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Multiplicity of African Regional Economic Communities and Overlapping Memberships: A Challenge for African Integration

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Abstract: The quest for regional integration in Africa has long been entrenched in the history of the continent. Anchored with its diversities, regional integration in Africa has been emerging from the politics of anti-colonialism, but on the basis of pre-existing colonial arrangements. It continues to this date with different shapes and forms. But in general, the journey was a tough and rough. It could be, partly; because of the multiplicity of RECs which deters the forward movement of the integration processes across the continent. Thus, this research was conducted to critically analyze the multiplicity of African Regional Economic Communities and the overlapping membership of African countries in the due process of regional integration. Accordingly, the result of the study shows that the proliferation of RECs complicates the overall continental integration process and put massive strains on the member states ability and resources to cope with diverse agendas and exigencies. Moreover, in this research; complications, contradictions and duplications of activities, the need of 'Modus Operandi' due to the variable geometrical integration of countries, overlapping authority, problems of harmonization of policies, high management and financial burdens on the member states were revealed as some of the effects and worries of multiplicity of RECs and overlapping memberships. Hence, eradicating wasteful or costly duplication of multiple memberships and rationalizing some overlapping sub-regional blocs should be a demanding agenda all over the continent.

Keywords: Africa, Regional Integration, RECs, Multiplicity, Overlapping Membership

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The history of regional integration in Africa, which traced back to the Pan African movement that aims to unite Africa, has been believed to be a panacea for Africa's multifaceted political and economic predicaments. This idea of integration was also sustained by the post-independence African leaders as a developmental agenda to promote trade with nations and for synchronizing socioeconomic and political policies and regulations. African states that had just acquired their independence as well as the wave of summits that took place between these states provided important lessons and experiences that eventually culminated in the creation of the OAU on the 26th May 1963. Since then, several initiatives have been transcended to hasten the process. Among these schemes, Abuja treaty is the first and foremost to mention.

According to the Abuja treaty, at least one REC is expected to exist on one of the five Africa's sub-regional configurations. Accordingly; to establish more focus and effectiveness, the African Union (AU) currently recognizes only eight of the fourteen Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as a building block of the African Economic Community. These include: The East African Community (EAC), The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and later The Community of Sahel Saharan States (CEN-SAD).

Despite the efforts made by the African Union so far, the institutional settings of RECs in Africa are overlapping like a spaghetti bowl which makes the regional integration process of Africa very complex and confusing affair whereby member countries are burdened with high political commitments and institutional requirements. Moreover, the problem of multiplicity of RECs and overlapping membership makes the Africa's regional integration (institutional) arrangement too duplicable, and requires too much resource for what it is being produced.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Among the 55 countries of Africa, 22 belong to dual membership; again 22 intend for three RECs; 6 countries retain a single membership and 4 countries are members of 4 RECs and lastly, the only country which is not a member of any RECs is Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

For considerable researchers in the field, the multiplicity of regional economic groupings has become recognized as a serious constraint for the effective integration of the continent. The RECs varied in capital and population composition, market size, institutional structure, mission, objectives, etc. Furthermore, there may sometimes conflicting objectives among these economic groupings that intensify the complication of meeting financial obligations by those countries which are already a member of multiple RECs. It is also common to see such a like difficulties in the case of implementing the protocols by such multi-member states (Ojo, 1999). Biswaro (2012), on his hand, strengthens the Ojo's findings by stating that being belong to several groupings and sub-groupings sometimes compete, conflict, or overlap amongst themselves rather than complement each other. This exacerbates the burden of harmonization and coordination, and is wasteful duplication in view of constrained resources.

To Ndomo (2009), the multiplicity of RECs and overlapping memberships have twisted towards an obscure web of competing commitments which, combined with a variety of rules, result in higher costs of trade transactions between African countries, in effect discouraging integration. Besides for that, it could lead to resource wastage and the consumption of much effort due to duplication of activities.

Therefore, by taking the above stated problems into consideration and identifying the research lacunae on the area, the researcher finds out that studying on the multiplicity of RECs and overlapping membership could indicate policy makers and relevant continental and national concerned bodies to stress on the case and to play their role in addressing the issue. Moreover, it would have an important role in solving the dearth of documents or studies in the area.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to critically analyze the multiplicity of RECs and overlapping membership as a challenge for African Integration.

1.4. The Structure of the Manuscript

This manuscript is composed of five main parts which had again re-structured into different sub-sections. The first part of the manuscript is the introductory part of the study, which includes background of the study, statement of the problem and objective of the study. In the second part of the article, the methodology of the study was clearly explained which has been followed by a literature review and data analysis and interpretation as a third and fourth elements of the study, respectively. Finally, the conclusion and recommendation part of the study has been reflected in this study.

2. Methodology of the Study

This research was conducted based on secondary sources of data. It was done through various sources and publications, including previous related research and the reports made by the Economic commission for Africa and African Union Commission as well as RECs. After collecting the necessary data from relevant sources, the research had employed descriptive types of data analysis methods which include percentages, figurative expressions, tabulations, and graphic representations.

3. Review of Related Literatures

3.1. Regional Integration in Africa

Regional integration in Africa has been started during the first half of the 20th century through the establishment of the South African Customs Union (SACU) in 1910 and the East African Community (EAC) in 1919. Following this tremendous dread, a number of RECs have been formed throughout the continent. Particularly, during the 1970s and 80s, a number of groupings have been increased astonishingly. In the present days, we have fourteen major regional blocs amongst of which eight have been recognized by the African Union. These sub-regional economic communities as the key vectors for the successful regional integration in Africa includes the following: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), The Southern African Development Community (SADC), The East African Community (EAC), The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and later The Community of Sahel Saharan States (CEN-SAD). It is therefore critical that the RECs develop the necessary capacity to support the regional integration agenda of the continent.

The Lagos Plan action, which was promoted and initiated by the OAU, envisioned three regional arrangements, aimed at the creation of geographically separated but congregated integration arrangements in three sub-Saharan sub-regions, i.e. West Africa would be dole out by the ECOWAS, a Preferential Trade Area (PTA) which was sooner or later replaced by COMESA would covers East and Southern Africa and ECCAS for Central Africa together with the AMU in North Africa were expected to lead to an all-African common market by the year 2025.

The above all treaties, summits and action plans (particularly the Lagos Plan of Action as depicted below in table 3.1) re-affirm that how much the African heads of states are devoted for African Integration processes.

Table 3.1. *Structure of African Regional Groupings (Lagos Plan of Action and Beyond).*

West Africa	1960s	1980s	1990s
Lagos Plan		In 1975 - Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	In 1993- revised ECOWAS Treaty
	In 1966 - Customs Union of West African States (UDEAO)	In 1973- West Africa Economic Community (CEAO) and West African Monetary Union (UMOA)	In 1994 - West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)
Central Africa			
Lagos Plan		In 1983 Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)/ (CEEAC)	
	In 1964 - Economic and Customs Union of Central Africa (UDEAC) & In 1961- Bank of the Central African States (BEAC)		In 1994 - Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa (CEMAC)
Southern and Eastern Africa			
Lagos Plan		In 1981 - Preferential Trade Area (PTA)	In 1993- Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) & In 1993 - Cross Border Initiative (CBI)
	Originally in 1889, and then 1969 - Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and Common Monetary Area (CMA)		
		In 1980 - Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC)	In 1992 Southern African Development Community (SADC)
	In 1967- East African Community I (EAC)		In 1999 - East African Community II (EAC)
		In 1986 - Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD)	In 1996 - Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Source: McCarthy, 1995

As reflected in the number of regional agreements, therefore, regional integration in Africa occupied a center-stage in the economic agenda of countries (Alemayehu & Haile, 1998). But the proliferation of RECs one over the other has become the center of discussion. As Severine Rugumamu (2004) remarks, the RECs should streamline their organizations, rationalize and harmonize policies, and coordinate joint programs in such a way that they are in compliance with the objectives, principles and priorities of the AEC Treaty. This actually enables RECs not to duplicate, compete and conflict with each other. However, in practice, as Teshome Mulat (1998) argues, the "path toward the AEC is neither clear and predictable nor devoid of twists and turns".

3.2. African Regional Integration and the Issue of Multiplicity

The Abuja Treaty identifies the sub-regional economic communities as the building pillars of the AEC. In practice, however, the process of establishing and consolidating the regional blocs, as pillars of the continental economic community is impinged by different institutional, administrative and policy problems (Severine Rugumamu 2004). Particularly, the problem of multiplicity of regional communities and overlapping membership has become a serious issue that attracts the attention of many country leaders, continental bodies and other stakeholders since it is highly challenging the forward movement of the continental integration processes.

As clearly explained by many researchers, many African states have simultaneous membership in more than one REC. The case in point is we can find the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) within the realm of ECOWAS and the Economic and Monetary Union of Central Africa (CEMAC) within the domain of the wider ECCAS region. Within the proposed geographic area of COMESA, it is possible to find the SADC, IGAD, EAC and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) with its associated monetary union (the Common Monetary Area, CMA). Besides, stretching from Dakar to Asmara, CEN-SAD shares a common geographical area with AMU, ECOWAS, IGAD and EAC. Eventually, this spaghetti bowl of RECs and member states makes the task of horizontal dexterity, difficult, since the same country will be progressing towards economic cooperation and integration at different swift in the different RECs to which it belongs. At the same time, the cost of membership and the management burdens rises with the increase in the membership of multiple regional organizations (Biswaro 2012, Severine Rugumamu 2004 & Alemayehu & Haile, 1998).

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Multiplicity of Regional Groupings and Overlapping Membership - an Overview

According to the Abuja Treaty, which aimed at the establishment of an African Economic Community, Africa has been divided into five regional configurations: North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and southern Africa. This geographical setting essentially had laid an important milestone in reprobating the spaghetti bowl type of duplication of RECs throughout the continent. However, it could not save the continent from replication of regional groupings.

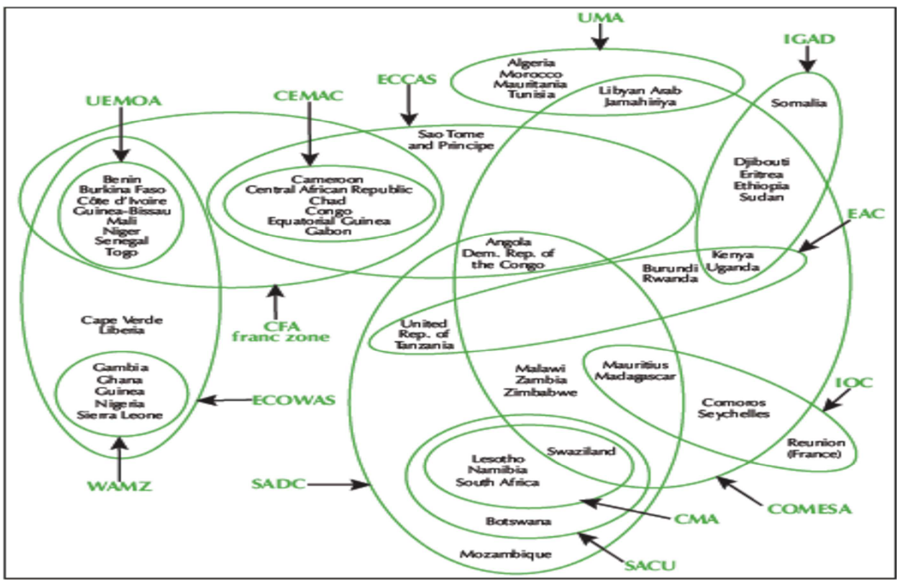
For strategic and political reasons or sometimes without deep thinking of the cons and pros of multiplicity, many African countries are members of more than one regional economic community (see figure 4.1. and table 4.1). For instance, in East Africa, COMESA coexists with IGAD, EAC, and CEN-SAD. Here, the two biggest inter-regional groupings, i.e. COMESA and CEN-SAD, stretching from north to south and east to west respectively, are exacerbating the multi-marriage of states with regional communities than it was before. Being the leading (in population) regional arrangement of the AU, West Africa, on the other hand consists the largest ECOWAS, which concurs with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA/WAEMU), the Mano River Union (MRU) and the wider CEN-SAD.

Table 4.1. *RECs in Different Geographical Configurations of Africa.*

Region	Name of the RECs/ Other Regional Blocs	Area (km²)	Population	GDP (PPP) ($US) In millions	GDP (PPP) ($US) per capita	No. of Member states
Inter-regional	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)	12,873,957	406,102,471	735,599	1,811	20
	Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN - SAD)	-	-	-	-	23
Central	Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)	6,667,421	121,245,958	175,928	1,451	11
	Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC)	3,020,142	34,970,529	85,136	2,435	6
Western	Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	5,112,903	300,000,000	1,322,452	3,888	15
	The Mano River Union (MRU)	-	-	-	-	4
	West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)	3,505,375	80,865,222	101,640	1,257	8
Southern	Southern African Development Community (SADC)	9,882,959	233,944,179	737,335	3,152	15
	Southern African Customs Union (SACU)	2,693,418	51,055,878	541,433	10,605	5
Northern	Arab Maghreb Union (AMU)	5,782,140	84,185,073	491,276	5,836	5
	Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)	5,876,960	166,259,603	635,450	3,822	5
Eastern	East African Community (EAC)	1,817,945	124,858,568	104,239	1,065	5
	Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)	5,233,604	187,969,775	225,049	1,197	7

Source: CIA World Fact book, 2005

As it has been reflected in the above table (*see table 4.1*), Central Africa is also suffering from the issue of overlapping membership due to the coexistence of three major monetary and economic communities. These include; ECCAS alongside with the CEMAC and the Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries (CEGLC). Besides, the southern part of the continent has a bundle of regional groupings such as the SADC, SACU, ECA (because of Tanzania), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the larger COMESA. Finally, the Northern Africa's AMU has shared a common area with Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the CEN-SAD. Thus, this intermixed regional economic arrangement of Africa has resulted in a duplication of efforts and waste of scarce resources.



Source: UNCTAD, 2015

Figure 4.1. *The Spaghetti bowl of overlapping memberships in African RECs.*

When we see the membership distributions of individual member states, the majority of African countries are members of several regional organizations (*see table 4.2*). As it has been tabulated and clearly scheduled in the following table, 54 African countries are members of 132 regional blocs. In other words, on average, one African country is a member of at least 2.5 regional communities.

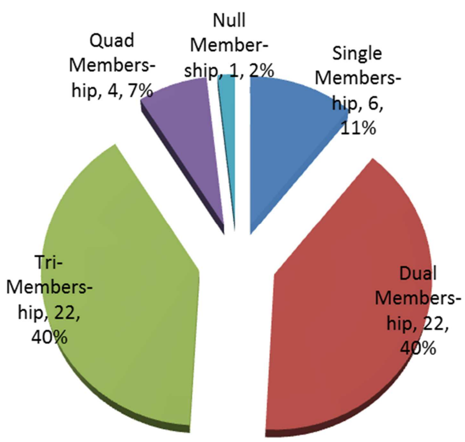
Table 4.2. *Membership Distribution of African Countries in Different RECs.*

S.No .	Country/RECs	COMESA	ECOWAS	EAC	SACU	ECCAS	IGAD	AMU	CEN -SAD	SADC	CEPGL	MRU	UEMOA	IOC	CEMAC	Total Membership
		Recognized by AU								Other Blocs						
	Algeria							✔								1
	Angola					✔				✔						2
	Benin		✔						✔				✔			3
	Botswana				✔					✔						2
	Burkina Faso		✔						✔				✔			3
	Burundi	✔		✔		✔					✔					4
	Cameroon					✔									✔	2
	Cape Verde		✔													1
	Central African Republic					✔			✔						✔	3
	Chad					✔			✔						✔	3
	Comoros	✔												✔		2
	Republic of the Congo					✔									✔	2
	Côte d'Ivoire		✔						✔			✔	✔			4
	Democratic Republic of Congo	✔				✔				✔	✔					4
	Djibouti	✔					✔		✔							3
	Egypt	✔						✔	✔							3
	Eritrea	✔					✔		✔							3
	Ethiopia	✔					✔									2
	Equatorial Guinea					✔									✔	2
	Gabon					✔									✔	2
	Gambia		✔						✔							2
	Ghana		✔						✔							2
	Republic of Guinea		✔									✔				2
	Guinea Bissau		✔						✔				✔			3
	Kenya	✔		✔			✔									3
	Lesotho				✔					✔						2
	Liberia		✔						✔			✔				3
	Libya	✔						✔	✔							3
	Madagascar	✔								✔				✔		3
	Malawi	✔								✔						2
	Mali		✔						✔				✔			3
	Mauritania							✔								1
	Morocco								✔							1
	Mauritius	✔								✔				✔		3
	Mozambique									✔						1
	Namibia				✔					✔						2
	Niger		✔						✔				✔			3
	Nigeria		✔						✔							2
	Rwanda	✔		✔		✔					✔					4
	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic															0
	São Tomé and Príncipe					✔										1
	Senegal		✔						✔				✔			3
	Seychelles	✔								✔				✔		3
	Sierra Leone		✔						✔			✔				3
	Somalia						✔		✔							2

S.No.	Country/RECs	COMESA	ECOWAS	EAC	SACU	ECCAS	IGAD	AMU	CEN -SAD	SADC	CEPGL	MRU	UEMOA	IOC	CEMAC	Total Membership
		Recognized by AU								Other Blocs						
	South Africa				✔					✔						2
	South Sudan	✔					✔									2
	Sudan	✔					✔		✔							3
	Swaziland	✔			✔					✔						3
	Tanzania			✔						✔						2
	Togo		✔						✔				✔			3
	Tunisia							✔	✔							2
	Uganda	✔		✔			✔									3
	Zambia	✔								✔						2
	Zimbabwe	✔								✔						2
Total		20	15	5	5	10	8	5	22	15	3	4	8	4	6	132

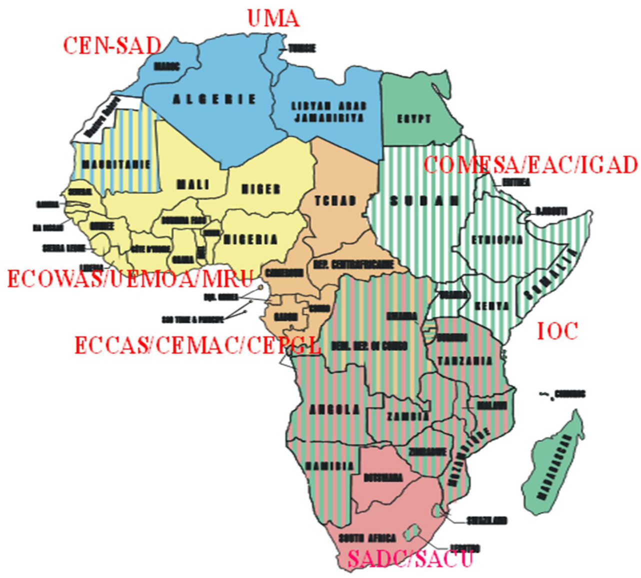
Source: Researcher's Own Compilation, 2015

To be more specific, except one country, i.e. Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, which is not a member of any of the RECs; others are members of one and more than one bloc. Six countries, including Algeria, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe are members of only one bloc, whereas 40% (22) of African countries such as Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Republic of Guinea, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe have a dual membership. Those countries which are members of three communities share equal proportion with those which are members of two blocs i.e. it constitutes 22 countries (*see figure 4.2 & 4.3*). These countries include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Niger, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo and Uganda. Finally, four countries are the members of four regional groupings. These countries are: Burundi, Côte D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.



Source: Researcher's Own Compilation, 2015

Figure 4.2. *Overlapping Memberships of African States in Different RECs.*



Source: Researcher's Own Compilation, 2015

Figure 4.3. *Multiplicity of RECs.*

4.2. Effects and Worries of Multiplicity of Membership

Nowadays, it is very common to get different regional integration groupings which co-exists each other in almost all sub-regions of Africa. The key question here is, does overlapping integration arrangement beneficial or wasteful? Does the multiplicity lead to a reduction in efficiency and thus call for reconfiguring regional groupings? Or does this multiplicity help regional communities to serve as building blocs to culminate the continent-wide regional integration process or it would rather leads the regional groupings to be stumbling blocs towards the wider integration agenda? The response to these questions is different for different scholars. Some argued that multiplicity could contribute to progress in integration, but others conversely squabbled that the overlapping of groupings could deter the overall regional integration processes specially by creating duplication of duties among the member states.

Among others, The Economic Commission for Africa (2004) contends that membership in two and more communities could maximize the benefits of integration and minimize the losses by distributing risks. It could be true, especially for countries with weak economic structures in which it enables them to be benefited from gains in each regional group. In the same line of debate, others, such as Lyakurwa (1997) formidably row that multiplicity means a genuine progress at one REC, especially the wider one, while maintaining the achievements and benefits of others. On the other hand, scholars like Aryeetey and Oduro (1996) strongly stated that overlapping membership could make sectoral cooperation and trade integration difficult and cumbersome.

Notwithstanding with the above debates, nowadays, scholars seem to come into an agreement in which majority of them classify multiplicity and overlapping membership as a challenge for regional integration in Africa. In line with this, therefore, it would be very essential to critically analyze and discuss the effects and worries of multiplicity of membership and proliferation of regional groupings in order to clarify the confusing contentions among different groups. Hence, in the following sub-sections of this research, the issue has been critically pore averred.

4.3. Complications, Contradictions and Duplications of Activities

Many policy analysts and researchers of the field argued that this multiplicity and confusing membership engenders duplication and sometimes competition in activities, while providing additional burdens on already over-stretched ministers of the countries to attend the various summits and meetings.

Many African states seek concurrent membership in two or more RECs. For example, in Eastern Africa, the majority of COMESA member states are also members of SADC and most IGAD members are also members of COMESA. In addition, East African countries are as well members of development finance institutions that extend alongside different regional groupings. These include, among others; the PTA Bank, East African Development Bank, and Agency for Trade insurance. The same is true in West Africa, where members of ECOWAS are members of WAEMU and members of MRU are members of ECOWAS and some members of ECOWAS are also members of CEN-SAD (*see figure 4.4*). This spider spin or web turns around and around in all sub-regional settings of Africa. Thus, ultimately, it leads into a difficult task of horizontal and vertical coordination. For one thing, countries will be challenged by harmonizing these all regional agendas into their national policies and programs. Likewise, the cost of membership would become unmanageable while the increase in the number of communities that the countries belong. In addition, the member countries will be stretched (in administrative and financial issues) but ineffective when they join many RECs. These problems may sometimes result with the shifting (withdrawal or joining) of membership which end up with the floating of blocs and put the culmination of the African Economic Community into question. By extension, neither the member states nor the organizations will be benefited.

The integrative effects of the overlie drawing of regional organizations of Africa could be shown in a way that it could in the first place resulted with complications and contradictions of the duties and fragmentation of loyalties. This in turn reduces the commitment of member states to their regional groupings. In the end, the progress of integration schemes will be retarded.

A significant number of studies show that in all African sub-regional settings, several regional blocs pursue essentially identical mandates and objectives, which leads to wasteful duplication of efforts. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (2004), “The overlap among regional economic communities also tends to dissipate collective efforts towards the common goal of the African Union. Moreover, it tends to muddy the goals of integration and lead to counterproductive competition among countries and institutions.”

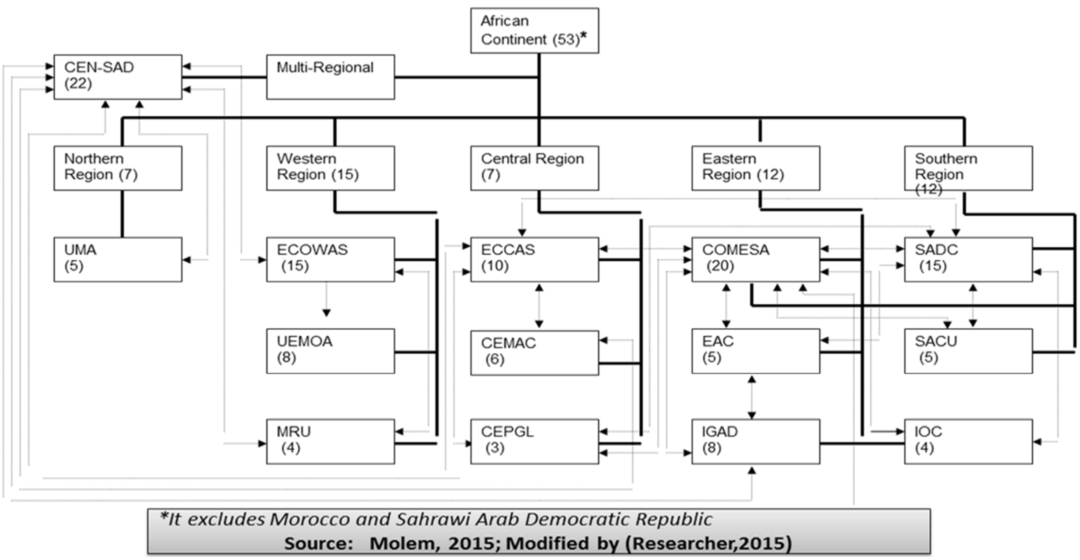


Figure 4.4. *Web of Interlocking RECs/Integration Blocs.*

4.4. The Variable Geometry of Regions Requires 'Modus Operandi'

The variable geometry of regions also makes the African integration process rough and tough. The existence of too many spaghetti bowl regional organizations in the African integration trend have made difficult to meet the objectives of regional blocs, especially when countries which have different history and levels of integration are coming together. There are different patterns of relations between countries, some representing fairly high levels of integration and others are not. At this time, serious conflict within RECs may happen. For instance, integrating the deeply integrated K-Swahilli East Africans with that of the neighboring Ethiopia or Eretria or Somalia, which have a different culture and language, is an arduous process. It is also common to find such type of integration differentials among southern African and Eastern African countries which are the members of COMESA. Thus, the problem of variable geometry could be essentially manifested when countries are greatly pressurized to find a *modus operandi* to pursue common and all inclusive regional integration arrangements.

4.5. Overlapping Authority

Sometimes overlapping authority is another consequence of duplication of the African integration arrangement. This has been seen between the peace and security agreements of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR/CIRGL) and the river basin management agreements of the Senegal River Basin Development Authority (OMVS).

Sadly enough, contrary to the proliferation and the overlapping authority of regional integration arrangements of Africa, the progress so far is very minimal. Despite the fact that regional integration is essential to move African economy to the next stage of competitiveness, its achievement in trade, security and other politico-economic spheres are very weak. This has been supported by the findings of Fouratan and Pritchett (1993) which states that the shares of intra-regional exports are typically below 5% in African RECs.

4.6. Problems of Harmonization of Policies

According to the African Union Commission (2013), the overlap or sometimes ascribed as the "variable geometry approach", is much more problematic mainly due to its difficulties to harmonize policies. The commission, furthermore, explained that managing the implementation of a multitude of programs in the same area of integration is a laborious and exhaustive observable fact. To the commission, the impact of reproduction of communities is not limited to the complication of implementation of those programs, but also on their monitoring and evaluation processes, which make up one of the failures of the regional organizations.

In West and Southern Africa, the problem of harmonization is typically magnificent. In these areas, there are wide free trade area arrangements, within which smaller yet deeply integrated customs unions are found. So, the question here is either to proceed with one group or the other as it would be unfeasible to have two negotiations in parallel, one with respect to the free trade area and the other with the customs union. The problem is that if negotiations proceed with the smaller customs union, it may accelerate the fragmentations of the larger groupings unless the small group decides to speed up its own integration objectives solely. Similarly, Alemayehu (1998) affirmed that proliferation of RECs makes the harmonization of policies very difficult. It is true especially in the areas of rules of origin and customs procedures. As far as harmonization is concerned a massive information gap at policy making and implementation levels is another danger which challenges the African regional blocs in general.

In spite of the fact that coordinating and harmonizing the activities of the regional groupings are among the key concerns of the African integration agenda; its success is remained very low. However, the progresses made by ECOWAS and UEMOA to have a common program of action on trade liberalization and macroeconomic policy convergence, a memorandum of understanding signed between EAC and COMESA to foster harmonization of their policies and programs and the adoption of a trade regime by ECCAS that takes into account the dispensations in CEMAC should be appreciated.

4.7. High Management and Financial Burdens on the Member States

Another major effect of multiplicity of RECs is the burdens overloaded by regional blocs in to the member states. A country belonging to two or more RECs faces a huge amount of human and financial costs associated with membership. The so far experiences of the African regional groupings show that their sources of finance are dominantly two. One is from assessed contributions, and the other one is external assistance. Due to multiple memberships of countries, their actual paid contributions and their commitment to pay the assessed contributions have been declined. The burden of financing the budget of RECs is not only a headache for the member states, but also for the regional communities which may even sometimes led to the collapse of these blocs as it has been seen in the West African Economic Community (CEAO). Furthermore, beyond financial obligations, countries are also entangled with multiple tasks such as attending different meetings; comply with various policy decisions, instruments, procedures, and schedules. The Economic Commission for Africa (2004) additionally asserted that Customs officials may also pressurized to deal with different tariff reduction rates, rules of origin, trade documentation, and statistical nomenclatures. The range of requirements multiplies customs procedures and paperwork, counter to trade liberalization's goals of facilitating and simplifying trade.

The existence of too many regional organizations, may followed by a tendency towards top-heavy structures with too many political appointments, failures by governments to meet their financial obligations to regional organizations, poor preparation before meetings, and lack of follow up by sectoral ministries on decisions taken at regional meetings by Heads of State.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Though the issue of multiplicity of regional groupings and overlapping membership is an argumentative one, nowadays, scholars seem to come into an agreement to have one voice, i.e. a multiplicity of RECs is one of the major challenges of regional integration in Africa. This is partly because it complicates the overall continental integration process and put massive strains on the member states ability and resources to cope with diverse agendas and exigencies. Hence, eradicating wasteful or costly duplication of multiple memberships and rationalizing some overlapping sub-regional blocks should be promoted by member states as well as the AU institutional bodies which are responsible for African integration processes. Moreover, it can be recommended that rationalizing the need of blocs and membership of them, based on a thorough analysis of comparative advantages and their efficiencies would have a positive impact on the multi-web nature of RECS in Africa. Beyond the sub regional confinements, studying inter-regional interactions could also allow us to rationally form which type of blocs and in which regional settings they should be established.

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