Reinvigorating Pan-Africanism to Tackle the Challenges of Political Commitment in African Economic Integration: The Case of the East African Community

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Abstract

Policy studies in Africa indicate that Pan-Africanism has been assumed to lay the foundations for regional integration in Africa. The regional economic communities have been tasked with transitioning African countries to the continental single economic community. The African Union endorsed eight regional economic communities. East African Community is one of the eight regional economic communities. This study investigated the challenges related to the political commitment of leaders and technocrats in the case of the East African Community. The paper used a scoping desk review (for secondary data), key informant interviews and focus group discussions (for primary) as data collection methods. A thematic analysis was conducted based on the checklist of variables. The study revealed that the EAC's Pan-African continental integration agenda struggles with leaders and technocrats' lack of political commitment. This weak political commitment led to a weak implementation of the Pan-African initiatives. The technocrats are highly obsessed with the neoliberal agenda, and this did not give adequate expertise and support for the implementation of the Pan-African projects. The study documented policy evidence on the results of the implementation of initiatives on the one hand and the implied weakness of the political commitment from leaders and technocrats at the EAC. Thus, interventions geared towards improving the political commitment of leaders and technocrats are required to implement the agenda of Pan-African regional integration in the EAC and the other regional economic communities.

Key Words: Pan-Africanism, Political commitment, Regional Integration

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1. Introduction

The idea of regional integration in the African continent as a means of collective measure for promoting integration and cooperation is a long-time endeavour (Ake, 1981; Aniche, 2020; Aniche, 2023; Zwanbin, 2023). The post-colonial African leaders and thinkers believed that an integration agenda based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism was essential for positioning African countries to achieve continental development and liberate from Western colonial influence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Nkrumah, 1963; Oloruntoba, 2020). Pan-Africanism as an organizing ideal, movement and policy tool has also served post-colonial Africa as a strategy for enhancing the African continent's decolonization struggles, forging continental unity, and designing African frameworks for African development (Aniche 2020; Aniche, 2023; Zwanbin, 2023). Out of the initiatives, the rearrangement of the continental integration using regional economic communities (RECs) was seen as a foundation and the step-by-step results of the initiatives (Aniche, 2023; Zwanbin, 2023). Post-colonial African regionalism is thus rooted in Pan-Africanist philosophical foundations that were later institutionalized in the 1963 establishment of the Organization of African Unity and the current African Union in 2001 (Aniche 2020; Zwanbin, 2023).

Regional integration in Africa is pursued through a gradual process of coordination, harmonization, and progressive integration of existing and future regional economic communities (Aniche, 2020; Oloruntoba, 2016). Despite the understanding that the African continent needs regional integration to unleash its potential and to assert its influence and visibility in the global arena, and as a necessary force for economic transformation, many challenges have continued to undermine its realization (Aniche, 2020; Aniche, 2023; Oloruntoba, 2020).

The continent's economic, political, social, and geographical challenges remain unresolved and increasingly dynamic in the post-colonization periods of specific African countries (Oloruntoba, 2020; Zwanbin, 2023). There is a wide range of gaps between agreements and frameworks and their implementation, including at the level of RECs (Wapmuk & Akinkuotu, 2018).

The gap between the rhetorical support of politicians (leaders and technocrats of national governments) and the actual state of integration indicates a lack of political commitment. Aniche (2020) attributed the gaps to the (a) state-centric approach to integration, (b) the lack of political commitment handoff leaders, and (c) the neo-liberal and western-centric policy advice from the technocrats of the national governments. Such findings of scholars were presented at continental levels, and specific studies at each REC level are scant.

Thus, the regional integration approach based on the successes of regional economic communities as building blocks is far from being fully understood (Aniche, 2020; Aniche, 2023; Oloruntoba, 2020). Whether RECs relatively played a role in fostering peace and security in the sub-regions, advancing economic performance and regional cooperation remains unundersto od (Adebajo, 2002; Adebajo, 2014; Oloruntoba, 2020). Specifically, the RECs' role in facilitating the relatively free movement of persons and capital is very low, and existing studies present the results, for instance, in trade volume among African countries, at 15% (Aniche, 2023; Tevera, 2020); however, whether the factors such as low political commitment of leaders and technocrats of national government are contributing for this low performance is understudied (Aniche, 2020; Aniche, 2023; Oloruntoba, 2020).

Previous studies show that the East African Community (EAC) indicate relative progress from the existing RECs in the continent (Zwanbin, 2023). Though studies identified challenges, they did not employ the Pan-African lens, and the role of political commitment of national-level leaders and technocrats was scarcely indicated. Thus, this study was aimed at exploring how the political commitment of leaders and technocrats, from a Pan-Africanist lens, is observed at the EAC level and whether Pan-Africanism can inform the RECs' role in regional integration in Africa (the case of the EAC). Ample findings exist on the harmonization of the frameworks (policy, legal and institutional) in place. However, this study assessed whether the harmonized frameworks serve as reliable indicators of the Pan-African ideals of integration and

the political commitment of leaders and technocrats. It also looked into whether these frameworks contribute to improved implementation and increased participation of African citizens in the process of integrating Africa.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1.   Theories for Establishing the Pan-African Analytic Lens

Pan-Africanism has evolved through time and space as a resistance to slavery, racism, and black subjugation (Adi, 2018). In its early years, Pan-Africanism was seen as a movement and an organizing political ideology of decolonization. It was about the unity and solidarity of black people, the transformation of the African economy, promoting African values, culture and civilizations, building a stable, prosperous and peaceful Africa, and addressing the continent's challenges.

Pan-Africanism evolved from the conceptualization of Negroism, as related to oppression, exclusion, and the resistance to change the flight of Negro people in the West and also black people in colonial states of Africa (Fosu, 1999). For Fosu, in a more realistic perspective, a "Pan-African people" may be defined as a union of two sets: (1) Negroids of the African continent and (2) the descendants of (1) who reside outside of Africa, referred to generally as African people in the Diaspora. For Fosu, Pan-Africanism conceptualizes race and race-based exclusion, diversity within the races, and the institutions in place to change the situation in Africa and the Diaspora. Thus, the RECs are institutions of the black people and the platform for collective and integrated resistance to common challenges of the continent. Furthermore, this concept informs the platform of policy power (political commitment of leaders) and policy evidence (commitment of the technocrat/expertise) for informing and implementing initiatives.

Wapmuk (2021) assesses Pan-Africanism and the Pan-African vision of promoting African unity, cooperation and integration, focusing on the African Union's (AU) achievements in the 21st century. The authors argue that despite the RECs and overarching policies and institutional frameworks in place, the lack of effective cooperation among the continental and national institutions remained a challenge. Thus, for these authors, the Pan-African roots in the continent, which championed the struggle of Africans and peoples of African descent for emancipation and the restoration of their dignity against slavery, colonialism and all forms of racism and racial exploitation registered results, did not overcome developmental challenges. Addressing these challenges holds the key to achieving the continental goal of unity and achieving the vision and goals of Pan-Africanism in the 21st century in Africa.

The AU achieved little in connecting its activities and programs to many ordinary Africans, providing common public goods and services valued by commoners in Africa, giving voice to the majority of young people in Africa, promoting intra-Africa trade, good governance, and financial independence of the African continent as well as struggled to address the expressed material needs and quotidian concerns of ordinary Africans.

Alvarado (2018) uses interpretative frameworks and propositions of Pan-Africanism regarding overcoming the Nation-State model. The author proposes a debate that seizes the racial question and its contrasts between homogenization and heterogeneity, national community and continental community, as well as the overcoming of the cartographic model of the Nation-State. Malisa and Nhengeze (2018) argue that Pan-Africanism, as a movement, an organizing platform and a policy tool of a quest for liberation and the pursuit of a united Africa via educational, political, and cultural movement, will have a lasting impact on the relationship between liberation and people of African descent, in the continent of Africa and the Diaspora.

Ackah (1999) presents four main thematic approaches to examining Pan-Africanism. The first approach portrays Pan-Africanism as a global expression of black pride and achievement, emphasizing black culture and highlighting the unique contributions of black people to humanity and civilization. The second approach, as highlighted by Ackah, centres on the back-to-Africa movement, particularly associated with Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Union, established in Jamaica in 1914. Ackah ties

the idea of returning to Africa to the enduring preservation of black cultural identity in the Diaspora and the continued yearning for the African Diaspora to maintain a strong connection with their homeland (Ackah, 1999, p. 15). The third approach to studying Pan-Africanism recognizes it as a symbol of liberation. Africans, recognizing their shared experiences, initiated movements advocating for the liberation of Africa, particularly from the chains of colonialism. The fourth approach, according to Ackah, sees Pan-Africanism as a push for the political and economic integration and unification of Africa, a concept that gained momentum after the conclusion of World War II in 1945 (Ackah, 1999). The leaders believed that political and economic integration among African states would be gradual. It was hoped that the regional-level integrations would serve as the bedrock for the complete unification of the continent. The subsequent sections relating to Pan-Africanist foundations (the RECs) of African integration were informed by the above theoretical interpretations.

2.2.   Pan-Africanist Foundations of the Regional Integration Initiatives

The notions of Pan-Africanism involved the establishment of continental and regional organizations as a platform for policy initiatives and implementation (Adi, 2018). For instance, the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) primary objectives were promoting African unity and solidarity, enhancing the quality of life for Africans, defending the members' sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence, eradicating all forms of colonialism from Africa, and promoting international cooperation (Adi, 2018; Aniche, 2023; Legume, 1962).

A key milestone of the OAU in this endeavour was the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) by the Heads of State and Government in 1980, centring on collective self-reliance. This idea was further reinforced in the Abuja Treaty of June 1991, which aimed to establish regional economic communities and promote self-sustaining development (Adejumobi & Olukoshi, 2009). However, the established organization, including regional economic communities, remained weak in integrating the continent, though it facilitated the independence struggles of the African nations (Adi, 2018; Legume, 1962; Murithi, 2008; Zwanbin, 2023). Thus, it became clear that Africans needed a continental institutional platform responsible for handling critical issues of the continent and the globe beyond formal political independence. By the early 1990s, robust arguments in favour of a new organization, including the option of a more integrative than the OAU that encompasses social, economic, and cultural schemas, emerged in the policy table (Adi, 2018; Murithi, 2008). The AU was then formally created following the Lome Summit of 2000, which adopted the Constitutive Act of the African Union; the Lusaka Summit of 2001, which expounded on the new organization's principles, and the Durban Summit of 2002, and the African Union was formally launched (Adi, 2018; Murithi, 2008). However, though the institutionalization considered Pan-African ideals, the funding of these institutions (approximately 75% of funds) was mobilized by external partners (mostly from the West, which were colonial masters). Through the resources channelled to these institutions, the West injected control mechanisms involving influence on policies and initiatives of integration. So, formal political independence can be understood as a grabbing strategy of continental institutions, which was further accentuated after 1991 through the penetration of the victorious ideology of global capitalism and the minimization of the foundational functions of the RECs in Africa. Though the original concept of realizing political independence, in the sense of independence from colonial rule, has been achieved, the continent still continues to be politically and economically dependent on aid, and the pan-African sentiment is losing its momentum throughout the continent (Adi, 2018). In this respect, research is required to understand the policy, institutional, and implementation challenges of African regional integration on the one hand and the Pan-African solutions on the other hand.

2.3.   Integration in the East African Community: Harmonization of Frameworks

The EAC is relatively better at implementing the regional integration agenda of Pan-Africanism, and its status among the RECs is better observed with the efforts towards enhancing the EAC Customs Union Protocol. This protocol significantly enhanced the framework for integration within the region and its lessons for other RECs on the continent. The EAC's commitment to regional integration has been recognized continentally, with the Africa Regional Integration Index (ARII) ranking it as the most integrated bloc among the eight regional economic communities recognized by the African Union (UNECA, 2013; UNECA, 2016). The Index is composed of the essential dimensions (trade integration, regional infrastructure, financial and macroeconomic integration, free movement of people, and harmonized framework to predict the status of the integration efforts).

According to the recently published ARII, the EAC has been ranked as the most integrated bloc among the eight RECs that are recognized by the African Union (UNECA, 2013; UNECA, 2020). This is a significant recognition of the EAC's efforts towards regional integration and collaboration in promoting regional integration and building the foundations for continental integration. The EAC regional integration is a multi-step process that began with the implementation of a customs union in 2005. Its goal is to foster deeper integration, facilitate intra-regional trade, increase production efficiency, and encourage domestic cross-border and foreign investments.

The Customs Union has made steady progress in implementing a common external tariff and eliminating internal tariffs, and a legal framework called the EAC Customs Management Act has been put in place (Aniche, 2023; EAC, 2011). However, challenges still remain, including issues with customs trade partnerships, slow progress in eliminating Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), delays in implementing regional commitments, and concerns over the proper application of the Rules of Origin. The Customs Union integration pillar in the EAC registered significant progress with the establishment of a single customs territory (SCT), the establishment of web-based NTBs, the ratification of the EAC-COMESA-SADC Tripartite and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreements by the EAC Partner States. The customs service has greatly enhanced its efficiency by introducing the SCT, harmonizing customs procedures, and implementing the Electronic Cargo Tracking System (ECTS) and One-Stop Border Posts (OSBP), among other trade facilitation measures. As a result, business costs and time have been significantly reduced (Aniche, 2023; EAC, 2021).

Established on July 1, 2010, the EAC Common Market Protocol (CMP) seeks to establish a unified market with the unrestricted movement of people, labour, goods, services, and residence. To achieve consistency throughout the region, member countries had to undergo a series of legislative and institutional changes (EAC, 2016, 2021). Despite these efforts, the protocol's implementation has been slow and has encountered numerous obstacles. Borders have yet to be fully opened, resulting in countries still operating as independent markets. Additionally, the free movement of labour and services has been limited, and NTBs have been erected, among other challenges. The introduction of CMP has resulted in favourable prospects within the agriculture, manufacturing, and services industries. Influential factors comprise health, education, food safety, international e-passports, mutual recognition agreements, tourism, cultural promotion, and trade services (Aniche, 2023; EAC, 2016, 2021).

Further, significant strides have been made by the EAC Council towards the establishment of the East African Monetary Union (EAMU) through the adoption of an organizational structure for the East African Monetary Institute (EAMI). The community has also made crucial headway toward achieving the Political Federation pillar (EAC, 2021). This has entailed the establishment of key legislative and judicial organs. These protocols are either currently under negotiation or waiting for ratification (EAC, 2021). The EAC has made strides in adopting a common market protocol, harmonizing policies, and eliminating barriers to free movement, which have further enhanced the integration process (Aniche, 2023). Overall, the EAC's political-level commitment to regional integration has yielded positive results in developing frameworks and protocols and has the potential to bring about even more benefits in the future in terms of the free movement of citizens (persons).

However, many of the deadlines for implementing various provisions of the Customs Union, Common Market, Monetary Union, and Political Federation have unfortunately been missed. Even the Customs Union and Common Market implementation is currently facing significant challenges (Zwanbin, 2023). The Customs Union was established in 2005, followed by the Common Market in 2010. Meanwhile, despite extensive talks and negotiations, the Monetary Union and Political Federation are still in progress (Cichecka, 2018). Notably, the EAC lacks a unified voice, leading to an asymmetrical relationship between its partner states (Cichecka, 2018) because of diverging internal factors such as the obsession with sovereignty rather than regional integration. The Customs Union has achieved some level of implementation, including institutionalization of the common external tariff regime and single customs territory, among others. Cichecka (2018) found that certain aspects of the Common Market have been implemented with mixed results, which confirms this finding by Aniche (2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Systematic Scoping Review

The driving perspective behind the institutionalization of the African RECs is the ideals of Pan-Africanism (Zwanbin, 2023). The RECs were assumed to function as the basis of step-by-step unification of Africa, per Pan-African perspective, among regional countries, and on the economic, social, and cultural integration leading to political unity for the formation of the United States of Africa. The AU recognized eight RECs as the foundations for the African continental integration, which are the (1) Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) in the north, (2) Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (in East and South), (3) Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD) in the northwest, (4) East African Community (EAC) in the east, (5) Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the centre of Africa, (6) Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the West, (7) Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the east and horn, and (8) the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in the south.

The institutionalization of frameworks was seen as a primary step, and the harmonized and integrated implementation frameworks in line with the Pan-African ideals were seen as a critical foundation for regional integration in Africa. Besides the above background information, findings of existing scholarly studies and initiatives by EAC countries were the basis behind the choice of the case REC (EAC) for this study. Specifically, the study (a) assesses challenges from secondary data related to political commitment in implementing the frameworks (policies and protocols) and (b) substantiates primary data on political commitment from three countries (Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania) in the context of a focus on sovereignty.

3.2. Study Approach and Design

The study employed mainly a qualitative research approach that evaluated qualitative indicators. The regional integration variable was assessed by reviewing the harmonization of frameworks (policies and protocols). The political commitment of leaders and technocrats was assessed by reviewing the implementation of these harmonized frameworks and collecting the perspectives of leaders, technocrats and citizenry in the case of the EAC. These indicators were analyzed in line with the Pan-African ideals of regional integration (building the RECs as a foundational block of African integration). The study design employed analytical and exploratory methods, mainly focusing on secondary information.

The qualitative study approach and design are convenient for assessing policy frameworks and the place of actors in implementing the frameworks. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to collect and analyze data, identify findings from emerging patterns of frameworks and practices, and draw inferences by triangulation and cross-checking of evidence in the research process at desk review and field levels (Creswell, 2007; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). In qualitative research, researchers combine patterns from diverse methods, tools, and evidence by triangulation to understand the research gaps from many dimensions and solve the research problem (Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2003;).

3.3.   Data Collection

Primary Data and Sources. The primary data was collected from the following participants: AU leaders and experts, ECA leaders and experts, EAC leaders and experts (Kenya and Tanzania), Pan-African Activists, Pan-African Scholars and Researchers, and AU Volunteer Youths (the volunteers, including those working on economic policy and institutions, education, media, infrastructure, etc.). First, using a semi-structured interview method and a checklist guide as a data collection tool, as suggested by methodology scholars (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Creswell et al., 2003; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). About 15 key informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The key interview was conducted at an in-depth level using the checklist and consent from participants. To ensure diversity perspectives, gender, institutional, and expertise level diversity was ensured. For instance, out of the 15 key informants, 6 were females, and 9 were males. Participants from AU, ECA, national institutions, and border communities were included.

Second, the focus group method and a discussion guide (checklist) are used as data collection tools, as suggested by methodology scholars (see Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Eight focus groups (consisting of 8 members in each group) were selected from the experts at the EAC (1 FGD), the UNECA (1 FGD), AU (1 FGD), decision-makers at the national level (from Kenya (1 FGD), Rwanda (1 FGD), Tanzania (1FGD)) and boarder area communities (2 FGDs, one at each border point), related organizations and government policy-making bodies in the selected countries (Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania) using a purposive sampling technique. Using a discussion checklist and the consent of the participants, the discussion was facilitated by the authors and field assistants.

The interview and discussion checklist were designed in English and translated into Swahili to conduct the interviews and discussions with border communities. Otherwise, the interviews and discussions with leaders and experts were conducted in English. The interview responses and the discussions were carefully tapped (recorded) and documented along with the specific key informants and later transcribed carefully among the thematic variables embedded into the checklist items. Besides recording, the authors and the assistants took field-level notes and carefully organized them into the thematic narrative reporting on the challenges.

The analysis of the interview, focus group discussion and scoping meta-data were conducted thematically and triangulated. The comparability of the perspectives was ensured using the tools and clarifying the purpose of the interview and discussions. The scoping desk review results were used to design the tools and decide on the primary data sets' dependability, transferability and trustworthiness. Also, a conducive environment was created for all participants to freely and confidently air their voices and build a rapport for participation. By doing so, all participants presented their perspectives, enriching the dependability, transferability and trustworthiness of the data obtained from the field.

3.2 Methods of Data Analysis

The data from the desk review were organized by using contents relevant to the study and the purpose of linking to the Pan-African agenda of regional integration. Besides the desk review data, the KII and FGD information transcribed from the recordings and field notes were arranged into themes and transformed into analytic narratives in line with the research gaps and objectives of the study. After separately presenting the focused desk review contents (in the background and literature review sections) and the primary field-level data into thematic narratives, the study presented the data results in which the discussion and findings are embedded. In using contents from the existing literature and thematic data sets from primary data sources, the authors ensured the dependability and transferability of the evidence (data) and the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

The data results are presented in two parts. The first part presents the data results on the challenges faced by EAC in implementing the frameworks for advancing regional integration in the framework of the ideals of Pan-Africanism. The second part presents data on whether Pan-Africanism serves as a solution to address the political commitment challenges of leaders and technocrats in the EAC in realizing the African regional integration objectives as observed in the EAC's diverse frameworks and protocols.

4.1.   The EAC's Regional Integration Challenges

The key challenges of regional integration in the African continent in general, and the EAC in particular, are related to the political commitment of leaders in the countries of the respective economic communities. Regional integration in the EAC region is relatively progressing. However, the lack of harmonized laws, regulations, infrastructure, connectivity, and the prevalence of corruption, bureaucracy, security, and political instability remains a challenge. According to interview results from the field, the absence of political commitment poses a major hurdle to the successful regional integration of the EAC. Informants from the AU and EAC Secretariat have revealed that several EAC Partner States lack the drive to implement the AU and Community's laws, regulations, decisions, and directives, which was confirmed by key informants from the EAC secretariat, ECA, and Pan-African Parliament (KII 1 from EAC, August 21, 2023, Tanzania, KII 2 from Pan-African Parliament, July 15, 2023, Addis Ababa, KII 3 from ECA, October 1, 2023, Addis Ababa, and KII 4 from EAC Secretariat, November 5, 2023). This gap is perceived as a threat to the AU regional integration initiatives and the EAC's long-term existence. The tendency of EAC Partner States to overlook regional laws, regulations, and rules is an entrenched political strategy. This is a real challenge that cannot be overlooked. An interviewee from the EAC Secretariat reflected that "…for successful regional integration, a strong political commitment is needed…rather the current practices related to just establishing institutions and signing treaties …the agreements need to be implemented. ... However, currently, sovereignty prevails rather than continental integration and EAC partner states look hesitant of complete regional integration…" (KII 4 from EAC, November 5, 2023).

This statement emphasizes the critical role that political commitment plays in achieving successful regional integration. It acknowledges that the mere establishment of institutions and signing of treaties is insufficient without proper implementation and adherence to agreements. However, the lack of political goodwill, especially from regional leaders, poses a significant threat to the community's long-term viability. Furthermore, the statement notes that certain Partner States within the EAC are hesitant to fully commit to specific aspects of the regional integration process, which is cause for concern. This suggests that these leaders may not fully appreciate the benefits of regional integration or may possess conflicting interests that hinder their willingness to commit.

In a similar vein, most interviewees and focus group discussion participants from the UNECA underlined the implementation crisis in the continent, particularly in the EAC region. This is confirmed by a key informant from ECA policy experts (KII 5 from ECA, October 1, 2023) and FGD with ECA policy experts in Addis Ababa (FGD 1 with ECA policy Experts, November 30, 2023, Addis Ababa). They state that there is a commitment from the leadership, which is manifested in the signing of treaties to enhance integration across the continent, but the technocrats of the member states partly cause the implementation crisis. The statement from the key informant from the UNECA, who is from EAC national, confirmed that "… though there is progress … disagrees with the extent... at the political level, there is a clear commitment … yet technocrats are not …. According to this same informant, for instance, President Ruto of Kenya wants to allow all Africans to visit Kenya without a visa, but the technocrats advise against it. This will

delay the integration from moving forward …" (KII 6 from ECA Regional Integration Expertise, Kenyan National, August 15, 2023, Addis Ababa).

The statement highlights the dichotomy between the political leaders and the technocrats in implementing policies for progress. According to the statement, political leaders demonstrate a clear commitment to progress, while technocrats tend to second-guess their superiors and cause delays. The technocrats' fears of the consequences of implementing policies too quickly, such as difficulty managing them, can hinder progress. This situation is not unique to Kenya. It is a common problem in many countries where political leaders and technocrats have different priorities and perspectives, which is confirmed by a key informant from ECA (KII 7 Economic Policy Expertise, ECA, August 15, 2023, Addis Ababa). Political leaders are often focused on achieving their goals and fulfilling their promises to their constituents, while technocrats are more concerned with the practicalities of implementing policies and ensuring their success. Two UNECA experts interviewed opined that political commitment is often intertwined with implementation challenges. Nonetheless, they posit that the genuine hurdle stems from the technical capacity of the institutions engaged in integration and the governing bodies tasked with executing the implementation. This was confirmed in the field by a key informant from ECA (KII 8 from ECA Trade Policy Expertise, August 15, 2023, Addis Ababa).

The study sought to delve into the matter of inadequate political dedication, as articulated by the individuals interviewed. An official from Kenya highlighted that the underlying factors affecting the regional integration in the EAC include "…budgetary constraints … failure of parties to make timely and important contributions … which shows limitations of political commitment and party's willingness to support the EAC cause and implement policies…." (KII 9 from EAC State Department Kenya, January 19, 2024, Nairobi).

The statement hinges on EAC's operational principle of decision-making by consensus rather than voting, as outlined in the EAC Treaty (EAC, 1999). Thus, in the event of a Partner State's failure to participate, any actions taken are rendered ineffective, and any adopted resolutions are deemed null. As a result, the absence of state delegates at regional meetings is viewed as a lack of political commitment towards promoting regional integration objectives. The timely contribution of the required membership financial contributions also shows the degree of political commitment, but most states fail to make such contributions in a timely manner.

This study finds that the lack of political commitment by Partner States of the EAC is delaying the process of regional integration in the EAC. The process of regional integration hinges on the unwavering commitment of political leaders and bureaucrats from each sovereign state. Their approval is crucial to the success of integration. It would be unwise to neglect the significance of political will in shaping and guiding the progress of regional integration. In fact, political factors play a more dominant role than economic factors in determining the speed and level of integration.

In one way or another, while addressing the political commitment challenge, various interviewees discussed harmonization, implementation, and domestication of laws as significant challenges in the EAC regional integration process. As observed by many interviewees and focus group discussions, effectively managing the differences in national legal systems and regulations is crucial for achieving regional integration within the EAC. This was confirmed in the field by a key informant from the EAC secretariat (KII 10 from EAC Secretariat, 22nd of Jan 2024) and focus group discussants from the secretariat (FGD 2 with the EAC Secretariat Policy Expertise, January 23, 2024, Tanzania). These variations, whether in terms of substantive or procedural laws, as well as legal customs and ways of thinking, can pose substantial challenges to the initiative. One of the key informants from the EAC secretariat noted that "… lack of harmonization of policies indicates different legal systems in the member states …. For instance, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda follow the common law system, while Rwanda and Burundi follow the civil law system" (KII 11 from EAC Secretariat Policy Expertise, January 22, 2024, Tanzania). The differences lead to the low implementation and application of policies and the interpretation of laws hampering the integration. The same informant also stated that "…tax laws, criminal laws, and business regulations exist in the member states and affect cross-country movement of capital" (*Ibid*).

As the interview in the above statement notes, managing legal requirements in different countries can pose a significant challenge for businesses. It often necessitates seeking professional legal guidance to comprehend and adhere to varying national regulations, ultimately increasing business costs. Furthermore, discrepancies in national legislation may create an unnecessary burden on investors in the region and result in certain regions attracting more investment than others.

In a focus group discussion, the cross-border business community from both Kenya and Tanzania indicated that disproportional tax and local charges imposed by the states are significant challenges. These challenges were echoed by focus group discussants along the borders of Kenya and Tanzania (FGD 2 with Sirare Border Business Community Tanzania and FGD 3 with Isebania Border Business Community Kenya, January 25, 2024, Kenya). They believe that such heavy taxation is imposed on small-scale cross-border business communities to discourage market access. Tax harmonization is crucial for purifying the economic environment of the East African region to enhance foreign direct investment. This aligns with the notion that a consistent and synchronized tax system can ease doing business and attract foreign investors. The analysis of data gathered from the cross-border business community shows that Partner States in the EAC lack a cohesive policy framework for implementing a uniform, coordinated, and non-discriminatory tax system to access their market. This hinders the integration efforts.

Ensuring consistency in immigration policies can promote seamless and uninhibited movement of individuals across regions. In contrast, the existence of varying immigration policies within regions can impede the free flow of people between states. Nonetheless, adopting uniform migration policies can alleviate such challenges. Take, for example, Tanzania's vagrancy laws that restrict the movement of impoverished individuals or discriminate against them based on their economic status, which is not a feature of Kenyan immigration laws.

According to many interviewees, the prolonged ratification process of protocols, Acts, regulations, and other legal instruments facilitating regional integration is a serious challenge threatening the EAC's existence. One key informant from the EAC underlines this challenge by referring to the recent move of the EAC Council to revamp the stalled ratification of the Environment Protocol that was signed back in 2006 by only Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This was confirmed by a key informant from the EAC secretariat (KII 11 from EAC Secretariat Policy Expertise, January 22, 2024, Tanzania). This challenge is related to some member states' lack of political will and commitment to implement the agreed policies and laws. This has led to delays and inconsistencies in the implementation process, which has slowed down the integration process.

Some interviewees have related the implementation crises in the region to the lack of progress toward the EAC Monetary Union and the drafting of the EAC Constitution for the Political Federations. According to the key informants in the field, the progress, though gradual, is encouraging (KII 12 from UNECA Trade Policy Coordination Expertise, August 15, 2023, and KII 7 from ECA Policy Expertise, August 15, 2023, Addis Ababa). The issue was also confirmed by focus group discussion with experts at the EAC secretariat (FGD 3 with the EAC Secretariat Policy Expertise, January 23, 2024, Tanzania). Domestication of laws has also been a challenge in the EAC, as key informants from state departments of the member states (KII 9 from State Department Kenya, January 19, 2024, Nairobi) and the EAC secretariat (KII 4 from EAC Secretariat, November 5, 2023) indicated. It is worth noting that none of the EAC Partner States has a specific clause in their respective national constitutions that outlines EAC Law's nature, effect, and implementation in their national legal order. This is despite the fact that some of these states have enacted their constitutions long after the conclusion of the EAC Treaty. This creates ambiguity and raises questions about EAC Law's status in the national legal systems.

Many scholars have also indicated that the lack of political will and poor implementation of integration initiatives are the main challenges to regional integration in the EAC. However, Africa's challenges and complexities in promoting regional cooperation and integration are not unique (Mathieson, 2016; Zwanbin, 2023). Amuhaya and Degterev (2022), in their recent book titled '*A Century of East African Integration,*' states that the major challenge for regional integration in the region is the unwillingness of the leadership to compromise their ambitions and transfer at least part of their national sovereignty for the regional level institution. The challenges are not unique to the EAC region. According to Odusote (2015),

regional integration in Africa's challenges includes the lack of internal capabilities of the RECs, RECs pursuing divergent regional economic interests, ambitious integration schemes and deadlines, failure to implement decisions, economic instability, and revenue loss. Oloruntoba (2020) also identified, among others, the model of integration adopted, the absence of incentives to surrender part of the sovereignty, and the lack of political will on regional integration as the significant challenges to regional integration in Africa.

4.2. Can Pan-Africanism Tackle the Challenges of Political Commitment in the EAC?

Against the political commitment challenges, it is imperative to ask about the relevance of Pan-Africanism in coordinating continental integration initiatives in the EAC. In the interview session, KII 13 emphasized the continued relevance of the idea of Pan-Africanism in addressing the challenges that are facing the continent. This was confirmed by key informant experts from the ECA Trade and Industry Commission (KII 13 from ECA Trade and Industry Commission, August 21, 2023, Addis Ababa). He suggests that for Africa to have a strong voice globally, it must first be strong domestically, and regional integration and Pan-Africanism are the keys to achieving this strength. The respondent calls for African states to fully adopt the ideals of Pan-Africanism in addressing the challenges of 21st-century Africa.

EAC officials and experts also, in unison, argue that Pan-Africanism ideals are relevant in addressing the lack of political commitment to implementing regional integration initiatives. One of the EAC experts stated: "*I would not say that most of the initiatives and activities in the EAC have been guided by the notion of Pan-Africanism. However, I believe that if the idea of Pan-Africanism guided the EAC, more than half of the implementation problems we are facing could have been solved*" (KII 4 from EAC Secretariat, November 5, 2023).

The statement by the respondent validates two issues in the continent's regional integration efforts. First, it validates the assertion that the EAC's regional integration efforts are void of the notions of Pan-Africanism. Secondly, the statement underlined the pivotal role of adopting Pan-Africanism as a guiding principle for successful regional integration efforts in the RECs of Africa. It also highlighted the missed opportunity resulting from the reluctance to be guided by the notion of Pan-Africanism in the EAC region.

One Pan-Africanist scholar also gave an affirmative response on the relevance of Pan-Africanism in Africa in general. In his statement, he affirmed, "*In my opinion, the Pan-African idea is still alive and relevant today. I believe that Africa is facing increasing challenges in the globalized world, and it is important for African nations to come together and harmonize their rules and regulations. The harmonization and implementation demands political commitment*" (KII 14 Diplomat from Kenya, November 18, 2023).

Many interviewees argue that Africa's political and economic elites have attempted to tackle the common challenges that the continent faces together under the umbrella of Pan-Africanism. However, according to these respondents, most of these attempts have been little more than superficial lip service, failing to deliver any real progress or meaningful change. Despite the rhetoric of unity and solidarity, Africa remains beset by a wide range of interrelated problems. In a focus group discussion with African youths who volunteer at the AU, the participants expressed their disillusionment with the concept of Pan-Africanism. The focus group discussion with AU youth volunteers confirmed this (FGD 4 with AU Youth Volunteers - Addis Ababa, November 14, 2023, Addis Ababa). They highlighted that the initiatives taken by the AU are not given due attention and relevance by the African states, which they attribute to the continent's leaders' reluctance to embrace the ideals of Pan-Africanism.

In a focus group discussion at the EAC, participants challenged the constructive relevance of Pan-Africanism, while others focused on the contemporary interpretation and, hence, the application of the ideology. This was confirmed by a focus group discussion from the EAC secretariat (FGD 5 with EAC Secretariat Experts, January 23, 2024, Tanzania). They argued that Pan-Africanism can play a pivotal role in addressing the current challenges faced by the African continent and the EAC in particular. They suggest that the full potential of this ideology can only be realized when it is embraced and given a central role in the design and construction of African society. According to the participants, policy-makers and leaders need to prioritize the values and principles of Pan-Africanism, such as solidarity, self-determination, and anti-

imperialism, in their decision-making and governance practices. By doing so, they can promote greater unity and cooperation across the continent and work towards a more equitable and sustainable future for all Africans.

Regarding Pan-Africanism as a Solution to the Political Commitment Challenges of the EAC, the key findings are: first, the EAC's Pan-African regional integration agenda struggles with a lack of political commitment, leading to a weak implementation of regional integration initiatives, and this finding is consistent with Aniche (2023) and Zwanbin (2023). Second, Pan-Africanism served as an organizing movement and policy direction, hence a solution for the challenges of African integration, and building the foundations for it by implementing and practising through the regional economic communities, which is consistent with the findings of Cichecka (2018) and Aniche (2023).

5. Conclusions and the Ways Forward

5.1. Conclusions

The findings revealed that the lack of political commitment from leaders and technocrats challenges the Pan-African continental integration agenda at the EAC. The integration frameworks (policies and protocols) are in place but not implemented as expected. There is weak implementation of the integration initiatives except for the rhetoric at the levels of political leaders. The policy and institutional level experts are obsessed with neoliberal prescriptions rather than Pan-African ideals. The paper argues that reinvigorating Pan-African ideals and embodying the principles of Pan-Africanism requires addressing barriers that hindered its adoption in the integration framework and their implementation and tracking of results. The reinvigoration needs to begin by aligning the different stances of the political leaders and technocrats and embracing the participation of the African citizenry at large. The study showed that political leaders emphasize the relevance of Pan-African frameworks, yet in terms of commitment to implementation, the policies and protocols in place are not materialized. From the leaders' side, there is a pre-obsession on national sovereignty rather than regional integration. The technocrats are pre-obsessed with neoliberal ideals in the design, implementation and tracking of the results of the policies and protocols in place. The lack of commitment from the political leaders and technocrats has weakened the implementation of the EAC's regional integration efforts and embodying Pan-African principles in the policies and protocols in place. Two areas of policy and academic concern emerged from the results of this study. First, there is a divergence in perspective between leaders and technocrats, and there is a need for aligning direction. Second, there is a drift from Pan-African ideals, and the neo-liberal ideals often inform the policies and protocols in place. Thus, reinvigorating Pan-African principles will inform African initiatives, resources, and regional integration goals that will lead to a unified Africa. In this respect, Pan-Africanism has recently been continuously gaining momentum, and this will boost the reinvigoration agenda and better pursue regional integration across Africa. Thus, it is crucial to reassess and improve the role of the RECs (in the implementation of the existing policies and protocols) and embody Pan-African principles in the implementation of regional integration initiatives in the EAC.

Overcoming the political commitment challenges demands instilling Pan-Africanism ideals in the institutional structures of the EAC in particular and the RECs in general. Such initiatives, in turn, must consciously align REC policies, practices, and decision-making processes with Pan-Africanist principles. The design and implementation of such conscious initiatives (by reinvigorating) balance the sovereign interest and the leaders' regional and continental integration interests. The change at the leadership level of commitment will transform the role of technocrats in search of Pan-African regional integration initiatives (policies and protocols) and improve the political commitment of the technocrats towards Pan-Africanism. On top of the above, the institutionalization of Pan-Africanism and enhancing the political commitment of leaders and technocrats will help effectively overcome the challenges hindering the integration efforts of the RECs.

The deliberate infusion of Pan-African ideals into the EAC also demands leadership commitment from partner states of the EAC. Leaders must advocate unity, exercise cultural exchange, and work aiming at a shared destiny, and such huge responsibility cannot be realized without the participation of citizens. While colonial subjugation and racism presented pre-independence African elites with a common enemy, the 21st-century challenges of Africa should frame the common purpose of Pan-Africanism in the continent. With this in mind, African elites (political leaders and technocrats) need to consciously craft a common goal and destiny for Africa in the 21st century. Although the leaders and technocrats had differing views on important issues related to embodying Pan-African principles, a shared belief that Africa needed to be free united all of them, they differed on how to do and achieve this. Thus, the leaders of the member states of the RECs must work to embrace the Pan-African visions and ideals in the normative and institutional frameworks and expand such projects to the citizens of the continent. Thus, this study finally: (1) documents the evidence and the understanding that Pan-African ideals/principles can serve as essential policy, framework and protocol components to overcoming the 21st-century challenges of the continent, (2) boost the regional integration agenda of the RECs in the continent, to become the foundations and building block of African integration, and (3) though there are many studies on Pan-Africanism, reinvigorating Pan-Africanism is essential for embodying its principles and make it serve as organizing policy tool of the actors and institutions in the continent.

5.2.   Contributions, Limitations, and the Implications of the Study

The existing studies on regional integration efforts, considering the reinvigoration of Pan-Africanism for boosting the political commitment of leaders and technocrats in implementing policies and protocols within the EAC, need to acknowledge challenges and prospects. There is also a critical gap in how these challenges are analyzed, interpreted and implemented. The political commitment challenges (divergence in ideal and drift from Pan-African principles of regional integration, focus on sovereignty, and neoliberal policy prescriptions) of leaders and technocrats are the key bottlenecks in designing and implementing the Pan-African agenda-driven policies and protocols. If these bottlenecks are not addressed, RECs will remain weak and cannot serve as building blocks and the foundations for African Continental Integration. Also, the RECs cannot build the capacity and relevance to solving the 21st-century challenges of the continent and waste the prospects of the institutions, frameworks, policies, and protocols in place. In addition, the continued efforts of the emerging Pan-African youth, academia and politicians will be wasted. Thus, the study recommends advancing and reinvigorating a renewed academic and policy debate on Pan-Africanism and the policies and protocols that address the challenges of 21st-century Africa.

The literature is scarce in documenting the weakness of the political commitment of leaders and technocrats in materializing the above recommendation. Thus, the current study (1) informs policy practice that is based on and embodies the reinvigorated Pan-African principles, (2) courting the REC initiatives and partner states in realigning to and reconstituting their relevance as building blocks to solve the challenges of the 21st century Africa, and (3) triggering an extensive case study in the rest of the RECs to document challenges and the prospects.

Apart from the contributions explained above, the study is limited in scope. It considered the EAC, so the results may not be generalized to the RECs and the continent. Also, it considered specific political commitment aspects of the Pan-African principle and is not conclusive research on all of its principles. Thus, further research is needed on (1) extensive interviews and discussion with a cross-section of actors in the respective RECs, (2) comparative studies within RECs and among the RECs to identify case-based and contextual policy implication, and (3) reinvigorating the principles of Pan-Africanism and their specific and combined implication to address the challenges of regional integration as founding block of African integration.

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Authors' Contributions

1. Tesfaye Belijge Dara: conceptualized the project, conducted the study, collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data, and wrote the manuscript.
2. Advisor 1: supervised the project, edited the manuscript, and offered comments.
3. Advisor 2: supervised the project, edited the manuscript, and offered comments.

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