

Transforming OAU into African Union - II

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This argument is countered by another view outside the OAU secretariat, which says that OAU secretariat officials are resisting the change, and thus would provide numerous excuses to delay the process. The recommendations of some organisations that had carried out an evaluation a couple of years ago (one from Canada and another from South Africa), which implicitly suggested that the OAU is overstaffed and thus should be "downsized", is being quoted regularly by the OAU secretariat officials. Of course, the real picture of the bureaucratic structure of the OAU is that the organisation is understaffed. In fact, four out of five directors of the secretariat's departments are acting directors, coming from one region, West Africa, a clear violation of the OAU recruitment bylaws. They are acting because the directors of these departments either retired or left the organisation. None of these positions could be filled at the moment because the organisation is in the transformation process. Moreover, there are only 40 professional positions filled in the organisation, and about 80 professional positions are vacant. These figures would make the argument that the organisation is overstaffed a big joke.

Perhaps one should also mention that there is need to create a situation whereby some personnel, whose performance is not up to the standards required by the renovated organisation, might be asked to leave or reallocate, but this process should be initiated by the entire new AU's system in a close cooperation with permanent representatives and the OAU staff union. Thus, the main question that deserves some attention at this stage should be whether the secretariat of the organisation had managed to meet its datelines of making the organisation ready to enter into the emerging transformed structure, both administratively and politically? There is a feeling that the rapid speed with which the progress of mobilising the regional and international community to support NEPAD has been going seems to have sidelined the transformation process of the OAU into AU. It seems that little has been done to mobilise African societies about the importance of transforming the OAU into AU and about the significance of NEPAD as an African integrated economic agenda. A feeling is growing among OAU/AU officials and experts that the concentration of some of the leading countries on the continent and the focus of their attention to promote NEPAD seem to suggest that the integration approach that they originally propagated (NEPAD being the economic arm of the AU) and their assertion that the AU and NEPAD are complementary projects is being abandoned.

The AU's emerging structures, and its objectives, are in many ways supportive of and complementary to NEPAD's long-term objectives; and since AU represents a political agenda for the continent, NEPAD should naturally play the role of collective African economic agenda. Selling NEPAD to the Western and developed worlds before the AU structures are in place would, in the opinion of some political analysts of the African regional politics, empty NEPAD of its African content. It will also reduce it to a self-contradictory project, since its main tenets are based on the understanding that Africa has enough natural resources that it could mobilise and that can help it forge the envisaged partnership with the international community. Some are arguing that asking the Western countries to help NEPAD succeed at this stage would defeat one of the main arguments put forward by its founders, and this is that Africa will not beg, again, the developing world to develop it, but will be asking the West to become its partner.

Some critics are also saying that the Peer Review Mechanism, that is being suggested should indeed be deliberated, because the entire continent adopted NEPAD at the Lusaka Summit. In fact the summit nominated five member states, representing the five regions of the continent, to form the NEPAD heads of state committee, later to be increased to fifteen members, each region being represented by three countries.

Moreover, it is being argued that NEPAD secretariat should indeed become part of the AU system (African Central Bank, African Monetary Fund, African Economic Community). By incorporating it into the AU economic system, NEPAD would become the driving force and the main implementing agent of African economic integration, in close cooperation with regional economic communities (RECS). It is in fact argued by some that NEPAD should be seen as a by-product of an evolutionary process that began with the Lagos Plan of Action 1981, the UN African Recovery Plan of 1990, the Abuja Treaty of 1991, the African Renaissance Project of 1996, the OMEGA Project of 2001, the New African Initiative of 2001, and a host of other national and regional economic and political initiatives and plans. These are naturally integral parts of the OAU/AU and African economic plan.

Then there is the question of what the role of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) will be in the AU/NEPAD implementation programme. Considering that AU lacks sufficient funds to implement both NEPAD and its own programmes, some are suggesting that ECA should be an implementation agent for both NEPAD and AU's financial institutions, as it has the trained manpower required for such a difficult task. It is to be emphasised that ECA has five programmes that are almost identical to the NEPAD and AU economic programmes. These divisions include: fostering sustainable development; development management; development information services; promoting trade and mobilisation finances for development; economic and social policy analysis, regional cooperation and integration; and African centre for gender and development.

Moreover, the ECA has five sub-regional development centres that coordinate these five programmes throughout Africa: Central African sub-regional development centre in Yaounde, Cameroon; Eastern African sub-regional development centre in Kigali, Rwanda; Northern African sub-regional development centre in Tangiers, Morocco; Southern African sub-regional development centre in Lusaka, Zambia and Western African sub-regional development centre in Niamey, Niger. There is a general belief among observers that a framework time of at least two years, with effect from August 2002, after the inauguration of the AU in July 2002, will enable the AU to focus on and devote itself entirely to restructuring administratively the main five AU organs (the Assembly, the Executive Council, the Commission, the Permanent Representative Committees, and the Peace and Security Council); to draft the protocols for the newly proposed financial institutions (African Monetary Fund, African central Bank) and to establish the African Parliament and draft the protocols for the ECOSOCC, African Human Rights Commission, and the African Court of Justice. It is to be recalled that the Lusaka Summit opted for a gradual approach to establishing the organs of the union, and recommended the establishment of the five main organs mentioned above. The same view was echoed by the secretariat, the permanent representatives and experts meeting in Addis Ababa on Jan. 25, 2002, who argued that the union should be endowed with initial powers and structures for the take off of its previous organs, the main five in particular. These powers and structures would be expected to expand as the financial capacity of the union improves.

In line with the above observation is the apparent overlapping of some themes and programmes of peace, security and governance in all three new African projects: NEPAD, AU and Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA). These projects speak of strengthening mechanisms for conflict resolution, protecting democracy and human rights; building capacity of African states to set and enforce the legal framework and maintain law and order; promoting long-term conditions for development and security, peace making, peace keeping, post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. These broad themes and programmes are clearly spelled out in all three constitutive acts of NEPAD, CSSDCA and the AU.

Something ought to be done about the possibility of incorporating some programmes of CSSDCA into NEPAD and, perhaps, incorporating some programmes relating to peace and security into the AU Peace and Security Council. By doing so, overlapping and duplication of functions and mandates might be avoided, particularly that financing of these three projects simultaneously will pose a real challenge to NEPAD and AU. Another issue that deserves some attention is the role of the civil and professional societies in articulating and promoting AU and NEPAD throughout the continent. What role is expected of them and what institutions, within the AU, can mobilise the African masses? This is very important if we know that the AU organs that are supposed to encourage the participation of civil society, namely the Pan-African Parliament, the African Human Rights Commission, and the Court of Justice are not yet instituted. The logical question then would be on how the civil societies would help the AU in the process of instituting these organs.

An open accusation circulating around is that Nigeria and South Africa are said to be imposing their understanding of what form the transformation should take and some within the organisation are apparently resenting this. Of course it is common knowledge that OAU was created by and is composed of the member states, and what they say goes, so it is not a question of whether OAU secretariat should influence the process or not, it is a matter of expressing one's opinion. Internal differences and misunderstandings among senior officials within the organisation, especially among the assistant secretaries general (ASGs), are said to have hampered the teamwork spirit within the organisation. Moreover, some countries are said to work closely with some ASGs, while completely ignoring others. Another issue often raised by the OAU/AU secretariat officials is that, while several workshops and seminars are conducted on the transformation of the OAU into AU throughout Africa, officials from the organisation's secretariat who might give some first-hand contributions out of their experience on the work of the organisation are not often invited.

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