



REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES HAVE CREATED PROBLEMS

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THE proliferation of regional economic communities (REC) has created problems, the third African Development Forum (ADF III) of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) consensus has stated.

The Consensus statement agreed on at the end of the conference last week highlights the overlap of membership to multiple RECs and the financial burden of multiple subscriptions to different organisations as some of the problems.

Zambia, for instance, is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) among other partnership. The ADF brings together a cross-section of Africans such as governments, private sector, civil society and academia to discuss key development issues of the continent.

The meeting has suggested that RECs be aligned so that they complement the African Union (AU) and a need for mechanisms to ensure coherence, reduce duplication, rationalise structures and harmonise policies and work programmes.

And ECA Southern Africa executive director Dr. Robert Okello has said there is a somewhat understandable scepticism growing in citizens of individual African countries party to the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Dr. Okello said this is because the general citizenry has not been adequately consulted and informed about what NEPAD entails despite their considerable interest.

He said so far there was no organised government system or process of letting people know what they have committed to. "People demand to be informed. The current feeling is there are not because most people do not know," he said. NEPAD is being seen as the economic heart of the AU and is expected to succeed because it has been born of the highest political level vision and African owned unlike other initiatives.

Dr. Okello said doubts were, however, starting to creep in because governments are moving on with the programme without consulting and informing people who include private sector and civil society. He said the NEPAD secretariat has indicated they are working on a communication and marketing strategy as there was a need to capture people's views before they turn into cynicism.

He also said peace and security, democracy, human rights, political, economic and social governance being pre-conditions for development, there was still a division as to whether NEPAD should be self-selective. Dr. Okello said it was the consensus of the ADF III whose theme centred on defining priorities for regional integration that there is a deep sense of the need to broaden participation and deepen ownership.

He said it was agreed that people need to be more engaged with the AU with the media playing a key role as an intermediary in the dialogue process unlike the way it was with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

He said it has been agreed as the way forward to accelerate regional integration by removing impediments through improved infrastructure, communication and information, peace and security and free movement of factors of production, especially people, across African borders.

He said people were not satisfied with the pace of integration in 40 years. Dr. Okello said a new architecture is required for international partnerships to transform the donor-

recipient approach to that of real partnership with shared values and accountability as outlined in NEPAD.

The Consensus also states that for macro-economic convergence and integration to be effective, countries would have to shed some degree of sovereignty in economic policy-making for collective interest.

A need to build harmonised structures for trade and investment legislation and judicial process was also identified.

The ADF Consensus is also of the view that to ensure an effective AU, the criteria for a country's continued membership in the AU should include a commitment to respect human rights, democracy and the rule of law as adherence to constitutionalism is the core principle.

"Africa needs to refine the principles of constitutionalism and strengthen the basic principle of suspension of governments that come to power through unconstitutional means from participation in the activities of the Union," the Consensus states in part.

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