African Union (AU)

The African Union, originally known as the Organization of African Unity, is the continental organization of fifty-four nations that includes all African states except Morocco; it has been in existence since 2002. Pan-Africanism, or the union of all African nations, is a concept that dates to the nineteenth century. By working for peace, security, and respect for human rights, the AU is taking decisive steps toward the social, economic, and ecological sustainability of the African continent.

The African Union—the organization of fifty-four nations that includes all African states with the exception of Morocco—did not emerge out of a vacuum. The African Union must be understood as another phase in the quest for African unity as underscored by Pan-Africanism, which, according to the scholar W. B. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, is "the acceptance of a oneness of all people of African descent and the commitment to the betterment of all people of African descent" (1986, 388).

Geography, history, and politics have influenced the idea of Pan-Africanism. In their institutionalization attempts, protagonists have accentuated cultural, poetic, philosophical, or politico-economic aspects of Pan-Africanism. The African diaspora—the dispersal of Africans throughout the world, particularly by slavery—laid the groundwork for transforming the idea into an institutional form. In 1897 H. Sylvester William, a lawyer from Trinidad, founded the African Association in London and organized the Pan-African Conference of 1900 (Geiss 1974). The eminent African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois promoted the idea through a series of Pan-African congresses in the early 1900s, while the Jamaican journalist and orator Marcus Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League in the 1920s. Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, both participants in the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England, in 1945, later became presidents of the independent Gold Coast (Ghana) and Kenya, respectively. Pan-Africanism thus reached continental Africa, where its leaders understood it as the unification of all African peoples, especially in their resistance against colonialism.

Then, like now, Pan-Africanism constitutes the framework within which African leaders envision Africa. Two dominant schools of thought soon emerged. Led by Kwame Nkrumah and the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, the progressives favored political integration based on a federation as the means to economic growth in Africa. The conservatives, led by Nigeria, argued that newly acquired sovereignty was still fragile, and they hence favored incremental economic, educational, scientific, and cultural cooperation as the proper approach to African unity (Adogamhe 2008).

In spite of these differences, thirty-two governments signed the agreement in 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to form the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU). Equity and social inclusion have always been at the heart of Pan-Africanism in all its resulting institutional forms. Social and economic sustainability therefore underlies the formation of the OAU and the AU.

Environmental sustainability followed soon afterward. In September 1968, some five years after the establishment of the OAU, African states adopted the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, which came into force in June 1969. Also known as the Algiers Convention, this comprehensive

instrument addresses Africa's environmental issues, ranging from soil and water to the establishment and maintenance of protected areas.

Milestones

The OAU was a product of its time. Struggles for the self-determination of Africans marked its beginnings. The organization primarily focused on safeguarding the sovereignty of the newly independent African states and eradicating colonialism on the continent. With most states achieving political independence by the 1970s and South Africans dismantling the apartheid regime in 1990, the OAU was becoming redundant. In addition, the continent faced social, economic, environmental, and political challenges to which the OAU was ill equipped to respond.

African leaders adopted the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos in 1980 on the premise that through industrialization and regional and continental integration, Africa would reduce its reliance on foreign aid and establish a common bargaining position on a global scale. In response to environmental degradation, African governments established the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in 1985 to provide guidance and enhance cooperation in tackling the environmental problems of the continent. AMCEN continues to play a crucial role within the AU structure today. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHP), in force since 1986, was an important milestone. Article 24 of this charter grants the right to a "general satisfactory environment favorable to their development" to all Africans, thereby consolidating environmental sustainability as the basis of social and economic sustainability on the continent.

The Abuja Treaty of 1991, establishing the African Economic Community, is a fundamental step in the history of African regional integration. It came into force in 1994 and aims at establishing an African common market with the free movement of people and goods by building on Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Today, these include the Arab Maghreb Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, the Economic Community of West African States, the East African Community, and the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD). The Abuja Treaty, moreover, highlights the importance of environment within the context of the sustainable development of Africa. African governments thus adopted the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Waste within Africa in 1991 as part of the efforts to safeguard environmental sustainability. African governments, under the aegis of AMCEN, outlined an African Common Position on Environment and Development and presented it at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. This concerted African effort produced the 1994 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The thirty-sixth Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the OAU in Lomé, Togo, adopted the Constitutive Act of the African Union in 2000. The African Union began in Durban, South Africa, on 9 July 2002, the same year as the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A key development in this time line is the adoption of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a program of the AU to promote socioeconomic growth and sustainable development in Africa.

The African Union

Fifty-four member-states belong to the African Union. Article 3 of the Constitutive Act of the AU gives the objectives as regional integration, peace and security, and the protection of human rights. In contrast to the OAU's focus on sovereignty and nonintervention, the AU reserves the right to intervene in a member-state's internal affairs in instances such as war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity and to restore peace and stability. This focus clearly recognizes the interlinkages between peace and security, political stability, respect for human rights, and cooperation as the preconditions for the sustainable development of the continent.

The AU's headquarters are in Addis Ababa. The AU has created a myriad of institutions to meet the challenges of social, economic, and environmental sustainability in Africa.

The AU Assembly comprises the heads of state and government of all member states. It is the highest decision-making organ of the union. It elects a chairperson every year to head the assembly. Directly below the assembly is the Executive Council. Specialized Technical Committees (STCs) in Industry, Science and Technology, Energy, Natural Resources, and Environment prepare, coordinate, and follow up the union's programs. The Peace and Security Council is a decision-making organ of the AU on matters of prevention, management, and conflict resolution.

The African Court of Justice is the main judicial organ of the AU. In 2008 it merged with the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights to form a single court, the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. Two

nongovernmental organizations lodged a complaint (Communication 155/96) on behalf of the Ogoni People of Nigeria. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2001 found the government of Nigeria guilty of, among other things, violating Article 24 of the ACHP. The commission ruled that Nigeria's government had failed to uphold the peoples' right to a clean and healthy environment by virtue of its dealings with oil-exploiting companies and the resulting environmental pollution in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

The AU Commission is the main administrative organ of the AU. Other organs of the AU include the Pan-African Parliament, the Permanent Representatives Committee, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), and the financial institutions.

Within the AU institutional arrangement, NEPAD is a comprehensive, holistic, and integrated framework for sustainable development that has three main components: peace, conflicts, political and economic governance; key sectors for economic growth; and mobilizing resources for growth. NEPAD thus stimulates sustainable development in Africa through investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, human development, the environment, export diversification, and intra-African trade. NEPAD works in the area of social sustainability to develop human resource capacity in science and technology, health care, and education, to increase access to basic medicines and vaccines, and to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria.

NEPAD's environmental sustainability focus is significant, first through the Specialized Technical Committee on the Environment. In collaboration with AMCEN, the AU, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Global Environment Facility, NEPAD has produced an Action Plan for the Environment Initiative. This comprises six programs: combating land degradation, drought, and desertification; conserving Africa's wetlands; preventing, co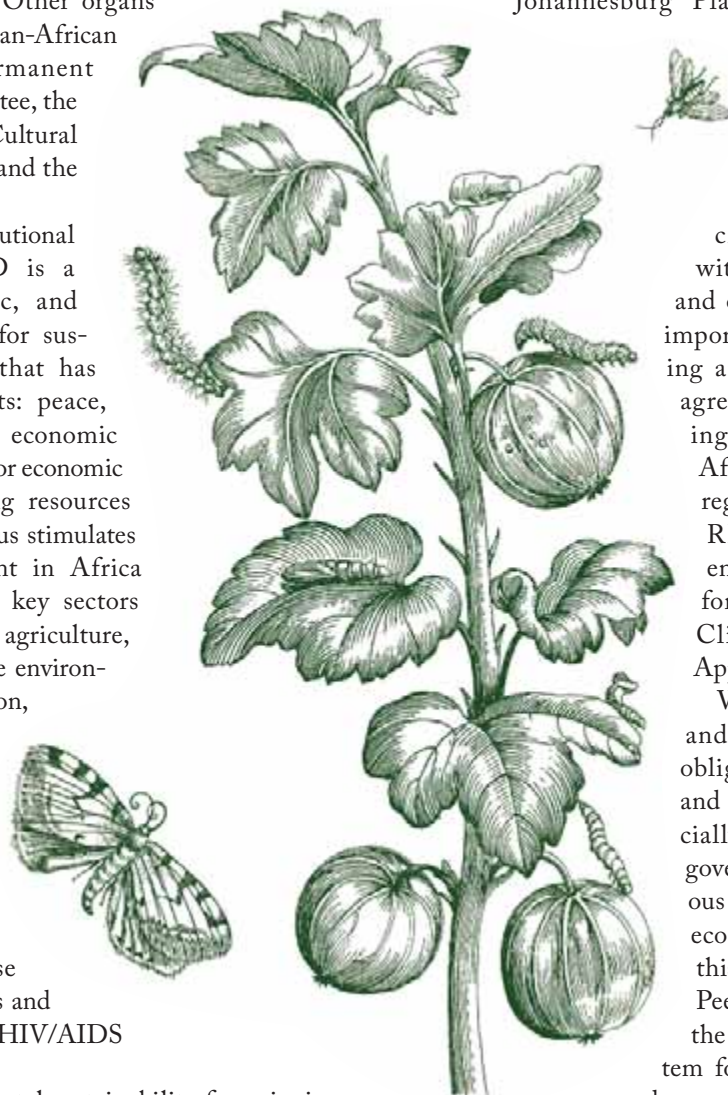ntrolling, and managing invasive and alien species; transboundary conservation or managing natural resources; conserving and sustainably using marine, coastal, and freshwater resources; and combating climate change on the continent.

Regional environmental agreements aside, several international environmental agreements to which AU members are party emerged from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in the post-Rio era. Of particular relevance to Africa are the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, Agenda 21, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. NEPAD's role in meeting the Millennium Development Goals in Africa thus cannot be overemphasized.

Today, the AU, especially in collaboration with AMCEN, NEPAD, and other partners, plays an important role in streamlining and implementing these agreements and in enhancing cooperation between African states. At the sub-regional level, most of the RECs have full-fledged environmental divisions, for instance, the IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre.

Widespread corruption and noncompliance with obligations under regional and international law, especially with regard to good governance, constitute serious obstacles to sustainable economic growth. It is in this regard that the African Peer Review Mechanism of the NEPAD serves as a system for monitoring corporate and governance practices.

Outlook

The AU interventions in recent conflicts such as in Darfur, Sudan, attest to the organization's commitment to regional peace and security. Critics contest the multistakeholder structure of NEPAD and its reliance on official development assistance and private investment, however. Some say that NEPAD seeks to integrate

Africa into a neoliberal global economy (an economy without any barriers such as tariffs, regulations, or restrictions on the flow of capital) and that its efforts will not result in the sustainable development of Africa (Murithi 2005). Other critics contend that the Regional Economic Communities that should be the building blocks of the AU are far from engaging in inter-regional trade. Whereas trade within individual regions is substantial, inter-regional trade is remarkably low (Bourenane 2002), largely due to the lack of infrastructure. Recent economic partnership agreements between African states or regions with the European Union might not favor inter-regional trade (Stevens and Kennan 2005). The British historian Basil Davidson (1992) might be right in his assertion that the "black man's burden" lies in maintaining colonial boundaries and using these as the basis for continental integration.

The political and intellectual elite are the primary drivers of Pan-Africanism and its current organizational outcome, the AU, as well as of regional integration in Africa. Although these elites diverge on the form such integration should take, plans for the next manifestation of Pan-Africanism, the United States of Africa, are indeed well under way. Political unity that bypasses real integration of the African people will run short of meeting the sustainable development goals of the AU. Although the AU structure provides for public participation through the engagement of civil society organizations in the ECOSOCC, grassroots Pan-Africanism, the indigenization of this idea, seems to present a viable option toward achieving social, economic, and environmental sustainability in Africa.

Synergizing the activities of AMCEN with those of NEPAD, the AU, its organs, and other institutions working on matters of sustainable development thus will be the key to attaining sustainability in Africa.

J. Manyitabot TAKANG
University of Cologne

Caroline Muthoni NJUKI
Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)

See also Africa (*several articles*); Climate Change Refugees (Africa); Conflict Minerals; E-Waste; Education, Higher (Africa); International Conflict Resolution; Migration (Africa); Mining (Africa); Rule of Law (Africa); World Bank

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