Intergovernmental Authority on Development & East African Community: Viability of Merger

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Abstract

Constituting a regional economic community has immense benefits to the societies within a given region. Regional Economic Communities (RECs) would play an inevitable role in increasing people to people interactions and gradually forging interdependence in different sectors, which used to limit government to government. Often, such bondage within given RECs among states in general and societies in particular paves the way to address the ills of the respective societies in a collaborative manner. In fact, it is plausible to argue that there is a conducive environment to constitute and build up RECs in the present globalizing world. Parallel to the global trend, Pan Africanism promotes the integration of economies and people under RECs. The establishment and development of RECs in different parts of Africa is among other things tantamount to laying the founding blocs for the aspired United States of Africa. Merging the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and East African Community (EAC) into the larger East African Community like it has been happening in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) is a novel idea. Such a merger would serve as a vehicle for a prosperous and peaceful larger East African Community and consequently would facilitate the integration of Africa. Given that, the research is designed to scrutinize the viability of a merger between the IGAD and EAC. To meet this objective, the study has set out two basic research questions: What are the viable conditions to merge the IGAD and EAC? What are the possible challenges to the merger of the IGAD and EAC? Finally, the study, to achieve its objective, employed a qualitative research approach which used a wider review of secondary data.

Keywords: *merger, RECs, IGAD, EAC, cooperation, opportunities, challenges.*

Background: Regional Economic Integration

Regional economic integration is as old as the independence of African states (Jiboku,2019). Surprisingly, the East African Community (EAC) was constituted before 1960, which is referred to as the African independence year. Since the 1960s, a significant number of African leaders have called for one Africa. The first generation leaders' regional integration visions were primarily motivated by political unification, which stimulated economic integrations. Later, the idea of political unification was accompanied by the economic policy of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI). Accordingly, the African ISI policy envisioned freeing Africans from their economic dependence on the developed world, which compromised political independence. With that objective, sub-regional integrations were proposed, but failed (Kritzinger-van Niekerk, 2004).

In fact, from the start, a qualified number of reasons were cited for the breakdown of Africa's integrations. Largely, the presence of too small markets, a lack of commitment from governments, exclusionary policies that discouraged the private sectors, and protectionism were identified as causes for the failures. Following the ISI's failure, African's second generation in the 1980s gradually resorted to a policy of open doors. Among other things, the drive for regional integration became central within the open door policy (Kritzinger-van Niekerk, 2004).

The road to economic integration takes multiple paths and phases. Consequently, regional economic groupings take variant institutional organizations as well as objectives. The grouping ranges from simple cooperation like the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to the well solidified Economic Union and in an exceptional case, it takes to the Political Union (Abdi & Seid, 2013; Thisen,1989). Often, regional economic integration would set up by two or more states initiatives. Depending on the benefits drawn from such co-operation, the integration gradually grows into a higher one (Gessesse, 1996; Tadesse, 2004; Thisen, 1989).

Today, the idea of regional integration has received wide currency throughout the world. That is why most of states become members of one or more regional economic communities (Abdi & Seid, 2013; Jiboku,2019).

Legal and Practical Basis for IGAD-EAC Integration

Promotions of regional integration are at the heart of economic and political objectives of Africa. In view of this, it is relevant to discuss rationales, experiences and legal backings of an IGAD and EAC merger. So, this paper precisely highlights these points.

Regional integration has become African's question. African leaders in numerous forums have underlined the importance of greater coordination and harmonization among regional economic blocs. In that regard, the Abuja 1991 Treaty took the lead. The Abuja Treaty laid a foundation for the establishment of the African Economic Community. Based on the Abuja Treaty, the Constitutive Act of the African Union of 2000 planned to employ regional economic blocs as its building pillars for the envisioned United States of Africa (ECA & AU, 2006; Jiboku,2019; Maruping, 2005).

In addition to the Abuja Treaty and the Constitutive Act of the AU, crafting regional economic integration, as well as different international economic groupings, has been something preferred by donors. So, establishing economic blocs, notably stronger ones, has become attractive everywhere (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014).

Among the regional economic groupings that are assumed to be the founding blocs of the AU, one is the bigger Eastern African Economic Community (IGAD & EAC, 2013 In this region, the larger East Africa is a home for about 26% of Africa's population, comprises 22% of Africa's land mass, and 16% of the combined African GDP in 2009 (AfDB & ADF, 2010). In this envisioned region, there are two blocs, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), respectively. Geographically, the region encompasses

Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan (which includes South Sudan), Tanzania and Uganda (AfDB & ADF, 2010). Among the listed states, Comoros and Seychelles are neither in the IGAD nor EAC membership lists, while the newly born South Sudan has joined the IGAD soon after its independence on 9 July 2011 (Berhe, 2014; IGAD & EAC, 2013).

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was established in 1986 using the name Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) with six member states: Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda (Clapham, 2017; Berhe, 2014; Saleem,1992). IGADD was established with objectives of addressing drought and facilitating development within the region. After a decade journey, in 1996 IGADD was transformed into the IGAD and also incorporated Eritrea as a new member country. What is more, after the birth of South Sudan in July 2011, it acceded to the IGAD as an eighth member country (Zewdie, 2016, 2017).

Furthermore, Berhe (2014) and Mesfin (2012) noted that the transition from the IGADD into IGAD came with additional mandates. The additional mandates included the duty of keeping peace and security within the IGAD. Under such a mandate, IGAD has been doing a lot in promoting peace and security in the region. Contrary to that, its records of accomplishments in regional economic integrations are insignificant. One can draw this from the study that was conducted by the AfDB & ADF (2010) on intra-regional trade in eastern Africa from 2000 to 2008. The same research indicates that trade among the Horn of African states was small in volume as compared to the EAC.

East African Community (EAC)

Contrary to the IGAD, the EAC has a long, established history. It was constituted in 1917 by present-day Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Since its establishment, the EAC has been subjected to dissolution and re-launching more than once. For instance, soon after independence in the early 1960s, member states brought the demise of the EAC, and re-launched it in 1967. However, EAC stayed for only a decade, between 1967 and 1977, then was dissolved for a second time. The reason for the EAC's dissolution in 1977 was ideological and economic disputes that occurred among the three member states. The EAC, after a decade and a half absence during 1977-1991, underwent its resurgence in 1991. As compared to its predecessor, the 1991 EAC came with extended goals. On top of that, in 2007, Rwanda and Burundi acceded to the EAC, which increased its members from three to five (Lunogelo & Mbiliny, 2009)

The EAC has worked hard towards a customs union that has envisioned harmonizing fiscal and monetary policies as per the agreement of January 1, 2005. Primarily, it abolished tariff and non-tariff trade barriers among members. The EAC has already established the 'Common Market' area as of July 1, 2010 and has issued common passports to facilitate internal travel. In general, the EAC has grown toward harmonization of economic and monetary policies along with economic integration (AfDB & ADF, 2010; Jiboku, 2019). Even though, the EAC has had a long journey in liberalizing trade among its member states, the larger volume of its trade is with the developed countries in the north. In addition, there are also some limitations to intra-regional trade, such as some restrictions on labor and capital movement, and some tariff and non-tariff trade barriers (AfDB & ADF, 2010).

Within the mentioned contexts, the IGAD and EAC member countries have started to look for a possible merger. Towards this goal, the IGAD and EAC heads of state and governments convened on October 12, 2013 in Addis Ababa. At the end of a day-long discussion, the heads of state and governments announced that they mandated their respective foreign ministers to examine the feasibility of a merger (IGAD & EAC, 2013). Until the present, the study and discussions on the merger are in progress.

In general, the international context of the Abuja 1991 Treaty, the Constitutive Act of AU, and, in particular, the October 2013 IGAD-EAC Communiqué give legal and practical grounds for the merger of the IGAD and EAC.

Feasibilities and Challenges to IGAD-EAC Merger

Viabilities of IGAD-EAC Merger

When examining integration vis-a-vis its viability, certain variables are taken into account. These are: "…geographic proximity, complementary economic contexts, converging political values and policies, allowing the flourishing of trade across national borders as well as the will and capacity to push the process forward" (Tadesse, 2004, p. 120). Conventionally, these variables are taken as checklists to gauge the feasibility of merger except there is a difference in the weight assigned to each (Gessesse, 1996).

Different scholars argue that the ongoing merger of the IGAD-EAC is a failed journey (Sabala, 2014). They say that the merger of the two blocs does not meet the minimum conditions. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether those scholars exhaustively and effectively gauged those indicators of merger vis-a-vis the facts on the grounds. Therefore, hereinunder, this study is set out to scrutinize the feasibility of the merger in eastern Africa vis-a-vis the aforementioned yardsticks. Accordingly, the discussions on the viabilities of an economic merger in the broader East Africa region are presented as follows.

Geographical contiguity. According to Tadesse (2004) and Kritzinger-van Niekerk (2004), geographic proximity is one condition for a successful merger. Kritzinger-van Niekerk (2004, p. 9) noted the importance of geographic contiguity in the following manner, "adjacency... the entire sub-region must become a set of contiguous countries, providing a 'unified' geography base for markets, especially factors and infrastructure services." In line with the geographic criterion, EAC and IGAD states easily meet that condition. The EAC and IGAD countries are contiguous and have an overlapping boundary. Each member state in the would-be-merging region must share a border with two or more of the member states, which eases communications to build in roads. For instance, Ethiopia, of the IGAD, borders six out of eleven members of larger East Africa. Next to Ethiopia, Kenya shares borders with five of the IGAD countries. The least connected country is Burundi, which is bordered by two countries of the larger East Africa (AfDB & ADF, 2010**)**. Hence, one can draw from this that the merger would meet the geographic condition.

Beyond proximity, sea outlet is another geographic factor that accelerates integration. In the would be broader East African Community, five states do not have sea outlets. The remaining six countries are endowed with sea outlets. In fact, out of six sea outlets in the region, Eritrean and Somalian ports are inaccessible to neighboring states due to some regional and international reasons. Among other things, the UNs Security Council resolution passed sanctions against the Eritrean ports. The Security Council, among other things, adopted *Resolution 1907* (UNSC, 2009) against Eritrea on December 23, 2009 because Eritrea found supporting terrorists and dissidents of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and, in general, for its action of destabilizing the Horn of Africa (UNSC, 2009). In fact, starting from July 2018, Eritrea has improved its relations with its neighbors, especially with Ethiopia. Following that, Eritrea's ports became open for use except for infrastructural problem.

As noted above, five of the regional states are landlocked. The list includes Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan. In other words, accessing the sea requires the landlocked countries to establish cordial relations with those states endowed with sea outlets (Zewdie, 2016). Of course, when relations are built, both landlocked as well as states with sea outlets will benefit.

Being landlocked by nature and consequent economic calculations encourage intra-regional trade. The trade by the landlocked states outside their region would incur greater port and transportation costs. Studies show that port and transportation costs are challenging for landlocked states. According to the ECA and AU (2006, p. 12) study, "For landlocked countries, transport costs can be as much as 77% of the value of exports. It costs about $1,500 (including insurance) to move a car from Japan to Abidjan, and more than three times that to ship the same car from Addis Ababa to Abidjan." The port and transportation costs can place economic pressure on landlocked states to push for integration or commercial cooperation, and this holds for East African landlocked states. In short, it is a blessing in disguise to have integration in Eastern Africa.

History. Almost all states in East Africa are colonized save Ethiopia. Regarding colonial masters, more than half of these countries remained under the British, which is one historical similarity and tie. For instance, the British colonized Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania (after the defeat of Germany in World War I), Sudan (which includes South Sudan), and Somalia (British Somaliland), and stayed in Eritrea between 1941and 1951 as the protectorate. Also, Britain remained in Ethiopia between 1941and the late 1940s as an allied force. Burundi, Rwanda and part of Tanzania remained under Germany. Later on, the former two passed to Belgium. Eritrea and Somalia (Italian Somaliland) remained a colony of Italy. Of course, Ethiopia also fell under Italy's occupation between 1935 and 1941 (Zewde, 2000). These are historical facts that demonstrate how countries in the region have shared a history of colonialism, and at least one colonial master colonized three or more of the current East African states.

Scholars like Sabala (2014) invoke colonial history to criticize the proposed integration in Eastern Africa, but his argument seems self-contradictory. He argues for the EAC to stay as it is, instead of merging with the IGAD which has a different history. Nevertheless, he did not seem to consider the history of colonial experiences within the EAC. As stated above, Burundi, Tanzania and Rwanda stayed under Germany until the defeat of that country in WWI. Then, they went to Belgian with Tanzania which was partly under Britain, while Uganda and Kenya remained a British colony.

Sabala (2014) and like-minded scholars describe the integration of the two east African communities as a failed journey. They reason that the IGAD and EAC have a different colonial history. The question is if mere historical difference relates to failure, then why do they promote the EAC as a successful integration since they had been colonized by Britain and Germany? Again, the West African - the appreciable journey of integration between ECOWAS and UEMOA (Jiboku,2019) - experience refutes such an argument. Regarding colonial history, ECOWAS states were British colonies, whereas UEMOA were French colonies (ECA & AU, 2006). On top of that, Iheme (2004) explained that the ECOWS region is made up of four language blocs, which include Spanish and Portuguese. So, if the West Africans and EAC have had successful integration which passed through different colonial history and various linguistic blocs, and again if Germany and France which were historical enemies established the EU, why would it not work if the EAC and IGAD forged together?

Overlapping membership. The overlapping membership between the IGAD and EAC can be considered as one condition that facilitates their future viability for integration. Kenya and Uganda are members of the EAC and IGAD. Besides their overlapping membership, these two countries, respectively, rank first and second in economic power in the region (Healy, Cramer, Styan, & Leonard, 2009). Being members to both groups and their relative economic power should enable them to serve as a steppingstone for the integration of the two blocs. Moreover, almost all EAC and IGAD countries are member of a broader REC that is the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (Moges, 2008). Their membership to COMESA, tells a lot about their track record of working together and the benefits drawn from membership in RECs. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that if the regional countries have the experience of integration to larger RECs such as COMESA, why would integration fail for relatively smaller bloc like the East African states?

Economic complementarities: Cross border trade. Economic ties, specifically trade in Eastern Africa, are not a new development. Trade between communities in Eastern Africa precedes the independence of IGAD and EAC states. Even at present, as is true for other regions in Africa, the informal or unregistered trade among the communities of regional states is common (El-Hardallo & El-Battahani, 1996; Gessesse, 1996). For instance, according to Lunogelo and

Mbiliny's (2009) study, intra-African illegal trade in the early 1990s was more than threefold of the legal one. This reveals the size of the trade volume and also the cross-border bondage. Even though this trade principally follows informal patterns, they are proof of the presence of real supply and demand across borders.

Economists name different factors as the driving forces for cross-border trade. Gessesse (1996) stated that both official as well as unofficial trades is driven by *Demand* and *Supply* factors. When it comes to the reality on the ground in Eastern Africa, illegal cross-border trade is successful. In fact, being illegal does not make informal cross-border trade stay alive in the region, but adds economic complementarities. Therefore, the question is, why should the expected economic merger in Eastern Africa be questioned due to a lack of economic complementarities? This is what the paradox rests on! Gessese (1996), Thisen (1989), Ayalew (1992) and El-Hardallo and El-Battahani (1996) have answers for it. According to them, there is an artificial lack of economic complementarities. Primarily, the problem rests on the economic policies followed by governments. Their policies have deficiencies in giving proper attention to proper economic sectors. Despite the endowments of abundant natural resources, the region is dependent on two, or a limited number of, colonial economies for export. Such deficiencies, which often portray cross-border trade, are taken as artificial problems rather than real ones.

Today, oil in Sudan and South Sudan, potential hydropower energy in Ethiopia (Berhe, 2014; Eshetu, 2012; Zewdie, 2015, 2016); natural gas in Rwanda, Tanzania and Somalia, and relative industrial power in Kenya and other EAC countries can be taken as evidence of the presence of economic complementarities (Zewdie, 2015). Therefore, countries in the region are not solely dependent on primary agricultural products. Energy, industry in addition to food grain production are potential comparative advantage areas. Some cite dependency on primary agricultural products as a major barrier to intra-regional trade (Moges, 2008; Sabala, 2014). From that, some project that the fate of an IGAD-EAC merger will be gloomy.

Nevertheless, close observation on the potential and some encouraging integrations among the member states could falsify that such assertions are at least partly wrong. For instance, after the 2000 Ethiopia-Sudan Comprehensive Agreement in April 2002, the two countries signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which positively impacted trade and integration between the two countries. Following the agreement, bilateral trade increased significantly between 2002 and 2011. Eshetu (2012) in Zewdie (2016) explained such a growth of trade between the two as follows: "The total trade flows (exports plus imports) between the two countries increased by 2,304.8 % during the same period" (p. 161).

Besides, Mesfin (2012) recorded that Ethiopia's exports to as well as imports from Sudan has increased from time to time. Regarding the increase of Ethiopia's import from Sudan, he cited the import of $1.42 billion worth oil from Sudan in 2010 alone. On top of that, Ethiopia alternatively uses Sudan ports. Similarly, Ethiopia's goods find their way to Sudanese markets, including the export of 100 MW of hydropower. Sudan is not only destiny for Ethiopian merchandise but also a market for young, jobless Ethiopians. According to Mesfin (2012) in Zewdie (2016:p.161), about 140,000 Ethiopians legally have jobs and job permits in Sudan.

Similar to Ethiopia- Sudan and at varying degrees EthiopiaKenya, and Ethiopia-Djibouti trade connections are encouraging. Both Sudan and Kenya trade with and also provide port facilities for Ethiopian goods. Very recently, in addition to infrastructural connections and age-old trade, Ethiopia has started to export hydropower to Kenya and Djibouti (Zewdie, 2016), which speaks loudly to the increase in areas of cooperation and trade, though small. What is more, Uganda as well as Kenya's exports to South Sudan, though the latter has been in civil war since the end of 2013 (Zewdie, 2017), was among the cases that can be mentioned as a practical starting point to regional economic integration.

The success stories of the EU also inform the possibility of integration around two or more comparative advantage areas and work to add some through time. The EU started as European Coal and Steel Communities (Tadesse, 2004). Therefore, there should be no problem if the IGAD-EAC merger starts around energy, food grain production and industry. Sabala (2014) and Moges (2008) portray the EAC as a success story. Contrary to that, Sabala (2014) invokes the EAC-IGAD merger as a failure among other things due to a lack of economic complementarities, but the five EAC member states, which are praised by both scholars as success stories, are also known for their dependency on primary agricultural produces like coffee, tea and maize. So, the questions are, why are these countries successful in intra-EAC economic integration, and why is the larger East African merger with more or less similar conditions doomed to fail?

Indeed, the regional states' economies are mostly dependent on agricultural products; surprisingly most of them are short of satisfying domestic demands. In particular, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Eritrea, which account for more than half of East African population, fulfil their food deficits through import (Zewdie, 2016). On the other hand, there are also states in the region producing food grains in excess, especially in the EAC. So, the existing food deficit in the mentioned IGAD countries will become markets for the East Africans who produce food grains in excess. Again, this will put under scrutiny the common critique that says East African states are primary agricultural producers; therefore, it hampers intra-regional trade.

Infrastructure. Infrastructure is another factor taken into account to check whether regional integration will be feasible or not. Therefore, the research, in trying to elaborate the in/feasibility of the merger between the two regional bodies, will first bring into the picture some of the factors that fall under infrastructure. These are inland and on-air connections, financial institutions, ports, energy, and the private sector. In that regard, the bigger east African region is poor in infrastructure. But recently, there are improvements in road connections. In fact, in terms of telecommunication and banking, the IGAD lags behind the EAC (Mesfin, 2012; Zewdie,2015). Comparatively, the EAC is by far connected by road and air; and has coordinated financial institutions. For instance, Kenyan banks have branches in Rwanda, Uganda and Sudan [South Sudan] (AfDB & ADF, 2010). Whereas regarding port access, six states have coastal lines. Of course, as aforementioned, practically four are functional. So, endowment with sea outlet and the presence of port infrastructure are also an addition to the integration.

Moreover, the shortage of power is one of the challenges that has slowed and will also be expected to slow the regional industrialization effort and access to electric power in East Africa. To address this current and future challenge, the region already established the East African Power Pool in February 2005. The aim is mainly to pull regional power capacity towards regional integration and benefit. So, to this end, the utilization of regional rivers is taken into consideration. In particular, Ethiopia has taken the responsibility of connecting the region through hydropower (Eshetu, 2012; Mulu, 2010; Zewdie, 2015 & 2016).

What is more, the regional states, in particular Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania, signed the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) in 2010 regarding the overutilization of the Nile River (CFA, 2010). The CFA was signed for hydropower generation among other things. Beyond signing treaties, though small, there are cases that can be cited as a good start regarding electric power connections. Ethiopia has exported hydropower to Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti, which is an addition to the existing infrastructure. In addition to hydropower, bear in mind that Sudan and South Sudan are petroleum producers, which is a crucial source of energy and input for economic integration (Berhe, 2014; Zewdie, 2015 & 2016).

Furthermore, the participation of the private sector has an indispensable role in the economic integration of the region. In this regard, Sudan has a larger class of merchants among regional states (Tadesse, 2004). Therefore, addressing trade and non-trade barriers would encourage the private sector to invest in their region.

Political willingness, values and stability. Finally, the political willingness, values and stability of the region are among the preconditions for possible economic integration. Eastern Africa has been characterized by war and other odds (Clapham, 2017; Olika, 2011). In fact, among other things, addressing these evils has been indispensable in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). But, it is essential to note that the region has shown certain improvement in the field of security.

The regional politics have shown relative stability when compared to the 1980s and 1990s. Power transfer through ‘elections’ has become a regional trend. However, elections are always contentious. Regional governments and institutions struggle to solve regional political and security problems in collaborated manners. Just to mention major ones: the IGAD’s role in promoting peace in Somalia began with the establishment of the Transitional Federal Somalia government in 2004 (Menkhaus, 2007; Ofcansky, 2006; Olika, 2011) and remained up to taking a lion’s share in deploying their forces in the Somalia-African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) under the auspices of the AU. Furthermore, the establishment of the East African Standby Force also talks a lot about regional states’ commitment towards addressing their regional insecurities on their own. What is more, the settlement with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and Sudan Civil War by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and the current IGAD’s effort of brokering South Sudan’s peace are some of the indicators of commitment towards regional peace and security (IGAD, 2014; Zewdie, 2017).

To sum it up, the region meets most of the feasibility criteria for integration. Hence, there is an opportunity to merge the EAC and IGAD into the larger EAC. But, this does not mean that the region is free of challenges.

Challenges to IGAD-EAC Merger

It is expected that certain challenges have encircled the IGAD-EAC merger. Most of them are typical for RECs in Africa. The problem starts with a number of export commodities. Commonly, the regional states depend on two or three commodities in their export trade. Also, these commodities are mainly produced by targeting markets in the north rather than in the region (ECA & AU, 2006; De Melo & Tsikata, 2014; El-Hardallo & El-Battahani, 1996; Gessesse, 1996; Thisen,1989). Of course, such dependency on few commodities for export in turn artificially creates a lack of economic complementarities (El-Hardallo & El-Battahani, 1996; Gessesse, 1996; Thisen, 1989). However, it is an artificial problem. But, as long as such scenarios continue unchecked, it remains a challenge to the integration.

Another challenge to an expected economic merger would be tied to the abolishment of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers in the intra-region. As it is well known, regional state revenue is dependent on tariff and non-tariff sources. So, the integration could jeopardize states in that they could lose certain shares of their revenue. What makes the problem severe is that in the short term, they will not develop the capacity to compensate for such losses (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014; Healy et al., 2009; Lunogelo & Mbiliny, 2009). Therefore, such a scenario will be another area of challenge to the assumed regional integration of East African states.

Furthermore, to a degree, trade imbalance will be a challenge for intra-regional trade and the merger itself. In the ongoing IGAD-EAC merger, one or two states are relatively strong economically. Kenya is repeatedly mentioned as it will benefit from this integration. It is relatively true that Kenya has assumed the economic power in the region, particularly in the manufacturing sector (Healy et al., 2009; Kritzinger-van Niekerk, 2004).

The EAC-IGAD merger, like other RECs, takes a top-down approach. The AU took the initiative of merging the EAC and IGAD, but it excludes the private sector and other stakeholders from consultation and participation (IGAD-EAC, 2013). In line with that, Jiboku (2019) argues that African regional integrations are elitist projects. Thus, it is high likely that the ongoing integration will suffer because of having shallow bases.

Overlapping membership is another challenge to the larger East African merger. It is true that each Eastern African state, on an average, has joined into two or more RECs (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014; ECA & AU, 2006; Maruping, 2005;). Overlapping membership, among other things, reduces a state’s loyalty to a given integration. Besides, states may fail to execute agreed upon policies in their respective territories due to the conflicting nature of policies of respective RECs (De Melo & Tsikata, 2014; Healy et al., 2009).

Another critical challenge to RECs in East African integration is their visible weakness in terms of institutional organization, capacity, and necessary infrastructure. Financial institutions, roads, ICT and energy would be expected challenges to an EAC-IGAD merger. Infrastructure, which can ease regional economic integration, is mostly in the infant stages (AfDB & ADF, 2010; De Melo & Tsikata, 2014; Healy et al., 2009;).

Finally, political willingness, stability in the democratization process, and security are among critical factors used to gauge the feasibility of economic integration. In that regard, East Africa is far from meeting these requirements. The recent civil war in South Sudan, unstable Somalia and piracy, the Ethiopia-Eritrea boundary conflict, Darfur, Sudan and South Sudan's unsettled boundary and oil issues, contested elections all over the region, terrorism and terrorist attacks in Kenya and Uganda, Rwanda and Uganda's intervention and conflict in the DRC, the Lord Resistance Army in Uganda, and internal instabilities in Ethiopia and Eritrea are contexts that play against integration or at least make it sluggish. What is more, such insecurities discourage the FDI (AfDB & ADF, 2010; Healy et al., 2009; Olika, 2011). Consequently, illegal trade is promoted.

Conclusion

There is no question about the benefits that could be drawn from creating regional economic blocs. Merging the IGAD and EAC into a larger East African Community could be happening to bring peace and security to the area. In that regard, it is worth mentioning the establishment of the East African Standby Force. Such a merger would be a vehicle to realize a broader prosperous and peaceful East African Community. The AU and international community encourage and support regional economic integration. On top of that, the continuation of isolated economies and efforts will not take the region a long distance in the 'globalizing' world.

So, the creation of a larger East African Community is a vehicle to realize a prosperous and peaceful East Africa. However, the road towards the envisioned merger of the IGAD and EAC is not free of challenges. The challenges include conflict, poor infrastructure, overlapping membership, and lack of political willingness and commitment, which potentially undermine the move towards integration. Therefore, the integration of the EAC and IGAD into a larger East African Community seems farfetched but not impossible.

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