The Role of The African Union and Agenda 2063 in Paving the Future of Africa

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The African Union (AU) was established in 2002 to succeed the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with a new mandate: not only to continue the fight against colonialism but to drive the continent's integration and address its socio-economic challenges. Unlike its predecessor, which adhered to a policy of non-interference, and could never resolve any major conflicts, the AU was empowered to intervene in cases of war, genocide, and human rights violations.

Despite these aspirations, political instability remains a serious issue. In 2015, the constitution of Rwanda was amended to extend the presidential two-term limit. The amendment allowed President Paul Kagame to stay in power for another seven-year term, followed by the potential of two further five-year terms, permitting him to continue in power until 2034. In the same year, the Republic of Congo's constitution was changed by a referendum, removing both term and age limitations that would have precluded President Denis Sassou Nguesso from seeking re-election. Notably, Nguesso has been in power for all but five years from his initial ascent to power in 1979. Many other African leaders have followed suit, bending and in some instances downright violating the laws of

the land to remain in power. According to data accumulated by Jonathan Powell & Clayton Thyne, there have been 492 recorded attempted or successful coups globally since 1950, with Africa accounting for 220 of these incidents, the highest of any region.

Corruption continues to be a significant barrier to development, with about 25% of Africa's GDP lost to corrupt practices. The African Union has struggled to enforce its policies, partly due to its reluctance to adopt binding treaties and weak enforcement mechanisms. For instance, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) does exist which is a self-assessment review on the state of governance and development in the African region; however, it continues to lose its effectiveness owing to a lack of enforcement capacity. The APRM has reviewed multiple African states but there has been little to no adherence to the recommendations.

AGENDA 2063 – A New Hope?

Since the establishment of the AU, the philosophy of Pan-Africanism which comprises African unity, self-sufficiency, integration, and solidarity, has been the center for all the programs brought forth by the organization. To further that philosophy, the AU unveiled Agenda 2063 in 2013. Agenda 2063 is aimed at guiding Africa's transformation, development, and renewal and to itself from all the issues that plague it, over the next 50 years. It is "a global strategy to optimize the use of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans".

The Agenda outlines seven 'aspirations' for Africa by 2063. To attain these goals, several strategic initiatives will be implemented. The goals will prioritize promoting common African positions, agricultural development, regional integration, conflict resolution, human capital development, natural resource management and industrialization.

Agenda 2063 will be implemented through successive 10-year Implementation plans with second 10 Year Implementation Plan being announced on February 17th, 2023 which is also being touted as the decade of acceleration. The second plan maintains that Agenda 2063 remains relevant and that collaborative efforts are critical to success. Moreover, it states that future plans should include mechanisms to defend against external shocks, raise citizen knowledge, and guarantee that projects are adequately supported and monitored.

However, the implementation of the same goals is in doubt. This is because according to the second Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, published by the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), by the end of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, only ten countries achieved 50% or more of their goals. On the other hand, 11 countries reported an implementation rate of 30% or less.

To make Agenda 2063 a success, lessons need to be learned from the limited successes and failures of older programs. For instance, The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) had widespread support when it was adopted in 2001. The goal

was to provide a foundation for the African continent's long-term development. However, soon the program experienced financial and strategic hurdles that hindered its implementation. Before the reforms that were made in NEPAD in 2010, the program struggled to obtain funding in Africa and had to leverage foreign support. Implementation progress was dependent on external resource availability. Therefore, the availability of funds domestically should be on the priority list of the AU. However, it would not be an easy task as there is a large public debt burden in Africa, especially in the last two decades. Despite receiving debt relief in the 1990s, about one-third of Sub-Saharan African states are facing financial hardship due to increasing debt. Agenda 2063 stresses the need for African countries to prioritize effective public finance management, debt management, and public investment to achieve the development goals and hence, it is inferred that these three areas need special attention.

Way forward

Africa has engaged in thorough reflection and conceptualization of its vision for the continent by the year 2063 and has a roadmap planned for achieving that goal. However, the fundamental issue is the failure of the AU to transform these goals into a cohesive and collective commitment of all the member states to not deviate from the necessary course of action until the agenda is fulfilled.

The task ahead of the AU is huge as the continent has diverse needs which require attention; however, the need for the hour is for the AU to prioritize and focus on solving pressing issues like tackling political instability, war and displacement in the region. Aiming at resolving all the issues simultaneously runs the risk of spreading the limited resources too thin and diluting the results. All long-term development policies like Agenda 2063, need to be reviewed, and if necessary, revised to keep them relevant and up to date with the priorities of the time.

Furthermore, the dependence on foreign aid should be reduced. The added effect of seeking foreign aid is opening the organization, and the member states by proxy, to foreign influences. Foreign dependence also undermines the authority of the AU. Self-reliance should be promoted by the AU which can be done by utilizing and propagating the philosophy of Pan-Africanism. Some ways by which self-reliance can be achieved are by investing in education and the necessary skills to meet the regional demands. Inter-African trade should be promoted by promoting the African identity and strengthening regional bonds.

Stronger adherence to the policies of the AU should be facilitated. The efficacy of the AU depends on its ability to implement its regulations through its institutions. Introducing stronger enforcement mechanisms while keeping within the boundaries of multilateralism can result in incremental improvements towards a stronger AU. The member states domestic laws should give way to the AU's policies in a way that doesn't hamper their sovereignty.

The issue with the AU is that when its institutions fail, players suggest creating new frameworks, revising current ones, and improving institutions. Institutional decisions and frameworks should be backed up by robust actions. The AU may achieve significant progress by focusing on implementation in the coming years.

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