

## **The Yearnings of Africans for Integration: The Need for Policy Speediness<sup>i</sup>**

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The paper concurs with the thrust of the theme for the Malabo conference in welcoming ideas on how the integration of Africa can be strengthened or accomplished, and correspondingly finds little use in some economic and political findings which conclude that African societies are rather too disparate and diverse for integration. Drawing from existing historical policy, cultural and charter documents of the African Union and its regional bodies, we find that Africans and African countries have determined that they needed: “An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena.”<sup>iii</sup> This vision itself is a logical conclusion to a long match by the continent, on the multiple planes of institutional evolution, historical inevitability, spatial and environmental convergences, as well as unstoppable human yearnings for unity and peace.

As an example, the establishment of and functioning of the eight regional economic communities, RECs, on the continent, of which ECOWAS is an integral part, augurs well for the realization of the planned merger of the monetary unions of the incipient West African Monetary Zone, WAMZ, and the erstwhile Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa, UEMOA. The paper opines that it is part of a thinking gap that exists between economic theory, on the one hand, and the institutional background from which policies are formulated in Africa, on the other, that some African economists and policy researchers hinge the progress of the integration of Africa on some stylized macro economic convergence and stability criteria. Our investigation clearly shows that if attempts to integrate were primarily based on a set of stylized convergence alone, there would be no reason for the 27 member-state European Union, the eleven member Euro countries or in fact, the 50 mainland United States of America to exist.

We show that economic research findings conclude that these criteria have never been met, and they probably would remain elusive for decades to come for African countries. What is not elusive, however, is that, the Organization of African Unity, OAU, was established in part, to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid, and the African Union, AU, seeks to accelerate the process of integration of Africa.

The paper focuses on the need for speedy labor market integration, realizing that the free movement of persons and workers is at the heart of current efforts at regional integration on the continent. Such policies and practices dovetail with the clear and resounding yearnings and aspirations of Africans and their governments to forge an economic community (Treaty of Lagos, 1991), and a political, social and economic union (Sirte Declaration, 1999).

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<sup>iii</sup> *African Union: A United and Strong Africa*. <http://www.au.int/en/about/nutshell>. retrieved 04/28/2011