

Regional Integration and Citizenship in the East African Community.

Although the topic covers the great Lakes Region, I have preferred to narrow it to the East African Community region for 3 reasons.

First the term Great Lakes Region is so amorphous that it needs a study in its own right. At the first summit of the Heads of State in Dar-es-salam, their Excellencies had divergent views on what the Great Lakes Region should constitute. I remember one Head of State arguing that since his country had borders on one of the lakes, should he just qualify? Another Head of State argued that since a lot of Lakes had been dug and created in his country he should qualify. Others argued that the country at the center of the problem should constitute the Region. It could mean Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and Democratic Republic Of Congo. Others argued that it covers any country that was directly or indirectly affected by problems of the Region like Angola, the Central African Republic, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Congo, and Sudan etc. should be part of the region.

So what constitutes the Great Lakes Region?

Second, I prefer to stick to the East African Community Region because its nature and composition is well known.

Thirdly, by virtue of my previous engagement, am most familiar with the East African Community, which has a policy or provision about the development and movement of citizens.

Before we talk about citizenship, why do we need Regional Integration? The state of affairs of the people of Africa and black Africa in particular is nothing to be proud of. There is abject poverty amidst great and rich natural resources. All poor statistics of the world, Aids, malaria, malnutrition, infant mortality rate, hunger, illiteracy, low life expectancy, lowest per capita income, civil strife, refugees etc are found in sub Saharan Africa.

The African people both at home and abroad are the most marginalized, despised, disrespected, looked down upon, at times by their own leaders, race on earth.

Respect has never been and cannot be granted. It has to be sweated for and largely home grown. Outsiders can only support and sympathize with you in the process.

Why is Africa in this state of affairs? We are all familiar with the reasons. But for the purpose of developing my argument let me mention a few. From the external forces, we had foreign domination characterized by slavery, colonialism. Colonialism was made worse by the artificial boundaries that created the current Nation States that were never meant to be viable in the first place, but which we worship and revere so much as if we created them ourselves and for our benefit.

The African Nation States boundaries are in my humble opinion millstones around the necks and prison walls around the very people they purport to protect. Unless something is done by the Africans themselves to transcend the negative effects of these boundaries, Africa is likely to remain in a miserable state visa vie the rest of the world in spite of discoveries of gold, diamond, oil and uranium. For they end up benefiting others than ourselves.

Internally we have had the distinction of having misrule, plunder and harassment by the very Governments that are meant to protect its citizens in the first place. Don't forget that it was the very weak states and narrow-minded pre-colonial leaders who assisted slavery, plunder and colonialism to take root in Africa.

However, whenever Africans have pulled their resources together, achievements against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, have been achieved. Examples are; the retreat of colonial masters especially in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The overthrow of the apartheid regimes in Southern Africa and removal of several dictatorial regimes including the removal of life Presidents like Idi Amin and introduction of relatively more democratic regimes and governance that prevail in most of African States today.

That leads to the relevance of Regional integration on the continent. Why Regional integration? It is a realization that the current set of African States are most unlikely to liberate the citizens from the state of abject poverty and misery referred to at the start. In spite of the numerous efforts, development plans, various initiatives and support and aid, nothing much has been achieved in raising the standards of living of the African people, forty years or more after independence.

At independence and even recently at the African Union summit in Accra, there has been two major schools of thought on how to achieve growth, development and respect for the continent. Out right unity of all African states or Regional groupings as building blocks for the eventual Union Government of the African Continent. This debate is likely to continue for sometime. But it is not an issue today for the topic is about Regional Integration.

Why have the East African Community? What is its purpose? Out of the objectives of the community in Article 5, I will just pick the first two. The community shall ensure: -

- a) **The attainment of sustainable growth and development of the partner states by promotion of a more balanced and harmonious development of the partner states.**
- b) **The strengthening and consolidation of cooperation in agreed fields that would lead to equitable economic development within the Partners States and which would in turn raise the standards of living and improve the quality of life of their population.**

How do you attain this, is in the objectives that follow which I sum up as sustainable utilization of resources and protection of the environment, strengthening economic, political, cultural ties, promotion of peace and stability plus good governance.

So really the purpose of the community, which is people, centered is to raise the living standards of the population by using our natural resources.

In my view, this has to be systematic and long-term goal. We should not look at the Community as a quick fix or solution to all our problems. To do so, is to create a recipe for frustration and uncalled for disappointment.

How do we utilize our resources for our own development as members of the Community through the private sector, public sector or combination of both to be able to exploit our natural resource? To turn the vast potential wealth into actual wealth i.e. goods and services? We must pay attention to one resource that has not been fully attended to. That is the development of the available human resource. To create a well educated and highly skilled populace by looking at and developing each and every human being without recourse to his/her origin, ethnicity, tribe, religion, clan, or race.

It is more easily said than done but it must be done or else. This is contained in chapter Sixteen Article 102 on the Education and Training. The development of the human resource in my opinion is central to the whole process of developing the citizens in the Community, which leads to the free movement of the labors and services. The chapter on developing the human resource is not exhaustive but we need to do the following: -

- Strengthen existing centers of excellence rationally in order to develop the required skills to develop and handle our resources e.g. food processing, textile manufacture, leather technology, mining and processing or polishing of minerals (for example it is a pity that the only rare mineral tanzanite is polished outside and the cream of the money enjoyed by outsiders). We need to create institutions to develop engineering and technology related skills. We need to develop skills and specialized centers in the field of human health and halt the hemorrhage of resources for treatment of our people outside.
- We need to create varied coordinated and related technical institutes to produce artisans and highly skilled technicians. In all this, we need to coordinate and avoid petty jealousies, silly competitions and harmful duplication.
- A skilled labour force is critical for the exploitation and development of our resources. It is central to the attraction and retention of serious investors both local and foreign. It is the key to producing quality goods and services not only to be able to compete but also to give confidence, respect and pride to the citizens including those who contribute little or nothing to the production and provision of those quality goods and services.
- A community of several nations creates a large population, a reasonable initial market for those goods and services, a huge pool for a variety resources and raw materials. Fragmented or balkanized States leads to

fragmented resources to make meaning or small populations to encourage large-scale production.

The issue of an educated and skilled population should ease the question of citizenship and movement of persons and labour. When we talk of citizenship, what do mean. In the context of the community we should be referring to people who are entitled to benefit from the integration process. The citizens of Partner States of the Community. When we talk of movement of persons, which excites some members of the Community and sends chills in the spines of others, what do we mean? What do people perceive and hence expect or fear. Some see an opportunity to shift and graze or cultivate on vast margin lands. Others imagine huge movements of persons with their herds of animals or hoes and pangas to occupy the land and degrade it.

In my view if there was a movement of needed skilled labour force to increase production and turn potential wealth into actual wealth, it would ease fears. Which owner of an industry does not need the best skilled person on the market, which hotel owner would not be looking for the best chef, which patient would not want to be attended to by the best neural, brain, heart etc surgeon or specialist? Which parent would not want to send his/her child to a good school with the best teachers? Why do our people flock to India and South Africa for basic services? It is the skilled labour force and specialists that should be created for the region. I am not proposing that unskilled people and labour should not move at all. I am pointing out that the Community is to enable us plan big, aim high in order to transcend these borders in better and more purposeful ways than currently obtain.

We should engage in negotiating where these centers of excellence and institutions should be located and commonly funded for good of all of us (cf the air bus industry in Europe) instead of concentrating on sharing places at the secretariat. These realizations and negotiations are not easy.

Our common goal and emphasis should be Education, Education, Education; Skills, Skills, Skills; Specialists, Specialists, Specialists. In all of them not just the usual talk of the specialist being the first and only, African South of the Sahara but they should be in plenty. These are not easy goals. Our task is not to deal with and handle the easier part of life. We have been looking for easy solutions and outsiders to solve our problems for too long.

It is to tackle the hard realities of life through integration and meaningful skills development. It is easier and safer for every body to walk than to drive. We cannot just go on walking and greeting everybody on the village path of human development. We need to construct highways and speed, on the road of human development by creating and developing massively, the areas of Education, Technology, Skill and Specialists.

It needs commitment of leaders of all types (temporal and spiritual) focus, perseverance, persistence knowing very well that some of the efforts will bear fruit when the current planners are no longer in place.

Those who have taken this hard and long road have made it. Those who believe in the easy and populist ways and easy fixes by outsiders and their local collaborators are still on handouts or on famine relief. This must not go on. You who engage in strategic studies better be strategists.

The whole purpose is to have long-term thinking and strategies. The issue should be where will East Africa be 10,20,50 years from now? What should we have achieved for the region and living standards of each citizen? What should be our contribution to the advancement of knowledge rather than surfing or listening to get the latest discoveries and advances of others as if God gave us no brain. What do we need to do to achieve this? Who are strategizing on this as a institution or think tank. What do we need to do to create and sustain this? This is one of the questions of the moment for institutions like yours which are engaged in strategic thinking and planning.