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MAKING REGIONAL INTEGRATION WORK IN AFRICA: A REFLECTION ON STRATEGIES AND INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

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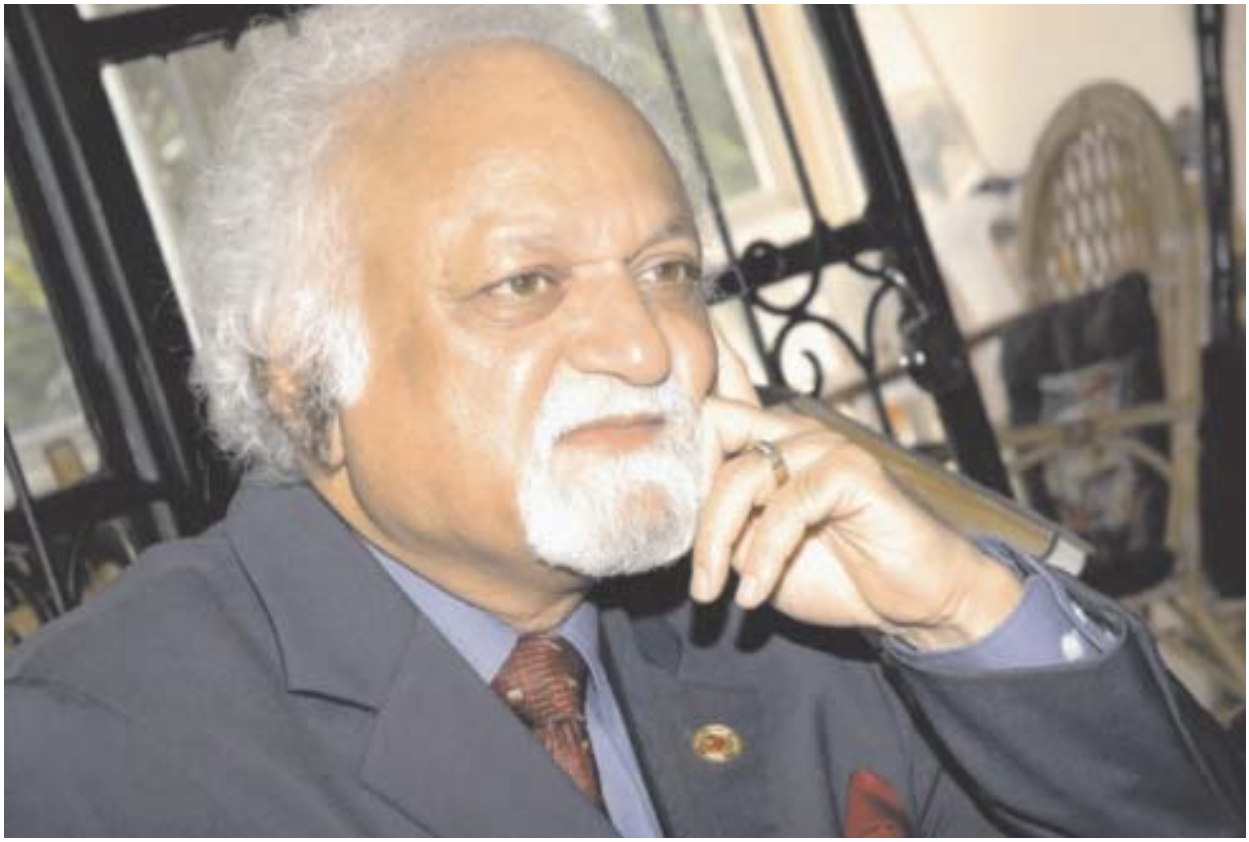
Former Assistant Secretary General of the OAU & Interim Commissioner of the African Union



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A Reflection on Strategies and Institutional Requirements

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THE ACBF DEVELOPMENT MEMOIRS SERIES

The ACBF s Development Memoirs Series is a key instrument in the Foundation s knowledge management strategy aimed at harnessing the know-how and learned experiences of eminent senior policymakers and development managers. Central to the Series is the understanding that knowledge management tools and practices can be effectively employed to leverage both local and externally generated knowledge to bridge the knowledge gap between sub-Saharan Africa and the developed world.

The Development Memoirs Series, which is generated through contributions from the ACBF Senior Policymakers and Development Managers Knowledge Sharing Program (SPM-KSP) provides professional insights, reflections, skills, processes and experiences among others in the management of specific policies and programs, and offer case studies on processes, practices and experiences associated with specific policies and programs that made measurable impact on the continent s development experience. The individual voices captured via the SPM-KSP collectively contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the Foundation s operations, identifying learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities, and providing practitioners with guideposts to best practices in policymaking and development program management.

The Development Memoirs Series reflects the Foundation s vision and quest to actively embrace a diversity of knowledge sources and knowledge including the ways gender, values and culture influence the generation, sharing and application of knowledge. The Series speaks to ACBF vision that the creation, sharing and deployment of cutting edge knowledge in an increasingly complex, competitive and changing world, is imperative to Africa s current development efforts and future prospects.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been barely six years since the African Union (AU) was launched in Durban, South Africa – two years of interim operation, and four years since the first college of Commissioners was elected in Maputo (the two-year interim period being the transition from the OAU to AU). Now, the continent's leadership is engaged in discussions in respect of the creation of a United States of Africa. However, what is it that Africans have achieved at the level of the AU that already gives us the assurance that we are ready to embark on the journey towards the United States of Africa?

If only Member States had applied themselves to implementing some of the decisions taken since the eighties, and authorities concerned had endeavoured to translate the decisions taken collectively into concrete action, the continent would have recorded substantial progress along the integration path. But the problem lies in the fact that those who represent Member States at the meetings/ conferences often speak from individual or national perspectives when addressing issues of regional integration. There seems to be a lack of commitment to the idea. We display to the outside world a collective wisdom underpinned by lofty ideals and good intentions but which, to say the least, remain superficial. There exists a chasm between our collective wisdom and the way we approach such issues at national level. There is a kind of disconnect between the objectives, the implementation and the impact of regional integration. While the objectives of integration, as articulated in Treaties and Protocols, are laudable, they have not been effectively pursued and implemented. As a consequence, there is very little benefit on the ground that the common man can perceive as being a result of regional integration. We have for years been seen to be committing ourselves and therefore our peoples to the ideals of regional integration but progress along that path, if any at all, has been made at snail pace! Yet, there are a number of not too difficult first steps that our countries could take in the direction of integration. For example, could we not do away with entry visa for the citizens of the continent? After all, we are thirteen years down the road from Abuja Treaty.

If the people cannot move freely within the region, how does one achieve any degree of integration? Integration is not just free movement of goods and capital. Free movement of people is an imperative in this endeavour. It is a *sine qua non* for a free flow of ideas, and the exchange of experiences. Granted, safeguards will be required, but these should be such that they do not make things unnecessarily cumbersome and difficult!

At present, national considerations override our march towards integration. Sovereign interests prevail over regional or continental interests. These are things that we hold on to too guardedly and jealously. The leadership may subscribe to certain decisions taken at continental meetings while not being fully convinced of their judiciousness, maybe to avoid the risk of being accused of breaking

ranks. But when it comes to implementation there is a concern that the decisions taken collectively will impinge on sovereignty!

The aforementioned notwithstanding, the enormity of the development challenges facing Africa at the dawn of this new century is such that the immediate establishment of the "United States of Africa" ought to be the ideal response. However, the establishment of the "United States of Africa" in the short run faces a number of major internal and external problems that make that approach unrealistic. A gradualist approach appears to be more realistic and pragmatic for its establishment. Under this approach:

- Efforts will need to be deployed towards the rationalisation and strengthening of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the building blocs of the "United States of Africa"

- Resources have to be mobilised and necessary capacity built to enhance the effectiveness of the various organs of the AU and to accelerate the implementation of the Declarations, Action Plans, Programmes and Policies

- Unnecessary administrative barriers will have to be eliminated.

Once the AU is able to deliver effectively on its current mandate and the economic and political benefits of integration become obvious to the Member States, they would be willing to consider more positively the surrender of sovereignty which is sine qua non for the establishment of the "United States of Africa."

The eventual establishment of a "United States of Africa" can, in theory, serve as a catalyst for the effectiveness of the AU. The unity and cooperation of African countries within the framework of a United States will not only reduce duplication of development efforts at national and regional levels but also permit the AU to be endowed with the necessary powers and resources that are critical to its effectiveness. Also, a "United States of Africa", in which the African Union Commission (AUC) serves as the official mouthpiece of the continent will enable Africa to speak with a common, strong and united voice in engagements with the rest of the world. More importantly, the enhancement of the bargaining power emanating from the establishment of the "United States of Africa" will increase the capacity of the African Union to achieve the objective of integrating Africa into the global economy and polity as a respected equal partner.

We need, therefore, to educate ourselves on the dire necessity to integrate! We need to involve Civil Society. We need the participation of NGOs, Trade Unions, Chambers of Commerce, among other stakeholders. Indeed, everybody should be on board. Integration should be made a cross-cutting national policy. It should be encrusted in our minds as we formulate our own national programmes of nation-building. It should become a matter of natural consideration to the extent that whatever national policy is put in place should be done in terms of its incidence within the region.

That way, whatever barriers exist can be addressed with a view to their eventual removal thus paving the way for effective interaction in the region and ensuring

movement as one entity.The path to integration is cooperation. We need to be able to cooperate better with each other. Those who are better endowed and better equipped should show solidarity towards the others.
Now, for this to really happen and take shape in an orderly manner, one needs to have the right kind of leadership, committed to this ideal, not only at the country level, but also within the institutions that are set up to translate this policy concretely. The right people in the right place: this is what is most important!

The way forward is the course traced in the Abuja Treaty. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. All that we need to do is to fine-tune whatever is required to make it more responsive to the present circumstances. This requires that we be ambitious. However, while it is commendable to be ambitious, one needs to have the commensurate resources to attain the objective of that ambition, failing which it will remain but an unattainable dream. While we need not forsake our dream, we have nonetheless to cut our cloth according to our size! We therefore have to be realistic.

One just cannot embark on a journey strewn with multiple unknown obstacles without first adequately planning that journey to ensure that the final destination is reached with as few mishaps as possible. The vision for an integrated Africa, both on the political and economic fronts, is a lofty ideal. What form it is given and it takes is equally important. But surely, this cannot happen overnight. The earlier we accept this fact, the better we will be armed in our endeavour to reach our objective. It is worth repeating that we need at all times to focus on the fact that the ultimate beneficiaries of our collective efforts are our peoples and they need to find expressions for their expectations in such efforts.

Care must be exercised that we do not fall into the trap of doing things simply to emulate others who are following a certain path at a given pace dictated by their particular circumstances. Our actions must be based on well-calculated and properly researched strategies. And such strategies have to respond to the aspirations of our peoples, and the aspirations themselves must be based on the vision developed for their advancement. There is no other way!

In Africa today, there is a consensus on major policy issues. But this policy consensus exists in a vacuum as far as the strategic objectives of development are concerned. There has been too much concern about keeping the policy ship afloat and too little attention to commitment to its direction and destination. My goal has been to revisit the pan-African vision for an integrated and prospering region as the destination towards which the policy ship should be steered. This vision has been given concrete expression in the Abuja Treaty as well as in the instruments that informed the emergence of the African Union. The challenge is to our development partners who should take advantage of the changing investment climate in Africa and the opportunities that present themselves. We should collectively repudiate the feeling of afro-pessimism that has pervaded the continent. The invitation is to our leaders and our development partners to pool efforts in a spirit of genuine partnership predicated on mutual accountability to work for the prosperity of the continent in the larger interest of our peoples.

To that extent, a right policy mix is of the essence. A leader's actions cannot be confined to the local context, that is, at the national level. Bearing in mind that our ultimate objective is integration, we have to be able to talk and listen to each other. But beyond that, we need to listen to our peoples. And most importantly, commitment to policy is critical. Without commitment we can go on talking to exhaustion point! Commitment and political will are critical in this endeavour, for without these two elements, the dream of integration will never be fulfilled. Courage of conviction is also another key requirement. If we believe in something then, we should not falter in our steps. We need to forge ahead and, in the long run, the reward will be there. We may not be there to savour the fruits of our labour but generations to come will remember and reap the benefits. The people, I wish to reiterate, have to be on board. To be able to reach the destination we have fixed for ourselves, all hands must be on board. It cannot be just the leadership. It has to be the leadership and the people. The movement forward should be collective! Everybody should know what the stakes are. We cannot afford to go it alone any longer! Our future lies in integrating Africa, the sooner the better! There is no alternative!

Ambassador Vijay S. Makhan
Former Assistant Secretary General of the OAU
& Interim Commissioner
of the African Union

St. Pierre
MAURITIUS
September 2007

MAKING REGIONAL INTEGRATION WORK IN AFRICA: *A REFLECTION ON STRATEGIES AND INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS*

I. INTRODUCTION

The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) through its Knowledge Management Department (KMD, ACBF) is geared towards generating, sharing, disseminating and utilizing knowledge for capacity building and development management. The ACBF knowledge management program seeks to achieve four major objectives, amongst others. These are to:

- Enhance the performance of internal project and program operations based on best-practice methodologies, strategies and instruments.
- Foster the sharing of best practices in capacity building, in the design and implementation of development policies and programs as well as in reform programs that are directed at strengthening the effectiveness of Africa's development process.
- Contribute to programs and mechanisms for extracting and sharing tacit knowledge for the benefit of national and regional development.
- Enhance returns to, and the efficiency of, investments in capacity building.

One of the key instruments in the Foundation's knowledge management toolkit is the Senior Policymakers and Development Managers' Knowledge Sharing Program (SPM-KSP). The program provides a platform for successful development practitioners – either currently serving or on retirement, sabbatical, or leave of absence, who have made significant contributions to the development process especially insofar as it relates to Africa – to share and document their tacit knowledge in the form of development memoirs, for the benefit of future efforts at African development. The program specifically targets very senior policymakers and development managers, including visiting academics and eminent guests to the Foundation. Participants are drawn selectively from national, regional, continental or global institutions. These consist of the public and private sectors organizations; national, regional and continental institutions; international development agencies; civil society organizations; ACBF partner institutions; tertiary institutions of learning; research and specialized training institutes, among others.

It is in this context that ACBF extended an invitation to Amb. Vijay Makhan to participate in the SPM-KSP, to share his profound experience in international development - both as a current member, Panel of Eminent Persons for the Audit of the AU, and Former Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission to the Islamic Republic of

Mauritania – guided by the theme: *Making Regional Integration Work in Africa – A Reflection on Strategies & Institutional Requirements.*

II. PROFILE OF THE CONTRIBUTOR

Currently resident in his home country of Mauritius, Ambassador Vijay Makhan is a member of the Team of Eminent Persons, established, by a decision of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, to undertake an audit of the Union. A career diplomat from Mauritius, he has more than 30 years professional experience at technical and policy levels Ambassador Makhan was Secretary for Foreign Affairs of his country from1993 to 1995 when he was elected Assistant Secretary-General of the OAU. He was re-elected in July 1999 and, following the transformation of the OAU into the AU, later served as Interim Commissioner for Trade, Industry and Economic Affairs of the African Union before his return to Mauritius in 2003 where he assumed once more the Office of Secretary for Foreign Affairs. In October 2005, Ambassador Makhan was appointed Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and given the responsibility of monitoring the country's political transition process.

III. INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

Drawing on the foregoing rich profile, Amb. Makhan held an insightful face-to-face interview with ACBF KMD in September 2007 with a focus on Regional Integration in Africa. The following questions guided the interview:

- What is the future of regional integration in Africa, including the historical context, progress, challenges and your vision on the way forward?
- How important is the need to engender a new African mindset and broaden the dialogue and key actors shaping the push for regional integration?
- Drawing upon your experiences garnered from years working in the foreign service of Mauritius, at the OAU and later the AU, what, in your view, constitutes the missing links in Africa's quest for meaningful regional integration and development?
- What are the major challenges facing Africa in its quest for meaningful and sustainable geo-political, economic and socio-cultural integration, and the role if any is there for the African diasporan community in the ongoing dialogue?
- What are your personal views about integration as a mechanism for addressing macro-economic growth and poverty eradication in Africa, particularly in light of the myriad regional bodies and sub-bodies already existing on the Continent and the ever-changing face of globalization?

Following the interview, Amb. Makhan further interrogated the issues in-depth to tease-out in more detail the issues in question.

IV. TRANSCRIPT OF KNOWLEDGE-SHARING INTERVIEW

What follows in the subsequent sections reflects a record of the interview between the Knowledge Management Department (KMD, ACBF) of the African Capacity Building

Foundation and Amb. Makhan, guided by the theme: *Making Regional Integration Work in Africa: A Reflection on Strategies and Institutional Requirements*.

KMD, ACBF: I would like to begin our interview by asking for your crisp reflection on the issue of regional integration in Africa, its historical context, progress, challenges and the way forward.

Ambassador Makhan: The legacy of colonialism and the partition, rather balkanisation, of Africa was the emergence, at independence, of economies that were small and fragile. While the freshly independent African states were determined to protect and consolidate their newly won political freedom, they also saw the need for regional cooperation and integration with a view to overcoming this legacy and deriving the political and economic benefits of integrated spaces that are larger than the individual national ones. In the early years of independence, many regional integration entities were established and driven by this motive, with few of them building on cooperation arrangements that dated back to the colonial period.

At the continental level, the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980 can be said to mark the beginning of a serious initiative for a Pan-African economic integration. A decade later, there followed in Abuja, Nigeria, precisely in June 1991 the signature of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC). The Treaty provided the legal and institutional frameworks as well as the timetable for the creation of the Community. During the earlier half of my first mandate as Assistant Secretary General of the OAU, I observed that matters relating to the issue of regional integration were hardly advancing. During that time, I tried to understand what was wrong. I needed to know what was not working so as to be able to develop appropriate strategies to infuse fresh dynamism in integration efforts. The question was: why weren't our countries implementing the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, which, as mentioned, had been signed amidst great pomp in June 1991 in Abuja, Nigeria and which had come into force in May 1994 following its ratification? Between 1994 and 1996 hardly any movement had been registered in the implementation of the Abuja Treaty. So, "what, indeed, was wrong?" With colleagues in the Department for which I had direct responsibility, that is, the Economic Development and Cooperation department (EDECO), we developed a questionnaire that was sent to Member States. Unfortunately and regrettably, very few countries bothered to respond. That attitude confirmed my initial assessment…the continent was simply not taking itself seriously!

The question was pressing: – what is it that is wrong with our Continent? Why is it that Member States spend so much time, energy and scare resources to congregate in capitals around the continent discussing, talking and discoursing, ad infinitum, and then hardly seem to recall the decisions taken? To make matters worse, one would be surprised to learn that some of those directly concerned with such meetings are hardly conversant with the decisions reached. Very often, conflicting views, if they are aired at all, are given with respect to decisions taken on the issue of integration. My response to this situation was two-fold. The first was to try and increase awareness, in and outside Africa, of the provisions of the Abuja Treaty as they relate to the objectives, organs, protocols, implementation, etc of the African Economic

Comm nity thro gh the p blication of a q arterly jo rnal: *The AEC Ne sletter*. The Newsletter soon became an a thoritative so rce of information on regional integration in Africa, both at regional and continental levels.

Secondly, I decided to p t my tho ghts to paper and these led to the p blication of a monograph – *Policy Consensus, Strategy Vacuum: A Pan African Vision for the 21st Century*. The thr st of the monograph is regional integration, which relates very m ch to the theme of o r exchange. It was written ten years ago b t as I reflect and as I take stock of the disc ssions today, I note that everything that I have said in the monograph remains of c rrency. And, if only Member States had applied themselves to implementing some of the decisions taken since the eighties, if only a thorities concerned had endeavo red to translate the decisions taken collectively into concrete action, the continent wo ld have recorded s bstantial progress along the integration path. B t the problem lies in the fact that those who represent Member States at the meetings/conferences often speak from individ al or national perspectives when addressing iss es of regional integration. I am being very candid and I ass me responsibility for what I am saying beca se this opinion is based on experience I have lived thro gh. Co ld it be then, that we do not have the capacity to act regionally, continent-wide? Isn't there a problem somewhere? For, between the time that we take a decision and the time that we reach home, there is a kind of vacuum that settles in – we seem to simply switch off! I mean, I can understand that once our ministers and other leaders reach home from a Conference, they have matters of a national dimension on their mind which they need to tend to, with little time for follow-up on the Conference decisions. But the consequence thereof is that these decisions suffer from non-implementation and take a backseat and, in time, they are clean forgotten! I am told that some of our countries do not even follow the practice whereby those attending conferences need to report to their cabinet colleagues or to national Parliaments on the outcome of these Conferences. Presumably, this is why there is so little tangible progress. On the other hand, I wonder how thoroughly are issues of integration that require decisions at the continental level, debated by all stakeholders at the national level to ensure that informed positions are taken by our country representatives at such Conferences? The responsibility for moving Africa's regional integration forward cannot and should not be that of governments alone. Mechanisms need to be put in place for the effective participation and involvement of all stakeholders in the process.

Are you therefore of the opinion that the issue of not reporting back is a contributing factor? And if the situation is occurring all over, couldn't one argue that something else besides the fact that delegates are not reporting back might be the real issue?

Ambassador Makhan: Well, that is definitely one of the basic reasons that could explain the lack of movement forward. There are, however, other aspects to that. Let me give you an example. The regional integration work in Africa was umbrella-ed by the OAU-AEC, which is now the AU. We've made, what some qualify as progress in terms of re-inventing our institutions. That is, we have moved from the OAU-AEC to the AU with the objective of accelerating the process of integration... accelerating the process of implementing the Abuja Treaty. Yet, four years down the road,

ince the AU Summit in Maputo 2003, the question remains "how far have we moved towards attaining the objectives that had been set in 1991 or let s say 1994, when the Treaty came into being?" Indeed, that s a span of thirteen years! That is a long time! And, in that time-span we were supposed to have accomplished almost half-way of the journey that we had set on. As is well-known, the Treaty is a thirty-four year long process, broken up in six stages. If I am not mistaken we are at this point supposed to be in the third stage! But are we really there? So, is our problem one of a constant urge to always invent new blueprints for development, create new institutions, toy around with new ideas but in terms of implementation, remain practically un-productive? It is like erecting a framework for a house without having the slightest idea of how to convert it into a comfortable and functional home. Therefore, it remains but a framework, just a structure! Is that a malady that the continent suffers from? For example, look at the way our leaders come up with very bright ideas, in favour of the continent, mind you, surely all very well-intentioned. But then, one gets the feeling that there is some sort of competition for turf. Whose idea is going to prime? Look at the way we lost ourselves in the NEPAD venture. There was MAP, there was OMEGA and there was UNECAs own idea about what to do with Africa in the new Millennium. Yet, already we had the Abuja Treaty, which covers precisely most of those very objectives encapsulated in NEPAD.

All that was done was to lift parts of the Abuja Treaty, repackage them in the form of NEPAD, save that it had now become a programme. There is nothing wrong in that, except that somehow or other, one has the impression that the Abuja Treaty has been shelved, in the same way that other blueprints for Africa s development have been confined to the archives! NEPAD should have been the operationalisation of the Abuja Treaty, for which there was so much going! Today, the enthusiasm that had visibly been raised on the launch of NEPAD has dampened. Let me say also that at one point in time, there was some kind of competition for space between the AU and NEPAD, the more so as the latter had gradually assumed an institution-like existence! Clearly then, do we have just the capacity for creating and then shelving our creations?

Africa's Blueprints: Monrovia Treaty to NEPAD

In fact, as I reflect over the past 40 years, this is precisely what we have been doing. Take a look at our archives – institutional archives – wherever they exist, you will find that every five or six years we [the African leadership collectively] have come up with ideas for the development of Africa either grown from within the confines of the continent or from outside its borders. Our shelves are replete with such blueprints!

Without having to go too far back in time, we note quite a few that have been adopted. Some that jump to my mind are the Monrovia Declaration, the Lagos Plan of Action, the Final Act of Lagos, the Abuja Treaty and now the NEPAD, without forgetting those churned out at the UN, including the UNPAAERD and the UN system-wide Initiative for Africa, among others. And I won t be surprised if, a few years down the road, we are not struck by yet another bright idea for our continent s development. That may sound cynical but there is sufficient evidence to speculate in that direction. We developed NEPAD around the same time that we were preparing to launch the AU. NEPAD was supposed to be a

programme. Today, as I have said, it has become almost an institution. It has a secretariat, which is outside the seat of the African Union Commission. Now, isn't that bound to create confusion and an unhealthy competition for turf? It is as a result of the confusion created around this matter that the decision was taken in Maputo, at the AU Summit, to incorporate NEPAD within the AU Commission. This is, however, yet to happen, though there was a time limit of a maximum of three years for its implementation! Can we then be taken seriously? And our partners in all of that? Aren't we making it difficult for ourselves and in the process making it easy for our 'partners in development' not to engage themselves fully in our development efforts? During the initial months when NEPAD was launched, I was told by some of our partners that they would rather throw in their support for NEPAD than the AU, which was considered by them as an unattainable dream! Of course, this scepticism is now gradually changing, but in the process, imagine the efforts gone waste and the time lost!

As I have said, there was a lot going for NEPAD. It was being propelled by five very prominent leaders of Africa but not everybody else was on board from day one. One can hardly say that it was owned by the entire continent. Today doubts still persist as to the viability of NEPAD. This is principally on account of the fact that not everybody is convinced about its workability. Our peoples aren't involved in its operationalisation. The resources necessary towards that end are phenomenal and simply not within our means. We are not in a position to raise such funds from within our shores. In short, we do not have the means of our ambition. And this is compounded further by the fact that we are still far from thinking and acting regionally. We've had countless meetings and spent some of our scarce resources discussing about it. We've even had meetings with the G8 on that but there is so far hardly anything concrete to show for all these efforts. The enthusiasm initially displayed by our partners is not visible anymore. Isn't that also because now we spend time discussing about the structure and architecture of NEPAD within the context of the AU? Much has been written about the dichotomy of AU and NEPAD. I have also expressed myself thereon, indeed, since its early days. According to me, the risk exists that once the present leadership that is still carrying the NEPAD torch changes, it may suffer the same fate as the other blueprints. Already one of the original proponents of NEPAD, President Wade of Senegal has expressed public criticism about it. However, I do not despair yet. The pressure of the outside world will simply not allow African states to go it alone. We are condemned to integrate to be able to face the globalising world. But we need to mobilise our peoples in this endeavour, with due regard to the urgency of the situation. The world will simply not wait for us.

Would you then say that the issue is partly that the continent lacks the political will to move forward with it, combined with a lack of ownership at the broader continental level? And that maybe a few elites are speaking for the majority?

Ambassador Makhan: Well…I think it's a mix of all that. There seems to be a lack of commitment to the idea. Can that be due to the very pronounced sense of nationalism that we nurture as a result of history and culture? We display to the outside world a collective wisdom underpinned by lofty ideals and good intentions but which, to say the least, remain

superficial. There e ists a chasm between our collective wisdom and the way we approach such issues at national level. Secondly, I think that if we have not made as much progress as should have been e pected some progress is there, mind you, if we have not moved much further, it s because the people, our own people, or let me say our peoples, since we cannot claim to be one people as yet, are kind of divorced from what we are doing. There is a kind of disconnect between the objectives, the implementation and the impact of regional integration. While the objectives of integration, as articulated in Treaties and Protocols, are laudable, they have not been effectively pursued and implemented. As a consequence, there is very little benefit on the ground that the common man can perceive as being a result of regional integration. Regional Integration Organisations are, therefore, unable to compete with national institutions for attention, commitment and loyalty. Our peoples are not aware of and alive to the decisions we take on their behalf. They don t know what we are up to! We have not given them the opportunity of being the vehicle of our development efforts. If the people are supposed to be the beneficiaries of whatever policies we churn out, then, they should also be the vehicle of those policies! But clearly they are not! Just go to any of our villages, and ask around whether the people there are aware of the Abuja Treaty, of NEPAD or whether they have any notion of regional integration? They simply have no clue. And that would be the story of the majority of our peoples. One would be surprised to learn that even some of our functionaries in the public service are not aware of all this. Now, if the people are not involved in this movement, in this venture, then, it will be very difficult to move forward, don't you think? We have for years been seen to be committing ourselves and therefore, our peoples to the ideals of regional integration but progress along that path, if any at all, has been made at snail pace! Yet, there are a number of not too difficult first steps that our countries could take in the direction of integration. For example, couldn't we do away with entry visa for the citizens of the continent? We are thirteen years down the road from Abuja Treaty. How many of our countries have really, even at the level of Regional Economic Communities, apart from ECOWAS in West Africa which can be heralded as one of the first regions to have done so, embraced free movement of people which is basic to the concept of integration? How many of our countries have abolished the visa regime for fellow African citizens?

If the people cannot move freely within the region, how does one achieve any degree of integration? Integration is not just free movement of goods and capital. Free movement of people is an imperative in this endeavour. That's sine qua non for a free flow of ideas, exchange of experiences, etc. Granted, safeguards will be required, like for example controlled right of residence, but these should be such that they do not turn things unnecessarily cumbersome and difficult! Putting up unnecessary administrative barriers will hamper the endeavour of regional integration. For years now, I, as many other pan-Africanists, have been pushing this idea forward. Indeed, my monograph, referred to earlier, brings this out in no uncertain terms. It projects a vision for the 21st Century and is focussed on a policy of integration. Seemingly, as I have underscored, there is a policy consensus, which provides the basis for the integration dialogue. Everybody says yes… Abuja Treaty, yes… integrating Africa, yes! I'll come back to this issue in a minute! In the book, I talk about economic vulnerability,

governance, policy and institutional implications, political implications, global trends and the emergence of the current policy consensus – where I insist that we can t go it alone. We have to integrate. I also suggest the way forward, that is, the systematic and consistent implementation of the Abuja Treaty. I then conclude by issuing a challenge and an invitation to act along the integration path. The challenge is for us to set about implementing the decisions we have taken and, the invitation, addressed principally to our partners, is to get them to accompany us and help us in that perspective.

I was saying earlier how we have the propensity to come up with new and bright ideas without first endeavouring to achieve what we have earlier decided upon. It has been barely six years since we launched the AU in Durban – two years interim, and four years since the first college of Commissioners was elected in Maputo – the two-year interim period being the transition from the OAU to AU. Now, our leadership is engaged in the discussions of a United States of Africa. So, what is it that we have achieved at the level of the AU that already gives us the assurance that we are ready to embark on the journey towards the United States of Africa? There is no doubt that the idea itself is good and needs to be applauded and upheld! Indeed, the intention is commendable and the objective lofty! In fact, this rekindles the dreams of such leaders as Kwame Nkrumah. And, even before Nkrumah, because at the turn of the century – last century I mean – the issue of a Union of Africa had been placed on the table.

What as the rationale for the transformation of the OAU into the AU? Do you think the Organisation has gained in effectiveness as a result of this change? Ho ould the establishment of the "United States of Africa" help increase this effectiveness? What ould be the appropriate pace and milestones in the establishment of the "United States of Africa"?

Ambassador Makhan: As clearly set out in the Charter that established it, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) had a limited mandate that was primarily of a political nature. Its main objective was to rid the continent of colonialism and apartheid, to achieve the unity and consolidate the political freedom of the newly independent states. The economic underdevelopment of the continent was seen largely as a legacy of colonial rule, and, the deep-rooted conviction was that the exercise of sovereignty would help to address and overcome that state of affairs. In the words of one of the founding fathers of the OAU, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, African countries should first seek political emancipation and economic development would follow. In the years following the establishment of the OAU, some attempts were made to broaden the mandate of the Organisation to address issues of socio-economic development. These include, as I pointed out earlier, the adoption of the Monrovia Declaration of 1979, the Lagos Plan of Action in 1980 and the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community that came into force in 1994. The implementation of the Plan and the Treaty were half-hearted, as the focus of the OAU remained heavily concentrated on political matters. This is evident from the disproportionate amount of attention devoted to such matters in the meetings of the key organs (e.g. the Executive Council and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government) of the Organisation.

With the end of colonialism and apartheid in Africa, the Organisation of African Unity had

succeeded in achie ing its initial political mandate b the 1990s. The crisis of development, which had remained a major phenomenon in Africa for much of the post independence period, was further compounded in the 1980s and 1990s by a combination of external and internal factors. These include the onslaught of the forces of liberalisation and globalisation and the increasing marginalisation of Africa in the process; the emergence of large trading blocs in Europe, North and South America, and East Asia; and the increasing conflicts and political instability in the continent that have some of their root causes in growing poverty.

The growing poverty in Africa is reflected in the relatively high number of the world s least developed countries (LDCs), 34 out of 50 located in the continent. This phenomenon in Africa has occurred at a time when the East Asian countries, which were at the same level of development with African countries in the 1950s and 1960s, are recording rising prosperity and improvement in the living conditions of their peoples.

The deepening crisis of development and the other socio-economic and political challenges facing Africa at the turn of the 20th Century called for a re-assessment of past policies, programmes and institutional framework at the regional and continental levels. A major response to the crisis of development by the African leadership at the highest political level was the adoption by the Fourth Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the OAU of the Sirte Declaration in September 1999. The Declaration culminated in the establishment of the African Union, which was formally launched in Durban, South Africa, in 2002.

The Sirte Declaration

The Sirte Declaration provides the rationale for the transformation of the OAU into the AU. Primarily, it is to deal with the challenges that will confront Africa and its peoples in the new century and to cope effectively with the new social, political and economic realities in the continent and the world; to eliminate the scourge of conflict which constitutes a major impediment to the implementation of Africa s development and integration agenda; and to accelerate the process of implementing the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (AEC).

As stated in the Preamble of its Constitutive Act, the African Union was born out of the necessity to face the "multifaceted challenges that confront our continent and peoples in the light of the social, economic and political changes taking place in the world". The rationale for the transformation of the OAU to the AU is fully reflected in the objectives, the core principles, the key organs and structures of the African Union as set out in the various Articles of the Constitutive Act. The AU encapsulates the vision of African leaders for a united, strong, and prosperous Africa that takes its rightful place in global economy and polity. As an organisation, the AU is endowed with a re-invigorated mandate and vision. Its approach to Africa s integration and development is holistic, incorporating economic, social and political dimensions. So much then for intentions!

To that extent, therefore, the transformation of the OAU into the AU is not cosmetic. It represents a real and significant qualitative improvement in the continental institutional infrastructure for the promotion of

development in Africa. There are many provisions of the Constitutive Act and new organs of the continental Organisation, which are aimed at removing the constraints on Africa s sustained growth and development. Among the new principles underpinning the operation of the AU are those of the establishment of a common defence policy for the African continent; the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, zero tolerance for unconstitutional change of government, greater adherence to democracy, rule of law and good governance. New organs such as the ECOSOCC and the Peace and Security Council have been established. The African Union Commission (AUC), which serves as the Secretariat of the Union, has structures, powers and functions, which, on the face of it, make it significantly different from the General Secretariat of the OAU.

NEPAD

To fast-track the process of Africa s development, the New Partnership for Africa s Development (NEPAD) was launched in 2002, initially, as a programme of the AU. A Strategic Plan for the African Union Commission has also been adopted. Under the framework of the NEPAD, comprehensive plans for the development of infrastructure, agriculture, energy, etc have been developed. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), aptly described as the flagship of the AU, through its programme the NEPAD, has been adopted as a key instrument for the promotion of good political, economic and corporate governance in Africa. The AUC is, in principle, mandated to assume a major role in the development and implementation of Africa s economic relationships with the traditional developed partners of the North (under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, EPAs, TICAD, and AGOA) and the emerging powers of the South (China, India, Brazil, etc.).

Under the AU, key economic sectoral Ministerial Conferences are called upon to become more active as policy organs for the promotion of Africa s economic development and integration. To a certain extent, some progress has been registered in this field. For example, in the last few years, AU Conferences of the Ministers of Trade, Industry, Energy and Infrastructure, and Science and Technology have adopted major Declarations and Action Plans that are aimed at accelerating the pace of Africa s development. It is a reflection of the increased importance that is being attached to socio-economic issues under the AU that Summits of the Organisation have in the last few years been convened to focus specifically on themes such as Science and Technology, Regional Integration, HIV-AIDS, Agriculture, and Africa s Industrial Development.

However, a definitive assessment of the effectiveness of the AU as an Organisation established to meet the challenges of Africa s development in the 21st Century is still too early to give. The process of the transformation from the OAU into AU has not been completed. Much still depends on the approach of individual Member States to the concept of integration. Some of the key organs of the Organisation such as the African Investment Bank, the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund, and the African Court of Justice are yet to be fully established or operational for a number of reasons, which we may discuss later on. Now, whether one should rush into the establishment of such Organs is a very debatable matter. We may also address this later on in this dialogue. However, timely

and effective implementation of the Declarations, Action Plans, Programmes and Policies adopted so far by the various Organs of the AU will contribute significantly to the achievement of Africa's socio-economic and political development. Indeed, some recent achievements posted by African countries such as improved growth performance, greater adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law, greater visibility and enhanced image of Africa on the global scene can be attributed to the advent of the African Union.

United States of Africa

The establishment of the projected "United States of Africa" or the "Union Government" is no doubt a lofty and achievable objective and will undoubtedly assist in increasing the effectiveness of the African Union as a continental organisation. In an eventual United States of Africa in which Member States would be willing to surrender all or a significant part of their sovereignty to the AU, the latter would be in a better position to address the major internal and external constraints in the process of Africa's development. The reluctance of Member States to surrender or pool sovereignty has been largely responsible for the slow progress towards the establishment of the pan-African Economic Community and the failure to harness the benefits of a large African market such as economies of scale, enhancement of competitiveness, and greater capacity to attract investment and develop and adapt technology. A United States of Africa would help to minimise the incidence of conflicts and political instability in Africa and enhance the continent's capacity to deal with such problems. Also, a United States of Africa would increase the collective strength and bargaining power of the continent for the removal of the imbalances in the global economic and political orders that are major obstacles to its sustainable development. Political and economic integration are critical to Africa in its endeavour to put an end to its marginalisation and taking its rightful position in global economy and polity. Obviously, to attain this level of integration, a number of important steps have to be completed and the environment rendered propitious.

There is general consensus within Africa about the idea of a "United States of Africa". Indeed, while there is no disagreement about the ultimate objective of an Africa that is politically and economically united, there is and has been a wide divergence of views regarding the pace and milestones for the establishment of the "United States of Africa". It will be recalled that the establishment of the OAU in 1963 was a product of compromise between the positions of two groups of African Heads of State (the Monrovia and the Casablanca groups) who advocated different approaches and paces for the realisation of African political and economic integration. As evident in the recent Grand Debate of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on the "Union Government", the divergence of views among African leaders on the issue of the pace of the establishment of the "United States of Africa" remains as wide now as it was in the years immediately preceding the establishment of the OAU.

The enormity of the development challenges facing Africa at the dawn of this new century is such that the immediate establishment of the "United States of Africa ought to be the ideal response. However, the establishment of the "United States of Africa" in the short run faces a number of major internal and external problems that make that approach unrealistic. A gradualist approach appears to be more

ealistic and pragmatic for the establishment of the United States of Africa. Under this approach, efforts will need to be deployed towards the rationalisation and strengthening of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the building blocs of the United States of Africa. Resources have to be mobilised and necessary capacity built to enhance the effectiveness of the various organs of the AU and to accelerate the implementation of the Declarations, Action Plans, Programmes and Policies. Once the AU is able to deliver effectively on its current mandate and the economic and political benefits of integration become obvious to the Member States, they would be willing, I believe, to consider more positively, the surrender of sovereignty which is sine qua non for the establishment of the United States of Africa.

Could you share your experience on the consensus building process that led to the adhesion of African Heads of State to the idea of moving from the OAU to the AU? Ho do you see African leaders' commitment to the AU, the NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?

Ambassador Makhan: African Heads of State and Government were able to quickly reach a consensus on the transformation of the OAU to the AU because the transformation was an idea whose time had come. On the eve of the 21st Century, most of the leaders were concerned that Africa was entering the new century in a position of weakness, without the achievement of major socio-economic and political objectives such as the eradication of poverty and improvement in the living conditions of the peoples and the aspirations for a strong, united and prosperous Africa still far from being realised. It was against this background of under-achievement of development goals and aspirations that the idea of establishing a new pan-African organisation to replace the OAU was launched by the Libyan Leader, Mu'ammar al Khadafi, at the OAU Algiers Summit of 1999. This was followed shortly thereafter by the Summits of the OAU in Sirte, Libya in September 1999 (Extra-Ordinary) and in Lome, Togo in 2000, which adopted the Sirte Declaration and the Constitutive Act of the African Union respectively. After the ratification of the Constitutive Act by the requisite number of Member States, in record time, the AU was established in Lusaka, Zambia in July 2001 and formally launched in Durban, South Africa in July 2002. The relatively short period between the conception of the idea of the AU in Sirte and its birth in Lusaka is indicative of the strong desire and political will of African leaders to meet the challenges of development in the 21st century through the creation of a strong continental organisation. Movement from the OAU to the AU was facilitated by the general recognition that the primary mission set for the OAU in 1963, i.e. ridding the continent of colonialism and apartheid, had been accomplished by the end of the 20th century.

As indicated above, the birth of the AU, one has to acknowledge, owed much to the drive of the Libyan Leader, Mu'ammar al-Khadafi. At the time he spearheaded the initiative, Libya was still regarded as a pariah State by many Western powers, many of which exerted subtle behind-the-scene pressures on Member States of the OAU to reject the idea, not necessarily because of any defect in quality but of their disagreement with the initiator. There is need to recall here that in 1998, a year before the Sirte Extraordinary Summit, in the face of the procrastination demonstrated by the West, with respect to the lifting of the sanctions that

had been imposed on Libya (including a no-fly zone), African leaders decided to defy the international community by flying out to Tripoli immediately after the OAU Summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. This sanctions-busting act by the African leaders hastened the quick resolution of the Libyan-international community imbroglio in favour of the African State. This event, no doubt, emboldened African leaders to forge ahead with building a more solid and cohesive African constituency. It is, therefore, to the credit of African leaders that in spite of pressures that were brought to bear on them by the West, they were able to quickly reach a consensus on the transformation of the OAU to the AU.

If one goes by the number of meetings attended and Decisions and Declarations adopted by them, one can say that African leaders have demonstrated their commitment to the AU, NEPAD and the MDGs. Where commitment, however, appears to be lacking is in the area of implementation of the Decisions and Declarations. There has been little or no effort to translate decisions into actions. Although the AU has been given an expanded mandate, with the provision for the establishment of new Organs, and numerous decisions with far-reaching financial consequences taken, there has been no improvement in the financing of the Organisation over that of the OAU. Member States' contributions to the AU, which are often not paid in time, are hardly enough to cover the operating costs, not to talk of the funding of programmes and projects.

With regard to the MDGs, the performance of African leaders can be gauged through the fact that while other developing regions are making progress towards meeting these goals by the target date of 2015, most African countries have been reported to be off the track. African leaders will need to intensify efforts towards the attainment of the goals. In fairness to the African leaders, however, the magnitude of the development challenges confronting Africa is such that efforts of the continent alone will not be enough for it to meet the MDGs. The international community must deliver on its promise to assist Africa in achieving the MDGs and meeting the other challenges of development. An Africa that shares in the benefits of globalisation and in which absolute poverty becomes history, is in the interest, not only of the peoples of the continent, but also of the global community. There cannot be sustainable global peace and security in an environment in which a significant component of humanity is marginalised and condemned to perpetual poverty and indignity.

What do you consider the opportunities and challenges of the AU as compared to the OAU? In the light of the opportunities and challenges of the AU, ho ould the establishment of the "United States of Africa" catalyze the effectiveness of the AU?

Ambassador Makhan: As compared to the OAU, the AU is confronted with some new opportunities and challenges. A major opportunity lies in its expanded mandate. There is increasing realisation on the part of Member States of the important role that a continental organisation like the AU can play in advancing the process of their development. This role includes not only the production of regional public goods such as peace and security, but also the establishment of regional and continental policy and institutional frameworks for the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development. Also, under the current environment, the

international community appears, on the face of it, to be more supportive of the goal of Africa's integration and the role of the African Union in the process than it was under the OAU. If this sounds slightly skeptical, that is because some doubt exists when one sees the contradictory stances taken at times by our partners, especially in international trade negotiations. But, the EU-AU Africa Strategy, the international endorsement of NEPAD, and the high priority being accorded to African regional integration by the World Bank and UNDP are indicative of the increasing global support. The support for Africa's integration process by the World Bank is particularly illustrative of the changing global attitude to the quest of Africa for integration. It will be recalled that the World Bank was lukewarm about, if not outright opposed to, the idea of regional integration and collective self-reliance as espoused in the Lagos Plan of Action.

For much of the forty years of its existence, the OAU had to operate in an environment in which many of its Member States could be aptly described as weak and failed countries that were beset by conflicts, military and civilian dictatorships, political instability, and poor macro-economic management. Such an environment constrained the effectiveness of the OAU. That the AU is now operating in a relatively improved and more conducive environment – emphasis being on the term "relatively" – constitutes an opportunity for the Organisation to be more effective in the delivery of its mandate. The ability of the AU to serve as an effective instrument for the promotion of development has also been enhanced by the end of the cold war. During that war, Africa had become an ideological battleground for the East and the West. The resultant division of African countries along ideological grounds complicated the task of the OAU in forging the unity and integration of the continent. The AU was established, inter alia, to enable Africa meet the challenges of globalisation. In contrast to the other developing regions of the world, Africa has remained marginalised in the process of globalisation and has not been able to partake much in its benefits. The continent still contains a disproportionate number (34 out of 50) of the world's least developed countries. Poverty is on the increase in Africa and, as indicated in the recent report on the UN Millennium Development initiative, at current trend, Africa risks not meeting the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015. There cannot be any doubt that the AU, as compared with the OAU, faces a greater challenge in the area of poverty eradication and attainment of sustainable socio-economic development.

The eventual establishment of a "United States of Africa" can, in theory, serve as a catalyst for the effectiveness of the AU. The unity and cooperation of African countries within the framework of a United States will not only reduce duplication of development efforts at national and regional levels but also permit the AU to be endowed with the necessary powers and resources that are critical to its effectiveness. Also, a United States of Africa, in which the AUC serves as the official mouthpiece of the continent will enable Africa to speak with a common, strong and united voice in engagements with the rest of the world. The enhancement of the bargaining power emanating from the establishment of the United States of Africa will increase the capacity of the African Union to achieve the objective of integrating Africa into the global economy and polity as a respected equal partner. Though my experience, as OAU Assistant Secretary-General and AU Interim

Commissioner, in both the Doha Round WTO negotiations, the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations, has convinced me that the position of Africa tends to be taken more seriously when it is delivered through a strong and united voice, the road to attaining and maintaining this ideal situation is long and strewn with numerous obstacles.

As far as the vision of a United States of Africa is concerned, e have some nations aggressively pushing for it, others calling for a slo process and yet others just adopting a ait-and-see attitude. So, it appears there is no general consensus as to ho fast this should occur.

Ambassador Makhan: The consensus about the idea itself exists but it is the timing for its concretisation that divides! The leadership unfortunately appears not to be ready to accept this fact and act accordingly. My experience leads me to the conclusion that however much our leaders may be in opposition to the implementation of an idea for the very understandable reason that its time has not yet come, most of them would simply abstain from articulating their position. It appears, therefore, that even if most of the leaders harbour serious doubts about the viability and functionality of the idea at this point in time, there is a reluctance to put that across for fear of being offensive to the proponent. It is in this manner that we end up adopting it without much conviction or unanimity around it. The need to be very courteous and remain polite overrides the imperatives of pragmatism and realism and in the process the continent is embarked on something for which it is not ready yet. Simply by adopting decisions and other resolutions will lead us nowhere unless there is genuine determination and readiness for their implementation. To make an idea work one must first agree that it is the right time for it to be put into motion. Then make sure that the appropriate environment is created for it to be fruitful. I am sorry to say that unfortunately we do not always follow this logic. And as I have said earlier, the ordinary African citizen is blissfully unaware of what's going on about the Abuja Treaty, regional integration, the African Union or about the United States of Africa project. He or she has no clue! One should not pursue an idea simply because it is being done elsewhere! The people have to be on board!

I do share your conviction that the people of Africa should o n the process if it is to be meaningful…

Ambassador Makhan: Yes, but look, there is no doubt whatsoever that for us to be able to survive in this global village, we have to get our act together. We cannot go it alone. But, in that process, some sacrifices have to be consented to. We have to let go of certain basic prerogatives in terms of national interests. We have to let go of some degree of sovereignty! In the endeavour to create an integrated space, sovereignty cannot be an unshakable end. Africa must be prepared to share and pool it for the benefit of its peoples. Despite the strength of individual Member States of the European Union, they are committed to pooling their sovereignty to enhance their weight and competitiveness in the rapidly globalising world. Are we in Africa ready for that? National considerations cloud our march towards integration. Sovereign interests override regional or continental interests. These are things that we hold on to too guardedly and jealously. The leadership may subscribe to certain decisions taken at continental meetings while not being fully

con inced of their judiciousness, ma be to a oid the risk of being accused of breaking ranks. But when it comes to implementation there is a concern that the decision taken collecti el will impinge on so ereignt ! The bottom line is: are Member States reall read to let go and trul start beha ing and acting as one entit or, fi e or more entities within the context of Africa?

I think that is definitely a key question!

Ambassador Makhan: If that is the question, then, what is it that we ha e trul undertaken and accomplished to claim that we ha e attained at least part of objecti e set? Let me expound. During the time I was at the OAU and subsequently at the AU, I was for a number of years responsible for the economic dossier. First as Assistant Secretary General of the OAU in charge of the Department of Economic Development and Cooperation, and then as Interim Commissioner in Charge of Economic Affairs. (In between I was also in charge of Administration and Finance). I really tried hard to develop a sense of oneness among our Member States, to get them to speak with one voice, to act as one entity, if not on all counts, at least on issues of common interest to the entire continent, especially in the field of negotiations – the trade negotiations. Well, to some extent success started to be registered and, believe me, such positioning started throwing the jitters among some from the outside world who suddenly realised that Africa could after all, on occasion arising, get its act together and demonstrate a commonality of purpose. And, that in turn could pose a threat to their self-interest! Africa had suddenly woken up to its capabilities!

The first call was the African Economic Community (AEC) Trade Ministers Conference, which held its first session in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1997. And just before that the first meeting of ECOSOC of the AEC Treaty was held in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. It became apparent that once the stakes had been explained and understood, there was no reason why, collectively Africa could not assume its responsibilities and participate on as equal a footing as possible with the rest of the players in the international field. The WTO Ministerial Conference of 1996 in Singapore had been an eye-opener. African countries had simply not had sufficient exchanges among themselves to be able to defend their interests as a group.

Individually, some of these countries tried to articulate their concerns but their voices were rather weak in front of the larger players there. On the spot, the OAU/AEC delegation that I was leading called for an African group meeting, took stock of the situation and managed to salvage the bare minimum, not without the realisation that we, (the Organisation as well as the Member States) had simply not put in place any mechanism to negotiate as effectively as possible. Hence, when we met in Harare the following year, we were honest and candid enough to acknowledge and discuss our shortcomings. We identified the issues of common interest to us and developed common positions thereon which were then commended to all Member States for the guidance of national negotiating teams. At the level of the OAU/AEC secretariat, we made it a point to put forth such common positions whenever addressing matters that had been the subject of collective discussions and on which decisions had been taken. And it worked wonderfully.

In fact, at the following WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva, African delegations

appeared more comfortable at the negotiating table. The eventual adoption of the WTO Doha Declaration that put development at the centre of the current round of negotiations, can be attributed largely to these earlier efforts. But, we were still operating as individual countries, notwithstanding the fact that the Secretariat delegation, which despite having no observer status, not to talk of a negotiating status, coordinated the African group and facilitated the harmonisation of positions as the negotiations progressed. What I believe would have been ideal for Africa, was to have been in a position to give a mandate to a Chief or Lead Negotiator to articulate Africa's common position on all issues at stake in the negotiations. That would have minimised the pressure that is normally brought to bear on national negotiating teams by certain other players that use bilateral relations coercively to their advantage. But already we were being recognized as an emerging group and gradually we were mastering the technique of group negotiations. Of course, in the process we encountered many difficulties. Very often, I had to use my position as an elected African Official to apply pressure on the various national negotiating teams to ensure that they would stick to the common positions reached. It was not an easy task.

Today, I still hold the view that Africa's interests in such fields as trade negotiations would be best served, if like the EU, we would give the mandate to negotiate to say the Commission of the AU, short of giving that responsibility to a Lead or Chief Negotiator. That, of course, means that we would need to ensure that first, we have the right persons to represent us at that level and second, that we would have discussed all issues at play extensively and in depth prior to issuing the appropriate mandate. As I said earlier, such a course of action would remove the threat of pressure on our weaker member states! With a collective mandate and credentials to negotiate, ensuring Africa's larger interest would become easier. As may have been observed, the EU Commission representative at all such negotiating forums, always puts forth his or her negotiating mandate, making it clear that, he or she is not prepared and not authorised to go beyond the parameters of the mandate. Fresh consultations need to take place with the principals who are the EU Member States. Surely, it would not be that difficult for us, at the level of Africa, to adopt a similar practice. That is, if indeed we are serious about integration! But worse, today, at the level of the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations with the EU, we have allowed ourselves to be divided and are thus present at the negotiating table in dispersed ranks. We are negotiating in four different African configurations and further sub-divisions within those configurations when we should have been sitting as a common African group, in line with the ultimate objective of integration, as enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

It appears therefore that our policymakers understand the value of integration but, for whatever reason, they also are bent on protecting their turfs! Why?

Ambassador Makhan: Well, candidly, the experience of regional integration in Africa has been one of a mitigated nature. It's been a kind of blow-hot, blow-cold situation! We have everything that is required of us to make it work. But then, how do we proceed effectively? What approach do we adopt? I believe that there are a couple of mistakes that we may have made in the pursuit of our endeavours. I do not want to fall in the trap of playing the blame game!

There is no doubt that initially, anything that is new and noble attracts a lot of interest. Then the players start faltering in their steps along the path that they themselves have traced as being the best course to follow, given the circumstances. I have lived through situations where the Secretariat, as duly mandated by Member States, organised ministerial meetings only to find that only about four or five ministers bothered to be present. Of course, the hall would be full but with representatives who would have no decision-making powers. How does one move forward under such conditions? I have found myself in the embarrassing situations of having to cancel ministerial meetings for lack of the required response in time. And obviously, that tends to frustrate not only one's efforts but also inconvenience others who are ready to live up to their commitment and play their role. These are factors that need to be looked into if we are really serious about what we want to do. And this is what I want to say to the African leadership. We've got to be able to put our money were our mouth is! And for our continent's sake, let's get on with it! What I think our countries should do is to internalise the issue of integration. National debates thereon need to be held and it needs to be explained properly to our peoples so that they feel part of the process. Such a matter should transcend party political considerations so that the need to follow the policy of integration is not put into question in the event of a change of leadership at the country level. The problem today is that we operate on an ad hoc basis! Most of our countries do not have well-defined policies when it comes to integration.

It is, however, a matter of satisfaction to note that in some of our Member States, Ministries of Integration have been set up. This needs to be saluted and encouraged. I must, nonetheless, confess that I am not in a position to say whether these ministries are making any positive indent. A few Member States, I know, have adopted the practice of flying the AU flag alongside their national flags and play the continental anthem besides their own on occasion demanding. But is that enough? I grant that it is one step forward, but does that really seep down to the grassroots level? Is the person who is attending to his business in his village, concerned about integration? Is he informed about integration? Has he been educated by the authorities about the advantages of moving in that direction? I guess, even at his own country level he is not aware of the need and advantages of linking up to the next village or town. The starting point should be at that level, then and only then can we make progress. Otherwise, we will continue to lament the lack of progress. Simply by taking, what we perceive and agree as being the right decisions, will not be sufficient!

To get things moving on the continent, in the perspective of integration, requires a new mindset altogether. This is articulated strongly in my book 'Policy Consensus, Strategy Vacuum'. As I said, this was published ten years ago and it remains valid today!

When you speak of a new mindset, what exactly are you referring to?

Ambassador Makhan: Well…it's all a question of educating ourselves on the multifarious advantages of integration, especially in this age of globalisation, when we can no longer go it alone! We need, therefore, to educate ourselves on the dire necessity to integrate! We need to involve the NGOs more. We need to involve Civil Society Organisations, Trade Unions, Chambers of Commerce, everybody. Indeed,

ever bod should be on board. Integration should be made a cross-cutting national polic . It should be encrusted in our minds as we formulate our own national programmes of nation-building. It should become a matter of natural consideration to the extent that whatever national polic is put in place should be done in terms of its incidence within the region. That wa , whatever barriers exist can be addressed with a view to their eventual removal thus paving the wa for effective interaction in the region and ensuring movement as one entit . As of now, this mindset hardl exists. One just has to take cognisance of some of the administrative barriers that our countries erect while dealing with each other. It s simpl unbelievable! On the one hand, we are seriousl propounding the need for a United States of Africa or Union Government of Africa and et, on the other hand, it is so ever difficult for an African citizen to move from the West to the South, to the East and to the North! It is a constant obstacle race! One is considered and treated as an alien, looked at suspiciousl . And so, how does one move forward towards meeting our proclaimed objective? This is wh I emphasise: we require a new mindset. We can t go on talking about the need for one Africa, while at the same time appl ing policies running counter to that objective! Can one just imagine that even toda , notwithstanding the fact that an official of the AU travels on the continent with an AU Laissez-Passer, he/she still requires a visa to enter most of our Member States? Now, if that is the treatment meted out to someone travelling with an official AU document, one can well imagine the difficult the ordinar citizen faces when travelling with a national document! Isn t that incongruous? What we practise doesn t match the decisions we take. It is not in consonance with what we preach! This surel doesn t help. How would one expect our people to espouse integration as a viable and worth pursuit when the are subjected to such hassles?

So, it appears that we need to broaden the dialogue? Relatedly, what about our African institutions, do they have a role to play?

Ambassador Makhan: As ou ma be aware, this aspect is currentl being looked at in the context of the audit of the African Union that we are carr ing out. In an attempt at integration, one needs to put in place appropriate institutions to provide substance and give meaning to such a process and take it effectivel forward. However, there is no point in putting up institutions if the are not given the tools to work with and the means to deliver. It is not because the legal instrument that informs the continent s integration polic provides for a number of institutions that one should rush to create them! It has to be done on an incremental basis. Such institutions, when set up, need to be provided with adequate resources, both human and material, to enable them pla their role as intended. Take for example the financial institutions that are provided for in the Constitutive Act of the AU.

In fact, the same are provided for in the Abuja Treat . But in the Abuja Treat the are meant to be set up during the last stage when a number of other steps in that long journe would have been successfull accomplished. That is, when the stage providing for the common market of Africa would have been achieved. But under the Constitutive Act, there is a tendenc in some quarters to set up such institutions right awa on mere account of the fact that the are provided for in the Act. Can one put up an African Central Bank or an African Monetar Fund at this point? M personal view is that

simply by putting up such institutions would not necessarily accelerate the process of integration.

Some ten years ago, here in Mauritius itself, a meeting was convened under the aegis of the then OAU to discuss about financial integration in Africa. The conclusion was that there was an urgent need to harmonise our policies in that sector first and foremost. The different national financial rules and regulations needed to be harmonised. Ten years down the road the evidence is that we have hardly made any movement in that sector. Our legal and financial systems differ fundamentally from country to country. Isn't there, therefore, need to put all of this in order first? Some may not follow my line of argumentation but this is what I think and again my stand is informed by the experience I have lived through. I insist, therefore, that some of these institutions of integration have to be established in an incremental manner. Besides, as you are aware, some of the institutions that have been set up are already in the process of a review! Such is the case with the Pan African Parliament, which, indeed, is a very important organ of the AU. It is an institution of the people and, therefore, is supposed to be representative of the people. But it is hardly so! What role is it playing right now in the construction of an integrated Africa? What legislative power does it exercise? If care is not exercised in this venture, one runs the risk of committing the same mistakes of the past by simply rushing. Look at the fate suffered by the Union of African Railways…an important institution but doomed to failure for lack of adequate resources, quality manpower and policy harmonisation! Let us take another instance. Right from the days when the Abuja Treaty was being mooted much was said about the need to rationalise and harmonise! The AEC was to be achieved using the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as building blocs. But, where are we? The decision had been taken to work on the basis of the five RECs, strengthen them and build on them. No sooner had that decision been taken than Member States started to lobby for the recognition of other sub-regional groupings as RECs! Obviously, what now obtains is a multiplicity of Regional Economic Communities! We are yet to develop the capacity to say no in Africa! Today the AU is meant to work with eight RECs, not to talk of other sub-groupings vying for recognition and space!

Based on our dialogue so far, is it accurate to say that you are in favour of an incremental process. We do things one-step at a time and let things snowball gradually?

Ambassador Makhan: Precisely! That is, to my mind, the surest way of achieving success. With this kind of approach, everyone is sure to get involved in the process. Every stakeholder would know the destination and would be adequately prepared to undertake the journey, appropriately armed! If the initial process of integration is able to deliver, and achieve positive impact, the commitment to the implementation of the more ambitious and difficult later stages will be stronger. All of this revolves around the mindset I referred to earlier. There are some institutions that are essential and which need to be reinforced, especially those where issues of continental interest are dealt with like the AU Peace and Security Council and the ECOSOCC. The latter institution is people-centred and is important in the process. But let me hasten to say that there is presently a criticism, and I dare say, justified to some extent, to the effect that not all delegates to the ECOSOCC

deliberations are representative of the people. It appears that some of the delegates represent but themselves! This is a matter that needs looking into as we build such institutions.

There is a need to look into the issue of Civil Society representation. Do they have the proper means of selecting their representatives? Are those delegated, accountable and, if so, to whom? Let us go back for a moment to the Pan-African Parliament. I believe it should have started more like a consultative forum. So far, there is no direct election to the Parliament. It will probably come, sooner for some, and much, much later for others. Let us be candid. Some of our countries do not even have a proper process of elections. So, who gets nominated to that Parliament? And what is the strength of representation? Who are they representing? Are they representing government?

Then, that is an extension of the executive! Are they representing Parliament? Then that is an extension of the national parliament. There is definitely need to overhaul the system. We should be courageous enough to admit our mistakes and bold enough to start afresh! Of course, that would mean investing more energy and more resources, but then, in the wider interest we should do it and proceed on an incremental basis. Once agreed upon, the Parliament has to be given teeth! What would be its term of reference? What would be its jurisdiction? The same applies to the Court of Justice. What is it that needs to be done? These are fundamental questions that need to be addressed but in a very, very well-thought out and truthful manner. They are critical to everything! Why create an institution if it's only going to be there in name and eat into the very scarce resources that are available? People should be able to identify with the institutions we put up and know exactly how these institutions are supposed to operate in their interest. They should have a communion with these institutions. We should not establish an Integration Institution simply on account of some national ambition, that is, merely because a Member State wishes to host it. I grant that there may be legitimacy and justification in the desire of Member States to host institutions of the AU, having due regard to adequate geographical distribution and representation. But that is not an insurmountable problem. One can take a firm decision on which region/country would host such and such institutions and leave it at that. When the time is ripe for the creation of those institutions, when the fundamentals for the setting up of such institutions have been established, then, concrete action can be taken accordingly. But for the time being, at this initial stage of integration, only those institutions that are critical should be set up! That, according to me, is the way to move forward! Incrementally, is the word! Such actions should be demand-driven and dictated by the circumstances and exigencies of the time.

I believe there is sufficient literature that has been written on integration. One doesn't need to reinvent the wheel! One knows what steps are to be taken towards that end. It is the approach that needs to be fine-tuned, that requires consensus.

How then can Africa move forward? How do we make it become a reality?

Ambassador Makhan: In taking that policy forward towards a fruitful conclusion, a certain degree of pragmatism is essential. One definitely has to take a pragmatic approach, based on the reality on the ground. Get the

people involved. Educate ourselves in that direction. Integration must become a kind of second nature in the manner we conduct affairs of our states and of the continent. We must breathe integration, not only talk about it. We must be able to internalise the process so that it becomes a matter of course for the generations to come. We need to create the appropriate space and environment for the next generation to be able to relate freely and think automatically as an African first and then as a national of such and such country!

The extant literature on Africa's integration posits that the continent's heterogeneity and multi-diversity poses both a challenge and hindrance to integration. What is your vie on this?

Ambassador Makhan: Well…I think I touched upon this earlier when I talked about how diverse we were in the way we carry one. We are subject to a vast cultural diversity, with ethnic differences, without forgetting our language and religious differences, among others. And obviously, we have different ways of approaching things. Without being academic and sounding pedantic, the fact is that, we have inherited frontiers, borders from the colonial times that have divided us, separated us from our brethren. But, and rightly so, we have agreed not to touch those, at least not in the short/medium term. For, in so doing we are bound to set the whole continent ablaze and in the process create bigger problems than we are already grappling with. The situation in the Horn of Africa, in parts of Central Africa and until recently in areas of West Africa as well as in Southern Africa answers the question that you pose. We are in 2007. At the turn of the new century, with a high level of legitimate ambition we asked – Can Africa claim the 21st Century? Indeed, we have since proclaimed that this century is ours. But then, the first seven years leave us room for concern, with a big query. Are we on the right track? If we are, and that all ties in to the issue of mindset I was referring to earlier, then why should we not be on talking terms with our neighbour? Instead of dialoguing to iron out whatever differences may exist between countries, the guns are allowed to speak leading to unnecessary loss of life and property and the squandering of scarce resources. Doesn't that stymie our efforts at integration? Our biggest challenge today is to be able to silence our guns, lay down our arms and enter a new era of peace. Only then will we be able to take giant strides towards integration.

But so far, our concern with selfish material interests remains overwhelming. So, challenges, there are plenty! It all boils down to a question of how much one is prepared to give up in the process of erecting the house of integration. If we are hell-bent on fighting for a piece of barren land and lay waste countless innocent lives, how are we going to achieve a United States of Africa? How are we going to attain the objective of an integrated Africa?

If e look at it from the above perspective, is the anticipation of a United States of Africa a realizable objective in the near future?

Ambassador Makhan: We need to recognise that some progress has been registered on the economic front, especially at sub-regional level. Some progress, however minimal that might be, has been achieved. At the level of the SADC or indeed the COMESA, movement has been recorded at the trade level. A free trade area has been launched within the COMESA space, though a number of its

member states are yet to come on board. Again, the difficulty comes from that same rush of trying to implement provisions of the COMESA Treaty even if the environment on the ground is not yet ripe for this kind of movement. The argument advanced once more is that the benchmarks in the Treaty have to be respected! But one should realise that if such things are done solely because the Treaty so decrees, even if the ground isn't ready for that stage, one is bound to flounder!

The ongoing debate about a Customs Union within the COMESA is a case in point at this time. How does one go about creating such a Union when not all member states are part of the free trade area? Okay, it can be done but it would be pro forma, for it wouldn't achieve the results that would be recorded with all Member States on board. Insisting to go along that line at all costs will only be perfunctory. Countless difficulties are bound to be encountered and slow down the process. I pray that I am wrong. But I fear that ten years down the road from now we would still be asking ourselves the same question and wondering what is it that we did not do right! All that we would have achieved then would only be cosmetic.

That is why I insist that we need to proceed in an incremental manner. We definitely can make progress starting now, but for that to happen, we need to have in each region, at least some powerful leaders who really believe in the integration ideal to push or pull it through! And such leaders, I believe, would be those from countries that are better endowed economically and who would be prepared to let go some of their sovereign interests to show the way. By so doing, they will set the example. This is how I see it happening. Our other problem is that so far, we have but focussed on the economic aspect of integration. Integration is all encompassing. We need to address the other aspects as well. The socio-cultural and political fronts as well. There must be some simultaneous action covering all sectors…but the primordial aspect remains the riddance of conflicts. How prepared are we to review and reduce our phenomenal defence budgets? With the release of such funds we may then start setting the stage for tangible physical links, by putting up the kind of infrastructure necessary to link up the various regions of the continent and translate concretely our dream of Cape to Cairo, of Mombassa to Dakar, of Praia to Port Louis!

We could also start addressing such other issues that can bring better understanding among our peoples and set the stage for closer cooperation and solidarity. Culture, sports and education are fields where conclusive action could be taken. It is going to take time but we need to start somewhere. Can't we try and lay down the foundation for establishing, in time, the same standard of education, develop a curriculum that would make harmonisation in the education field and mobility of labour possible? Let me give you another example.

Four years ago, when we started laying the foundations for the African Union, I had suggested that one of the ways to really reach the people was to think of something with which they could identify easily and that could unite them, if only momentarily. What is it that links Africans more than anything else? Music and games! Can't we envisage an African Union Games every four years with the regions building up towards that finality? The current All Africa Games could be redesigned and transformed into Union Games with emphasis on the African Union, thereby popularising the concept.

While such a venture would no doubt see the emergence of many a talent it would also help popularise the objectives of the African Union. The appointment of Ambassadors of goodwill in the cause of the African Union is also something that would help put the African Union to the fore. That would be one of the ways to bring the people closer to the actions of the leadership!

So, hy are all these ideas never implemented?

Ambassador Makhan: I frankly do not know. Is it an absence of political will? Or is it that not enough thinking has gone into the process? That is at the level of practical and doable things?

As previously agreed, I read your statement and publication last night and have managed to tease-out a number of questions, hich ill guide today's session. Suffice it to say, the vie s in your book, albeit ritten 10 years ago, still are of currency.

Ambassador Makhan: It only goes to confirm that the ideas relating to integration have been around for some time but little has been done to translate those ideas concretely. I am not prophetic! The views are still of currency for the simple reason that fundamentally, not much has changed! Not much progress has been recorded since then, and the problems encountered then are practically the same. And that's our greatest challenge! This morning I was on the line with the South African High Commissioner discussing the problematique of integration with him. I expressed my concerns and apprehensions regarding the current negotiations that most of the African countries are locked in with the EU, relating to the Economic Partnership Agreements. As I mentioned earlier, it is indeed a pity that we allowed ourselves to be balkanised and by partners coming from the very region that is itself intensifying its integration process. But we can't blame the others for going into the negotiations in such a dispersed manner. I grant that our partners have their own agenda but at the end of the day, we were not strong enough to withstand the pressure! They have all the means and the material clout but we have the numbers… we have the political numbers. We should have stood our ground and gone into the negotiations as one African entity as our Heads of State and Government had decided. But instead, we have gone in these negotiations in four different configurations that are not in conformity with our configuration for continental integration and in the process undermined our own avowed objective of integration.

Going in such configurations have occasioned the eruption of a number of problems in the various regions. The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) understandably want to go one way and the non-LDCs another way! In the regions of eastern and southern Africa, two configurations are involved drawing members from the two RECs, COMESA and SADC. The issue of overlapping or dual membership for some of the countries, that is, belonging both to COMESA and SADC, has exacerbated the problem. SADC has constituted itself as a negotiating bloc made up of the SACU (Southern African Customs Union) Member States plus Angola, Tanzania and Mozambique. The latter two countries do not belong to COMESA anymore. Angola does belong to COMESA but has opted to negotiate within the SADC-EPA configuration. The other Member States of SADC are negotiating within the ESA (Eastern and Southern Africa) configuration. Now, look at how divisive the

situation is. Had we stuck together as one African group, the situation would definitely have been different. This is my firm belief!

Let me repeat that most of the LDCs that exist in the world are within our continent. In fact, there are 34 of them in Africa out of a total of 50 worldwide! The LDCs are covered by the EBA policy, that is, Everything But Arms. Clearly there is no reason for the LDCs to follow the non-LDCs stand in these negotiations. Doesn t that create a conflicting environment? An atmosphere of suspicion? One should not forget that the ultimate objective of the African Union is an integrated Africa both on the economic and political fronts!

So, not only this divisive situation may create bad blood but, it also undermines the objective that we, collectively, have set for ourselves. I simply do not understand why we cannot stick to decisions we take. If we can't do that, why then do we take such decisions at all? I think I have addressed this peculiarity earlier. The AU Assembly, it will be recalled, had taken the decision, upon my submission, for Africa to negotiate as one entity. But then it was not followed, with the consequence that we know. There is a fundamental weakness in our way of doing things and that, we need to address urgently. Today, a lot of pressure is being brought to bear on our countries to sign the Economic Partnership Agreements by the end of this year! But surely there are other ways to go about this. When the negotiations for a new WTO-compatible ACP-EU trade regime were launched in 2002, the expectation was that the Doha Round of negotiations, with development at its core, would be concluded by end of 2004 at latest. The negotiations are still ongoing. My view is that the timetable for the EPA negotiations should take due account of this delay. After all we are here talking about the livelihood and well-being of millions of people! Rules are not cast in stone. They can be changed to ensure that they are beneficial to the majority of the peoples, especially those from the developing world. But for that to happen, we need the necessary political will and the understanding of our partners! Is that too difficult a situation for them to understand?

Is it that our leaders have just turned a blind eye to the benefits of negotiating collectively?

Ambassador Makhan: Well, I am not sure that that is the case. It is just that once the decisions are taken, as I said earlier, they are not followed through. There is no mechanism to ensure strict adherence to these decisions. There are no sanctions yet on those who do not uphold or implement decisions taken collectively. I believe that the time has come for our principals to focus on this matter. One of the things that has always bothered me is the thought that maybe some, if not most of our principals simply are not alive to the intricacies of such issues or are not being briefed adequately thereon.

There is a dire need, therefore, to overhaul the system and revisit the way that we address issues at the continental level and indeed establish a monitoring mechanism. We have the institution to do this, and that is the African Union Commission. What is lacking at this point in time is its effective empowerment.

Yet again, we are not sufficiently concerned about the plight of each other. We are yet to develop the capacity to stand up instinctively to or show concern naturally for the problems and struggle of our neighbours. For example, take the case of the cotton producing countries in West and Central Africa. They would

probably have struck a fairer deal already for their cotton which faces an unfair competition from the heavily subsidised American producers, had all African countries stood up steadfastly and made that struggle their own. I do not say that they don t support the struggle.

It s just that it is not done in a convincing and engaged manner. The same holds true for other countries producing and exporting other commodities. Look at the fate of the sugar producing countries. Yet, as I say, had we developed a system of collective bargaining and displayed a greater sense of mutual solidarity at this level, we would most probably have struck better and fairer deals for ourselves. For, let s face it, our producers simply do not get a remunerative and fair price for their products, especially in the agricultural sector as the market is heavily distorted in view of the heavy subsidies that the developed countries grant their farmers. Besides, one just has to take stock of what is happening at the WTO negotiations to understand this point fully. We are all so quick in adopting supportive declarations and resolutions when we congregate, yet we are seldom there when the time comes to defend those very decisions. We simply do not seem to gauge the advantage of putting up a collective front and stick to it till the very end. Another truism is that by and large we are rather conservative in our policies as exemplified by the fact that we stick to our traditional markets. There is nothing wrong per se, in that. But, we should be bold enough to explore new ones at the same time. Take the history of cooperation between the African countries and Europe, that is, African countries within the context of the ACP. While we represent about 10% of the world s population, in terms of international trade, we represent an insignificant percentage! Our trade with the EU has gone down from 6-7% in 1975 to less that 2%. Shouldn t this blatant fact be an eye-opener for us? Shouldn t we be doing something about it instead of allowing ourselves to be subjected to further dictates, on account of our so-called historical and traditional links?

If Africa is unwilling to venture into new markets or change the status quo, what then is the way forward? What should be done?

Ambassador Makhan: We will continue to mark time while the world moves ahead at full steam! We are in for trouble if we do not wake up to that reality! Really, the chips are down! Our strategy has to change. We don t even trade among ourselves to the extent desirable! The degree of intra-African trade is rather insignificant. Our slate of exports in general is rather limited. Yet, our continent is a very well endowed area of the globe.

The continent, as a whole, has an underground wealth of inestimable value and of necessity to the outside world. We have had close to four decades of cooperation with the EU. Within the context of the ACP, the different conventions that have regulated our cooperation with the EU (Yaounde, Lome, Cotonou) have always been heralded as examples of perfect North-South cooperation. But today, most of our countries have remained providers of raw material. We have hardly benefited from the necessary and much-promised transfer of technology for the transformation of our natural resources! The truth also is that very few of our countries have been able to take full advantage of the provisions of preferences that were agreed to under those conventions.

The Conflict Industry

The question that arises from this situation is, why have our countries not really benefited from these cooperation instruments and their provisions of preferences? I believe that the reason hovers around the absence of capacity coupled with the facts that we have lived and continue to live through numerous conflicts and political instability on the continent. Our resources, therefore, both human and material, have to a large extent been engaged in, what I call the conflict industry! Our partners have equally not been too forthcoming in terms of transferring technology into Africa. The easy excuse for such a situation has been instability and conflicts! Yet, we all know how despite the raging conflicts in some of our countries, investments kept on flowing, especially in the extractive economy! Oil, diamonds etc. This, then, remains our plight! Isn't it a paradox that some of our richest countries, in terms of mineral and natural resources, are also those that find themselves in the category of Least Developed Countries? With the new ball game on the international trade front, our relations with the EU are bound to change. We will be losing the preferential regime! We need to adjust accordingly. Yet again, it is a question of capacity. We require more time to carry out such an adjustment, the more so, as it is acknowledged that the playing field is simply not level! We will need to be competitive and, to be competitive we need capacity. We have to acquire the necessary infrastructure, and generally address the supply side constraints. But for that to happen, resources are required. So it is a kind of chicken and egg situation. To make matters worse most of our countries are heavily indebted and the meagre resources that are at our disposal have to be apportioned so minutely between the servicing of our debt, catering for social needs of our peoples (even in this endeavour there is hardly ever enough!) etc., that we hardly have anything left for development purposes. Of course, there has been a lot of squandering. We all know that there are plenty of illegally acquired monies from the continent in bank accounts abroad, principally in Europe! The return of such monies to the national treasuries of our countries would have gone a long way to ease the situation. But we all know the story.

So, then where is that partnership that we are talking about? Partnership also means mutual accountability. It means transparency. All cards on the table! We may not be equal but if we have agreed to be partners, then by God, let's be partners! However, this is easier said than done! But what will it take? The subsidies that are dished out by our partners to their agricultural producers annually represent more that the external debt of all African countries. There is apparently more than a billion dollars worth of subsidies that are given daily. I am also told that the subsidy spent per cow in Europe is many times more than the average earnings of an African citizen classified as poor! I grant that in certain cases subsidies may be necessary as such a system also makes it possible for net-food importing countries to pay for their imports less expensively. But then, it also affects the agricultural producers in our countries who simply cannot face such unfair competition. Yet, it is possible to find a fairer way, a middle course to the satisfaction of one and all. For that to happen, there is need for our countries to pool their resources for a collective strategy to be formulated and adhered to. The bottom line, however, still remains our capacity to demonstrate the political will that is necessary.

Now, if you look at the relationship between Africa and the world, Africa remains the

darling of the world. Not for betrothal but to be courted! Let us be frank and admit that one of the compelling reasons for all the attention bestowed upon our continent is that it regorges with raw materials that they need. We ha e entered into all sorts of cooperation agreements: ACP-EU, AGOA, China-Africa, Japan-Africa, India-Africa, etc. Sure, we welcome all of that, but these are not based simply on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. It cannot simply be because "Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world as former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair put it a few years ago. Unless both sides live up to their commitments under these agreements and ensure that they are all focussed on a substantially heavy development component, I am afraid we will still be lamenting along the same lines years from now!

To come back to the issue of partnership, I am very concerned at the way our so-called privileged and historical partner, the EU, has been applying undue pressure on our countries to sign the Economic Partnership Agreements, to the extent, I am told, that a ministerial meeting scheduled for October 22 to coordinate and formulate a common position has been cancelled by the host country, Benin. The principal reason advanced, I understand was that our partners did not think it was opportune for such a meeting to be held!

To what extent, in your opinion, is the lack of institutional convergence on the continent a contributing factor to our inability to forge ahead with integration?

Ambassador Makhan: Institutions are an important element in our efforts towards integration. But as I have said earlier, we just don't need to establish all the institutions as a matter of course just because they are provided for in our treaties. They should be set up as the circumstances demand. Obviously, the institutions that already exist in the various regions of the continent need to coordinate more rigorously, especially on policy matters. Beyond the issue of convergence, there is a great need for the rationalisation of institutions. What bothers me is that there is a duplication of efforts at the institutional level. This costs money. The other question that arises is do they have the necessary authority to perform? Integration is not just about signing a document that decrees it! The institutions that we set up need to be made functional and perform to the maximum to attain the objectives we have agreed on.

At times, I despair at the fact that we do not take sufficient advantage of our institutions to inform ourselves of the experiences of each other. Let me explain. Take the issue of our external debt. All of our countries at one time or another are involved in debt repayment negotiations with the Bretton Woods Institutions or other bilateral creditors. We know how tough and complex these are and how unfair and skewed they could be. Had we established a system whereby we could make our experiences available to each other, we would surely have avoided some of the pitfalls encountered in such negotiations. This is a plea that had been made by the OAU in the context of the Committee on Debt that had been set up to address the issue of Africa's debt burden. But regrettably, no heed has been paid to that recommendation. I do not know of any country that has ever shared its experience in this field or sent important data thereon to the Secretariat of the then OAU or to the Commission of the AU now, for ease of consultation by other Member States. The consequence is that we end up making the same mistakes. The same holds true for the

agreements we enter into with the multinationals with respect to the exploitation of our natural resources. We don't exchange or share information at all. Surely that's not the way for us to proceed in our integration efforts! Convergence of policies among the African institutions is *sine qua non* towards integration.

Would you say that our development partners are morally obliged to ensure that all their dealings with Africa are transparent?

Ambassador Makhan: Absolutely! It cannot be otherwise! Partnership is based on trust. That's why we call each other partners. While we are on this issue of partnership, let me seize the opportunity to say that I have always abhorred the connotation of donor/recipient in our dealings with the developed world.

I favour the term partnership. "Partners in development", is how I look at it. For after all, in such a kind of relationship both partners stand to gain. The key element then in that partnership is "development"! We should avoid situations where even an iota of suspicion exists in our relationship. All cards must be placed face up on the table. There should be no hidden agenda! Does that sound too utopian? But then, this is what partnership is all about. In talking about mutual benefits, I should like to touch on the unfortunate recurrent incidents surrounding the attempts of some of our citizens who put their lives at risk to try and migrate to some countries in Europe. Had our countries been firmly engaged on the path of development with tangible signs showing, there would not have been such a scramble on the part of those citizens towards what they consider are greener pastures. But they do so out of utter desperation. For, I think, there is hardly anybody who would not want to live a decent life and die in his own country, instead of eking it out illegally in a foreign land, in constant fear of being caught! The urge to leave is motivated by the livelihood factor! So then, the way to avoid this is to create the right environment that will be conducive to entice our citizens to live their life decently among their loved ones in their own countries.

This is where the partnership that we are talking about becomes relevant, provided we agree on the fundamentals of that partnership and we deal with each other in a transparent manner and we accept the notion of mutual accountability. The present situation does not point in that direction at all. Despite the various Conventions that have predicated our relationship with the European Union, for example, there hardly has been a serious attempt at the transformation of our economies, through appropriate transfer of technology. Yet these conventions invariably made provisions for such transformation. I refer to this state of affairs in my book as well. While the EPA negotiations are focusing much attention on the opening up of ACP markets to European goods, the issue of the mobility of labour from Africa and other ACP regions to the EU is hardly receiving any mention.

Is it an unfair partnership?

Ambassador Makhan: It doesn't look otherwise to me! It's a mind-boggling situation. And one wonders whether somewhere there is not a kind of deliberate attempt at maintaining us where we are so that we can keep on being merely providers of raw materials? But while we need not renounce the present partnership, the change must come from within. Those of our

countries hich are better off, and hich have the means and resources, must take the lead. We have in the past experienced this kind of intra-African cooperation that orked rather ell. As an example, there as a time hen Zimbabwe needed teachers. So, they recruited teachers from the region. A number of teachers from here (Mauritius) went there. In this kind of cooperation both sides derive some advantage but the best part of it all is the emergence of a new culture of understanding between the different countries involved. It also facilitates cultural exchange and appreciation that is crucial in any integration movement. The point I am making is that very often the expertise we require for the implementation of our development policies is available right here on the continent and yet we always turn to the outside world where such expertise is expensive and is not necessarily compatible or of advantage and relevance to our particular realities!

Another idea that had been mooted some time back hasn't been given sufficient attention. And that is, a form of triangular cooperation, a kind of North /South/South cooperation. It works in this way: financial resources are provided by the North and available expertise from the South is paid for from those resources for the benefit of the South countries in need of such expertise. In that way all parties will benefit from this triangular cooperation that has the advantage of flagging and enhancing capacity in the South. Such a system is very doable!

Let's also recall that most of the so-called expert advice and recommendations or shall I say impositions emanating from the Bretton Woods institutions are prescriptive. Indeed, there is criticism to the effect that most of such advice is a form of copy, cut and paste. A one size fits all policy! Such criticism has been levelled by senior officials who, themselves, have worked in those institutions and, therefore, know what they are on about! So, it is for us to get our act together. Without necessarily espousing or favouring the concept of autarky, we need to look within our shores and determine what expertise is available among our countries and put that to use. And as I have said that would cost us less and at the same time we would be valorising our own experts. The path to integration is cooperation. We need to be able to cooperate better with each other. Those who are better endowed and better equipped should show solidarity towards the others.

But for any meaningful exchange to take place, countries must be illing to share, and others illing to accept. Would you agree that it's a t o- ay street?

Ambassador Makhan: Right. That is very essential. The question that arises, therefore, is: do we talk to each other? Or do we just go and deliver well-crafted speeches? Do we listen to each other? Indeed, do we hear each other? And, I think, here again, it's the people who should apply pressure on the leadership through their representatives, through Civil Society Organisations and Non Governmental Organisations. We need to galvanise our people to move faster and steadfastly along the path of integration!

You note in your book that across West Africa, there is a certain element of integration at the local level bet een business, traders, service providers etc., due to the free movement across borders. Should this be emulated across Africa?

Ambassador Makhan: Of course! For without this kind of mobility, integration will remain

but a pious wish. The situation is like this: You can go and sign as many treaties relating to integration and/or cooperation as you want, but for their proper operationalisation, you need to involve the people at all levels. I have said it earlier and repeated it in many fora: the people are at the heart of everything! They need to be informed and convinced of the judiciousness of this kind of policy.

The movement of people, without let or hindrance, I mean unnecessary bureaucratic and administrative hassles, across borders does help to increase cross-border trade and bring down cultural barriers. It also allows for the expansion of investment and transfer of regional expertise. Besides, it is always better to have a larger regional market for one's produce than a limited national market! Of course, at the initial stage in the implementation of such a policy, you will need to set up some safeguards to ensure that you don't end up with economic refugees converging on the better-off countries within any given region.

Now, for this to really happen and take shape in an orderly manner, one needs to have the right kind of leadership, committed to this ideal, not only at the country level, but also within the institutions that are set up to translate this policy concretely. The right people in the right place: this is what is most important! If one ends up having officials in such institutions who are only there only for the job and the salary, then one would have made the wrong choice right from day one! People who serve in these institutions should be committed soldiers of integration. If this sounds too military, let us call them preachers and practitioners of integration! All competencies available should be harnessed and put to contribution to ensure that we reach our destination.

I also believe that it would be appropriate to have the curriculum in our schools structured to include integration. That way, right from the beginning, you would have inculcated in the people the need for and the advantages that would arise from integration.

The advantage of movement of people and integration as such, should also lead to the judicious utilisation of scarce resources. Countries within a given integrated space would be able to cater and provide for services to the region, each according to its comparative advantage in different sectors. Centres of higher learning, training institutions, high-tech specialised medical services are some of the sectors that I have in mind.

Well…it appears e need the cross-fertilization, but hen and here do e start – is it at the level of government, level of institutions, level of citizens?

Ambassador Makhan: I think it needs to be across the board, at all levels of society: Government, private sector, civil society, citizens and institutions alike. But first, we need to empower them appropriately with well-designed and well-focussed policies. Take the private sector in West Africa, for example. In Ghana and Nigeria there exists a thriving and more or less organised private sector. But as one travels across the other countries of the region one is struck by the spread of the informal sector. All the "mama benz", as they are called, are there going about their business from their car boots. While this is part of the folklore and is a tourist attraction, it wouldn't take those so involved very far. They need to be organised around proper regulated systems and be made aware of the more cost effective manner of doing business. With the exchange

of information and other e periences within the regulator frameworks, I have no doubt that those involved in the informal sector will attain higher levels of prosperit and e pand their businesses to the benefit of all.

At another level, sa in our thrust to set up parliaments on solid foundations, it is not that essential that our officials need to visit foreign parliaments outside of the continent in their learning process. Wh can t we visit countries within our own continent, countries that have an e perience of and a s stem of democratic governance? Instead of sending our parliamentarians to Brussels or elsewhere in Europe or to other developed countries where naturall the are awe-struck b the infrastructure, and state of the art modern technolog that are at the disposal of their counterparts there, the should, I believe, in the first instance be taken to well-established parliaments in the region where the same results are obtained with less dazzling infrastructure. I suspect that some of the things I have said here are alread happening but it needs to be done in a s stematic wa . Of course, while charting out the wa for such e changes we need first to have established the objectives that we want to attain b so doing. Onl then will such e periences and e changes be enriching. The same polic should be adopted for all other segments of societ . A constant dialogue should be established. So, it s a cross cutting dialogue, that is one at all levels, that we require to move the process forward.

However, as matters stand, and based on my personal experience at the OAU/AU, I find that quite often the decision-makers who participate in the meetings called by the continental organisations seldom come with a mandate from their respective parliaments or cabinets. In such circumstances therefore, the debates are not of the level desired and the decisions taken not as informed and opinionated as one would hope. Obviously then, there is no great compulsion to report back on such decisions! Let's take the issue of health. At the AIDS Summit held in Abuja a few years ago, the leadership decided on a number of issues, and actions that could easily be implemented. Well, if a survey is carried out on the actual implementation of those decisions by our countries, one would be surprised, if not dismayed, by the result. The same holds true in the domain of agriculture. A decision had been taken for our countries to commit 15% of the national budget to the agricultural sector. And of course, a few years later, we are hardly there! Yet, we keep on doing the same thing over and over again. I repeat what I said earlier, that is, there should be put in place a mechanism to monitor the degree of implementation of our decisions and, eventually, a system of sanctions against Member States that renege on their undertakings. We simply have got to be more serious!

So, is it a lack of political will or the fact that we just do not follow through on our actions?

Ambassador Makhan: It's all of that! We decide but we don't follow through! It is unimaginable that to the extent that some of the decisions taken could have such a positive impact nationally, we just do not embark on their implementation. I believe that in the first instance one should gauge the consequences of decisions one is expected to take during such conferences. Unless one is ready to translate those decisions concretely at the national level, it would be of no use to simply approve them at the continental level. I am of the opinion that we should refrain from taking

decisions on matters of that nature unless we have debated them thoroughly at the national level, at parliament or cabinet level, and agreed on the positions to adopt. But very few of our countries have that practice with the consequence that I have just described. So then the whole process gets slowed down, because there is an absence of conviction in our undertakings. This state of affairs, unfortunately, can easily be seen in our quest of integration, in practically every region of the continent. As an example, within the COMESA, the Free Trade Area of that particular REC was launched a few years ago. So far only about 9 or 10 countries are on board out of 20 Member States. And as I said earlier, the COMESA is now endeavouring to establish a Customs Union because the Treaty stipulates that there shall be such a Union some years after the launch of the FTA. Ideally and pragmatically, one should first have ensured that all Member States are on board within the FTA. It will not be easy under such parameters to make the system fruitfully operational.

We have to be pragmatic in our approach. I grant that one should try to follow, as far as possible, the provisions of the Treaty that governs the institution but, on the other hand, one has to take account of the reality on the ground and adjust accordingly without in any way putting into question the ultimate objective. One needs to understand why the other Member States have not joined the FTA, and try to address their concerns, whatever those might be. That is how we should operate. Mind you, I am not saying that we should put everything on hold until everyone is ready. But such fundamental hitches have to be addressed. It is only in this manner that we can build the common space that we long for. Countries should not feel left out and, more importantly, feel uncomfortable in that process.

As I said, we cannot wait indefinitely for others. But I certainly agree with those who say that we have to move in a mode of variable geometry as we call it. So, if it's possible for a group of countries to move forward, then by all means, those countries should move. But then it should be done in such a way as to make it possible for others to follow in as smooth a manner as possible. Surely the mechanism for such a course exists. What is required is the necessary conviction and political will. This argument may appear in contradiction with what I have stated earlier, but it is not an issue of "one size fits all". One will have to determine under what circumstances one could proceed and under which others, one should put the process on hold.

I believe some will state that this is easier said than done! But, as the saying goes, "Every single journey begins with a first step." So, let's take that first step, then move on to the next step and keep on moving. In this case, the first step is our decision for integration. The second step, naturally, is the implementation. The unfortunate prevailing situation, however, is there seems to be no commonality of purpose, no cohesion in the direction we should take. Some want to move left, some right, some want to mark time, while others want to move backwards. Here again, I believe, it all boils down to a question of leadership. If the leader is not competent, or is not engaged enough, then, there is not much that is going to happen. I wonder how many of our leaders do really think regionally while taking decisions nationally. I am not inventing anything. As has been said, one should "Think Global Act Local!" Indeed, think regional act national! Think continental act regional! It's all incremental. Moving in such a manner will surely bring us dividends!

With regards to Africa s slo pace to ards integration, if e look at the experience of the EU, it appears they also took their time. So, ho different is our cautious behaviour from theirs?

Ambassador Makhan: Well, 40 ears is a long time in an indi id al s life b t a relati el short one in a co ntr s or a continent s e istence! v s in the case of the indi id al ho needs to ha e a goal in life, a co ntr needs to ha e a ision and similarl o r continent req ires sharing a ision. The ision for o r continent has been de eloped. It is one of an integrated space in the larger interest of o r peoples. For v frican co ntries more than for the E ropean co ntries, regional integration is matter of s r i al in a globalising orld, d e to the differences in the si e and strength of the economies. That is the thr st of the v b ja Treat the p tting in place of an v frican Economic Comm nit (v EC) in time.

v n appropriate plan of action had been elaborated to translate that ision concretel . No , ith respect to hat is happening in the EU, and ho e relate to that, one has to admit that despite n mero s differences ithin the EU, their Member States ha e ne er lost sight of their ltimate objecti e, that is, the creation of a common space. The are e panding and are adj sting as the mo e along to address nforeseen circ mstances. v nd the ill to do so pre ails. Sadl , in o r case, there seems to be a lack of commitment. We are al a s at a le el of nfinished b siness. In s ch a sit ation it is hardl s rprising that there appears to be little or no progress in o r endea o r. Let me elaborate.

D ring the ears of m ten re of office at o r premier continental organisation, the practice had been established at the le el of the Co ncil and of the v ssembl of Heads of State and Go ernment to transform their reg lar sessions into sessions of the v EC hen iss es pertaining to the implementation of the v b ja Treat ere to be addressed. Within that format, appropriate disc ssions ere held and decisions taken to ad ance the ca se of integration. Indeed, at the end of these sessions, decrees ere solemnl signed b the Chairs of the Co ncil and the v ssembl thereb gi ing legal a thorit to the decisions taken. These decrees ere thereafter p blished b the Secretariat in an Official Jo rnal, as stip lated in the Treat . From hat I no gather, since 2003 ith the la nch of the v frican Union and the setting p of the v U Commission, this practice has been abandoned.

I am a are that Special S mmits of the v U ha e been con ened to deliberate on some iss es pertaining to integration. Ho e er, the E ec ti e Co ncil and the v ssembl do not go into the mode of the v EC and progress or rather lack thereof in the field of integration is not addressed in a holistic manner, as sed to happen. Similarl in the ears referred to earlier, the c rrent political Heads of Regional Economic Comm nities sed to report progress in their respecti e regions on matters relating to integration to their peers d ring the v EC sessions. This does not seem to be the case an more. Doesn t this, therefore, demonstrate a lack of commitment on the part of o r leadership and also a eakness at the le el of the Commission? Yet, there are countries on our continent that could take the lead and pull the rest towards our declared goal. The Commission of the AU should be empowered to develop yearly business plans to move the continent forward and they need to be held accountable for their actions or inaction! The institution, that is the Commission, simply has to be vitalised and

gi en the means and resources to perform. Otherwise we will continue to lament lack of progress eternally! The crux of the matter is that we go on singing the praise of integration, its numerous ad antages without taking the actions that are required for mo ement towards that end!

Let me also draw attention to a fundamental difference between the EU and the AU in the perspecti e of integration. The EU embarked on its journey of creating an integrated space with an incremental form of membership, that is, they started way back in 1957 as a three-member organisation limited to cooperation in the field of coal and gradually expanded to six to nine to twel e to fifteen up to their present day membership, encompassing practically all aspects of statecraft.

We, at the OAU/AU, delved into that venture with our entire membership, that is, the fifty-three countries. Of course, we are supposed to proceed from the level of the RECs, using them as building blocs to converge into the AEC. I have already expounded on the obstacles that are strewn along our path. The EU also has its share of worries but the political will to move ahead exists and their institutions are solid and respected!

In your book, you note that a consensus exists on integration but then you say that it's in a vacuum and you use the analogy that the policy ship is afloat but that all attention is just to keep it afloat ith no one paying attention to the destination or the direction of the ship. Can you please elaborate?

Ambassador Makhan: That's right, there is a strategy vacuum. The regrettable situation is that in practically all of our countries, any government official when asked the question: 'do you think integration is a good thing for our advancement and effective participation in the global economy?' will invariably answer positively. And the next question: 'what do we do about it?' draws the answer: "Oh, we've got to talk about it and see how to go about it!" Thus we go on talking year after year after year, with practically little to show as progress. We are still talking!

The book you refer to was launched here ten years ago. Doesn't the situation as it exists today confirm that we have kept the policy ship afloat but have not given it any sense of direction? For while some of us are saying let us create the United States of Africa, others are saying wait a minute, let's create the African Union Government instead, and yet others are saying no, no, no, let's create something regionally. So, there is a complete absence of direction! And the destination is nowhere in sight!

The waters remain uncharted. We are yet to determine and agree on the best course to take to reach that destination. The risk of floundering is great! That is why I titled my book and I find that that title aptly translated the prevailing situation then and unfortunately is still descriptive of the present situation: 'Policy Consensus, Strategy Vacuum.'

So, here are e going, do e kno ?

Ambassador Makhan: I still believe that the answer to that remains the course traced in the Abuja Treaty. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Maybe, all that we need to do is to fine-tune whatever is required to make it more responsive to the present circumstances. Take the Specialised Technical Committees provided for under the Abuja Treaty. These are the same that are catered for in the

Constitutive Act. But ver little has been done, apart for a couple of them that too partiall to operationalise them. Yet, the Constitutive Act was adopted with a view to accelerating the process of implementation of the Abuja Treat . It was felt that 34 ears was too long a period. Now, in these four ears, since the advent of the African Union, what have we achieved? We have, granted, set up the Pan-African Parliament. As I have stated earlier, in fact, the basis on which the Parliament was set up was on the premise of the Abuja Treat . But the Abuja Treat provides for a number of steps that have to be taken to move forward. Again, put the question to an African citizen as to his/her awareness of the e istence of such a Parliament. Hardly a handful of them can claim to know of its existence and its objectives! Yet, the Parliament exists since 2004! What are its attributes? No one knows. Who do the parliamentarians who sit therein represent?

The people or their national parliaments? And let me just underscore the fact I stated earlier, that is, not all our countries conduct democratic elections! What issues of concern to our peoples have they debated since they have been sitting? How many advisory opinions have they emitted? What advocacy role have they played? In the final analysis, are they indeed accountable? What has been the impact of the Pan-African Parliament on the lives of the citizens of our continent? What influence does it wield, if any at all? Now, it all boils down to the point I was making earlier and I will not tire in driving the point forward: Do you go about setting up institutions and organs of the African Union simply on account of the fact that they are provided for in the Act? Or do you set them up as you progress on the road to integration and as the circumstances demand? I grant you that one needs to be ambitious. But then, one has to have the means of such ambition. While it is commendable to be ambitious, one needs to have the commensurate resources to attain the objective of that ambition, failing which it will remain but an unattainable dream. While we need not forsake our dream, we have nonetheless to cut our cloth according to our size! What I mean is that we have to remain realistic. One just cannot embark on a journey strewn with multiple unknown obstacles without first adequately planning that journey to ensure that one reaches one's final destination with as few mishaps as possible.

The vision for an integrated Africa, both on the political and economic fronts is a lofty ideal. What form it is given and it takes is equally important. But surely this cannot happen overnight. The quicker we accept this fact, the better we will be armed in our endeavour to reach our objective. I cannot tire in repeating that we need at all times to focus on the fact that the ultimate beneficiaries of our collective enterprise are our peoples and they need to be associated in that enterprise.

Care must be exercised that we do not fall into the trap of doing things simply to emulate others who are following a certain path at a given pace dictated by their particular circumstances. Our actions must be based on well-calculated and properly researched strategies. And such strategies have to respond to the aspirations of our peoples, and the aspirations themselves based on the vision developed for their advancement. There is no other way!

As you crisply conclude in your book, Africans have to make this place one that they want and only then can we expect FDI and find ways to stem the brain drain.

Ambassador Makhan: Precisely. We should use that e perience as a learning ground to be able to integrate into the global economy efficiently. Our policies need to be harmonised and they need to be people-oriented. We should resist the dumping of prescriptive solutions churned out from outside of the continent. Any reform we carry out has to have a human dimension to it otherwise we shall only succeed to e acerbate the situation. The social aspect has to be paid heed to. I simply cannot agree with those who say that we do not have the means or the capacity to do that. What truly bothers me is the fact that some of our countries which are naturally rich, that is, they are well-endowed with natural resources, are yet not in a position to take off. If one probes this further, one finds that the policies adopted have not been the correct ones. Too often, our countries allow themselves to be used as laboratories for the e perimenting of policies brought in from outside. It pains me to see a country that has its oil wells e ploited by foreign multinationals suffering from social unrest regularly on account of its citizens having to queue up from morning to sundown to be able to fill up their vehicles! Isn t that a parado ? The same is true for water-laden countries. The distribution remains poor and inadequate.

In situations such as you note above, ould you agree that the continental body – AU needs to play an active role in ensuring citizens get a decent share of the national pie?

Ambassador Makhan: I could not agree more with you. But for that to happen, there are three things that need to be done. First, there needs to be agreement on the role that the Organisation, that is the AU, is e pected to play on the continental and international scene. Once this has been determined, then the necessary means have to be given to it to enable it perform that role to satisfaction. By means, I am talking, not only about the financial resources, but, the human resources as well, with a heavy premium on the quality of people who assume responsibility at the AU. And thirdly, and more importantly, our countries need to consent to part with some of their sovereign rights and vest those in the Commission. This can be done in an incremental manner. That way, the AU will be able to assume its role fully and be able to take initiatives in the larger interest of the continent. Already, in the aftermath of the adoption of the Declaration relating to unconstitutional changes of governments, the AU is empowered to initiate action immediately to suspend from membership any Member State where such an unconstitutional change has taken place. A recent case in point is Mauritania, which was suspended from the AU following the coup that took place there in August 2005. But that is not the end of it all.

The AU has the responsibility of doing everything that is necessary to bring such a Member State back within the democratic fold. I had the privilege of facilitating the return of Mauritania to constitutional governance in my capacity as Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission to that Republic. I believe, however, that the time has come for the AU to go beyond merely reacting after such an event. We have to be able to intervene to prevent the deterioration of any such situation and issue the right kind of warning to the authorities of the country at risk well in time. The fact that a government may be in place democratically, does not give it a license to abuse its authority and make life unbearable for its people. The role of the AU Commission in the particular case of Mauritania has been applauded but not ventilated enough. This is a

success story that needs to be told so that our peoples and governments alike take stock of what the AU Commission can achieve given the means and the necessary empowerment. The leadership role to mediate and facilitate the return of Mauritania to a constitutional government was left to the AU by the international community which, of course, lent all its support to that endeavour.

The AU condemns, as a matter of principle, any form of forceful change of leadership in Member States. What as the rationale for the AU to send a Special Envoy to supervise the transition process in Mauritania and hat is the AU's contribution to the restoration of democracy in this country?

Ambassador Makhan: The forceful change of leadership is not consistent with the principles of democracy and good governance, which are critical to meeting the challenges of development. Hence the AU has zero tolerance for forceful change of leadership as evident by the suspension from the Organisation of countries whose leaders assume power by force. Experience has shown that leaders who take power by force are often worse in terms of performance than the leaders they overthrow. Only leaders that assume power through free and fair elections have an obligation to be accountable to the people.The rationale for the AU to send a Special Envoy to facilitate and supervise the transition process in Mauritania is obvious. Peace and security is a public regional good. Political instability in any Member State has development implications not only for the country but also for its region as well as the entire continent.

The complexity of the crisis in Mauritania was such that the Chairperson of the Commission of the AU felt it imperative and expedient to appoint somebody from outside of the region who would easily be acceptable to all the parties, to mediate and supervise the resolution of the crisis. Through the mediation process that I had the honour and privilege of supervising as its Special Envoy, the AU was able to make a significant contribution to the restoration of democracy in Mauritania. The task was not easy but it was facilitated by the fact that through my person, the AU was constantly by the side of all stakeholders – the government, the political parties, and the Civil Society Organisations – and offering advice and guidance on the way forward. Besides, the international community looked up to the AU for leadership during the entire transition process that culminated in the return of Mauritania to the democratic fold.

I firmly believe that the success of the Mauritanian experience needs to be flagged more vigorously, and let it be known that Africa has the capability of finding its own solutions to its problems, given the chance and the means to do so. Indeed, the AU can pride itself in the fact that, although it had immediately suspended Mauritania following the coup d'état of August 3, 2005 as per its decision on unconstitutional changes of government, it made it a point to be by the side of the country and, by extension, its people, throughout its arduous task of reverting to the constitutional path. Indeed, a success story to be told.

An increasing number of African countries are holding elections to choose their leaders. Ho ever, elections are not necessarily a guarantee of real democracy. Ho meaningful as the role of the OAU/AU during your tenure in assisting its member countries to improve their electoral and democratization processes?

Ambassador Makhan: It is absolutel true that elections are not necessaril a guarantee of democrac an where in the world, especiall in most African countries where the electorate is largel uneducated and poor, the mass media, the civil societ , and the judiciar are too weak in their oversight role to ensure free and fair elections, and where sitting governments use their powers of incumbenc to "rig" elections and perpetuate themselves in office. Quite often, the groundwork for the rigging of elections had been perfected before the dates of the elections. In such a situation, there is very little that an Organisation like OAU/AU could do to ensure that elections contribute to the attainment of real democracy.

In an attempt to ensure fair and transparent elections in Member States, the OAU/AU has been sending observer teams to observe and monitor their elections. The effectiveness of this mechanism has been hindered by a number of factors. First, the inadequacy of resources has meant that sufficient numbers of observers/ monitors could not be sent to the countries concerned. Second, they are usually dispatched practically on the eve of elections when the critical elements of the process such as registration of voters, media coverage of campaigns, etc, which could have implications on the outcomes of the elections had been virtually completed. Also, especially under the OAU, the strict adherence to the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Member States meant that the Organisation was reluctant to issue adverse reports on elections even in cases where it was obvious that the process was not free and fair.

Under the AU, it is expected that the building of the capacity of the civil society, the mass media, and the judiciary as well as the implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) will help Member States to improve their electoral and democratisation processes. Indeed, the increasing number of sitting Heads of State and Government who have espoused democratic systems for their countries and accepted the outcome of popular elections in recent years gives room for optimism about the future of democracy in Africa. Moreover, the principle of non-indifference is now firmly enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union and relevant Conventions relating to democracy and good governance have been adopted.

What would you consider your major achievements at the OAU, then at the AU? What would you have done differently, if you were to revisit your tenure?

Ambassador Makhan: As Assistant Secretary-General of the OAU in charge of the Department of Economic Development and Cooperation (EDECO), I had responsibility for initiating the economic integration and development programmes and policies of the Organisation for the consideration and approval of its policy organs as well as for the implementation of the approved programmes and policies. For a brief period during my tenure as Assistant Secretary General at the OAU, I was in charge of its Departments of Administration and Finance, which had just been merged. As AU Interim Commissioner for Community Affairs, my portfolio included not only the economic development and integration matters of the previous OAU EDECO Department but also social development affairs.

Performance under both the OAU and the AU was hindered by institutional, financial and human capacity constraints. As Assistant Secretary-General/Interim Commissioner, one

had to operate like an Army General, with a limited power to shape and execute his war strategy and with inadequate and ill-equipped soldiers. For example, the EDECO Department which had responsibility for the promotion of regional integration in Africa, including the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, and coordination and harmonisation of programmes and policies at continental level in many areas such as intra-African trade, Africa's trade and economic relations with the rest of the world, the development of infrastructure (energy, transport, communication, etc) had fewer than 10 professional staff. There were some key issues of great relevance to the promotion of continental integration and development, which had not even one professional staff to cover them!

The above-mentioned constraints not-withstanding, there were some achievements under my watch that are worth mentioning. A major one was the initiative for the building of the trade negotiating capacity of African countries and the effective mobilisation of African Trade Ministers and Senior Trade Officials to speak with one voice in international trade negotiations. Realising the importance of the outcomes of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, the Economic Partnership Agreement and the WTO negotiations for meeting the challenges of development; the issues of capacity building in trade negotiations and the unity of Africa in the negotiations were brought by my Department to the attention of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU, which at its Ouagadougou Summit, directed the Secretariat to establish a Panel of African Experts to provide technical support to African negotiators and to ensure that Africa speaks with one voice in those negotiations. The Panel, which I constituted and for whose activities I mobilised resources, made a significant contribution to the high quality of Africa's position in the negotiations on the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

It is to be noted that the OAU/AU, not being a member of such Organisations, cannot take the floor at the meetings of the ACP/EU and the WTO. However, in OAU/AU meetings, which were held in preparation and on the margins of the meetings of these organisations, I was able to mobilise African negotiators to speak with one voice. This was particularly so during the Seattle and the Cancun WTO negotiations where the African Group's insistence that "no agreement is better than a bad agreement that does not take account of Africa's interests" contributed to the collapse of the talks and subsequent change in the attitude of major players and the adoption of the Doha Declaration. Within the context of the negotiations, the African Union was instrumental to the building of a strategic alliance among the African, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and the African Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) Groups. I must here recount how, in Cancun, the so-called Group of 90 (G90) was born. As leader of the AU Commission delegation to the Seattle Meeting, I had organised for the African Group to meet one morning at 9.00 am to look at the African Common Position and compare it with that of the ACP Group as well as that of the Group of Least Developed Countries for an eventual harmonisation of positions. To our surprise the organisers of the meeting decided to fix the meetings of the ACP and the LDCs at the same hour. It should be remembered that most of the African states also belong to the two other groups. Obviously, if the three meetings were to be held at the same time, the African

members would have been divided among the three meetings, thereby defeating the purpose of the meeting. I immediately consulted with the Chairpersons of the three Groups explaining the situation to them. I further explained that, having gone through the texts of the three Groups, I had found very little that separated them and that we could easily harmonise the positions at a joint meeting, which was, in fact, what we did. When we came out fifteen minutes later with a common position of all three Groups, the word had spread that a new group had been formed which was given the name G90.

Although the Doha Round of the WTO negotiations is yet to be concluded, it is expected that the outcome for Africa cannot be as unfavourable as the Uruguay Round. Africa has achieved significant improvement both in its negotiating position and bargaining power.

The publication of the AEC Newsletter was another major achievement during my tenure as OAU Assistant Secretary General in charge of the EDECO Department. The Newsletter served as a medium for providing information to Member States, Development Partners and Research Institutions on the African Economic Community. It contributed to a greater understanding of the process of Africa's integration.

Further, in my capacity as Assistant Secretary General in charge of Administration and Finance, I initiated a process of improvement of the administrative and financial procedures of the Organisation and implemented a programme for the uplifting of the premises of the General Secretariat. If confronted with the same set of constraints, I am not sure that there are things that with hindsight I would have done differently during my tenure at the OAU/AU. Perhaps the building of the analytical capacity of the staff of my Departments through training and the strengthening of the linkages of the continental Organisation with the RECs would be given more priority.

The AU, as its predecessor the OAU, faces chronic funding challenges. What in your opinion are the reforms required to enable the AU achieve a long-term financial sustainability? What happened to the financial strategy that was developed during your interim assignment?

Ambassador Makhan: An organisation could have a well-defined mandate and a clear vision and mission and yet perform poorly because it lacks the financial resources to implement the mandate and fulfil the vision and mission it has set for itself. The perceptible gap between mandates/objectives and achievements of the OAU and now the AU has been due largely to the chronic inadequacy of funding, which you referred to. The availability of resources (both human and financial) is a critical determinant of the success of any organisation. With a mandate that is broader than that of its predecessor, the AU faces a daunting funding challenge.The AU, like the OAU before it, is heavily dependent on Member States' assessed contributions for its funding. This source has proved to be grossly inadequate for the funding of the Organisation. Assessed contributions are hardly sufficient to cover administrative costs, thus forcing the Organisation to rely much on donors for the financing of its programmes and projects, with the adverse implications of donor conditionalities for ownership.

Assessed contributions, which are determined by the Member States, have been set at

relatively low levels and often not paid as and when due. Many Member States fall into arrears with the payment of their contributions. The low level assessed contributions and the arrears of payment have often been attributed to the prevalence of poverty in Member States. However, I do not believe that there is any African country that is so poor that it cannot make a fair contribution to the adequate financing and to the success of the premier continental Organisation to which it belongs. What has been lacking has been the political will on the part of the Member States to put their money where their mouth is.

The irony of the situation is that some of the countries that are in arrears in the payment of contributions to the AU meet their financial obligations to other international organisations without delay. Part of the problem in the failure of Member States to meet their financial obligations to the OAU/AU can be ascribed to the fact that agreed sanctions against payment defaulters are hardly implemented by the Organisation, though, of late, I understand that that situation has changed for the better. The failure of Member States to make adequate contributions to the financing of the OAU/AU may also be linked to the widespread perception that the Organisation is irrelevant to solving the pressing problems of poverty in the Member States, that there is very little to show for the limited contributions made to it, and that both the administrative and the financial management of the Organisation are inefficient. A major challenge facing the AU is to put in place appropriate measures to improve its performance and change the negative perception of its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency as a development institution. During my tenure as Assistant Secretary General/Interim Commissioner, I tried my best, with a certain degree of success, to improve the internal administrative and financial procedures of the Organisation and to sensitise the Member States on the relevance of its programmes to their development. If the Member States are to claim ownership of the AU and its programmes, their assessed contributions must be an important source of the funding. However, the long-term financial sustainability of the Organisation will depend on its ability to mobilise its own sources of financing, independent of the assessed contributions of the Member States. Again, while I was still with the OAU/AU, some ideas on alternative sources of financing the Organisation were generated. Such alternative sources include a small community levy or tax to be imposed on imports into Africa from the rest of the world, a tax on air travel to and from Africa, and a continental value added tax. These proposals are still on the table and are receiving, so I am told, the attention of the various organs of the Organisation. What is required to move from the level of idea to that of implementation and reality is the mustering of the necessary political will.

Thanks for another day of insightful dialogue. Tomorrow, we can focus on the issue of partners and conflict. I will also interrogate our conversation over the past two days for issues that require follow-up.

Ambassador Makhan: No problem. We can surely do that. But, let me say to wrap up our dialogue that as long as we do not address the issue of conflicts comprehensively and rid our countries of those pockets of tension that erupt into bloody confrontations every so now and again, there is not much that we can achieve. As I have said in my book, referred to earlier, without peace there can be no development and without development peace cannot be durable! How can we go about talking about a

United States of Africa and at the same time wage war with each other on our frontiers? We should be concentrating our efforts on creating the right kind of environment to facilitate the kind of integration we aspire for. Let us get on with creating the necessary infrastructure that we have been dreaming of for years Cape to Cairo! Let us speedily implement the NEPAD Infrastructure programme.

There is so much that can be achieved, given the right kind of mindset. Couldn't we for example develop a common policy on fisheries and sharpen, through appropriate sharing of experiences, our negotiations with say the EU regarding the fisheries agreements that we sign with them individually? Isn't it high time for the setting up of an African Fisheries Commission under the aegis of the AU Commission? The same goes for air transportation. Isn't it high time for our national airlines to pool their resources and chart out a policy of cooperation to maximise benefits in that domain while at the same time ensuring a proper and efficient air communications system? All of this boils down to a question of commitment with a good dose of mutual trust. Earlier in this dialogue, I spoke of the African Union Games. This is a doable event. We have the expertise onshore to do that. Another doable endeavour would be the introduction of an African Union Passport, as suggested by the current Chairperson of the AU Commission. An AU passport with the identity of the issuing Member State thereon to identify the country of citizenship of the holder. Anyone holding such a travel document should thus be entitled to a visa-free entry into any of the Member States of the AU, say, for a stay of up to three months. These are some of the easier things that one could envisage as initial steps on the journey to a meaningful integration.

Leafing through my notes from the past t o days, an issue that appears left out of our discussion is the role Africans in the Diaspora can play in the continent's effort to integrate?

Ambassador Makhan: Well, to tell you frankly, I am not too comfortable with this issue of diaspora because the so-called diaspora isn't an organised entity and, therefore, doesn't react as one. What is diaspora to start with? Are we talking of the descendants of our people who had been forcefully taken away from the continent under the conditions that we all know, globalising the world in those days? Are we talking about the descendants of those who call themselves Afro-Africans/African-Americans? Because the moment one refers to the diaspora, people think of those who are in the United States of America. But, there are also others elsewhere – Australia, India, European countries and throughout the world.

So, how does one go about organising the diaspora? The last time I think the AU tried a meeting of the diaspora, it was held in Dakar, Senegal. There, you had mostly the people from across the Atlantic who came. But, the issue is, are they really concerned about the continent and its problems? Do they have the same reading as we do of the problems besetting our continent? My encounter with those in the so-called diaspora that I have met during my days at the OAU/AU does not give me room for comfort. I may be wrong and there may be some in the diaspora who are concerned and prepared to help, but I am yet to see a clear manifestation of that.

And, if diaspora means only those who have left the continent since independence, and, therefore, have identifiable links with their countries of origin, that would probably be different. But even there, I am not sure whether

the connection is deep enough for any meaningful action on their part. Otherwise those of our brothers and sisters who constitute this kind of diaspora could have organised themselves into powerful lobby groups in the countries of their adoption and got the governments there to really develop and adopt policies towards Africa, based on norms of irreproachable partnership.

How many of our brothers and sisters in the diaspora would truly be prepared to come back to their countries of origin and put the expertise they have acquired abroad to the service of the continent, and obviously for remunerations that can hardly stand up to the kind of income they derive in the countries of their adoption? But then, to be fair, how many of our own people at home would welcome them and allow them to put their expertise to contribution should they decide to so do? Wouldn't they be subjected to negative vibrations and be regarded as people who had left the country when most needed and who now had come back to occupy positions at the expense of those who stayed behind to struggle it out? The question also is how does one go about organising the diaspora?

The latter have been categorised as the sixth region of the continent. I personally do not subscribe to that notion. I think it is not something that truly can be upheld, if what we are aiming for is a reversal of brain drain. I do not believe in applying pressure on the diaspora to make them feel obligated in any way to the continent. If anything, it has to be natural. Our brothers and sisters who find themselves in a comfortable life in their countries of adoption should not be pressurised into action for the continent. It has to be left to them. They should not be made to feel guilty about having left the continent for greener pastures abroad.

I believe that their engagement in favour of the continent has to be spontaneous and natural and not imposed. I am sure that from an individual perspective, there are quite a number who would be willing to contribute towards the advancement of their less fortunate brethren on the continent. We should leave it at that. I just do not see how one can institutionalise the diaspora. My scepticism on this notwithstanding, I am informed that some of our countries have started putting in place the regulatory framework necessary, for mobilising the skills and resources that may be available in the diaspora. However, there are no data at this point, to which I could refer to give an informed opinion on its workability. One will have to monitor the situation over a certain period of time to see if this development will really make a significant contribution to capacity building in the countries concerned.

Taking a cue from the above, ho do you envisage Africa's capacity gaps being addressed?

Ambassador Makhan: During the Second Pan African Capacity Building Forum that was organised recently by the ACBF in Maputo, I had the opportunity of talking about various forms of capacity building. Definitely, our continent needs to develop capacity in many sectors and fields. One requires, in the first instance, to determine the areas of weakness in our countries, that is, where capacity is lacking. Then, ascertain whether that capacity is available in any of our Member States. Once identified, with the right kind of commitment, it should not be difficult to organise the transfer of such capacity to those in need.

Where such capacity is not available amongst us, then, of course, one can look elsewhere.

B t it needs to be demand-driven and not thr st pon s. At the ACBF For m in Map to and before then at its first For m in Bamako, Mali, I emphaticall made the point that o r co ntries need to develop the capacit to sa "no". We just cannot accept whatever is brought our way in the name of cooperation or assistance from our partners, when there is no need or demand for such assistance. Across Africa, one can see examples of such unneeded assistance. That is why I insist we should only go for capacity building to fill those areas where we are in deficit and which are of priority to us. From that perspective maybe one can solicit from the diaspora but based on the premises that I have described earlier.

Let us cooperate among ourselves first, look at what is available on the continent before seeking assistance from across our shores. In my opinion, the best thing would be for our institutions – regional and continental – to develop appropriate databases and register our available expertise for the benefit of our Member States. We should also facilitate the mobility of skills between our countries.

Another issue that I'd like you to expand upon is the point you make that hat is needed is just not the political ill, but also a bottom-up approach to doing things. And ho do e get Africans in non-democratic states to participate?

Ambassador Makhan: It will not be that easy, unless the powers that be in those States are prepared to change the setup. Here again, I believe the civil society has an important role to play. There is need to organise all non-state actors who are concerned about the welfare of our peoples and who wish to participate in nation building. They need to be given space to have their voices heard. Otherwise, there will come a time when power from the street will prevail. Such situations as we have witnessed in certain countries of East Europe and Asia as well, may very well occur in our countries if we do not give our peoples the chance to air their concerns. Hence, the absolute need to listen to what the street is saying. Not listening to the voice of the people can only lead to dire consequences for the leadership. Some of our countries have to carry out a sort of self-assessment and determine whether they are on the right track, and adjust accordingly before it is too late for them. At the continental level, I am pleased to say that as early as 1990, in the aftermath of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, our Heads of State and Government congregated in Cairo and issued a Declaration on what Africa should do having regard to the changing circumstances of the world. The issue of good governance featured very prominently in that Declaration and if one looks at that document carefully, one would see that the leadership had rightly decided that time had come for the Africans to take their destiny in their own hands. In such a given strategy, to ensure progress, one needs to allow for a bottom-top approach as well. I sincerely believe that progress has been registered on that score, for as can be gauged, there are now fewer and fewer coups on the continent. It is a new ball game altogether. I referred to the case of Mauritania earlier. Now, that was a peculiar situation. The people did not quite come out on the street to demonstrate their frustration against the regime that then held sway. But when it was toppled, unsurprisingly they welcomed the change, because the ousted government had lost all touch with the people. I hasten to add though that there is no good coup or bad coup. A coup is a coup and remains condemnable! The best course would have been a change through the ballot box. That presupposes that

the democratic parameters exist for such change! Such parameters have now been catered for in the Constitution of Mauritania, adopted as a result of wide-ranging consultations in the country.

So, all this leads me to believe that we are on the right track as far as political governance is concerned. We are not there yet but we are on the right track. On the economic governance level as well, we need to register progress. All of our countries should adhere to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is an instrument of good governance. One of the greatest scourges that gnaw our countries is corruption. Unless we address this matter assiduously, we will not be able to progress significantly. I grant, however, that where there is a corrupt person there is also a corruptor. Both must, therefore, be dealt with as severely as possible. Those of our partners who preach to us about corruption should ensure that they deal with the corruptors equally.

Incidentally, I am reliably informed by African linguists that the word corruption does not exist in any of the African languages. Of course, that in no way absolves us from our responsibility to rid ourselves of that malady. But what we don't need is to be pontificated on that issue by those who have themselves been found wanting on that score. I need not elaborate further thereon. And let us not hide behind varying perceptions of corruption! Corruption is corruption, whichever form it takes!

What do you consider the major political governance challenges in Africa? Can the AU realistically address them even within the context of the African Peer Review Mechanism?

Ambassador Makhan: The major political governance challenges in Africa include the often–mentioned ones of the lack of transparency and efficiency in governance, accountability, rule of law and respect for human rights. Poverty in the continent, in the midst of the richness of natural resources, can be ascribed, to a large extent, to the poor quality of its leadership and bad governance. Bad governance is reflected in the lack of accountability and transparency in the management of resources and the resultant widespread corruption and deepening of poverty. Bad governance is also the product of the inadequacy of relevant institutional and human capacities. All arms of government – the Executive, the Legislative and the Judiciary – must have the capacity that is necessary for the efficient and effective performance and delivery of their services. Non-government actors including the civil society and the private sector have a role to play in meeting the challenges of political governance. Some Organs of the African Union such as the African Court of Justice, the African Parliament, and the ECOSOCC can also play a role if endowed with some "biting teeth."

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which is a key instrument of the AU, as stated earlier, can assist in addressing the major political governance challenges in Africa. The subscription to the Mechanism by as many as twenty-seven Member States is indicative of their commitment to the principles of good economic and political governance. However, as the experience of African countries with many good initiatives has shown, adoption is not enough. Of critical importance, is the implementation of the initiatives. If the peer review process is carried out by competent and respectable people and Organisations in

an honest and transparent manner, and, the reviewed countries effectively implement the reports and recommendations, the APRM can indeed serve as a major instrument for the attainment of good political and economic governance in Africa.

Given Africa s enormous development and integration challenges, hat ould you consider as priority areas for the continent over the coming five years and hy? What ould you recommend to address them?

Ambassador Makhan: The development and integration challenges confronting Africa are indeed enormous. In spite of the recent improvement in the economic growth performance of many African countries, poverty on the continent is still on the increase and, as indicated in UN Millennium Development Report, Africa runs the risk of not achieving the MDGs by the target date of 2015. I think the main focus of our efforts in the next five years is to put in place measures that will ensure that this prediction does not come true, and, that will prove the sceptics wrong, that Africa is not a doomed continent. My experience at the OAU/AU leaves me in no doubt as to the contributions that regional integration can make to meet the challenges of development in Africa. For too long, however, we have paid lip service to the promotion of regional integration. This is evident from the slow progress posted by the RECs in making integration an important factor in the growth and development of their Member States. The limited progress in the implementation of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community is also indicative of the lack of commitment to the process of regional integration in Africa. I think that, if we are to make any significant indent in our march towards integration in the next five years, we should do things differently. It cannot and should not be business as usual. The issue of the rationalisation of the RECs needs to be speedily addressed and the building of regional infrastructure for greater interconnectivity should go hand in hand with the promotion of the liberalisation of intra-regional trade. There is also an urgent need to engage the peoples of our continent and ensure their full mobilisation in the creation of an integrated Africa.

I had earlier referred to the recent improvement in the growth performance of many African countries. There are two major factors in this development: the policy reforms which are leading to better political and economic governance, and the boom in commodity markets. In the next five years, we must ensure that there is no reversal of the gains in policy reforms and governance. The remaining pockets of conflict and instability on the continent must be addressed so that Africa can soon become a conflict-free zone and can focus only on the issues of development.The commodity boom-induced growth indicates the importance of trade as an engine of growth and development. I think, in the next five years, Africa should put greater efforts into the mainstreaming of trade into development and to improving its share of global trade. This will require the development of an appropriate strategy for export diversification and achievement of greater value addition to our natural resources. It will also require concerted and united efforts to remove the imbalances against Africa in the global trading system. In this regard, ensuring that the outcomes of the current EPA and WTO negotiations take adequate account of the development concerns and interests of Africa must be of great priority.

Although the development and integration challenges facing Africa are enormous, I believe that they can be easily overcome if we are able to muster the political will to implement the necessary measures at the national, regional and continental levels. Given Africa's rich endowment of natural resources, we should position it to be the continent of the future, and remove from it the label of being the weakest link in the global economic chain.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout my involvement with the Continent's development efforts, as articulated in my book referred to a few times in this dialogue, I have been concerned to argue that, in Africa today, there is consensus on major policy issues. But this policy consensus exists in a vacuum as far as the strategic objectives of development are concerned. There has been too much concern about keeping the policy ship afloat and too little attention to commitment to its direction and destination. My goal has been to revisit the pan-African vision for an integrated and prospering region as the destination towards which the policy ship should be steered.

This vision has been given concrete expression in the Abuja Treaty as well as in the instruments that inform the African Union. The challenge is to our development partners who should take advantage of the changing investment climate in Africa and the opportunities that present themselves. We should collectively repudiate the feeling of afro-pessimism that has pervaded the continent. The invitation is to our leadership and to our development partners to pool efforts and in a spirit of genuine partnership predicated on mutual accountability to work for the prosperity of the continent in the larger interest of our peoples.

To that extent, a right policy mix is of the essence. As a leader, one's actions cannot be confined to the local context, that is, at the national level. Bearing in mind that our ultimate objective is integration, we have to be able to talk and to listen to each other. But beyond that, we need to listen to our peoples. And as importantly, commitment to policy is critical. Without the commitment we can go on talking to exhaustion point! Commitment and political will are critical in this endeavour, for without these two elements, the dream of integration will never be fulfilled. Courage of conviction is also another key requirement. If we believe in something then, we should not falter in our steps. We need to forge ahead and, in the long run, the reward will be there. We may not be there to savour the fruits of our labour but generations to come will remember and reap the benefits. The people, I will not tire in repeating, have to be on board. To be able to reach the destination we have fixed for ourselves, all hands must be on board. It cannot be just the leadership. It has to be the leadership and the people. The movement forward should be collective! Everybody should know what the stakes are. We cannot afford to go it alone any longer! Our future lies in integrating Africa, the sooner the better! There is no alternative!

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