Regional Integration in Africa
Comparative study with Europe, Asia and Latin America

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Introduction:

Regional integration is a process which aims to enhance cooperation between countries in a specific area of the world. Integration process depends on making arrangements via rules and institutions to regulate it and achieve its goal. Regional integration often begins with economic integration which starts with free trade area and end with complete economic community. Integration process is voluntary process and it started to spread widely from the mid of the last century in the Western Europe.

After the independence of most of African countries in 1960s it was suffering from a lot of social, economic and political problems after along colonialism. Most of governments after independence put plans to solve these problems and to make economic development and reach democracy and most of them couldn't achieve it for many internal and external reasons.

African countries began to think in integration to solve its problems and it began with African unity organization which was replaced by AU in 2002. Other economic organization began to appear in each region like SADC in south and ECOWAS in the west.

These papers discuss the status of integration process in Africa and compare it with integration process in other areas-Europe, Asia & Latin America- to benefit from their experiences. European Model will be specially focused on cause it is the most successful integration model till now on the continental level.

This paper seeks to answer a main question which is: how can Africa benefit from other integration model?. To answer this question the paper will be divided to 4 points:

1. The status of integration in Africa.
2. EU model vs. AU model.
3. Integration in Asia and Latin America.
4. Conclusion.
First: Status of regional integration in Africa

After independence African countries faced a lot of problems but the two main problems were economic problems and conflicts as most of them suffered from intra stat conflict and inter stat conflict. Dividing Africa into small entities cut cross ethnicities and physical attributes in addition to bad transportation and communications between these entities led to make no common sense of cooperation between them\(^1\). According to the conditions after independence African countries weren't able to solve there problems alone and most of them continued depending on there pervious colonial stat instead of depending on their neighbors. Although some leaders at 1960s like Nekromah and Abd al Naser began to think in cooperation with each other to solve there problems especially in the global context of cold war and the beginning was the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.

OAU was promoting development and unity between member states by enhancing cooperation and integration between them in economic, diplomatic, political and social level. In 1997 OAU member states established African Economic Community (AEC) and by 2002 African Union (AU) replaced OAU and began to complete what OAU began in the field of integration\(^2\). AU recognized eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as representatives of regional association of African states and actually these RECs referred to 1990s.

The RECs are:
- Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)
- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)
- East African Community (EAC)
- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)\(^3\)

Every one of these organizations plays an important role in the economic level its region and in the last few years it began to play a role

\(^1\)Woodrow Wilson international center, *Africa regional and sub regional organizations: assessing their contributions to economic integrations and conflict management* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson international center the Africa program, 2008), p. 4
\(^3\)http://www.claiminghumanrights.org/african_recs.html,” regional economic communities in Africa”, last access in 28-8-2013at 8:15 pm.
in solving conflicts and promoting for human rights especially with the evolving role of AU in it. ECOWAS, EAC and SADC have sub-regional courts of justice to pronounce human rights violations.

Although these RECs were established basically to enhance economic integration but it now playing important role in political relations between member states and in solving there problems. One of the main problems in these communities is the possibility of overlap as many countries are members in several RECs.¹

A- Objectives of regional integration in Africa:

From the early beginning of regional integration in Africa there were main objectives to it which are:

- Promoting common market as beginning to complete regional integration with a unified currency.
- Improving regional infrastructure.
- Reaching regional governance.

These objectives improved to be compatible with the changes in the global context especially after the establishing of AU. In addition, the calls for regional solving for problems after the failure of US intervention in many crises like Somalia crisis².

Now regional integration for African countries become the main tool to overcome there problems as it introduce a lot of chances but still faces many challenges.

B-Regional integration between challenges and chances:

Although African countries made a progress in integration process but it still faces many challenges that prevent African countries from gaining the benefits of this progress.

1- challenges:

1. Long period of political instability and intrastate violence.
2. Some African leaders still don’t show the necessary of regional integration.
3. Infrastructure problems.
4. Lack of mechanisms that ensure the fair distribution of organizational benefits.

¹ Idem.
²Woodrow Wilson, op.cit., Pp.6-7.
5. Lack of public awareness of the importance of the regional integration in their economics.
6. Shortage of investments of the private sector in their neighbor countries.
7. Most of African countries depend on exporting limited kinds of crops or goods.¹
8. The vulnerability of African countries to economic and political shocks of major powers².
9. The role of major powers in Africa which seek to save its interests in some situations it impedes the process of integration³.

Theses are the general challenges that face regional organizations in Africa but it should be taken in consideration that regional organizations in Africa aren’t working in continental level but in each area separately like SADC in South Africa and ECOWAS in West Africa.

However, the integration still provide a lot of chances especially if it is applied on continental level so African leaders and regional organizations are responsible for introducing a clear strategic plan of the structure and mechanisms of integration between them and how to overcome these challenges and pick up chances.

2-Chances:

In the economic level common market is considered important tool to reach the complete integration and organizations like ECOWAS is already using it in its area and it led to facilitate the movement of goods, services and labors and it may reach to unified currency.

In the political side, AU created a common political space between African countries which may lead to enhance cooperation and overcome their inherited problems and conflicts from the colonialism and push the democracy process in these countries.

In the field of security and peace making, AU improved some mechanisms to solve inter and intra state conflicts like a diplomatic prevention mechanism and African forces which playing important role in Somalia crisis through its commission there which called AMISOM ⁴.

¹Ibid. p.13.
²Ibid. p.30.
³Ibid. p.8.
⁴Ibid, p.22.
Security problems is one of the most obstacles that faces African countries in general and the process of integration between them as the common between African countries that insecurity and instability lead to impede their development process and in some cases it turns some of them to failed states. African conflict mechanisms are particularly advanced in comparison of Latin America which means that with more cooperation and coordination between countries that may help to end their conflicts regionally without intervention from other international powers.

Finally it should be taken in consideration that regional integration depends basically on economic interests and political will of the leaders.

**Second: EU vs. AU:**

EU now is considered a model for continental integration and in the recent few years EU started to help other region in establishing regional institutions through a group of agreements with these regions like Barcelona process.\(^1\) It doesn't mean to export the European model as a total but only take the lessons from it as a flagship model because the context in Africa is different from European one.

This part will discuss EU model in a comparison with AU model as both of them are regional institutions works in continental level which enable us to show the problems that faces AU and how to learn from EU in solving it. According to this idea this section will discuss similarities and differences through three main points:

1. Context and historical background.
2. The structure of the organization.
3. Evaluation to the integration process.

1- Context and historical background:

A- EU:

After the Second World War European countries were seeking to peace and stability and they believed in achieving it through unity and integration between them. The begging was is 1947 by Marshall Plan which led to establishing the Organization for European Economic Recovery Cooperation (OEEC). The early European community began

\(^1\) Sanossi Bilal, " Can the EU be a model of regional integration ? risks and challenges for developing countries ", *paper presented to second international conference on globalization* (Dakar : European Centre for Development Policy Management,29-31 August2010), p.3.
with six countries only as there were countries that reject the idea of integration to save its sovereignty (eastern block in the cold war era)\(^1\).

In 1957 the Rome treaty was signed to create the European Economic Community (EEC) which led after that to establish European common market. The period between 1950s and 1970s witnessed a lot of progress in the integration process as many countries joined (EEC). In 1992 Maastricht treaty was signed and this established the EU to place EEC and it created anew political dimension to the integration process. By 2002 EU became more close to the complete unity by introducing the Euro as a unified currency to EU countries with the free movement of goods, services and people between them\(^2\).

B- AU:

The beginning in Africa was through Pan-Africanism movement which was seeking to restore African dignity and unity between Africa and its diasporas. It followed by establishing the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 through political will of some African leaders at that time especially Nkrumah, Nerery and Abd al Nasser. They argued that cooperation between countries by gathering them in OAU is the only way to develop and ending the colonial dependency. Most of African countries at that time was new independent and was seeking to save their complete sovereignty so they prohibited the OAU from interfering in the internal affairs of the stats which weaken its performance in solving conflicts and in unifying all countries in one direction especially in economic affairs\(^3\).

The failure of OAU in fulfilling its promises led to establishing AU to replace it officially in 2002 in Durban in South Africa. The global and regional context was changed after the Soviet Union collapse and also the priorities of African countries changed and they became more flexible in the idea of integration and sovereignty. It began also to depend on capitalism mechanisms in economic development process and give more attention to human rights and democracy which created new dimensions to the integration process through AU about political and security affairs\(^4\).

From the previous brief to historical context to EU and AU shows that the beginning of integration was different as in their reasons of

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2 Ibid, p.4-5.
3 Ibid, p.3.
4 Idem.
integration and the progress in it as in European case it reach to the current status gradually but in African case it didn’t happen in the same norm and wasn’t effective for along period. However the differences between them, they seemed to face the same problem in the beginning which was saving the state sovereignty which European community had the ability to pass it while Africa couldn’t.

2- The structure of the organization:
AU was built upon the EU model with simple differences as the table below shows:

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<td>- European Council (Heads of States)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Council of the European Union (Ministers)</td>
<td>- Executive Council (Ministers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- European Parliament</td>
<td>- Pan-African Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- European Court of Justice</td>
<td>- African Court of Justice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Court of Auditors</td>
<td>- Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- European Commission</td>
<td>- Permanent Representatives Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Committee of Regions</td>
<td>- Specialized Technical Committees</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Committee of Permanent Representatives</td>
<td>- Economic, Social and Cultural Council(ECOSOCC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- European Central Bank</td>
<td>- Financial Institutions</td>
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<td>- European Investment Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Other Offices and Agencies</td>
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Differences in structure don't matter if the departments of the organization working sufficiently and that's why EU is a successful model but in case of AU some administration inside it still disabled to do its duties sufficiently.

3- Evaluation:

Being the most successful model in integration didn't come by a coincidence but EU reached it through good planning, clear goals and political will of the member states. EU began with economic goals through the creation of a single market at the beginning to reach to unified currency at the end. Through seeking to the economic integration member states relations became stronger and integration gain new dimensions like political interests and recently they began to give more attention to environment issues and public health problems. One of the most important achievements that EU facilitates movement of citizens between member states.

On the other side, AU still has a lot to do to reach the required level of integration. According to economic measurements, Africa still have low level of regional trade and considered a marginal player also in the world trade however the statistics indicates that there is improvement in African trade performance as it was $32 billion in 2000 and $130 billion in 2011. the figure below show this improvement from 1995-2011:

Figure (1)
Intra trade in Africa


Other indicators like investment rate and have the same case only little progress. On the other side, the AU made progress in the security process and efforts in peace building through troop missions to conflict areas like Darfur and Somalia. AU doesn't reach yet the required level of free trade between its members and there are a lot of obstacles in facilitating the movement of citizens between African states however organization like ECOWAS and SADC made a progress in its regions to facilitate movements between them.

**Third: Integration in Asia and Latin America:**

This section discuss the status of integration in Asia and Latin America to introduce different integration experiences to show how different context may affect the integration and to learn from them how they deal with their challenges.

1- **Asian Integration Model:**

   **A- context and historical background:**

   Asian integration experience is differ from EU & AU as it didn’t depend on building institutional frame to the integration process.¹ It isn’t a weakness point in Asian integration in the continental level but organizations and forums in Asia (APEC, ASEAN, ARF and others) are already playing a role fostering trans-national networks, they have yet to become policy-making institutions.²

   In contrast European case, there wasn’t clear Asian identity in the begging cause of many reasons like lack of clearly defined borders as well as common culture and religion. In 1990s hopes were raised that economic and political integration would help Asia to develop its own identity by overcoming the legacy of colonialism.³ Asian financial crisis in 1997-1998 was a chance to foster integration process as Asian leaders realized that absence of transparency and accountability in integration process is a reason for this crisis.⁴

   ASEAN model of integration encouraged Asian nations to implement free trade agreements exclude china until the recent few years as in the

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¹ Axel Berkofsky, “Comparing EU and Asian integration process – The EU a role model for Asia?”, in EPC issue papers (Brussels: European Policy Center, issue 23, 2005), p. 8
² Idem.
⁴ Idem.
era of 1980s Japan was the engine of integration process but recently China emerged in creating East Asian Economic Community by 2020. Unlike France and Germany in Europe, Japan and China couldn’t solve their problems which affected the integration process.¹

B- Obstacles and achievements:

Like integration process in the other regions of the world in Asia it faces some of obstacles according to the pervious context like:

1. Cultural heterogeneity between Asian countries.
2. Gap in GDP per capita between Asian countries.
3. The effect of colonialism era in south East Asia in the norm of integration in this area and the shape of democratic structure.
4. The principle of non interference in other countries affairs is hindering reaching the required level of integration special in political relations.²

However these obstacles Asian countries, it made progress in the economic integration through bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements but it still limited in the political relations however they began to give more attention to security issues specially China³.

Integration process in Asia still need to do more to reach to continental level of integration as it happens between different levels of economics and culture which requires sophisticated coordination and common understanding of priorities from integration.

C-Evaluation:

Asian integration process is completely different from European and African process in its beginning, motives and its strategies in integration. Asian integration process started without institutional frame but it began with bilateral and multilateral agreements which approved that integration process basis at first on its members will and common interests before establishing institutional frame.

¹ Ibid, p.15.
³ Ibid, p.11.
Asian and African Context have some commons like a colonial history and differences between countries in culture and heterogeneity. In 1990s Asian countries began to think in integration as a tool to create common identity. In Africa regional organization also declared many times that it seeks to unity and to find a common identity but actually till now it can't achieve it although it has institutional frame similar to EU in its structure.

ASEAN is important model of regional organization which began to achieve its goals gradually and it's expected to play important role on the regional level in the near future. The importance also of this model that all member states in it are developing countries- like African countries- and they began to achieve their goals through it.

2- Integration in Latin America:

A- Historical back ground:

The begging of regional integration in Latin America back to 1960s with the first free trade association (LAFTA). The democratic transitional in 1980s affected the integration process which was affected by the success of European model. The begging was establishing Latin America Free Market Association. In 1990s they established new regional institution called MERCOSUR which was a result from two previous attempts-the Andean Community of Nations and the Central American Common Market- and these three institutions have a different vision but the common between them is they differ from regional theories of EU model.¹

MERCOSUR in Latin America like ASEAN in Asia has a special position. MERCOSUR’s main objective is to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of the all member economies by opening markets, promoting economic development in the framework of a globalized world, improving infrastructure and communications, making better use of available resources, preserving the environment, generating industrial complementation and coordinating macroeconomic polices. Achieving a common external tariff is one of the main goals of the block².

There are other regional institutions beside MERCOSUR but it has special position in Latin America due to its strategy and achievements and its unique relations with EU and other integration groups around the world.

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²http://en.mercopress.com/about-mercosur, last accessed in 27-8-2013 at 8 pm.
B- Challenges and achievements:

MERCOSUR is still completing its internal institutions and the performance is still slow and faces many challenges like:
1. The idea of sovereignty and special interests of each state.
2. The weakness of central institution which has the responsibility to regulate the process and take the decisions.
3. The lack of shared vision between members.
4. Lack of policy coordination and implementation.
5. Weak political commitment.

However it still facing these challenges it began to make achievements like:
1. In the summit of 2010 it took a decision to remove taxation and tariffs which considered a step on the right way.
2. Expanding membership will lead to enhancing relations between its members.
3. MERCOSUR played very important role in reducing the hostility between the two leading regional rivals Brazil and Argentina.

C- Evaluation:

Although Latin America integration experience back to more than 50 years but it is walking slowly on the road of integration. However it considered a promising model of integration as it actually began to take the right steps to overcome its challenges even if it takes it slowly. Like other regions, Latin America has its special historical experience which affects its current status in general.

2 Ibid, p.234.
3 Ibid, p.245.
4 Ibid, p.234
Conclusion:

This paper studied the status of integration in Africa, Europe, Asia and Latin America with aim to gain experiences from other cases. After showing the integration status in Africa, I discussed European model with some details as it become a reference model of integration then discussing Asian and Latin America cases as promising models that may Africa benefit from. It doesn’t mean that African integration process is failed but in contrast it began to make little progress on continental level and need to do more and that is why we need to learn from others achievements.

Through the studying of general integration status of these regions I found remarkable points and some lessons that African leaders and institutions should take in their consideration:

1. Historical experience in every region affects the integration process in it.
2. The political will and common interests are corner stones for regional integration.
3. Institutional frame is necessary but with a specific conditions like clear goals, common vision of member states and real grantees to equal distribution of benefits and transparency.
4. Regional work shouldn’t be isolated from other regions of the world.
5. Regional integration isn't a goal in itself but it is tool to reach economic prosper, political balance and cooperation and achieving peace and stability.
6. Africa, Asia and Latin America have some similarities like:
   - Most of their countries are developing countries.
   - They look to EU model as a reference model of integration
   - They began their trails of integration from the mid of last century but they are still in the beginning of it.
   - They have general common goals from integration like is identity, economic prosperity and peace building.

Finally, Africa has many regional organizations that actually began to make remarkable progress Like SADC and ECOWAS but it need to work together with coordination with AU to unify their goals and vision and to prevent overlapping of membership.
References

1- Books:


2- Periodical:


3- Report:


4- Papers:


2. Bilal, Sanossi, "Can the EU be a model of regional integration? Risks and challenges for developing countries ", paper presented to second international conference on globalization (Dakar: European Centre for Development Policy Management, 29-31 August2010).
5- International Web Resources:
