

## Efforts of Integration in the African Regional Groupings (The Community of Sahel-Saharan)

By : Saeed Ali Ahmed Taha  
PhD Researcher in international relations- Sudan Academy of Sciences



**R**egional integration in Africa went through several stages and took many forms according to the different objectives and fields. At the beginning, it appeared in the form of regional groupings that have coped with regional and international changes in the African continent and with what was known as the “Old Regionalism”, where the Organization of African Unity was established followed by the formation of some regional blocks that appeared in the seventies and the eighties of the last century such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Within the framework of the “New Regionalism”, several regional groupings emerged in Africa, salient of which is the Community of Sahel-Saharan States that was established in 1998 and is known as CEN-SAD community. It aims to achieve economic integration by focusing on the following objectives:

- Establishment of a comprehensive economic integration.
- Implementation of an integrated plan.
- Elimination of all obstacles impeding the free movement of individuals and capitals.
- Enhancement and improvement of land, air and sea transportation and telecommunications.

CEN-SAD community contributed to change the frozen and tense relations between the Sahel-Saharan States turning them into relations that are characterized by mutual co-operation in economic and political fields. However, CEN-SAD community wasn't effective. It faced stumbles that hindered it from achieving such economic unity, which it aspired. Besides, it failed to achieve political and cultural exchange. And thus, it became an entity that has no economic weight compared to other regional economic groupings that are more active in Africa.



By the end of 2011, the community demolished under the overwhelming conditions that took place in the Arab region as a result of the developments of the Arab Spring revolutions which overthrew Muammar Gaddafi's foundation. Moreover, the growing security challenges that are taking place in the African Sahel region pushed the leaders of the community to think of reviving, reviewing and amending its inception treaty so as to make it a strong and effective grouping that focusses on economic issues and addresses new issues related to regional security arrangements.

The subject of this study is an evaluation of the process of regional integration in the Community of Sahel-Saharan States that lasted for more than 17 years in the light of the economic, political and institutional challenges that faced the community and ended with its failure to achieve its objectives. In this respect, the study is trying to identify how far the community succeeded in achieving its objectives in the light of these challenges that faced it and are still facing it till present.

#### **The Motives of Regional Integration in Africa:**

##### **First: Economic Motives**

African countries realized the importance of economic integration projects since the sixties and the seventies of the last century; especially

after the fragmentation which such countries faced in the wake of independence. Therefore, they adopted economic integration plans for the following reasons:

- They help in forming economic units that have the capacity to survive and markets that address the shortcomings of the factors of production in African countries.
- They provide the appropriate framework to mobilize the resources and markets in the African countries.
- They lead to the competition between regional products in the countries of Africa, which increases the production efficiency of economic projects and achieves the optimum utilization of resources.
- They lead to the economic expansion of labor exporting countries by easing the pressure on the labor market and providing an additional income through the money transfer of overseas labor. Also, the hosting countries benefit from foreign labor in developing their competitive capacities.
- They help in reducing the deterioration of the African countries on the international level.

After the Cold War era had ended, the African continent was marginalized in favour of Eastern and Cen-

tral European countries that have become more important due to their economic and developmental progress. Such marginalization was embodied in the extreme decline in the aids provided to the African countries compared to those given to Eastern European countries, besides the economic and political conditionality, in addition to the weak response of the West towards the crisis that hit the continent at the beginning of the nineties such as the crisis of Somalia, Liberia and Serra Leone. Therefore, the world conditions after the end of the Cold War imposed upon Africa to engage more in an economic integration process so as to avoid any more marginalization, which some considered that it was for the benefit for the continent.

#### Second: Political Motives

The weakness and fragility of the African countries are the most important motives for regional integration in Africa, especially after the international changes and their impact on the countries of the continent and their economies. In this respect, the African countries became too weak to meet their social responsibilities showing a clear decline in their role in terms of public services.

However, such decline included some positive dimensions. First, the collapse of the national state project had an indirect positive influence on

the process of regional integration, where the African countries realized their inability to face national merger by their own. They, also, realized that absolute sovereignty will neither achieve political stability nor economic development. And thus, most African countries adopted policies based on market mechanisms and democratic transformation rather than those based on ideological basis. Second, the decline in the role of National State highlighted the significance of group work in solving the problem of national integration through co-operation with neighbor countries. This in turn confirmed the interactive relation between internal and regional stability as regional integration plays an important role in the stability in the continent of Africa.

From this standpoint, political considerations emphasize the need to establish strong regional groupings since they form the confrontation force that can face all external pressures on one hand and can help in achieving independence in the field of international political economy, on the other hand. In addition, regional integration represents a pivotal factor in maintaining social and political stability as it provides the appropriate framework to settle conflicts and to put an end to the sources of tension as well as disputes related to nationalism and sectarian-

ism that destabilize the countries within the domain of war.

**Evaluation of Integrated Performance in Sahel-Saharan Community**

CEN-SAD is one of the sub-regional groupings that are inter-governmental. It was established in Africa by the end of the nineties of the last century aiming to achieve economic integration among Sahel-Saharan States.

The grouping is, mainly, an economic union or organization that seeks to implement integrated developmental plans along with the national developmental plans of Member states in order to ensure an effective presence in international economic relations.

CEN-SAD community benefited from national and international factors that helped in its inception among the African regional groupings. These factors include that most of the countries of the community were under the European colonization and thus have mutual economic as well as political elements, in the sense that such countries face the same problems, especially those of poverty, underdevelopment, the spread of deadly diseases, the manifestations of corruption, besides the failure and weakness of the state. This is in addition to the negative consequences of globalization which imposed upon the regional entities to engage in collective solidarity union.

Also, the community benefited from the status of the regional and international relations after the end of the cold War, which changed to a great extent. This is represented in limiting the barriers between countries and Libya's openness to the African regional environment after being in a state of regional as well as international isolation.

The Treaty on the inception of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) is divided into a preamble and eleven articles. It is noted that the leaders and the governments of the signatory countries should take into account the common interests in addition to the ethnic geographical and historical ties between their peoples.

In recognition of the magnitude and complexity of the problems in the continent of Africa in addition to the need to face both internal and external factors of economic underdevelopment as well as instability, they have reached to the conviction that joint action in the context of integration is the best way for regional integration. They, also, agreed on that such social, political and economic integration shall be implemented in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of Islamic Conference, and the Abuja Treaty of 1991. Accordingly, it was

decided to create the Community of Sahel-Saharan States referred to as CEN-SAD.

**The Development of Performance in the Structures of the Community**

Under the Treaty, the main organs of CEN-SAD Community consist of five structures. These are the Council of Heads of State, the Executive Council, the General Secretariat, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ESCC), and Sahel-Saharan Investment and Trade Bank.

Since its inception, the Community attracted the membership of about 28 African countries and showed absolute regularity in holding summits, in addition to the remarkable performance of the Sahel-Saharan Bank.

**First: The Expansion of Membership in the Community**

CEN-SAD was established on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, 1998 following the conference of Leaders and Heads of State held in Tripoli (Libya). It includes the following organs:

- The Conference of Heads of State
- The Executive Council
- The General Secretariat
- The Sahel-Saharan Investment and Trade Bank

Membership in CEN-SAD community is divided into two types: the membership of founding countries and the organized or conditional membership. The first include six African states; namely: Libya, Mali,

the Sudan, Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso. These states met in the city of Tripoli to discuss the establishment of a new regional grouping and ended with signing a Treaty for the establishment of the community. The latter included the states that didn't participate in the preliminary preparations for the establishment of the community but joined later under Article VII of the Treaty of Establishment, which stipulates that any African country can join the community by the consent of all Member States.

It is clear from the content of this text that it is required from any country wishing to join the community to fulfill all the conditions stipulated in the treaty and approved by the competent authorities of the community.

It is worth mentioning that the Treaty of the Inception of CEN-SAD community stipulated that only a State can request a membership. This means that entities that do not have an international recognition, such as the Republic of Somalia, the Republic of Somaliland and the Western Sahara may not be admitted into the community. The Treaty, also, stipulated that only African States can request to join the Community and that such request shall be tangible. This means that it shall be written and submitted to official government channels that shall sub-



mit it to the General Secretariat and then to the Conference of Heads of State in order to be discussed in its ordinary session and to receive a unanimous acceptance by Member States.

It is noted that membership conditions are flexible as it is opened for all African states. It is a cross-regional membership, which means that it isn't limited to a specific region within the African continent contrary to the COMESA, SADC and ECOWAS. This is due to the aspirations of Gaddafi who wanted to expand the membership of the community, so he didn't impose any restrictions or sophisticated conditions. The one and only condition is the unanimous agreement of Member States on the request to join the grouping.

Moreover, the membership witnessed an expansion in the geopolitical plan of the community as it succeeded in attracting many African countries since its inception to become the largest African regional grouping in terms of membership. This is represented in the following:

- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State held in N'Djamena in February 2000, five countries joined the grouping; namely: Senegal, Gambia, Djibouti, Central Africa and Eritrea.
- In the ordinary session of the

Conference of Heads of State held in Khartoum in February 2001, another five countries joined the Community; namely: Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria and Somalia. This was followed by including some of the Nile Basin countries as well as the countries of North Africa. It's worth mentioning that the joining of Nigeria helped in creating a linking bond between the Member States of the Community and the countries of the Atlantic Coast.

- Sirte Summit that was held in 2002 witnessed the joining of Togo and Benin. While other subsequent summits witnessed the joining of another eight countries. Thus, in 2005 the number of Member States reached 23 countries and continued to increase till it reached 28 African countries in 2010.
- CEN-SAD Community was not only opened on the regional level but also on the international level. First, on the regional level, it was recognized as a regional economic grouping in the 36<sup>th</sup> ordinary session of the Conference of Leaders and Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity that was held on 04-12/07/2000 in Lome, in Togo. It signed a Protocol on Relation between the African Economic Community (AEC) and the Regional

Economic Communities (RECs) in February 1998. It, also, signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation with COMESA in Cairo, in May 2001 concerning the fields of development, transport and communications. Second, on the international level CEN-SAD community was given the observer status in the UN General Assembly by virtue of the UN General Assembly Resolution No. A/RES/56/92 issued in 2001.

**Second: The Performance of the Main Organs of CEN-SAD**

**1. The Council of Heads of State**

It consists of the leaders and heads of state of the Community. It has a supreme authority over the various institutions. It meets once a year and its presidency rotates among the capitals of Member States. All meetings of the Council are closed. However, it may hold some public hearings as well as extraordinary meetings at the request of any of its members. These meetings are only valid by the presence of two thirds of the member States. At the beginning of every ordinary session, the council elects a bureau that consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, and a rapporteur. The Council shall make decisions by majority relating to the general policy of the implementation of the Treaty and the achievement of its objectives.

The Council approves the deci-

sions of the other organs and provides them with guidance. It decides the matters referred to it by the Executive Council and the Secretariat. It issues the decisions, regulations and instructions necessary to achieve the goals and implement the programmes of the Community. It, also, approves the general budget and determines the contribution percentage of Member States.

It's worth mentioning that since its inception, CEN-SAD community held its summits regularly. Its first ordinary session was held in Sirte in February 1998 attended by the founding countries that signed the Treaty of its establishment under the presence of observers from Egypt. This was followed by N'Djamena Summit held in 2000, in which eleven countries participated. Then, Khartoum summit held in 2001, which witnessed the expansion of Afro-Arab rapprochement within the Community. These were followed by Sirte Summit in 2002, Niamey Summit in Niger in 2005, Bamako Summit Mali in 2004, Ouagadougou Summit in Burkina Faso in 2005, Sirte Summit in 2007, Cotonou Summit in 2008, and the Eleventh Summit in Tripoli in May 2009, followed by the Twelfth Summit in N'Djamena in 2010.

By the Death of Gaddafi in 2011, things changed. He was the main supporter and sponsor of the summits. And thus, since his death no

ordinary summits have been held till present except for the exceptional summit that was held in N'Djamena in February 2013. This summit is considered to be special not only because it is the first since the death of Gaddafi but also because it witnessed the restructure of the community on all levels, in the light of the wide spread of tension in Sahel-Saharan region, after the approval of the Conference of Heads of State, the Executive Council and the financial system under the new agreement of the community.

As it is difficult to cover all the issues addressed by the summits of the community since its inception, we preferred to divide them into two categories. First: the economic issues, second: the political and security issues.

#### First: Economic Issues

The first Summit of the Council of heads of State focused on the economic integration issues aiming to establish an economic union and to promote trade exchange. The third summit focused on expanding trade exchange and enhancing transport networks. The fourth summit studied the ways to establish a free trade zone among the countries of the Community. In this respect, it was approved to form an economic commission that includes each of Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Nigeria to follow up the economic issues within the framework of the mutual economic

co-operation between countries. In the Tenth Summit, Gaddafi called for directing the Libyan investments to the countries of the Community then to those of Europe so as to help the peoples of the CEN-SAD community.

#### Second: Political and Security Issues

Despite the economic problems which the countries of the community faced, the leaders gave attention to the political issues with security implications. This is represented in the Second Summit of the Council of Heads of State that was held in N'Djamena and highlighted the security issues for the first time in order to urge member States to set a security Charter which guarantees peace, security and stability. Therefore, it was agreed upon prohibiting the use of the territory of member states to carry out any activity that may affect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries.

In subsequent summits, political and security issues exceeded the economic issues. This is represented in the final statement of the fourth summit of the Council of Heads of State which called upon the UN Security Council to release the Libyan citizen named Abdel Basset al-Megrahi who is accused in the Lockerbie case. The Statement, also, included political issues between the countries of the grouping such as the issue of reconciliation between Egypt and the Sudan within the framework of IGAD initiative, besides the Peace Agreement between the opposition and the regime in Chad. In addi-



tion, the Statement called upon the need to resolve the disputes in Central Africa and the conflict between Eritrea Ethiopia. While the Sixth Summit focused on security issues, such as combatting terrorism, as it set a security protocol concerning the mechanism of conflict prevention and management. The Thirteenth extraordinary Summit focused on the security issues, especially after the establishment of a permanent Peace and Security Council. It, also, assigned Egypt to study the establishment of a regional center for combatting terrorism.

## 2. The Executive Council

The Executive Council consists of a number of ministers from the Member States concerned with foreign relations, economy, finance, planning, internal affairs and security. The Council is held once every six months and chaired by the country that hosts the summit of the Community.

At the opening of each session, the Council elects a bureau composed of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a rapporteur. The Council formulates the complementary programmes and plans, implements the decisions of the Council of Heads of State, and prepares for the sessions of the latter. And, in cooperation with the Secretariat, it draws up its agenda. Moreover, it gives effect to the conclusions and recommendations of the special ministerial coun-

cils and submits them to the Council of Heads of State for approval.

Many sessions and meetings were held within the frame work of the executive Council since the inception of CEN-SAD community, salient of which are the preparatory sessions held to prepare for the Khartoum Summit in 2001, the ministerial held to prepare for Sirte summit in 2002, and the exceptional Ministerial meeting held in Rabat in 2012, where “Rabat declaration” was approved asserting that national security and sustainable development are the two main fields of the action plan of CEN-SAD. It was, also, agreed to set sectorial policies based on the exchange of experiences within the frame work of South-South co-operation. In the ministerial meeting held in Khartoum in March 2011, the Council approved that Morocco shall host the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Council of Heads of State.

## 3. General Secretariat

It is the administrative organ of CEN-SAD Community. It is composed of the Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General and a number of staff employees.

In the first year, the Secretary-General and his assistant were appointed by Gaddafi, as he chaired the first session of the Council of Heads of State. However, the Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General are to be appointed

by the Council of Heads of State for four years, subject to renewal.

The Secretariat is one of the main organs of CEN-SAD community as Article XI of the Treaty of the Inception of CEN-SAD stipulated on choosing Tripoli, the capital of Libya, as the temporary headquarters of the Secretariat. Also, the Declaration of the Council of Heads of State concerning the functions of the Secretariat stipulated in Article II that Tripoli, the capital of Libya, shall be the headquarters.

The Secretariat includes many departments and offices, such as Research and Legal Affairs Department, Administrative and Financial Affairs Department, besides other technical departments.

#### 4. Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ESCC)

It is an advisory organ that is mandated to assist the organs of CEN-SAD in setting and developing the policies, plans and programs in economic, social and cultural matters of the member states.

The headquarters of ESCC is in Bamako, the national and economic capital of Mali. It includes five members elected by member states and has four commissions; namely:

- Planning, Economy and Finance Commission
- Education, Culture, Science, Information and Development Commission
- Social Affairs and Health Com-

mission

- Transport, Communication and Energy Commission
- Challenges of the Integration Process of CEN-SAD Community
- First: Political Challenges
- Libya found from the inception of this Community an opportunity to protect a number of vital interests, salient of which are:
  - Get out from the regional and international isolation which it suffered from on the Arab as well as the African level.
  - Cover Libya's failure in the Chadian-Libyan war
  - Lift the siege which Libya faced after the international sanctions imposed in 1992.
  - Strengthen the Libyan call for African Unity, since Gaddafi considered this grouping as a stone corner to such unity.
  - Gaddafi kept on using CEN-SAD Community for solving many special political issues and interests of Libya. This weakened the integration process of the Community.
- Such Libyan sovereignty upon the Community lasted since its inception until the death of Gaddafi. This was embodied in the following:
  - Libya's membership in three commissions that were decided to be established in Sirte Summit in 2002.
  - Libya's chairmanship of the Community for the second time

in spite of the presence of Egypt and Nigeria.

Most of the Summits were held in Libya

Libya adopted bilateral as well as multi-lateral cooperation agreements in the fields of oil, investment, transportation and communication.

For example, in 2002 the Libyan Company Tam Oil signed an agreement with the government of Central Africa on oil exploration for 99 years. In 2006, Libya made an African portfolio with a budget of about 5 billion US Dollars allocated to investment in Africa. A portion was distributed among a number of projects and companies, while the other portion was distributed in the form of deposits by the Sahel-Sahara Bank.

It is now clear that Libya looked forward, through its role in CEN-Sad Community, to assume the leadership which it neither enjoyed on the Maghreb nor on the Arab level. Accordingly, this created a spirit of competition rather than cooperation, in addition to the presence of double standards. This was represented in how Libya competed with Morocco on organizing the World Cup Finals, which the International Football Federation decided to hold in Africa, for the first time. Besides, Libya accepted the membership of countries that have diplomatic rela-

tions with Israel, such as Eritrea, but worked on the exclusion of Mauritania because of its relations with Israel.

#### Second: Security Challenges

Security challenges are, mainly, related to the Sahel-Sahara region that has become one of the hotbeds of tension and security threats. This region is a long bar that extends from the Red Sea in the East to the Atlantic Ocean in the West with an area of about 9 million km<sup>2</sup> encompassing many countries.

Since the beginning of the Cold War, the region witnessed the escalation of many security threats aiming to harm the interests of the individuals, groups and government. This is due to a number of factors that can be summed up into three main dimensions.

First, the presence of radical Islamic groups that turned the region into a safe haven and a base for their operations. Second, the spread of the phenomenon of organized crime, human trafficking, drug trade, illegal immigration and arms trade. Third, the structural and functional failure of states in the region, especially that of Mali throughout the last years. Thus, such security situations in the African-Sahel region form a great challenge for the states of CEN-SAD Community.

The decline in the Libyan role by the death of Gaddafi formed a great

setback for the Community that lasted for more than fourteen years under his leadership, which uncovered that the Community was in a state of turmoil. In this respect, the vice Secretary-General called upon the executive Council to confirm that the Community showed “a lack of practical vision” and thus “a structural reform is necessary”. Actually, serious attempts to restructure the Community have been made by each of Morocco and Chad, where the latter called for the need to amend the charter of the Community.

Such concern and attention given by Morocco to Sahel-Sahara Community within the circumstances faced by the countries of North Africa is a result of the Arab Spring that led to internal reforms in Morocco, salient of which is the amendment of the Moroccan constitution which considered the Sahel-Sahara region as one of the priorities and main concerns of the Moroccan foreign policy.

In this respect, the Kingdom of Morocco sought, over the last two years, to maximize its regional influence in the region, especially in Mali, at the expense of Algeria which has the greatest influence in the region’s issues. In addition, Morocco opened new branches for its banks in Mali and Senegal. In this framework, Wafa Commercial Bank

obtained more than 50% of the shares of the international Bank in Mali. Moreover, Morocco sought after boosting its relations with Chad through the presence of Moroccan companies, such as Africa Cement Company (CEMAF) and Royal Air Maroc.

An obvious coordination and convergence between Morocco and Chad was noticed, especially after the opening of the Chadian Embassy in Morocco in 2013. This highlighted an important motive for the revival of CEN-Sad Community under the joint responsibility of both countries compared to the past, where the responsibility was limited to one country, namely: Libya.

#### Third: Economic Challenges

Many economic challenges face CDN-SAD Community, on top of which is the great gap between countries in terms of population, area and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). For example, the big gap in population between Egypt and Nigeria compared to Niger, Comoros and Djibouti.

In addition, many of the countries of the Community suffer from the high debt percentages. According to the statistics of 2009 submitted by the African Development Bank, the African Union and the African Economic Commission, the volume of foreign debts of Burkina Faso is estimated at about 1,751 million US

Dollars. While that of Mali is estimated at about 1,863 million US Dollars. And according to the Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Program in 2014, Chad ranked 184, Niger 187 and Burkina Faso 181.

In spite of this gap, trade volume within the Community increased during the period from 2000 to 2007. For example, in 2000, the total Two-Way trade reached 4060 million US Dollars; while in 2001 it increased to reach 4249 million US Dollars, but in 2002 it went down to 4182 million US Dollars. Then, again it began to rise gradually reaching 7120 million US Dollars in 2004, 8905 million US Dollars in 2005, 10305 million US Dollars in 2006, and 12653 million US Dollars in 2007.

In light of the aforementioned, the reasons for the weakness of economic integration between the countries of CEN-SAD Community are numerous under the weak economic infrastructure of most of the countries. This is in addition to the increased number of member states and the lack of coordination which explains the modest economic achievement of CEN-SAD Community, in terms of two-way trade and economic growth.

Concerning Egypt, the volume of Egyptian exports to the countries of CEN-SAD Community reached 377.2 million US Dollars in 2003, but

increased to 315.3 US Dollars in 2004. While Egypt imports from CEN-SAD countries reached 147.4 million US Dollars in 2001 and continued to decline. By 2005, they rose to 233.8 million US Dollars. However, in the last years, the CEN-SAD Community ranked the last in terms of trade exchange with Egypt, where the total value of imports from its countries reached about 5.4 billion pounds in 2014 compared to 4.5 billion pounds in 2013.

#### Fourth: Institutional Challenges

The institutional challenges facing CEN-SAD Community include two main issues. First: the need to limit the membership of the community. Second, the need to activate the structures of the Community, especially the Secretariat and Sahel-Sahara Bank.

Finally, the challenges which the countries of CEN-SAD Community witnessed, especially in the African-Sahel region, imposed upon the leaders and Heads of State to restructure the Community. And thus, they decided in the last N'djamena Summit to share the responsibility of the Community in the light of the absence of Gaddafi, which represents opportunities as well as challenges. These opportunities are represented in the transition from personalism, embodied in Gaddafi, to institutionalism.