

On the social front, elaborate social programmes were developed as part of the national building project, and these helped diffuse social tensions (Aina 2004:12; Adesina 2007). In a space of less than a decade and a half, dramatic improvements in the parameters of social indicators, health, education, etc. were registered. As Adesina argued, social policy became an important instrument in nation-building because it offered all citizens a set of worthwhile goods and opportunities. This was also supposed to instill a sense of affinity among diverse nationalities and prevent intra-group conflict.

Despite espousing radical nationalist ideas such as democracy, redistribution, and egalitarianism, however, few nationalist leaders had a serious interest in genuine transformation. Given the social basis of the nationalist struggle – comprising groups with divergent class

interests (urban elites versus rural landless peasants) – the social groups tied to colonial capital came to exert considerable influence on the post-independence development agenda. In practice, this meant separating the national from the social question (Mkandawire, 2007:9). The “redistribution” agenda was to take back seat while propounding the idea of nation building and national unity. As Claude Ake (1991) reminded us, “political independence in Africa was rarely the heroic achievement it was made out to be; it was often a convenience of de-radicalisation by accommodation, a mere racial integration of the political elite”. In practice, the post-independence development model lacked any “transformative” ideology and instead resembled the colonial model of “accumulation by dispossession”. These same views were best captured in the book *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967) by Oginga Odinga of Kenya and by Rene Dumont, in his popular book, *False Start in Africa* (1969).

National development initiatives became a means to “disempower” the people rather than a means for unleashing their energies for their own “self-empowerment” from below. Nation building and national unity meant having to sweep many sensitive issues under the carpet, and these later came to haunt post-independence leaders (Mkandawiere 2007:6). Ethnicity and tribalism were officially banned, but in practice, these were the main criteria for distributing public resources. Thus policies such as “indigenisation” and “Africanisation” were applauded in the face of growing inter-group inequality and without transforming the old colonial order.

The Premature Demise of the Nationalist Project

As Africa entered the decade of the 1970s, however, the “nationalist project” was being threatened from within and without. With the drama of Cold War politics being played out intensely across the continent, democratic forces went into retreat as the African military began to shape the nature of the content of national politics in a dramatic fashion (Decalo, 1990; Laidi 1990). Each side in the East-West rivalry backed its “own” cohorts of dictators who let loose their predatory instincts and indulged in corruption, abuse of office, and repression (Chabal 1986; Rothchild et al, 1988). The new power holders became preoccupied with short-term considerations at the expense of long-term ones: Power over welfare, personal over institutional considerations, and security over development. This led to centralisation and a top-down approach to the management of national development (Ake 1996; Mkandawire 2007). The State thus became the market where office holders compete for acquisition of material benefits and maintain power through elaborate patron-client ties.

More tragically, disciplined planning, which was the *modus operandi* of post-independence African governments in the 1960s, quickly gave way to a reckless management of the affairs of the nation as if the countries were the “private property” of the governing elites. As the appeal of the nationalist ideology dissipated, the gulf between the rulers and the ruled also began to widen considerably as ordinary citizens began to view elite-led development as a

deliberate attempt by those in power to level them into destitution (Cheu 2000; Ake 1996). As Ihonvbere (1996:344-345) rightly put it, “people came to see independence as a sort of punishment that brought nothing but misery, exploitation and dashed hopes”. The familiar from the ordinary Africans, the peasantry in particular, became “Please don’t develop us”! a testimony to the catastrophic betrayal of the values and visions of the nationalist project.

Moreover, the export-led development model that African countries chose to follow began to unravel in the mid-1970s due to several internal and external factors. Even the so-called success stories of Africa of that decade, such as Kenya, the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Ghana, and Zambia, which registered impressive growth until the early 1970s, began to experience huge economic difficulties due to the fluctuations in the prices of primary commodities. For example, between 1975 and 2005, export prices for sub-Saharan Africa were twice as volatile as those of exports from East Asia, and nearly four times more volatile as the exports of developed countries (UNCTAD 2003; Brown and Tiffen 1992). The persistent decline in commodity prices was further aggravated by mounting competition from substitutes such as synthetics for cotton, aluminium for copper, and corn syrup for sugar as a result of technological changes. Attempts by African countries to offset lower world prices by increasing their share of the world market further drove down prices. The problem was further aggravated by escalating, discriminatory tariffs against African products and restricted access to Western markets.

Thus, barely halfway into the second decade of independence, the vision of an independent, prosperous, and united Africa had started to fall apart, and the gulf between the State and the society had widened considerably as the “independence” and “democracy” dividend failed to materialise in real terms. The “national project” was cut short by poor political governance as unaccountable political elites, often supported by competing Western powers, let loose their predatory instincts and indulged in corruption, abuse of office, and repression (Chabal 1986; Rothchild et al 1988). Development which was supposed to lift millions of Africans out of poverty, became a stool for personal accumulation by the elites and their supporters.

Development Strategies for Africa and Lessons from Western Europe, Asia, United States of America and Canada

Development strategy has been defined as an economic concept that defines the priority goals coherently explains how set goals can be realised, identified the policy tools and explores tradeoffs and the time frame (Priceve, 2015). From a more critical point of view this can be seen as general guidelines and not specific measures for targeting development, especially, in the

underdeveloped and developing countries of Africa (Fosu, 2013). Five (5) Strategies for development which aligns with the development requirements of Africa are as follows:

- a. Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA),
- b. Primary Exports and Diversification.
- c. Planned Use of External Aids.
- d. Natural Resources Economics.
- e. Domestic Resource Mobilisation.

Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA)

Africa's pursuit of regional integration has long been regarded as a strategic imperative for achieving sustainable economic growth and development. Despite its rich endowments of natural resources, a burgeoning youthful population and expanding urban markets, Africa remains one of the least integrated continents in terms of trade and economic cooperation. Intra-African trade accounts for less than 20% of total trade compared to 60% in Europe and 40% in North America (UNCTAD, 2021). Against this backdrop, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) launched in January 2021, emerges as a potentially transformative initiative aimed at addressing historical trade barriers, promoting economic diversification, and unlocking the continent's growth potential.

The AFCFTA, established under the auspices of the African Union (AU), seeks to create a single market for goods and services across 54 of the 55 African Union member states, covering a population of over 1.4 billion people and a combined GDP of approximately \$3.4 trillion (World Bank, 2020). Its key objectives include eliminating tariffs on 90% of goods, reducing non-tariff barriers, facilitating the movement of people and capital, and enhancing cooperation and investment, intellectual property, and competition policy. Proponents argue that AFCFTA has the potential to foster structural transformation, industrialisation, and poverty reduction by enabling African countries to trade more with each other rather than relying predominantly on external partners (UNECA, 2020).

However, despite the widespread optimism surrounding the AFCFTA, significant questions remain regarding its viability as a panacea for Africa's longstanding development challenges. While trade liberation can stimulate economic activity, it is not inherently developmental unless accompanied by complementary policies and institutional reforms. Many African countries continue to grapple with weak infrastructure, limited productive capacity, policy incoherence, and governance deficits – factors that may undermine the agreement's effectiveness (Signe and Van Der Ven, 2020). Moreover, disparities in economic size, technological capabilities, and levels of development among African states pose risks of uneven gains and increased inequality unless mechanisms for inclusive implementation are put in place. The theoretical justification for the AFCFTA rests on classical and modern trade theories,

including the principle of comparative advantage and the endogenous growth model. The classical perspective suggests that by specialising in the production of goods in which they hold a comparative advantage, African countries can enhance efficiency and mutually benefit from trade. Endogenous growth theory further posits that trade openness can lead to knowledge spillovers, innovation, and increased productivity, especially when combined with investment in human capital and infrastructure (Romer, 1994). From a political economy lens, regional trade agreements such as AFCFTA can strengthen collective bargaining power, reduce external dependence, and enhance geopolitical leverage for African countries in the global economic system (Mattli, 1999).

Primary Exports and Diversification

In the upsurge of development in the 16th and 17th centuries respectively, the mercantilist countries achieved development through exportation, which was considered a primary means of wealth accumulation and power retention between the then core countries of the world, like Portugal, Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium, and the Soviet Union. This gave rise to the differing ideologies of economic distribution of goods and services, not only within the country but as a criterion which shaped relationships with other countries. These ideologies of capitalism and communism further allowed the Governments of nations to dominate the economics of the world through exportation (Amadi, 2020).

Subsequently, in the modern political economy, countries of the world have leveraged the industrial revolution and their comparative advantage in the manufacturing of specific products and services to dominate international trade. Some of these countries, with no or little abundance of natural resources, have relied on manufacturing and exportation as the mainstay of their economy, hence, recording a consistently favourable balance of trade and payments in the international market, and augmenting economic development in their regions. For example, China has remained the world's largest exporter since 2017 with an estimated export rate of \$2.16 trillion in 2025 (Nan, 2021; Jahn, 2021). Additionally, despite global disruptions of supply chains during the pandemic, the country's balance of trade surplus rose from \$523.99 billion in 2020 to N676.43 billion in 2021, the highest recorded since 1950 (Bala, 2022). These export products range from electronic equipment and machinery to pharmaceuticals and processed foods. Exportation constituted about 20.01% of China's GDP, a rise from 17.65% in 2020; hence the importance the country places on her global relations with other countries of the world in the promotion of export enterprises (Ma, 2022). Other countries like the United States, Germany, Japan, South Korea and France, form the bulwarks of countries that have developed through their comparative advantage in industrialisation, manufacturing and exportation of goods and services. These investments are shown in both the levels of economic growth and Human Capital Development (HCD) in these countries (West & Lansang, 2018).

It is however alarming as most African countries that enjoy an abundance of natural resources have not been able to leverage their advantage to augment production and exportation of goods and services, in comparison to the developed nations mentioned above. For example, according to the World Bank, while African exports of goods and services have seen their fastest growth in the past decade, the volume remains abysmally low as it contributes a paltry 3% of global trade. This is a result of poor digital connectivity, the ineffective fundamental economic legal framework in aspects such as contract enforcement and property rights protection, competitive exchange rates and inflation, infrastructure and the absence of special economic zones according to comparative advantage (World Bank, 2022). For instance, one of the defective exportation strategies about comparative advantage is shown in Nigeria which is advantaged by its strategic location along the Atlantic which also assures access to numerous ports in the Southern region of the country, but concentrates majorly on the ports in Lagos (Apapa Port, TinCan Port, and Lekki Port), which are the inlets of about 97% of goods transported through waterways in Nigeria (Salau, 2017). The neglect of other ports such as Calabar, Delta, Warri, and Port Harcourt Ports, respectively, results not only in unnecessary migration into the Lagos area, but also the overwhelming pressure on the infrastructures, increasing cost of transportation, and losses through accidents and other road hazards in the process of transportation from Lagos to other major cities in Nigeria due to over-dependence (Salau, 2017). Such is similar to the situation in other countries such as South Africa, Djibouti, Kenya, Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire, Cameroon, and Morocco, which depend majorly on the ports in Durban, Djibouti, Mombasa, Tema, Abidjan, Douala, and Tangier, respectively (Signe, 2019).

Another strategy closely linked to exportation is diversification. Diversification in the context of economic development is the shifting or movement away from dependence on a single source of revenue towards multiple sources from a growing range of sectors and markets. Diversification aims to increase productivity, create jobs, and provide the base for sustained poverty-reducing growth (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2022; OECD & World Trade Organisation, 2019). Diversification is necessary because it saves economies from external shocks, in cases where demand for the resources drops. Consequently, countries that have developed through exportation have been radically diversified. These countries do not depend on their natural resources alone or even their comparative advantage but arduously seek innovations and inventions to augment their manufacture and exportation of automobiles shifted its concentration to the production of robotics, optical fibers, biochemistry products and hybrid vehicles, after facing competition from neighbouring China and South Korea. Switzerland and Germany are other diversified economies in the world. It is therefore not surprising that these countries are at the peak of socio-economic development in the world (Routley, 2019).

The Planned Use of External Aids

The patterning and political cum economic arrangements of colonialism in Africa, which were exploitative and thievery in nature, have placed external aid as a means of development on the antagonistic side of the global economy (Rodney, 1972). Historically, the colonialists penetrated the weak and underdeveloped regions of Africa and some parts of America with exploitative interests. However, benefits in the form of “the then sophisticated” tools and machines were used as decoys to distract the attention of the colonies. Till today, it is widely believed by modern political theorists and development scholars that any form of external aid is a move towards advanced economic colonialism termed imperialism (Rodney, 1972:16).

However, external aid has been a strategy for development for most developed and highly developed countries. These countries depended on financial, military, social and humanitarian aid from developed countries to augment their development. Countries like South Korea, Vietnam and Ghana have benefited from the Official Development Assistance (ODA). Even advanced countries like the Republic of Korea have also benefited from countries of the OECD for the erection of physical infrastructures (Fosu, 2013). For example, when the South Korean economy collapsed in 1997, the country was led to accept \$57 billion in aid from the International Monetary Fund, which was reinvested into domestic economic production, manufacturing and consumption, which later resulted in economic resurgence (Kihwan, 2006).

In the same vein, India, Turkey and Afghanistan have remained the highest recipients of external aid. India uses financial external aid in improving infrastructure, agriculture, and energy (USAID, 2021). This explains the need for infrastructure as it mitigates social and financial costs, while also acting as a stand-up foundation for development, attraction of foreign direct inflow, and development of tourism (USAID, 2021).

The positive effects of these external aids in some African countries are obstructed by the fact that African countries spend a larger portion of these aids on debt servicing and recurrent expenditures rather than on public capital investments, and combating health and economic crises, which further compounds heavy financial debts for these countries. For example, a breakdown of data from the Medium Term Expenditure Framework and Fiscal Strategy Paper (MTEF/FSP) shows that Nigeria borrowed N1.3 Trillion in 2021 to service domestic debt and pay salaries (Ibemere, 2021). In the same year, the country’s total public external debt rose to N15.85 Trillion from N12.19 Trillion in the previous year, indicating a 23 percent rise. The country still has over 70 Million people living in poverty in 2022 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020, Ujah, 2022). External aid should be such that is invested in productive ventures which should also have reverberating effects on the borrowing country’s economy.

Consequently, it has been argued by scholars that external aids are more weaknesses than strengths. Such damning weaknesses in Africa include weaning of the recipient country’s

sovereignty in global politics, laxity in internal revenue generation, constant dependence on aids, vulnerability to whims and caprices of donor countries and organisations, and discouragement of local markets (Isobo, 2020).

Natural Resource Economics

Following the principle of comparative advantage, it is anticipatory that some countries are expected to be more developed than others. This development strategy is engineered through the possession of unlimited resources as endowed by nature. Some African countries like Uganda, DR Congo, Nigeria, Mali, Algeria, etc., are repositories of valuable natural resources like petroleum and crude minerals, iron ore, gold, uranium, tin, etc. (World Atlas, 2018; Diallo, 2020). Because of the global demand for these resources for the production of hi-tech and sophisticated machines, tools, and devices, the wielders of these resources are on a higher pedestal of increasing export, and financial accumulation in the international trade market. However, few countries have been able to accelerate development through the trade in natural resources. Aside from African countries, a good example is Malaysia where petroleum revenue had provided an initial source of revenue and which was further redistributed to other sectors of the economy for even development. Other countries like Oman and Bahrain followed suit (Khan, et al, 2021).

An example of a developed country which attained such status through natural resources economics is Australia, which is rich in uranium, gold, coal and iron ore. In 2019, Australian mineral exports (excluding petroleum) amounted to about \$234 billion, which was slightly less than 60% of all export merchandise and 47% of all exported goods and services. The domestic mining industry accounted for 12% of the country's GDP in the same year (Australian Government, 2020). The country further challenged and invested these profits into human capital development in the form of social security, education, housing, and agriculture through welfare capitalism. Other countries like Brazil which is rich in gold, iron and tin have also leveraged this strategy to ensure a form of development (Ennes, 2023).

This is quite different from the practice in most African countries. For example, DR Congo is considered the reservoir of some of the major valuable resources in the world such as uranium, coltan, cobalt, copper, diamond, gold, and tantalum. The country is also reported to hold over \$24 trillion in mineral deposits (International Trade Administration, 2022). As glamorous as the amassment of these resources and minerals may seem, the country is one of the poorest countries in the world with a GNI per capita of \$550 (World Population Review Data, 2022). Furthermore, data shows that about 73% of Congolese live on less than \$1.90 a day (World Population Review Data, 2022; World Bank Data, 2022). The chronic poverty levels in the country are attributed to problems like political instability, civil unrest, corruption, the humanitarian crisis resulting from violence among armed groups, land disputes, sexual

violence and inter-communal conflicts; economic mismanagement, ethnic divisions, poor policy framework, and above all, imperialism (Lendahand, 2022). This is an indication that the accumulation of natural resources without a proper development strategy for exploration and use of the gains from such does not necessarily result in even development. Therefore, just as learnt from the restructuring of the political environment to ensure peace and security which is the primary precursor for development, rebuilding infrastructure, and investment in domestic and international industrialisation, while also exploring aspects of human capital development such as education (ideological and technical education), health, social welfare, and employment provision (Udofa & Ekeuwei, 2023:112).

Nonetheless, the strategy of natural resources economics has been criticised as proffering a monopolistic approach to revenue generation and development, instead of diversification. Hence, monies gotten from the resource sector should be channeled into other sectors of the economy to ensure uniform and reverberating development.

Domestic Resource Mobilisation

Domestic resources mobilisation is a process through which countries raise and spend their revenue (mainly through taxation) to provide for the people. In extension, it is an economic strategy used to accelerate economic growth and development by raising and spending domestic funds for public goods and services like schools, hospitals, clean water, electricity, and other infrastructure (USAID, 2022). Agriculture, local production and infrastructure are the primary measures for increasing domestic revenue. For countries with rural populations, fertile lands and agricultural as well as mineral resources, investments should be directed to these areas to augment the exportation of these products. The Asian Tigers (Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan) all maintained rapid growth from the 1960s through the domestication of their economies by improving agriculture and production through industrialisation (Lin, 2021). For example, Taiwan became an economic powerhouse through improving the small and medium scale enterprises that produced textiles, appliances, footwear, athletics equipment, and in the long-run, semi-conductors, steel, and shipbuilding materials, while also maintaining the import-substitution policy. Notably, export-processing zones were also established to allow foreign companies that were given significant tax breaks and other advantages, but that also trained local labour and generated manpower for local enterprises.

Conclusion

It has been argued in the literature that African regional integration promotes shared economic growth and income convergence among member countries, through direct and indirect channels of increased, intra-regional trade, economic scales, and dissemination of knowledge, technology and structural transformation. This paper contributes to this literature in Africa. The future of development in Africa depends solely on comprehensive and

transformative approach, aimed at addressing key challenges and driving sustainable development on the continent. Such development agenda need to be grounded in line with enhanced global development goals. These goals cover diverse fields such as the provision of employment opportunities, elimination of poverty, strengthening of health and education, and boosting of economic development as well as the sustainability of the environment, among others. The study examines whether previous need for regional integration has played an important role in economic growth and income convergence of member countries in Africa, in order to draw lessons for the process of establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA). To this end, the study estimated two models, one for economic growth and the other for income convergence in the African sample.

The baseline results as well as the multiple robustness tests indicate that regional trade integration promotes economics growth in participating countries. The result is robust to the use for alternative indicators of trade integration, to the time frame of the analysis and to the estimation method particularly, for the sample of Africa at large, including COMESA, SADC, ECOWAS, WAEMU, and SADC. And in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Project, the result shows how necessary it is to design specific programmes (social programmes and training programmes) to support the most vulnerable economies in order to protect their sectors that will suffer negative shocks when the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA) comes into force. The result also shows that regional integration offers substantial gains, whose full absorption is conditional on the implementation of comprehensive structural reforms aimed at diversifying economies and increasing their productivity.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following are the recommendations:

1. Development strategies adopted by African countries should be specific. Two or more development plans should not run concurrently, especially when they are similar in scope, objectives and targets. African countries should leverage their comparative advantage in natural resources to boost primary exportation and domestic revenue generation.
2. African countries should diversify their economies despite their comparative advantage in the possession of natural resources. They should seek technological innovations to augment areas of little or no comparative advantage. External aid should be such that is not characterised by harsh and regressive conditions for underdeveloped and developing countries of Africa.
3. The governments of African countries should encourage and take measures to ensure the production and consumption of locally made goods. A more digital, fair, transparent and accountable tax administration system should be adopted by African countries to ensure equitable tax revenue generation and resolve the problem of tax evasion

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