

Launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) within Agenda 2063: an assessment of the ‘Actorness’ of the African Union (AU) in International Relations (IR)

Joseph Kwabena Manboah-Rockson, Ph.D.

Department of Research, Innovation and Programs Development (ORID), Catholic University of Business & Technology (CIBT), Institute Drive, Adabraka, Accra, Ghana.

Abstract: This paper seeks to examine the dynamics of decision making within the African Union Commission (AUC) that has led to the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) in July 2019 using Agenda 2063 as the basis. The AU’s Agenda 2063 is both an economic and social model that supports market capitalism and one that incorporates Pan-Africanism as a guiding set of values, and how this ideology defines and reinforces regional integration. Scholarly studies have long accepted the extent to which, an entity like the European Union (EU) is capable of becoming a coherent actor in the global governance complex; which indeed raises important questions about what constitutes ‘actorness’ in contemporary international relations. Can a continental driver of integration such the African Union (AU) emerge as a significant actor in global politics? If so, how can we conceptualize actorness? This paper is attempting a new way at capturing the AU’s internal and external behavior – one that takes into account, not only the AU’s own characteristics – but the kinds of political, economic and social transactions it undertakes, and the feedback processes engendered pertaining to actorness.

Key-words: Regional Integration, ‘Actorness’, Decision-making, International Relations (IR), Pan-Africanism, Agenda 2063, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

I. INTRODUCTION

In May of 2019, the leaders of forty-four (44) African Nations signed on to a framework agreement to open up their borders to commerce and increased trade on the continent. The establishment by the African Union Commission (AUC), is an attempt to bring together over a billion people with a cumulative transactional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$3 trillion in United States dollars (WTO, 2019). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) would be the largest free trade agreement since the founding of the World Trade Organization (WTO), about thirty-five years ago (WTO, 2019). Born out of Agenda 2063, the CFTA agreement is an important stepping stone toward a continental customs union, pan-continental socio-economic integration, and a more economically self-sufficient Africa. Unquestionably, the AfCFTA has immense potential to facilitate a virtuous economic growth cycle for the continent, facilitate increased intra-and extra-regional trade and bring

about job and GDP growth and a more prosperous and self-sufficient economic future for the people of Africa (GIZ 2015). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) avers that it could double Africa’s trade figures if tariff rates and non-tariff barriers are reduced, and will also generate the much needed employment for Africa’s bulging youth population, and attract new investors to such a single African market (UNECA, 2019). The operational phase of the AfCFTA was launched during the 12th extraordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union in Niamey, Niger on 7 July 2019. This was after a threshold of 22- countries deposited their instruments of ratification with the African Union Commission (AUC) depositary in conformity with legal provisions of the AfCFTA Agreement. Together, an initial total of 29 countries both signed and ratified the AfCFTA Agreement out of the 54-AU member states on the continent; effecting the commencement of the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA). Within the AfCFTA, there are five operational instruments namely: (i) the Rules of Origin (RoO), (ii) the online negotiating forum, (iii) the monitoring and elimination of non-tariff barriers, (iv) the digital payments system and (v) the African Trade observatory (AUC, 2019).

1.1. What is Agenda 2063?

The genesis of Agenda 2063 is the realization by African leaders that there is the need for them to refocus and reprioritize Africa’s agenda from the struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid and the struggles in attaining political independence for the continent which had been the focus of the OAU; the precursor of the AU. Instead, Agenda 2063 prioritizes inclusive social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance, peace and security amongst other issues, aimed at repositioning Africa to become a dominant player in the global arena moving forward. The AU describes agenda 2063 to include critical flagship programs amongst others as: infrastructure, education, science and technology, the arts and culture as well as initiatives to secure and maintain peace on the African continent (AUC doc, 2019). An in-depth study of Agenda 2063 reveals the following: (i) to construct integrated

high speed trains, roads, and bridges network; (ii) the formulation of an African commodity strategy (iii) the establishment of an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); (iv) the establishment of an African passport and free movement of people and capital (v) to work towards ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-bases violence, violent conflicts and prevent genocide; (vi) to support intra-regional power pools and their combined service to transform Africa from traditional to modern sources of energy and ensure access of all Africans to clean and affordable electricity; (vii) to organize annually, African Economic Forum that brings together the African political leadership, the private sector, academia and civil society organizations to reflect on how to accelerate Africa's economic transformation (viii) the establishment of strong African financial institutions comparable to the IMF and World Bank; (ix) to establish Pan-African e-Network to put in place policies and strategies that will lead to transformative e-applications of services in Africa; (x) to establish an African Outer Space Strategy to strengthen Africa's use of out-space technology and to bolster its development; (xi) create an African Virtual and E-University to develop relevant and high quality open, Distance and eLearning (ODEL) resources to offer students guaranteed access to the University-from-anywhere in the world-and-anytime (24) hours a day, 7 days a week; (xii) to establish cyber security network and technologies that will be used for the benefit of African individuals, institutions or nation states by ensuring data protection and safety online; (xiii) the establishment of a Great African Museum to create awareness about Africa's vast, dynamic and diverse cultural artifacts and the influence Africa has had (and continue to have), on the various cultures of the world; and finally; (xiv) to create the Encyclopedia Africana Project, which will provide Africans a body of truth to guide and unite them in their development with foundations in all aspect of the African life including history, legal, economic, religion, architecture and education as well as the systems and practices of African societies (AUC, 2019). All these programs are to be based on Agenda 2063 previous frameworks: the LPA (1980), the Abuja Treaty (1991, NEPAD – New Partnerships for Africa's Development; CAADP- The Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program; AIDA – Accelerated Industrial Development; MIP – The Minimum Integration Program; PIDA – Program for Infrastructure Development in Africa; 3 ADI – Africa's Agro-industry & Agribusiness Development Initiative and Social Policy Frameworks (Agenda 2063, 2019)

II. THE "ACTORNESS" OF THE AUC IN CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION

In international relations, "an actor" is an individual or a collective entity capable of devising a personal strategy and acting autonomously in order to achieve certain objectives (Crozier, Friedberg, 1992). An actor, (as in Actorness), can also be defined as an entity whose actions in international or transnational domains have an impact on the distribution of

resources and the definition of certain values at the global level (Batistella et al, 2006). The 'actorness concept' evolved as a deliberate attempt to move beyond methodological nationalism to account for the international activities during the early days of the European Union (EU) (Murau and Spandler 2015). In their view, regional organizations, such as the EU, are constituent of states and often lack real autonomy. As alluded to by social constructs, international actors are established and consolidated through practices, discourses and institution-building (Van Langenhove, 2011). In a similar vein, Gunnar Sjostedt made this observation in the introduction to his landmarked theory of actor capability in 1977 and over forty years later, the remark appears to have lost little of its validity. Besides that, the concept of actorness has suffered from a certain theoretical underdevelopment despite its intuitive appeal in an era of ever increasing international relations. Sjostedt defines an international actor as an entity which has *autonomy*, which is based on two basic conditions – (i) it is discernable from its environment" and that (ii) it enjoys a "minimal degree of internal cohesion" (Ibid: 15). However, *autonomy* is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement for actorness. Apart from *autonomy*, an international actors needs to possess the structural prerequisites for actor *capability* – "a measure of the autonomous unit's capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system. Structural prerequisites for actor behavior include elementary qualities such as the *ability* to set goals and achieve them; *decision-making* and monitoring facilities; and, the means of performing *actions*. Designed to explain the external role of the European Community (EC), one can also use Sjostedt's model to inform on the role of international actors in general and in particular the AUC's external role in crafting Agenda 2063 with the objective of facilitating continental integration through the launch of the continental free trade area for Africa. Therefore, 'actorness' is used abundantly in innumerable studies concerning international relations, even though it is not elaborated upon sufficiently (Sjostedt, 1977: 5). Actorness in international relations is the result of a multitude of interactions. It is indeed contextual, inter-subjective and relational and does not require the sovereign authority, decision-making powers and foreign policy instruments that characterize statehood. So what is it about actorness that accounts for its enduring appeal, and utility for the AUC? What does this notion of actorness teach us about the African Union Commission's celebrations of the 50-year Golden Jubilee of the OAU (AUC) in 2013? What were the matching orders given to the AUC during the jubilee celebrations about Agenda 2063?

2.1. Theorizing the Study and the Framework

There is an abundance of theoretical studies addressing issues of regional integration around the world. These studies include the ones that have specifically addressed the issues of the importance of and/or necessity for regional economic integration and the challenges and strengthening of regional

blocs. This study however takes a different approach and seeks to critically analyze the decision-making process of the African Union and how, and in what manner it takes those decisions – the ‘Actorness’ of the African Union Commission. But before we begin a few clarifications are in order. The one concern here is the definition of “integration,” “regional cooperation,” and “regionalism.” One of the classical and accepted definitions of regional integration was offered by Lindberg who defined political integration as (i) “the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organs”; and (ii) “the process whereby political actors in several distinct settings are persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new center” (Lindberg, 1963). Similarly, Ernst Haas offered his version of regional integration as “the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new center, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states” (Haas, 1958). Thus, ‘integration’ implies a much required and developed cooperation which leads to the creation of a new polity bringing together a number of different constituent units – such as AU’s member states. Indeed, the topic Agenda 2063 and what it means for the launch of the continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) is relevant and timely, given that Africa is trying to enhance its regional integration processes. However, there are outstanding issues that need to be recognized and addressed by African states, individually and collectively, in order to take these two processes forward.. African institutions particularly that of the African Union (AU) and its affiliate institutions, who are particularly relevant in implementing most of the flagship programs of Agenda 2063, among others, need to be accounted for at this time. Reference is made here of the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980, and subsequently, the Abuja Treaty of 1991 of recognizing 8 regional economic communities (RECs), to serve as the “building blocs” toward the achievement of the African Economic Community (AEC). These are topics that have received unlimited political and social attention and has influenced the manner decision-making and ‘actorness’ are exhibited in international relations. All these have been imperatives in building partnerships within the continent against global challenges such as peace and security, economic and social development and the protection of the environment.

As earlier on enumerated, this paper’s focus is on the decision-making process of the African Union and its boldness and assertiveness in launching the CFTA. It also seeks to unpack the processes that went into achieving CFTA by critically assessing the processes, structures and the ‘actorness’ of the African Union. The study highlights the similarities of decision-making by the AU against past procedures of decision-making, their inclusivity and participation of people at the grass root level by the EU in

fostering integration. An integrative approach is taken in understanding the institutional framework of the regional economic bodies in terms of their efficiency and institutional framework. Indeed, the importance of decision-making is fundamental in realizing the Aspirations of Agenda 2063 and the benefits of the 50-year plan set out by the AU in developing the means of connecting Africa through integration. Like (Schiff & Winters, 2003) avers, there is a new realization, which focuses on developing countries turning to regionalism as a means of economic and political growth. Regionalism is a process that entails a global economic shift that is multi-dimensional in the new regionalism order and thus affects countries’ decision-making towards cooperation (Schiff & Winters, 2003). Understanding the decision-making processes and AU’s capacity can therefore set precedence in attaining the goals of the Agenda 2063, which is to “achieve an Africa We Want”; an Africa of good governance, respected in its achievement of human rights, justice and the rule of law (AU, 2019). There are many theories of regional integration, but they all stem from the experience of the European integration. There are however some that can be applied specifically at this time, to explain the integration processes of some regional blocs. To this end, this paper moves away from this and instead curves a theoretical path that fits the integration process as it is believed that not all regional bodies have evolved in the same manner as the EU. Invariably, the AU’s integration methodologies have been criticized by many as having used the wrong experiences that do not much the realities of the African space (Moravcsik, 1993; Mattli, 1999b; Laursen, 2004; Taylor, 1983), But as to whether those assertions are all true and acceptable; this paper leaves that to scholars within the field to make their individual judgments.

III. CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

In this study, we ought to look beyond traditional scene-setting within the European Union and to switch our attention to the African context and what has been happening over the years, in forging integration and keeping the peace. If not, we must as well revisit the past, and give an indication of how difficult or easy it is to repair the notion’s gilded reputation by following recommendations defined in the literature regarding actorness (Sjostedt, 1977). Indeed, there are more systematic approaches now toward operationalization of the notion of actorness on others; apart from the EU, if one takes a study of regional integration in the same vein. Despite the lack of consensus, Dryburgh et al, avers that the nation-state has been the benchmark unit in actorness research, symbolizing its influence in international relations (Dryburgh, 2008; Huigens and Niemann, 2011; Sjostedt, 1977). Notwithstanding all these, actorness came into prominence as a theory in the 1970s, and embodies the changing international arena surrounding its creators. For example, one can recall the growing awareness that nation-states, even if still predominant, are no longer the only actors in international relations (Drieskens, 2015a). Witnessing this context of both

continuity and change, scholars introduced actorness to assess the extent to which emerging collectives could be regarded as international actors. Similarly, and in a more specific analysis of international relations and the term actorness, Consgrave and Twitchett (1970), first brought about the notion of the term in order to understand the mechanism and the rising influence of the United Nations (UN) and the European Economic Communities (EEC) in international relations. In that order, the study has been designed in such a way that it adds up to the literature of actorness, and also builds on the foundation that has already been established in literature. In that regard, this study takes a look specifically at the African Union's political actorness in global politics, which has not adequately been recognized. This study covers particularly, the changing internal dynamics within the AU regarding Agenda 2063 and the CFTA, and how that impacts AU's actorness at the global level. It also covers the changing external dynamics such as the rise of new actors and how that impacts the creation of CFTA under Agenda 2063. Decision-making is used interchangeably here with actorness, as a thought process of selecting a logical choice from available options should that be recurring. When making a decision regarding regional integration, the concerned parties must weigh the positives and negatives of each option and consider all the alternatives. For effective decision-making, it is prudent to be able to forecast the outcome of each option as well as, based on all these items, determine which option will be the best for that situation (Niemann, 2011).

IV. A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

In the following literature review, there is an assertion that the topic under discussion could have been explained away using a mixture of federalist, neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism arguments. This is simply due to the fact that there is no single approach that can fully exhaust or account for all processes in African cooperation or integration since the 1950s; after all, there has been tremendous improvements in the thought processes of African integration to, just as the European case cannot be explained completely by one single theory. Manners (2010) has been working on the EU and contributed over half a century of research on the European Union's functioning at the global level and its multitude of concepts and metaphors (Manners, 2010). Some of his contributions have disappeared as quickly as they arrived, while others have been proven, tried and trusted over time (Bretherton and Vogler, 2013). "Actorness" stands as a key example of the latter category, having become one of the most prominent concepts for analyzing the EU's functioning in international relations. In order to shorten this narrative; the notion originated in the early 1970s, and had its academic breakthrough in the late 1990s and, after a period of more prominent focus on the EU's international identity, has received renewed academic attention in recent years. Scholars explain the current interest in actorness as a logical consequence of the Lisbon Treaty's (failure); and its promise to strengthen the EU's role as an international actor

(Bretherton and Vogler, 2013; da Conceicao-Heldt and Meunier, 2014; Niemann and Bretherton, 2013; Laursen, 2004). In many revelations, important objections have been raised against the notion's continued use. Some of these are relatively easy to overcome, like the strong interconnectedness of actorness and the study of EU integration; others are much more fundamental; notably the lack of consensus on what constitute an international actor (da Conceicao-Heldt and Meunier, 2014).

4.1. AU has the recognition and presence

International Relations (IR) discipline has been for so long dominated by Realism, a School of Thought that places nation states at the center of world politics. Pioneered by Waltz (1959) and Mearsheimer (1994), realism has over the years greatly undermined the role of all other actors but states. Contrary to realist theory is the argument that "states have not withered away, but they are not necessarily the principal actors, let alone the sole international actors" (Zielonka 2008:472) Unquestionably, new actors have emerged in the international system and have been accorded *recognition* and *presence*, both by states and non-state actors transforming global politics into a mixed-actor system (Yong 1972). In employing the external environment of actorness, Jupille and Caporaso (1998) define *recognition* as "the acceptance of an interaction with an entity by others." By virtue of the fact that the AU is able to enter bilateral agreements with nation states, regional organizations and, even the UN, means the AU has the "*sine qua non of global actor hood*" (Caporaso, 1998: 14-15). The AU is essentially recognized by other states as a credible actor with whom agreements could be reached. Furthermore, the AU strengthens its *recognition* status, by assertion its "*presence*" (Vogler and Bretherton, 2006) through extension of its influence in areas such as Europe, North and Latin America and Asia, which subsequently shapes the perceptions of other actors about the role of the AU. Moreso, Kupchan (2002) alludes to the fact that by AU's *capacity* to bring together all the 54-member countries in Africa to sign up for the establishment of the Continental Free Trade Area, towards the fulfillment of Agenda 2063, as well as its flagship programs affirms its *identity* and *presence* on the global scene. It must be borne in mind that the African Union is trying to re-focus the economies of African countries to the tenets of intra-African trade that may be at odds with other global trading partners. Similarly, the external factors/dimensions shaping the AU's global actor role is how the Organization of African Union (OAU) was perceived by other actors in international environment and the after-efforts made by the African Union (AU) to extend that *presence* and *recognition* in global issues. Notwithstanding these, a strand of literature however argues that *presence* does not emerge from activeness of the AU but instead by how other actors perceive the AU after its transition from the OAU to the AU (Kupchan, 2002).

4.2. *AU has the autonomy and opportunity*

The African continent is marred with significant challenges that revolve around the decisions our leaders make. In our attempt to find the actorness of the AU and its capacity to decide, when and how, we turn to the *autonomy* and *opportunity* as tools of actorness. While the African Union acts in accordance with the opportunities in the global arena, it also plays the function of creating and projecting opportunities. This explains the linkage between Vogler and Bretherton's (2006) conceptualization of *opportunity* and Jupille and Caporaso's (2006) conceptualization of *autonomy*. Put together these two concepts combine to explain the behavior of actors in relation to other actors in the international system. For instance, *autonomy* as an external factor is viewed through AU's institutional distinctiveness; separate from other involved actors in the international system" (Greicevci, 2011: 287), such as the UNECA, IMF, the AfDB and other NGOs and CSOs. The African Union asserts its role as a global actor to the extent that it is able to set a global agenda – Agenda 2063/Flagship programs or the CFTA - to effect some pertinent changes/or enhancements on its own. Notwithstanding, this relationship between the AU and the global environment goes both ways; in that, other actors in the international environment may present *opportunities* that may perhaps shape AU's global actorness. These *opportunities* could, at the same time contribute or present new opportunities that can shape the behavior of other actors (Vogler and Bretherton (2006:23).

4.3. *AU has the coherence and consistency*

AU's internal *cohesion* is used here as a broader umbrella to capture factors inherent in the domestic level issues within AU that either attenuates or enhances the effectiveness of the AU as a global actor. The first factor to be discussed is "*cohesion*", referring to *coherence* of AU in foreign policies. Arguably, according to research on the AU, this has proven to be one of the difficult areas around which AU faces difficulties (Nuttall, 2005). Two main problems are associated with conceptualization and measurement of this concept. First, there is a fine line between *coherence* and *consistency*; at least from the perspective of member states. Second, some member states tend to associate *coherence* with AU institutions; whereas others perceive it in terms of policy makers' values, rhetoric or even processes (Nuttall, 2005; Thomas, 2012). But for the sake of this study, Thomas' definition of *coherence* is employed here; that AU's foreign policy *coherence* is best-defined simply as "the adoption of determinate common policies and the pursuit of those policies by AU member states and institutions" (Thomas, 2012:458). This definition however reflects only one form of coherence: *vertical cohesion*. Equally important is the other form known as *horizontal coherence*, which refers to *consistency* between several AU policies and institutions. These two forms of cohesion broadly captures the various kinds of *cohesion* identified in the literature. In analyzing the AU's *cohesion* in this direction, just imagine the *coherence* by the AU of the

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) for 2030. Did you know that the AU's agenda 2063 and the UN's agenda 2030 have complimentary objectives? The UNSDGs emulated a somewhat similar blueprint to that of the agenda 2063 of the AU. Was that a coincidence or what? But it was not. It was through a broader (prior) consultation across the continent with the assistance of the AU in the formulation of those objectives. It is incredible to note that Africa was the only region of the world that had developed a document which represented a united African voice in the formulation of the SDGs (Agenda 2063, 2019). This document greatly influenced the work of the Open Working Group on the SDGs and the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the post-2015 development Agenda. As a result, there is a high degree of convergence between the continent's priorities, as embodied in the Africa Union's Agenda 2063 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (Agenda 2063, 2019). *Cohesion* has also been shown in this sense to emphasize and enhance the legitimacy of AU actorness in the world (Portela & Raube, 2009). The study by Portela and Raube concluded that AU's external policies are more effective and legitimate when there is *cohesion* between member states as well as between AU institutions. *Coherence* in this sense implies the fact that the AU is able to identify specific policy area of importance that are defined, and accepted by the RECs and other AU institutions, to bring about the coherent policies that are trustworthy for other actors in the world. This is in line with the argument of this thesis that cohesion paves the way for the other dimensions and hence provides the best dimension to assess effectiveness of the AU: *coherence* makes the AU's commitment to comprehensive and global objectives credible as the UNSDGs and AU Agenda 2063 exemplify.

V. A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF AU'S ACTORNESS IN "THE AFRICA WE WANT."

Taking up these questions, this paper explores, explains and assesses the state of the art of actorness within the work of the African Union. Statements could perhaps, have been made regarding some regional bodies like the OAU (now the AU); that the (AU), and by extension the ECA, or the RECs do not possess the qualities of actorness in the same degrees that the European case does (Cosgrove and Twitchett, 1970). But in the assessment so far of what the AU has been doing over the years, it is evident that the AU does possess the *recognition* over the years of that 'actorness'; which fills the gap of an international organization's *capacity* to act globally depended on these three elements: (i) its *autonomous* decision-making power; (ii) its *impact* in international relations; and, most importantly, (iii) the *significance* attached to it by its members (Cosgrove and Twitchett, 1970: 12-14). From this analogy, most authors, in defining the actorness of the European Union, do not only minimally refer to the work of Cosgrove and Twitchett; they also acknowledge the work of Sjostedt (1977) with the formulation of the concept. Sjostedt's work illustrates how scholars and practitioners received with

admiration the emerging European integration process in the mid-1970s, while also raising questions about its nature and direction. In the attempt to identify, as well as predict actorness, Sjostedt (1970) developed a model in which two conditions must be fulfilled for an entity like the African Union (AU) to be regarded as an actor in international relations. The first is that the AU must display a minimal degree of both *internal cohesion* and two, the separateness from its *internal environment* (Sjostedt, 1977: 15). These considerations have laid the foundation ever since, for a widely cited definition of actor *capability*, which trickles, in part or in whole, into scholars' definition of AU actorness.

In attempting therefore, to analyze the work of the African Union, using the attributes of Manners (2010); Sjostedt, (1977); and Cosgrove and Twitchett (1970), among others, the AU fulfills all the conditions and, as well as qualifies as an actor in international relations. This stems from time immemorial – (i) the AU' pursuance of a linear path progression - beginning from the formation of the OAU in 1963; (ii) the OAU's purpose-drive in fighting colonialism, and racism; and the fight against Apartheid in South Africa until its eradication; (iii) the crafting of the 1980 Treaty of Lagos and the enthusiasm and zeal in transforming the OAU (re-inventing it) into the AU in (2002); (iv) the recognition of eight regional economic commissions (RECs) as the African Economic Communities (AEC), through whom a continental unity could be forged through the crafting of the Abuja Treaty of 1991; and (v) the 50-year Golden Jubilee (2013-2063) celebrations, which brought the launch of Agenda 2063 and its flagship programs – (i) the Action Plan for Accelerated Industrial Development of Africa (AIDA), adopted in July 2014; (ii) the Action Plan for Boosting intra-African Trade (BIAT), adopted at the 25th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and governments; the (iii) Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), established in 2003 and (iv) AU's First Ten-year Implementation Plan, adopted at the 25th Summit of the AU in June of 2015 (UN, 2015); and lastly, but not the least, the recent launch of the African continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) on July 9, 2019 in the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

Unquestionably, the African Union has achieved that "*actor-capability*" which, in principle, is the key measure of any autonomous unit's capacity to remain active and deliberate in relation to other actors in the international system (Sjostedt, 1977: 16). Besides, the African Union exhibits two basic forms of *external relations*: that is, relations with third-party states or entities (the WTO, UN, NGOs, CSOs) and those with other regional organizations, such as UN Economic Commission (UNECA) within Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America/Canada (NAFTA) and others around the world. In addition to these two categories, an inter-regional organization like the AU is, either directly as a group or indirectly by way of some or all of their member states, involved in interregional mechanisms of a wider and more diffused nature, which is closely associated with the

phenomenon of new inter-regionalism and often referred to as trans-regional arrangements (Ruland 1999a, 2001b, 2002a; Yeo 2000; Gilson 2003). Therefore, from an inter-regional perspective, three forms of *external* relationships is discernable here: (i) relations with regional organizations in other regions, who work side-by-side with the AU; (ii) relations with third-party states in the African sub-regions as in the case of the AEC/ RECs and its member states; and (iii) direct or indirect involvement in other inter-regional mechanisms like the UN, the UNECA and other international bodies. From these perspectives, these approaches symbolize how AU exhibits the 'actor-system' existence of the common values within its member states; the high level of *legitimacy* in the decision-making processes the AU makes; the *capacity* to set priorities in foreign policy and the *ability* to *identify*, *develop*, and *implement* policies within its scope. After all, the AU has all along acted in the observance of the several occurrences/achievements from the LPA of the 1980, the upgrading of the LPA into the Abuja Treaty in 1991 (effected in 1994), and the latest launch of the continental free trade area in an attempt to implement flagship programs (mentioned above in the last chapter) under Agenda 2063. Therefore, "actorness" is no longer the preserve of the European Union integration (Ruland, 1999b; Yeo, 2000, Gilson, 2003; Bretherton and Vogler, 1999). This is due to the fact that the African Union's (AU) main activities are within the ambit of inter-regional and international relations as other regional and international organizations. The AU has over-developed and institutionalized the requirements of international actorness in particular areas and various dimensions. But, in so far as a comparative framework for systematically comparing and contrasting actorness across different organizations is lacking, it is difficult to predict the likely outcomes of such relations. Nevertheless, pluralist "*liberalist*" approaches to International Relations (IR), have led to a broadening of the scope of analysis to include a range of non-state actors such as international organizations like the African Union. But taking a traditional "*realist*" approaches to IR, this study has focused almost exclusively upon the role of the African Union and its extension, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) as actors. Similarly, within the circumference of international law, states remain pre-eminent subjects and hence the primary actors in international relations. While the scheme developed by Keohane and Nye (1973:380) distinguishes between governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental actors, it still has many wide ranging uses as tools of categorization; but it does not – or no longer – grasp the full variety of actors in international relations (Ibid: 278). Intergovernmental organizations have been supplemented by supranational organizations or hybrid intergovernmental-supranational entities such as the UN, EU, WTO, the AU, as well as by other international institutions below formal organizations but still exhibiting some – albeit very modest – capacity to act.

5.1 The AU is an Actor in IR

The model – actorness, has only been tested by Hulse in 2014, in the analysis of the actorness in respect of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the field of international trade negotiations. Despite the work on these two Regional Economic Communities' (RECs') strong *identity* and *presence*, in their respective sub-regions; it is the AU – who has an overarching *presence*, the commanding *identity* and effective decision-making, as well as better *capabilities* – hence greater actorness – a fact impacting on inter-regional outcomes such as the RECs, towards the achievement of AfCFTA under agenda 2063. Accordingly, *presence* is a precondition for actorness and, in consequence, *presence* denotes latent actorness (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999:33). *Opportunity* refers to factors in the external environment which enables or constrains purposive action; it is defined as the interaction between events and the ideological climate which combine purposive action (Merle, 1986). *Capability* is the concept at the center of this definition of 'actorness' as it is broken-down into five constituent components which forms the key requirements for actorness. These requirements are (i) a shared commitment to a set of overarching values and principles; (ii) the ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate consistent and coherent policies; (iii) the ability to negotiate affectively with third parties; (iv) access to policy instruments; and finally, (v) legitimate decision-making processes (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999: 37-42). Accordingly, actorness has three main components: (i) action triggers goals, interests, principles; (ii) policy structures and processes which involves the capacity to take decisions in relation to action triggers; and (iii) performance structures which includes all those structures and resources necessary for actual performance of a given task once the decision has been taken (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999:51).

In summation, one can trace the ideals of the Africa unity back to the nineteenth century with the idea of pan-Africanism gaining traction. The first phase being the institutionalization of pan-Africanism through the six pan-African congresses held between 1900 and 1945; the second phase was the inauguration of the Organization of African Unity (OAU in May of 1963); and the third phase being the re-organization of the OAU (renaming it) the African Union (AU) in July of 2002 to continue that path of forging African unity and development. Obviously then, the Agenda 2063 and other key flagship programs (Agenda 2063 presentation, 2019), as presented in this paper is that exhibition of actorness by the African Union in-phases and the current achievements over the past few years. It is evident that the boldness and assertiveness of the AU over the years constitute that 'traction'- in terms of *capacity*, *cohesion*, and *the autonomy* it commands, to implement programs both in its external or internal backyard. Further accounting for progress in recent years about the African Union; its actorness has been

witnessed by acts of assertiveness, by virtue of the fact that, there is an almost eradication of forced takeovers, coup d' tats, and the non-resurrection of intra-African ethnic conflicts within the continent. Most member countries can now boldly invite the AU into its geographical space to mediate on conflicts, prevent conflicts, and even accept an all-AU peace-keeping force; something that was frowned upon by member states as infringements on their national sovereignty and meddling in their territorial space. There is also the commitment to an enhanced role for regional institutions (RECs), evident in the formal negotiating structures present within the AU Summits, in which the AU Commission is seen as being granted the mandate to negotiate on behalf of the member states. For example, the AU Council of Ministers – Foreign Ministers from all 54 African countries were designated chief Negotiators to the Agenda 2063 and its flagship programs launch; with senior officials of their ministries and technical expert teams being asked to work closely with the AUC. Non-state actors were also given a relatively strong role, including civil society organization, and the much needed support to contribute to Agenda 2063 content. The AU encouraged inputs of non-state actors who were also instrumental in justifying the continental offer of the free market access, where each member state was offered to delegate up to three national experts to the negotiating teams; reserving the roles (s) of senior officials and technical expert advisors to African Union Commission officials and assisted by ECA officials (AU 2019). By the actions of the AU, civil society was also much in support of Agenda 2063 content; as their formal inclusion in the negotiation structure may have increased the AU's bargaining power and will remain so going forward in AU's international relations.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has pointed out several aspects of the African Union's contributions to the creation of rules, policies, and laws (by action), leading to several regional interventional programs and initiatives on the African continent. The first part of this paper started with a background account of the events leading up to the 50-year Golden Jubilee celebrations of the launch of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, renamed, the African Union (AU) by a Constitutive Act in 2002, in Durban, South Africa. The celebrations sort to among other things, mark the period (2013-2063) as an awakening call for work on enhancing continental integration and also mainstreaming agenda 2063. The celebrations also marked the call for the continued embracement of the holistic cultural, historical, spiritual, political, artistic, scientific and other philosophical legacies of Africa since antiquity to this time. Reminding themselves of the period of Pan-Africanism and their stance since the 1960s of liberating Africa from colonialism, racism and the then apartheid system in South Africa before 1994, it was indeed a celebration to look ahead to strengthen regional integration in their respective forms within Africa and to initiate flagship programs for continental integration. The second part of the paper addressed the

conceptual framework and identified four issues related to the AU's (internal and external) actorness in the establishment of the African Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Agenda 2063 – *recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion*. Afterall, it is about the role-play and actions attributed to the African Union, as an application of regionalism on the continent over the years, which has accounted for the migration of rule-making authority from national governments to the African Union. In such rule-making authority, the AU has created, and enforced rules as in “supranational governance.” As has been well documented with the European Union in respect of the above (Fligstein and McNichol 1998), these competences have deepened - the AU's rules system and have become denser, and more articulated within particular policy areas - and broadened - covering and expanding a range of substantial domains overtime. Explaining away in detail of the actorness of the African Union, the paper enumerated the qualities of an ‘actor’ in relation to an entity. With a detailed review of the relevant literature on the subject of actorness, it was established that the AU qualifies as an actor based on its unambiguous *recognition* and *coherence* in the creation of the relevant flagship programs to strengthen regional integration.

Furthermore, it has been well documented in this paper that the AU's neo-functionalism type of rule-making has strengthened the capacity of all AU organs to monitor and enforce AU laws within member countries and institutions. The expansion of supranational governance in the AU has been remarkable politically and an innovation within the continent in the last 10-years witnessing – the celebrations of the OAU golden jubilee in 2013 - marking 50-years of the OAU and a clarion call for Agenda 2063, which calls for flagship programs like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), recently launched on July 9, 2019 in the Rwandan capital. These are the kinds of institutionalization long at work within the African Union and indeed crucial to the understanding of AU's actorness in the implementation of regional programs in international relations.

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