Nigeria's Contributions to the Development of Africa in the 21st Century: An Assessment

By
Theresa Egwure Chima.
University of Port Harcourt. Faculty of Humanities,
Department of History and Diplomatic Studies.
Email: chimatessy@gmail.com Phone Number: 08033368709.

Abstract

The paper evaluates the role and contributions of Nigeria toward the development of Africa's regional and sub-regional institutions in the 21st Century, namely, Economic Commission for West Africa, Lagos Plan of Action, African Economic Commission, African Union and New Partnership for African Development. The article examines Nigeria's efforts in the unity and development of Africa, which involves the integration of economic growth, and the improvement in the living standard of the people of the African region. The work interrogates Nigeria's foreign policy agenda towards African as she shows her preparedness for many issues affecting the continent as the leading contributor in the transformation of Organisation of African Unity to the African Union in 1999, which were duly acknowledged through the former President, Olusegun Obasanjo. The work concludes that Nigeria's Leaders and their administrations have played and still playing effective roles in the contribution, advancement of the economic development of the African continent.

Key words: Nigeria, Foreign Policy, African Union, Transformation, Development.

Introduction

It is very obvious to recognize the efforts, roles and contributions of Nigeria towards the unity and development of African States and its people, which involves integration for economic growth and improvement in the standard of living of the peoples of the region, through its formations, stabilizations and survival, looking back from the Organisation of African Unity, 1963, the Lagos

Plan of Action in 1980, the African Economic Community/Abuja Treaty of 1991, the African Union, 1999 the New Partnership for African Development, 2001,etc, Nigeria has contributed significantly and substantially to the development and sustenance of the African Organisations, mostly on international peace and security, till date.

It is also important to note that since Nigeria's attained independence for over 64years ago, she has not hidden her declaration on foreign policy behavior that always shows her preparedness for so many issues faced and facing Africa. For instance, by the measurement of her roles and contributions, the preeminence Nigeria has acquired has accorded her the leadership role of the sub-region and the spokesperson for the region bothering on the following issues: new international economic order/economic issues, debt issue, reparation, Lagos Plan of Action's self-reliance/self-sustaining economic development, African Economic Communities harmonization and revival of Regional Economic Commission (RECs), transformation of OAU to AU, peace and security through ECOWAS-ECOMOG, and the recent African Partnership organization, known as New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

The AU Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) with it objectives and functions which comprises the economic and general welfare of the African people established under article 20 of OAU charter and equivalent of article 61 of the UN economic and social council (ECOSOC) with similar functions such as initiating studies and reports with regards to economic and social issues affecting the destinies of the African people.

Therefore, the attention of African leaders and the organization towards economic and social matters that took place in 1980 when a concrete plan of action towards economic and social development was drawn for the emancipation of the continent's peoples and states from their fate of economic underdevelopment.

The most important reports of the symposium in Monrovia, Liberia, February 12-16, 1979 where the future development prospects of African towards the year 2000 was held and attended by 40 experts from all parts of Africa and outside. It was discussed at several OAU Ministerial meetings and in the various Capitals in

Africa in draft that were discussed and approved at the meeting of the OAU Heads of state and Government in Lagos the 28th of April, 1980 (George, 1994, p.205).

ECOWAS: Indeed, promoting the view of functional co-operation, Nigeria, along with Togo, brought the positive leadership to the formation of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS) 1975.

One of the reasons behind Nigeria's decision to sponsor the formation of ECOWAS was also influenced by the activities of private sectors, that is, business community, Nigerian Chamber of Commercial, Industry Mines and Agriculture which perceived economic integration as beneficial and thus threw its support behind government's decision to initiate the formation of ECOWAS. To support its integrationist position, the Chamber embarked on an active campaign to solicit support from its counterparts in Anglophone and Francophone West African States, an action that also resulted in the formation of the Federation of West African Chamber of Commerce (Akiba (1997, p.57).

With the effort at achieving continental integration, African has adopted the approach that the regional Economic Communnitis (RECs) would be the building blocks for ECOWAS. Again with the leadership of Nigeria, RECs have provided the needed example to follow. (Chux and Timi, 2017).

Nigeria used the instrument of the law to reverse economic situation, sponsored a review of the 1975 ECOWAS Treaty. Nigeria also sponsored ECOWAS meeting of the Authority of Heads of State and Government in Abuja July 1991 where in a committee of Eminent Persons was set up to submit proposals for the review of the Treaty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1991, Pp84-85).

Nigeria as an influential and a potential leader of African continent has made impact on the international scene, as a mediator she has played numerous roles to most of her neighbours, actively involved in their development, prevention, management and resolution of conflicts through the formation of the sub-regional Peacekeeping force, known as ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), found in the following countries: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Ivory Coast Angola and Sudan. As, without Nigeria, ECOMOG would

not be active, the projection of her powers in the region made her intervene in Togo, Liberia, Sao-Tome and Principe, etc.

African Economic Communities (AEC) and Lagos Plan of Action (LPA):
After political independence in the 1960's most ECOWAS States were not seriously inclined towards regional economic cooperation. It was not until the middle of the 1960s when the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) by resolution 142(vii), agreed to assist African countries to set up regional "Inter-governmental machineries responsible for harmonization of economic and social development" that any serious thought was made by West African states on the fundamental issues of regional economic cooperation (Abutudu, 1990, Pp.93-97) The AEC treaty document was the outcome of a joint project of the OAU and UN Economic Commission for Africa(ECA), headed by a Nigerian, Professor Adebayo Adedeji. It was a measure of Nigeria's foreign policy success that the document was signed in Nigeria and called the 'Abuja Treaty', establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) 1991.

The draft Final Act of Lagos as the Lagos Plan of Action was called as the first OAU meeting of Assembly of Heads of state and Government devoted exclusively to economic problems of Africa. It focused on the consideration of guidelines and measures for national and collective self-reliance in economic order which arrived at the eventual establishment of an African common market leading to the establishment of African Economic Community (AEC). For example, Professor Adebayo Adedeji was the brain behind the drafting of the Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act of Lagos (George 1994, p.206). The Nigeria academia and bureaucrats played a crucial role in the drafting and formulations of the policies of the LPA in 1980 with regards to the agenda on Africans economic transformation, Nigeria has been in forefront and has provided the effective leadership that culminated in the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action and the African Economic Community (AEC). It was Nigeria's diplomats, under the late Ambassador Gabriel Ijewere who crafted the documents that eventually led to its adoption and provides the continent with the direction it follows (Chux and Timi, 2017, Pp.19-20).

Nigeria's roles and Contributions on AU: Despite all the achievements of OAU, there was an observation that the organization needed to be reformed as the historical challenges confronting the people of the continent, cannot be solved with the way the organization were operating. The world is changing rapidly with the era of globalisation and new sense that the AU tends to benefits from some sort of supra-national identity and power (Osita and Ogaba, 2011, p.214).

For the past decades, the world ushered in the twenty first Century and the new millennium with feelings of enthusiasm, vigor and a new found disposition to tackle the development burdens that the continent has been saddled with for such a long time, one of this renewed vigor has been the establishment of the African Union (Joy, 2002, p.12).

The birth of A.U was earlier initiated by the late Libya's Muamar Gaddafi in 1999, which could not be said to be borne out of the failure of the OAU, but a historical truism which dated back to the late 1950s and early 1960s when the continent was in search of a viable forum to unite all countries of African under one umbrella, then the 'radical' Casablanca group opted for a union Government of African while the conservation group opted for some loose union which gave birth to the OAU. Thus at the end of 20th century, and the idea of a Union was mooted by the late Libya leader, Colonel Muamar Gaddafi during the 4th OAU Extra-Ordinary Summit in Sirte, Libya, September 1999, African Union was birthed to reflects as a sovereign supranational entity.

For Nigeria's roles and contributions in the development of Africa and her efforts to transform the OAU to AU, Nigeria's leading contributions was duly acknowledged. Regrettably, many people erroneously believe that it was the late Brother Ghaddafi that played the leading role. It is acceptable that the idea of an African Union was rooted by him at the 4th extra-ordinary summit of the OAU in Sirte; this idea would have been immediately killed if not for the convincing and moderating role played by the former Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo (An Article, 2013).

However, Former President Obasanjo, convinced his peers that rather than an outright dismissal of Libya's President's proposal, it should be considered as an

opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the Abuja treaty, which was designed for the economic integration aimed at subsequently leading to Africa's political and economic integration.

Furthermore, it was Nigeria that provided the leadership role that enabled Africa to see clearly the way forward in establishing the African Union, the powerful and sovereign supra-national entity which Libya proposed and tried to promote, subsequently was tampered and replaced by the gradualist approach of the European Union model to continental organization favoured by Nigeria and a majority of member States. It is important to note that a Nigerian Professor, Adele Jinadu, was one of the six experts that produced the Draft Constitutive Act of the African Union.

Even at the expert's level, Nigeria's voice was clear, consistent and equivocal, enabling most countries to support a balanced position put forward by Nigeria's delegation. During Ministerial debates, Nigeria along with four others ensured that Africa was not saddled with an unworkable Union as intended by its initiators. When debates became deadlocked, it was Nigeria that provided the compromise solutions that save the day. (An article, 2013).

In 1990s, the OAU began to aggressively condemn unconstitutional change of government in the continent. The steps taken by Nigeria, declaring the coups in the following countries as unconstitutional: Burundi (1996),Sierra Leone (1997), Central African Republic (2003), guinea Bissau (2003), Sao Tome and Principe(2003), Togo (2005), Mauritania (2005 and 2008), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009) and Niger (2010). (William, 2011).

Indeed, Nigeria is one of the fifteen pioneer members of the Peace and Security Council. President Obasanjo as the then elected Chairperson of the African Union, presided over the inaugural meeting of the Peace and Security on 12th May 2004, an honour bestowed on Nigeria because of her past and future roles in conflict resolution. And as a member of the Peace and Security Council, Nigeria has deployed a lot of resources in human, material and monetary, to help deal with Africa's conflicts, for instance, the Darfur Peace Talk (Akinterinwa, 2005:88).

Meanwhile, Ambassador Olu Adeniji, CON. former Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, in his capacity as the then chairman of the Executive Council of the African Union, chaired a meeting of the EU-African TROIKA held at Ministerial level in Addis Ababa, on the 5th December, 2004.

During the outbreak of 'Ebola' diseases in Africa in 2015, Nigeria deployed 250 Volunteers to the countries affected by the deadly Virus. These countries were guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nigeria working collectively with the AU, World Health organization, African Development bank, Aliko Dangote Group of Companies and other development partners interested in Africa (FMOH, 2015) trained the health personnel.

Nigeria remains one of the five major financiers of the AU operating budget, with full AU voting rights and sponsored her nationals for strategic positions requiring AU support for various international organisations. The other major financiers are Algeria, Egypt, Libya and South Africa (Okereke, 2012). These five countries contribute 75% of the organization's operating budget while the remaining countries contribute 25%. The big five contributed US$14.4 million by 2012, these contributions were put at US$16.7 million (Okereke, 2012). Nigeria has been one of the largest contributors to the annual budgets of the organization, paying as much as 15 million US dollars to the running costs of the organization in 2012 alone (Ashiru and George, 2013). In 2007, a Nigerian General. Martin Agwai was appointed as the Commander of the UN/AU hybrid peace keeping force in Darfur (Osita and Ogaba, 2011, p.205)

The AU and its institutions are stridently marching forward, thanks to the clear and consistent direction provided by Nigerian government in the process leading to the transformation. There is no doubt that in all, Nigeria's principled stand was anchored on the importance which the country had always attached to the unity and development of Africa and the forging of solidarity among its people.

Nigeria's Contributions in the Development of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD): Against the backdrop of African's worsening economic situation and conscience of ongoing global transformation, African leaders devised new mechanism to address the continents economic woes. The outcome

was the parallel initiatives designed to bring about the economic turn-around of the continent. Although accounts of the process leading up to the establishment of the NEPAD which originates from two main conceptual documents: The Millennium African development plan (MAP) championed by three African Leaders-Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Addelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and the OMEGA plan, conceived by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade. These two initiative benefited from technical and analytical inputs from the "Global Compact for Africa's Development", conceived by Africa's traditional development policy think tank- The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Africa leaders based on a common vision and a form and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries both individually and collectively on a path of sustainable growth and development and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body polity. The programme was anchored on determination of Africa to eradicate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalizing world. (Animalu,2002, p.1).

With its goals of restoration of peace and security in Africa, that is, conflict prevention, management and resolution entrenchment of good governance in all ramifications, eradication of severe poverty, underdevelopment and acute income disparity, promotion of economic renewal, accelerated growth and sustainable development and reversing Africans marginalization in the process of globalization (Adewale, 2004, Pp.127-128).

The involvement and contributions of Nigeria was through the leadership role former President Obasanjo played in driving the initiative both within and outside Africa. Obasanjo, at the June 2001 Group of Eight (G8) Summit in Genoa, Italy, was among the four leading African heads of State to unveil an African development mechanism known as the New Partnership for African Development.

As one of the African leaders who developed NEPAD framework document, conceptualized and adopted the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as an

African-conceived instrument for a systematic review of the performance and progress of peer states towards attaining good governance (Isaac, 2004, p.171).

Nigeria was also the Chairman of the Head of States and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) (The highest body of NEPAD and the Chairman of the committee of Participating Countries in the Peer Review Mechanism (APR Forum). An Eminent Nigerian Professor Adebayo Adedeji represented the West African Sub-region at the Panel of Eminent Persons on the APRM (APR Panel). While a notable and successful Nigeria businessman, Alh. Bamanga Tukur, Chaired the NEPAD Business Group (Isaac, 2004, p.172).

Nigeria was made the chairman of the NEPAD Steering Committee, the think-tank from July 2004 to July 2005 and was given a slot of the United Nations Under Secretary-General and Special Adviser on African. Back home, the former President Obasanjo constituted the NEPAD Business Group (Nigeria) to boast the involvement of the Nigeria private sector in the implementation of NEPAD priorities (Isaac, 2004). And one of the NEPAD's offices is situated in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Conclusion: Nigeria as a Sovereign nation, is industrious, bold, assertive and a leading country in Africa through her immense resource endowments that enhanced her status as a leading nation not only in Africa but the world at large. The creative and innovative roles and contributions Nigeria's Leaders and their administrations have played and still playing in African continent, as regards her impact on promoting economic growth and development through African institutional integration is highly regarded, which has earned her a Prime of place among Frontline States.

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