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African Political Directions and the Organization of African Unity.  
by  
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## INTRODUCTION

It is twenty years since the Organization of African Unity was established. Within this period the continent has been transformed greatly compared with the period of over Seventy years in which Africa was under colonialism.

The OAU has been a source of inspiration for the African peoples and is a vehicle for the strategy of the continent's destiny.

Through and within the framework of the Organization of African Unity member states have mobilised themselves in the political, economic, social, cultural and scientific fields. Certain goals have been achieved in these areas. Others have not been achieved for a number of reasons. Nevertheless OAU member States continue to demonstrate their greater zeal, mechanical solidarity and determination to work towards the attainment of these goals within their capability. This of course entails alot of political will by each OAU member state.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

The Organization of African Unity is a regional institution established within the context of Article 52 of the United Nations which states that:-

Nothing in the present charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintanance of international peace and security as appropriate for the regional action, provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

The members of the United Nations entering into such arrangements or constituting such agencies shall make every effort to achieve pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies before referring them to the Security Council.

The Security Council shall encourage the development of pacific settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or by such regional agencies either on the initiative of states concerned or by reference from the Security Council.....

Thus, the Heads of State and Government who established the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa on 25th May 1963 did so in line with Article 52 of the United Nations.

They pledged to see an African body that depicts the aspirations of the African peoples'.

The purposes and principles of the OAU are set out in Articles II and III of the Organization's Charter. They are based on sovereign equality of all member states with wide ranging scope embracing political, economic, scientific, social, cultural, sanitation and defence issues.

#### Institutions of the OAU

The main institutions of the Organization of African Unity are:-

(a) The Assembly of Heads of State and Government

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government is the Supreme Organ of the OAU. It convenes once a year in an Ordinary Session.

In case of pressing issues an Extra-Ordinary Session may be called for. Each member state has one vote. Approval of resolutions is by two thirds majority. Or in the usual African fashion a resolution may be approved by acclamation.

(b) The Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers is composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs or their representatives. The Council holds two Sessions each year, in February and before the Summit.

The February Session is devoted to the OAU Budget and other administrative matters. Certain political and economic matters are also discussed.

An Extra Ordinary Session of the Council can be convened at the instruction of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Voting in the Council is by simple majority.

The Council is supported by all Heads of African Mission resident in Addis Ababa. They form the Advisory Committee on Budgetary, Administrative and Financial Matters. They also serve on other political, economic, social Committees and Commissions.

In essence they work hand in hand with the General Secretariat.

(c) The General Secretariat

The General Secretariat is headed by the Secretary General elected by the Assembly. At the time the Organization was established, the Secretary General was limited to the supervision of the Secretariat. In the late 1970's the Charter was amended to empower the Secretary General to take certain political and economic decisions in consultation with member states.

Since the office of the Secretary General has played a number of mediatory roles.

The Secretary General is supported by five Assistant Secretaries-General each in charge of political, economic, Administration, Finance, Social and cultural matters. The Assistant Secretaries General are elected on regional basis ie north, west, east, central and south.

(d) The Liberation Committee

The Liberation Committee is a branch of the Political Department. It has its Headquarters in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It plays a crucial role in the implementation of resolutions pertaining to Liberation struggle in those countries where independence has not been achieved. Assistance to Liberation Movements fighting for freedom in Namibia and South Africa is channelled through the Liberation Committee.

(e) The Commission of Arbitration and Conciliation

The Commission of Arbitration and Conciliation is entrusted with the role of mediating between two or more states in dispute.

(f) Specialised Commissions

The OAU has three Specialised Commissions namely:-

(i) Economic and Social Commission

(ii) Educational, Scientific, Cultural and Health Commissions.

(iii) Defence Commissions.

Political directions within the Organization of African Unity

Talking of political directions within the OAU entails an enumeration of events which have taken place in Africa since the Organization's inception in 1963.

It encompasses political, economic, social and cultural spheres vis a vis the African states' effort to achieve these goals in line with their aspirations. It also becomes inevitable to relate the situation to the legacy of colonialism.

In 1963 only thirty one African countries were independent. In line with the Charter - that is absolute dedication to the emancipation of African territories still dependent; the independent countries worked for the attainment of independence by the territories which were still under colonialism. They provided financial, moral and material support to freedom fighters. A number of countries became independent in 1960's and 70's. The process is not yet completed. There is the problem of Namibia's independence and the dismantling of the system of apartheid in South Africa.

All African OAU member states contribute to the Liberation Committee Fund to assist Liberation Movements of Namibia and South Africa in their struggle for freedom and justice.

OAU member states also assist Front Line States in rehabilitating refugees within their boundaries who have fled from the apartheid apparatus in South Africa and Namibia. There is also burden sharing regarding other refugees or displaced persons by all African States.

The OAU has also been instrumental in bringing understanding between two or more sister states in the continent which have had disputes.

The main disputes centre either on boundaries or purely differences in ideologies.

As regards boundaries drawn by various colonial administrations, the OAU member states are bound by the Charter to respect them as they are. The good offices of the Chairman and the Secretary General in conjunction with the Commission of Arbitration and Conciliation have played major roles in trying to solve this problem in areas where frontier disputes obtain.

As far as differences in ideology is concerned, one has to accept that where there are people, views vary. It is also true that there is external influence from outside the continent mainly a tug of war between the east and west.

Whatever the case may be OAU member states by and large continue to work in unison within the framework of the Organization.

For more than a decade the global economic situation has been bad. The effects of poor economic performance has been more devastating in Africa because of declining prices of most of the states' products which are usually primary. In addition the continent has constantly been hit by disasters such as drought and famine.

The OAU member States have not just sat down lamenting about their plight. They have addressed themselves to the economic crisis and sought ways to improve the situation both at national and continental levels. Unfortunately their resources are very limited. One third of the poorest countries of the world are in Africa.

Towards the end of the 1970's African States together with the United Nations Commission for Africa nominated experts to map out development strategy for Africa in all fields (ie economic, scientific, social, cultural, education and research.



At its 16th Ordinary Session held in Monrovia, Liberia, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the recommendations of the experts on the need to examine economic problems of Africa.

Thus in 1980 an economic Summit was held in Lagos, Nigeria. The decisions taken at this Summit now constitute the Lagos Plan of Action for economic development of Africa for the period 1980 to the year 2000.

Within the Lagos Plan of Action the African States have sought to:-

- (a) promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of economies with a view to achieving an increasing measure of self sufficiency and self sustainment.
- (b) promote economic integration of the African region.
- (c) give an important place to the field of human resources by eliminating illiteracy.
- (d) put science and technology in the service.
- (e) step up food production.
- (f) implement programmes of the United Nations transport and communications Decade for Africa.
- (g) realise sub region and regional internally located industrial strategy.
- (h) co-operate in the field of natural resources control, exploration, extraction and use of development of African countries' economies for the benefit of the people and set up institutions to achieve these purposes.
- (i) develop indigenous entrepreneurship, technical manpower and technological abilities both at national and continental levels.

- (j) co-operate in the preservation of natural environment.
- (k) to ensure that development policies reflect adequately the social and cultural values in order to reinforce cultural identity.
- (l) to formulate elaborate national plans to include studies and measures aimed at achieving rapid socio-economic transformation of African States.

Since the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, African states have within their limits strived to integrate their economies. Subregional and regional institutions have been established to serve as vehicles of development. Intra African trade has been encouraged.

There are of course a lot of problems in executing projects due to fiscal constraints. Some commentators of African development have been quick to jump on the conclusions that economic development in Africa cannot take off the ground because of political interference. This contention is unfortunate. African countries have learnt a lot from past experience so much so that most countries have given experts enough room to explore the pros and cons relating to development.

It should also be borne in mind that the OAU, like any other international organisation is a Federation of States which is a product of political decisions. So are regional and subregional institutions. Each member country has the right to participate in the decision making of the running of the organizations. This characteristic is not peculiar to the OAU alone. It obtains in all international bodies. It should be hammered home that economic development is to some extent the result of political decisions.

Politics or change of governments cannot be singled out as the only draw back on Africa's economic development. It is because of the complexity of the problem that African countries cannot achieve the projected goals. Colonial legacy, catastrophies such as droughts are to name a few impediments to economic sustainment in Africa.

President Diop of Senegal, then Chairman of the OAU made it clear when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly Special Session for Africa a few months ago. He told the world body that African countries have diagnosed most of their problems which retard development. The main problems are resources which to some extent is not of the countries' own making.

#### The OAU and the rest of the world

It is no doubt the organization of African Unity has had alot of impact on world affairs since its inception. To quote one of Africa's statesman, the voice of Africa is echoing from north to south and east to west.

At the level of the United Nations African countries play a major role either as a regional group or within the Group of 77.

Some people have argued that Africa and other third world countries can force resolutions through at all multilateral fora and nothing materialises.

But it cannot be denied that the emergency of new states in Africa in the 1960's changed the United Nations greatly.

It is through the effort of the African states and other members of the Group of 77 that decolonization was

expedited and other issues within the context of North-South negotiations have been partially resolved.

African states have been in the fore front to denounce the system of apartheid in South Africa and Pretoria's illegal occupation of Namibia in defiance of world opinion. The OAU states are committed to see that the draconian legislation in South Africa is brought down with the help of the international Community. So is the need to see that Namibia gains independence.

It is indeed gratifying that Australia has taken a positive stance vis a vis sanctions against South Africa in order to force the Botha regimen abandon the abominable system of apartheid.

Australia has given assistance to the needy in Africa and has contributed to regional institutions such as SADCC so have NGO's. African states are very grateful indeed.

Besides enjoying good relations with other countries all over the world, African states co-operate with a number of other regional groupings such as the European Economic Community within the framework of the Lome Convention, Afro-Asian solidarity, the Afro-Arab co-operation ASEAN and so on.

In order to co-ordinate all these activities the Organization of African Unity has offices in New York, Geneva and Brussels .

#### CONSLUSION

Twenty three years in which the OAU has been in existence might seem long. It is certainly not taking

into account of the long period industrialised nations took to be what they are today. Let alone that Africa still has the scars impinged on her by colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism.

Since 1963 the Organization of African Unity has been the driving force in the direction of African affairs. Through the OAU member states have singularly and severally mapped out their political, economic, social and cultural strategies with a view to develop the continent. Alas, the present global economic situation coupled with natural catastrophies has had great impact on Africa. Despite all this the African countries still strive to improve the situation within their limited means.

Equally the OAU is very active in world affairs. It is an effective lobby Group at the level of the United Nations and has good relations with the rest of the world.

In all the OAU member states relentlessly seek to promote good understanding with the rest of the world.

These then are the directions of the African countries within the aegis of the Organization of African Unity.



ANNEX

Member States of the OAU

Algeria +	Mali +
Angola	Mauritania +
Benin +	Mauritius
Botswana	+
Burundi +	Mozambique
Burkina Faso +	Niger +
Cameroon +	Nigeria +
Cape Verde	Rwanda +
Central African Republic +	Sao Tome and Principe
Chad +	Senegal +
Comoros	Seychelles
Congo +	Sierra Leone +
Djibouti	Somalia +
Egypt +	Sudan +
Equatorial Guinea	Swaziland
Ethiopia +	Tanzania +
Gambia	Togo +
Gabon +	Tunisia +
Ghana +	Uganda +
Guinea +	Zaire +
Guinea Bissau	Zambia
Ivory Coast +	Zimbabwe
Kenya	
Lesotho	
Liberia +	
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya +	
Madagascar +	
Malawi	(+ Founding Member)

OAU Offices in Africa

Headquarters

Addis Ababa - Ethiopia

Liberation Committe Offices

Dar es salaam

Lusaka

Luanda

Maputo

Scientific, Social & Cultural Offices

Nairobi

Lagos

Yaunde

Niamy

Tunis

Bangui

Kampala

OAU Offices Outside Africa

New York

Geneva

Brussels

Financial Institution

African Development Bank

(other countries outside Africa have become members of recent)

Regional and Sub regional institions

Economic Community of West African States

Kageria Basin

Preferential Trade Area for East and Southern African States

Southern African Development Co-ordinating Conference

Arab League (Afro-Arab Co-operation offices)