

THE QUEST FOR EAST AFRICAN FEDERATION

A PAPER PRESENTED TO PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON EAST
AFRICAN FEDERATION

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In preparing this written paper I cannot exercise fully my freedom of speech or say fully all I know and what I feel are the problems and likely out come. Until recently, I was the SG of the community for 5 years. In that capacity you hold both official and unofficial discussions. You occasionally hold a one to one conversation with Presidents, Ministers, business people and delegations. People give you their views not to be quoted and in full confidence that you are not going public.

It is still too early to say all that I know or think as a result of the information that came to my knowledge by virtue of that office.

Having said that, the struggle to bring the East African countries under a single Government has been on for along time. The first attempt was under the British at a time when the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was being formed. It was nipped in the bud mainly out of fear that the white settlers in Kenya would swamp the region.

It is common knowledge that just before and shortly after independence, the leaders of the region were publicly in for the federation of the East Africa. What went wrong?

Whenever there has been a big push for Federation, East Africans have been short changed and received less than what was portrayed as the ultimate. When the Federation failed under the colonial system we settled for the High Commission eventually becoming East African Common Services Organization.

When the envisaged federation at independence failed, we ended up with the East African Community in 1967. This was more than 6 years after the independence of Tanganyika. However, both the East African Common Services Organization and East African Community were vibrant and visible.

There were common services like Road, Rail, Water and Air travel. Telecommunication, Common standards in Education, common currency, easy movement of people and labour. Common research in Agriculture, Health and Science. They were high profile, visible and tangible. Eventually, even the substitute for that Federation i.e. the Community also collapsed. Many reasons have been given why it collapsed. They include: -

1. Sharing of resources, costs and benefits.
2. Unequal Development.
3. East/West conflict (as if we were part of it rather than victims of it.)
4. Ideological differences.
5. Non-involvement of private sectors and civil society.
6. That too much power was concentrated in the Authority.

The truth as to why the envisaged Federation never took off has never been truly revealed. But I am positive that the forces both local and external that acted against the formation of the Federation still exist. They may have changed shape and tactics but never the less, they still exist though much weaker, may be.

For purpose of today's paper let me stress 3 reasons why the community collapsed:

1. The advent of Amin. This was a result not just of poor and conspiratorial governance, but of a leadership that was becoming isolated within its own party and cooking weird policies. Remember the 3+1 theory. The issue of governance and leadership. I am not saying that this was for Uganda only but it burst the banks in Uganda.
2. The issue of shortsighted leaders. Greedy for not just power but ill gotten wealth. Such leaders would always prefer the territory they knew and controlled under the cover of sovereignty. They would withdraw certain matters from the community back to the partner state. The Chinese have a saying that, "*a thumb before the eye blocks out a mountain*".
3. The habit of some leaders at all levels, of agreeing on some issues at the region and when they come back, they either ignore them or just do the opposite, or implement only those, which directly benefit them or those that don't give them headache. Remember the Kampala agreement.

One time we were in Abuja attending the African Heads of State Committee of fast tracking the African Union Government. One head state said, "What is wrong with we African leaders? We sign an agreement knowing very well we are not going to implement it. We don't just sign one agreement but one after another knowing very well that we are not going to implement them". The old Community was not entirely free of this malaise.

Then you had people who were openly against not only the East African Federation, but even its substitute the East African Community. These were led by Mzee Charles Njonjo. He is still the same. We should pay attention to such people even if there are wrong.

One, they challenge those who want East African unity to wake up, pull up their socks and sweat for it. All good things are a result of hard work, discipline, commitment, consistency and persistency. Such people are a challenge not an obstacle or a problem. In my vernacular we say, "*Omuzimu gugamba tigwita*" i.e. the evil spirit which tells you why its struggling you, does not kill. Because you know why and respond quickly.

Secondly such people are better than those who support unity in words and do the opposite in actions. Or those who support Federation in Arusha and do the opposite at home. For example I find it odd for a member of Parliament to support East African unity on the basis that Uganda is too small and unviable that we should forget our tribes and build East Africa and promote Kiswahili as a Lingua franca, then turn round and demand a district not even based on tribe but on a dialect, insisting that this will bring services closer to the people, and that they can hear one another. At whose cost one may ask.

One who argues that one President for East Africa would be cheaper for the region and carry more weight in international fora but shortly after that, argues that many

RDC's, CAOS and limping Districts Chair persons are a good thing for the already over burdened Ugandan tax payers.

Having said the above, let us move on to the juicy, positive and optimistic side in the process of the integration of East Africa. In my humble opinion integration process is on course and irreversible. One may delay it but no one can now stop it or reverse it. I will give some reasons for this optimistic view.

1. The realization that with the collapse of the old Community all the three Partner States performed badly though at varying degrees. Their growth rate separately was worse than when they were together in the community.
2. In the sixties there were hot debates among the politicians and academicians whether it was possible for a socialist country to unite with a capitalist one. That a poor country cannot cooperate with a rich one. Today the main question is not whether, but how and at what speed. There are many forces in favour of the integration process. These are in Governments and out side Governments, academicians, Civil society and the private sector, especially those who sweat to produce the goods and services compared to those who survive on favours and handouts. These forces are on the ascendancy but need to be better organized and focused.
3. When the community was being revived there was a lot of suspicion, fear and mistrust in meetings of the community at the technical, Permanent Secretaries and ministers levels. Through the processes of confidence building measure these suspicions and mistrust have lost a lot of ground.
4. While negotiating the Customs Union there was a strong view that the intended Customs Union would lead to hemorrhage and loss of revenue especially by Uganda and Tanzania. This view was advanced mainly by
 - a) Technical officials from the revenue authorities. Some genuinely others clearly out of selfish interests.
 - b) Some outside forces. There was one IMF representative who was so against the Customs Union, so pro importation of second hand clothes and buvera, so pro Uganda arguing that Uganda would have nothing left. He was almost a nuisance.
 - c) The manufacturers who feared the unknown. They feared what would happen with a regional approach.

Yet we had commissioned a study on *Benefits and Costs of Integration* by Dr, Mulei, Prof. Wangwe and Mr. S. Atingi-Ego of Bank of Uganda (B.O.U), which clearly showed that to the contrary revenues would go up as efficiency would increase and leakages would be blocked, irrational favours eliminated with a regional approach.

In reality the revenues of the 3 partner states shot up with the coming into force of the customs union. A number of these industrialists have not only kept afloat but prospered and some have opened establishments in Dar-es-salam and Mombasa and are looking forward to venturing in Kigali.

5. Admission of Rwanda and Burundi was such a hot issue and raised fears and anxiety to say the least. The forces of reason, integration and bigger

blocks prevailed. Rwanda and Burundi are in, all is calm of course it is good to listen to the doubting Thomas and those who fear the unknown. They help you to do more home work, be more cautious and take measured steps.

Work at the East African Community sobered me up and gave me hope. Things that looked easy and obvious became hard to implement. Things that looked hard and near impossible were resolved and implemented. May be hard ones gave us a challenge and drove us to work hard and listen while simple ones may have been taken for granted.

Now we come to the issue of the East African Federation. The Treaty spells out the stages of integration as a Customs Union, Common Market, Monetary Union and ultimately Political Federation. We had not even completed stage one, when forces for starting with stage Federation surged. Why? I will give the positive and optimistic analysis of why. I told you about why the integration process is irreversible. Let me add a few more.

- i) The forces of globalization and big blocks. Globalization is not new to Africa. We have been part of the Global system ever since the era of explorers, slave, ivory and gold traders and colonialism. The only difference is that we have always been on the receiving end. As a result, the African people are the most despised, disrespected (both at home and abroad) most marginalized race on earth. We even despise ourselves and disrespect ourselves at home. Take case of Mabira demonstration. The Indian who was unfortunately killed, we know his name his village and family. Yet we don't even know the names of the Africans that were killed in similar circumstances. They are just a statistic. Dignity, respect and rights are never granted but sweated for and fought for. Whenever Africans have fought as a force we have done well. E.g. war against colonialism, apartheid and local tyrants here in Uganda. Either we pull resources or we continue to be marginalized and irrelevant.
- ii) Realization that small states will take us nowhere. Africa is rich in resources but miserable in everything. You can fit USA, India, China, Europe in Africa and you have room to spare. All resources are available, yet we are the most miserable. Nobody cares for us if we don't care about ourselves. As President Mkaapa said, "***The way things are going, we in Africa will soon have no image beyond geography, no identity beyond colour, no sovereignty except flags. Worse still, we will end up competing to do the master's urging in the neighborhood.***"

In my opinion the artificial borders of Africa are a high prison wall around the citizens they purport to protect, a millstone around their necks on the edge of a bottomless sea. Coming together is a matter of our survival. If you look at our statistics of nutrition, access to power and safe water, life expectancy, GDP, per capita income, Human resource, Development, internal trade in goods we produce, cross boarder trade, savings etc. It is miserable. Only we East Africans can address it. Can we solve them better together or separately?

There are issues we need to address which are of concern.

1. Should we bring the Federation first or follow the order but speeding them up with definite time frames as was the case with the Customs Union. Fears and suspicion still exist in some areas. Do we resolve them by federation

while we are together as was the case between Zanzibar and Tanganyika while we are together or do we solve them first. My own view is, while you should tackle some issues first. If you are to wait to solve all known problems before you can start something, that is the surest way of never starting at all. For example if Tanganyika and Zanzibar had waited to solve all problems before the union, would there be a union today? Is our region better off today with the union or would we be better off without it considering the forces local and foreign that were at play in the area at that time.

2. It is said that the community is not well known by the people in the region. Who should carry out the outreach or publicity? The Secretariat or Partner States? My view is that the resources to do so, both human and financial, should be transferred to Arusha. Then the Partners States will call upon the Secretariat to account. At the moment Arusha cannot call upon Partner States to account.
3. Was the time and resources available to carry out this exercise adequate. In my view, both the time and resources are inadequate. The approach could be improved upon by involving more stakeholders.

What could be done in the mean time as the discussions, which for sure will take more months, continue?

- a) Let member states take the best practices to the community.
- b) Let us strengthen the existing institutions and respect their decisions. In short the sovereignty already surrendered should not be recalled.
- c) Respect and implement decisions already taken e.g. negotiating as a block.
- d) Respect the regional groupings that we ourselves have formed. We Africans are fond of respecting other people 's creations and achievements and pay less attention to our own creations and achievements. Needless to mention the way the African Heads of States rushed to China to admire the new example for Africa while some states are not up to date with their contributions to the African Union. The Chinese first and foremost took decades to solve their own problems using their own resources and developing them especially their human resource. Now they are looking else where for friends, resources and markets to meet their new challenges.
- e) Let us encourage and develop our local investors too.
- f) Let us pay attention to the issue of human resource development through education, skills development and research in science by creating and using centers of excellence and abandon the habit of duplicating institutions that become donor dependant.
- g) The criteria for new members must meet to gain membership should continue to apply to existing members and a mechanism should be in place to monitor compliance.
- h) Efforts should be made to have members of East Africa legislative Assembly to be elected by universal suffrage. This will bring the

matters to the attention of citizens and cause the forging of alliances across borders.

- i) Jurisdiction of the East African court of Justice should be extended to make it truly an East African court of Justice.
- j) Joint projects should be encouraged and carried out.

When will our region be part of the industrialized world? For how long will Africans tolerate and be at the receiving end, suffering humiliation and indignity. The answer lies in bigger regional blocks and the elimination of suffocating borders.

We have had many and enough outside initiatives for Africa.

- The Blair commission
- The African decade (as if Africa matters in one decade only).
- The world commission social dimensions of Globalization.
- The Commonwealth committee of eminent persons.

all to no avail.

Why is China, India, Brazil knew forces that can no longer be ignored. Whether the Federation is fast tracking or not the integration process must move and move first.

Although the integration of East Africa is a obvious necessity to many, we should be complacent and take it for granted. Those who value and believe in it must get better organized, focused and be ready to endure some sleepless nights. Because those who benefit from our weakness and fragmentation (both within the region and outside it), are very active. Those who enjoy appearing or being seen are small fish in small ponds, are frightened of bigger valuable blocks. The road to the federation may look smooth and straight but it is not a easy road to walk. As I said in the beginning, good things that benefit you are sweated and struggled for, they never come so easy.

The purpose of these notes is to stimulate thoughts and provoke a lively debate rather than give easy and ready answers.