

**AFRICAN UNION (AU) REGIONAL INTEGRATION AGENDA AND
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-
REGION: A STUDY OF NIGERIA AND NIGER REPUBLIC**

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ABSTRACT

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was transformed into the African Union (AU) in July year 2002, due to the resolution of African leaders to reposition the continental organization for better performance. This paper examines AU regional integration agenda and socio-economic development in West African sub-Region: a study of Nigeria and Niger Republic. The two countries share a common land boundary which covers over thousand kilometers. Historically speaking, they were both colonial creation of Britain and France respectively which was said to have born out of series of negations, treaties and conquests during the first decade of the 20th Century. By 1960, the two countries got their political independence and have since exchange diplomatic missions and entered into various bilateral relations which border on trade, industry, culture, education and politics with a view to improving the socio-economic and political life of the citizenry. The duo established the Nigeria- Niger Joint Commission for cooperation in March, 1971 as a strategy towards promoting their socio-economic development. However, one of the perceived major problems to effective trade and integration in most Regional Economic Commissions is lack of political will. This is because most countries resist liberalization and tend toward protectionist policies to protect trade. Premised on this fact, how the AU hoped to effectively achieve its integration agenda particularly, as it affects Nigeria and Niger republic remains a serious challenge and a major concern for this paper. Methodologically, the paper adopted qualitative method that uses interview as instrument for data collection and this was supported with documents data. The findings from the results revealed that in terms of the impact of AU regional integration agenda on socio-economic development of Nigeria and Niger republic, there has been a lot of achievements. The two countries are said to be intertwined politically, religiously and socio-culturally and any other forms one can think of. The findings from the results further identified major challenges confronting the AU in the integration of the two countries and Africa at large. These include; lack of political will; limited intra-African trade; funding problem; underdeveloped infrastructure etc. For better performance of the organization and the two countries, the paper recommended among others; the need for strong political will on the part of African leaders to turn policies and resolutions into actions at national levels.

Keywords: African Union, Regional Integration, Agenda, Socio- Economic Development, West Africa, Nigeria and Niger Republic.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Historically speaking, what propel regional integration across countries is distinct. The motivating factors for regionalism particularly between developed and developing nations are not the same. For instance, Africa has adopted regional integration as development strategies since 1960 mainly because of its potential socio-economic benefits. The desires for a reasonable level of political and economic independence, and the high welfare expectations of the people, have been primarily responsible for the creation of regional economic and political organizations on the African continent. The attainment of political independence by many African countries in the 60s gave more force to the desire to create a super-national institution. This was because, leaders in Africa were anxious about multifaceted governance challenges within the continent, particularly, the need to eliminate the remaining part of colonialism so as to promote the principle of self-determination and engender the establishment of truly sovereign states that would be free from all forms of external interference. And also to unite different independence states in Africa as a tool to achieving internally motivated development. The establishment of OAU in 1963 was to promote unity, solidarity and international cooperation among the newly independent African states. The organization did provide both practical resources and political force needed for countries in their struggle against colonization and championed the fight against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Although this was one motivation for the establishment of the OAU, severe limitations and constraints within the organization prevented it from effectively delivering on its mandate, hence, its dissolution and succession by the African Union in 2002 (Abdallah;2002).

The formation of the African Union represents the collective reaction of African leaders to the rapidly changing political, social and economic dynamics in their region. Consequently, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government issued the Sirte Declaration in September 1999. The unanimous decision to transform the OAU to the AU was however taken on 9 September 1999 during the fourth extra ordinary summit meeting of the OAU Assembly of Head of States and Government in Sirte, Libya (Eyinla, 2005). It is informative to note that the defunct OAU (after its '39' years of existence) has been discovered to be institutionally defective to stand the test of the new globalised era. This is particularly true in view of the fact that the problems that prevailed at the formation of the OAU in 1963 had been overtaken by events of the 21st century. Yet the organization still saddled itself with problems like political instability in African states, debt crisis and many other problems. This scenario however, painted a gloomy picture of the organization. To catch up with the prevailing global realities therefore, the African leaders having brainstormed on the way forward in Durban, South Africa in July 2002, denounced the distressed OAU and proclaimed a vibrant, virile and more focused body, the Africa Union (Dayo;2002).

With the establishment of the AU, there were high expectations that the new body would be a force for better change in Africa and an effective instrument for combating Africa's multifaceted challenges in the new millennium. It is believed that the AU would be better funded than its predecessor and would have all that the OAU lacked, including the power to create a common African parliament, a central Bank, a common African Currency and

international Court of Justice. It is hoped that the AU would have the authority to achieve economic and political integration among member states, as well as work towards a common defense, foreign and communication policy: national boundaries would be blurred, armies merged, and a single passport introduced. However, it is six decade after the creation of the OAU and over two decades after the transformation of OAU to the AU, the continent is yet to adequately address its multifaceted developmental challenges. This is in spite of series of research efforts made by researchers in the past. Although, studies of Alemayehu and Edris (2005), Abdulrahman and Abraham (2016), Bakare (2014), Bruce and Jane (2015), Daniel and Eric Evan (2014), Edemealem (2016) and Magret (2002) made significant contribution at addressing regional integration problem in Africa, the shortcoming of their studies is that they took a general perspective of the issue under consideration without limiting the scope to country by country studies. More importantly, it is observed that very few studies have been conducted within the frame work of the present research. Studies of Ibrahim (2015), Iliyasu (2014), and Boureima (2014) examined the impacts of regional integration on Nigeria and Niger development.

However, as important as their studies are, they captured only the economic aspect of integration. To overcome these limitations, this study examines AU regional integration agenda and overall development of Nigeria and Niger republic. The choice of the two West African countries was informed by the need for easy collection of research data. More importantly, the two countries share a long border and have similar colonial experience with existing cultural linkage in the area of languages and customs. To realise this objective, the paper is sub-divided into five sections. Section one introduces and gives the background information. Section two reviews the works of previous scholars in the study area. Section three addresses methodology and theoretical frame work while section four discusses the AU integration agenda and socio-economic development in Nigeria and Niger republic. The concluding part as well as recommendations is contained in section five of the paper.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the African Union regional integration agenda and socio-economic development in West African sub-region with particular reference to Nigeria and Niger republic. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Examine the achievements of AU regional integration agenda on socio-economic development of Nigeria and Niger republic;
- ii. Evaluate the challenges of the AU towards the integration of the two West Africa countries;
- iii. To construct a new framework for Nigeria-Niger regional integration.

1.2 Research Questions

This study answers the following general and specific questions;

- i. What is the impact of the African Union regional integration agenda on socio-economic development of Nigeria and Niger republic?
- ii. What are the challenges of the AU towards the integration of the two countries?

- iii. What could be done to enhance better integration of the two countries for socio-economic development?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the paper focuses on a review of some of the literature that is related to the current research with a view to laying solid scientific foundation for the research work. It need not be repeated that one of the reasons for the transformation of the defunct Organization of African Unity OAU to the African Union AU is the need to reposition Africa, to be able to participate meaningfully and effectively benefit from the current global economic situation like other regions in the world. This is to be achieved through the integration of African economies for socio-economic and political development.

2.1 Empirical Review

On the achievements of the AU towards Africa integration; Bruce and Jan (2015) observed that there exist a long term desire for economic connectedness in Africa. The study emphasised that despite the rhetoric and apparent policy consensus, implementation of related commitment on the part of African leaders lags seriously. The lack of progress towards the free movement between national markets of goods, services, people and capital according to the study is frequently blamed on a combination of lack of political will and capacity. The study took a political economy approach to regional integration as a way of understanding the progress on regional economic integration. It however defines five lenses through which one can better appreciate the progress or not of regional integration process: structural factors, formal and informal institutions, actors and incentives, sectoral characteristics, and external factors. It further asserted that applying the five lenses to the tripartite North-South corridor and the Maputo development corridor, both varying in nature and scope, it has shown how a political-economy understanding can take us beyond “political will and lack of capacity” explanations. Regional integration process is said to be successful when and where these are aligned with and support national political priorities, as shaped by the ways in which political power and settlements are determined in each member country. The study suggests that, in the short term, narrower aspects of the regional integration agenda are more likely to succeed, while formal regional integration processes may do well to build on informal, more functional regional integration in medium to long term.

Abdulrahman and Abraham (2016) undertook a juxtaposition of the African Union and its counterpart, the European Union (EU). The study affirms that the architects of AU undoubtedly relied on the EU template that the two entities are not spatially apart, but temporary fifty (50) years apart. It therefore suggests that African Union have to chart its own rhythm and write its own history. It recognised the established regional integrations as a remedy for Africa’s multifaceted problem. In Alemayehu and Edris (2015) study on the potential for trade and regional integration in Africa, the findings among other things identified the existence of significant potential for intra-Africa trade. The study however pointed out that lacks of complementarities of exports as well as the relative competitive position of African potential export supplies impede this potential and effort to advance regional integration through intra-Africa trade. This is said to be the result of weak infrastructure, productivity and trade facilitation- in short, a cute export supply constraint that characterizes the African export trade.

Therefore, an innovative approach to enhancing intra-Africa trade and deepening regional integration was suggested.

Furthermore, Magaret (2002) research on regionalism in Africa as a solution to AU's strategic action plans towards Africa integration revealed that African governments continue to adopt market integration based on the EU model, believing the strategy will enhance economic growth and development even though it has failed miserably on the continent. The study argued that market integration in Africa has been counterproductive to the regional agenda, and therefore, regionalism as currently practiced in Africa is part of the problem and not its solution. The fact that the strategy does not take into consideration African realities accounted for one of the reasons for its failure according to the study. It however pointed out that rather than market integration, African leaders should adopt a strategy that includes both regional cooperation and regional integration. Such a strategy it is argued is more conducive to African realities, and capable of resulting in Africa's capacity to better co-exist within the weave – world of regionalism and globalization. It further affirmed that although, the implementation of the proposed regional cooperation/ regional integration nexus strategy will not solve Africa's economic problem, it will therefore not be counterproductive to the African regional agenda. The study concluded that regionalism in Africa can certainly be part of the solution rather than the problem if placed within the context of African realities.

As contained in Thomas (2019), one major reason for the transformation of the OAU to the AU was the promotion of intra-Africa trade. The AU was expected to use the treaty of the African Economic Community in promoting intra-Africa trade and to speed up the process of creating an Africa Free Trade zone (AU, 2001). The study however noted that in spite of the fact that the AU inherited a fully negotiated treaty for continental African Economic Community, came with a lofty Free Trade agenda, and could call upon the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for technical support and the African Development Bank (ADB) for financial assistance, the AU has had negligible impact on intra-Africa trade. According to ADB's African Economic Outlook 2017, intra-Africa trade, which the report argued has "the greatest potential for building sustainable economic development and integration" in Africa, grew from just 10% in 2000 to about 16% in 2014 (African Development Bank, 2017). The report further affirmed that trade in manufacturing, the key to any meaningful trade between African countries, declined from 18% to 15% during the period. In fact it was observed that any growth in intra-Africa trade since the AU was established occurred not on the account of the AU

The study of Edemealem (2016) affirmed that achieving political integration in Africa may not be easy. This difficulty is said to be on the account of existence of different grass-root problems. The study emphasised that political integration is all about establishing a single central government which can govern people of a particular region with uniform laws. The existence of various challenges in Africa according to the study has not made the goal of political integration achievable. Yet, there appears to be no genuine ways which can bring Africans for a common goal. The study therefore, recommended that a genuine political integration of Africa can only be achieved if there is a strong political consensus among the African leaders and the people. This is said to be capable of eliminating mistrust and suspicion among Africans.

On the challenges of the AU towards regional integration in Africa; The Study of Daniel and Eric Evans (2014) investigates regionalism and economic integration in Africa from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. It identified that; The rationalists theory of neorealism and neoliberalism; The social construction theory, and Several theories of economic integration are very relevant in explaining the formation of regional and economic blocs in Africa. The study affirms that, economic integration theories that focus on trade, economic interdependency, monetary, fiscal, and political policy coordination seem to be the propeller driving regionalism and economic integration on the continent. It further emphasised that major hindrances to the success of regionalism and economic integration in Africa among others are; transportation and mobility of factors of production, limited intra-African trade, multi-memberships, macroeconomic divergence, and conflicts. These problems notwithstanding, the study stressed that there are opportunities and possibilities in the power and energy sectors, the manufacturing sector, and private-public partnerships that the continent can explore to accelerate Africa's speed of regional and economic integration, crucial for economic growth and development.

Solomon (2002) opined that the establishment of the AU has raised a lot of pertinent questions. One of such according to the author is that is Africa at her current pathetic level of infrastructure and economic development ready for this gigantic project known as AU. The answer is said to be no. This was because from all indications, the AU was described as simply a blind imitation of the European Union which is an outcome of several decades of gradual transformation from a mere economic cooperation outfit. Before attaining the status of a union, each member state of the EU were said to have achieved remarkable development in multidimensional aspects (economic, social, political and scientific). Thus; it is relatively easy for them to even collapse their economies into one since they are already linked up directly with one another by air, road, sea, railways, and even telecommunications. The situation in Africa was said to be different from what is obtainable among the European nations. The level of infrastructural development in Africa is said to be far below the European countries as transnational transportation and telecommunications are limited. Africa must tackle their numerous domestic problems like poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, inflations and the presence of defective economic structure. The socio-economic realities of the African states require that they need to put their houses in order before embarking on a grandiose scheme like the AU otherwise, they will end up integrating poverty at continental level.

The study of Dokubo (2005) explained the transformation of OAU to AU and emphasised that it marks the long awaited turning point for Africa in terms of the quest for economic development in Africa over the years. This transformation according to the author marked a sharp departure from the erstwhile focus of the OAU which was primed to pursue political independent from colonial rule and economic survival for the emerging nation states. The author however expresses reservation over the effective functioning of the organization in meeting the needs of the continent in the globalised world of today. The AU according to him composed of the same set of countries which were not able to pay their annual dues, countries that wallowed in so much IOUS on membership dues, countries that could not make meaningful headways both at home and within the OAU collectively. Audu (2005) opines that the formation of the AU is fundamentally hinged on the most important aspect of economic globalisation, such as breakdown of national economic barriers, the international spread of trade, financial and production activities and growing power of international financial

institutions. He, therefore, submits that the challenges ahead of the AU are a focused new form of political and economic reformations that will engender purposeful national policies

Raji, (2014) opined that, in order to solve the continent's socio-political and economic burdens, African leaders have remained consistent in the task of developing the continent within the paradigms of many internally inspired development strategies, part of which was said to have placed more emphasis on regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration for the socio-economic positive transformation of the region. The author opined that, though the primary focus of most sub-regional development institutions in Africa is tilted towards functional cooperation and integration to promote sustainable development in the continent, current statistics as at the time of the report indicated a partial success of such efforts, especially towards regional integration. For example, intra African exports and imports as of 2010 were 13.6 percent and 11.2 percent respectively as virtually all African countries relied on trading arrangements with their Western trading partners rather than to one another (UNDP, 2011). African project has almost been left in a vacuum because much effort has been concentrated on sub-regional leaning by many African countries. This may not be unconnected with the fact that all the African sub-regional groupings have different needs and aspirations (in spite of the same objective of developing Africa). Each is therefore stressing their peculiar sub-regional development needs to the negligence of other sub-regions. This no doubt is another source of challenge for Africa integration efforts.

In the study of Alemayehu and Edris (2015) on the potential for trade and regional integration in Africa, the findings among other things identified the existence of significant potential for intra-Africa trade. The study however pointed out that lacks of complementarities of exports as well as the relative competitive position of African potential export supplies impede this potential and effort to advance regional integration through intra- Africa trade. This is said to be the result of weak infrastructure, productivity and trade facilitation- in short, a cute export supply constraint that characterizes the African export trade. Therefore, an innovative approach to enhancing intra-Africa trade and deepening regional integration was suggested.

Egiebade (2004) on his own part posited that the transformation of the OAU to the AU constitutes a fundamental and qualitative change that would open a new phase in the history of Africa. The AU according to the author is the inevitable maturation of the idea of Pan-African unity that gave rise to the establishment of the OAU. He however noted that in spite of the transformation of the OAU to the AU coupled with the fact that Africa is said to be richly endowed in terms of natural resources, the continent was and is still the poorest in the world. This according to him is premised on the fact that almost half of the population of Africa still live in absolute poverty. The alarming rate of poverty in the continent constitutes one of the most important challenges the AU is to tackle in the process of globalisation.

In the opinion of Bakare (2014), one of the most daunting problems hindering the effort of African Union in integrating the continent for developmental transformation in line with its motto: "a United and Strong Africa" is the issue of ethnic divisions which was said to be a result of Slavery. The author further stressed that, Nunn (2007:1) attested to this fact when he asserted that 'the largest numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped politically at the end of the 19th century and are the most ethnically fragmented today'. Colonialism in his opinion added salt to injury through the imposition of artificial

boundaries on Africa by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1885 where Africa was partitioned with complete disregard for existing societal and geographic boundaries. Consequently, many Africa countries were disadvantaged through the disruption of established indigenous communication and trade linkages, thus, creating an abnormally large number of landlocked states, and leaving various countries (such as Niger) without natural resources (Sachs, 2005 cited in Bakare, 2014). Throughout the colonial era, Africa was said to have witnessed nothing but political subjugation, economic distortion and human and natural resources exploitation, cultural suppression, ideological domination, and technological stagnation; which led to the underdevelopment of the continent.

In his analysis of the challenges before the AU, Thomas (2019) opined that the AU has been very successful in addressing the needs of the African political class but it is yet to make a significant difference in the lives of many ordinary Africans. The author argued that the AU has created many useful decision-making structures that have contributed to the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts in Africa. More importantly, the organization was said to have socialized African leaders to accept liberal values as the foundation of international cooperation in Africa; enhanced the agency of African political class on the world stage; and established progressive and innovative rules and norms for the African continent. However, it is less successful in connecting its activities and programs to many ordinary Africans; providing common public goods and services valued by commoners in Africa; giving voice to the majority of young people in Africa; promoting intra-Africa trade, good governance, and financial independence of the African continent as well as struggled to address the expressed material needs and quotidian concerns of ordinary Africans. These, the author argued remained a big challenge to the effective realization of the integration agenda of the union.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Economic Development in Africa Report (2019), revealed that the degree of complexity and restrictiveness in rules of origin should consider the levels of product diversification, sophistication and competitiveness in member countries; too restrictive and complex rules of origin at low levels of regional productive capacities can provide incentives to member countries to trade outside the African continental Free Trade Area rather than within. Such incentives it is said may be greater for small and / or low income countries such as LDCs, in which productive capacities and competitiveness levels may be lower. It further emphasizes that the nature of rules of origin that is, how they are designed and their requirements and procedures, and the associated compliance costs affect export performances and more. Rules of origin can, to varying degrees, restrict trade, misdirect investment, inhibit productivity growth and reduce welfare from levels otherwise attainable, depending on how they are been specified. The report however affirmed that, rules of origin have a functional role to play in stimulating the development of regional value chains as well as the participation of downstream and upstream in Africa to achieve the goals of the Abuja treaty.

The study of Mzukisi, (2007) undertook a critical assessment of the validity of the proposition that integration is desirable strategy for overcoming Africa's deep-seated developmental challenges. It noted that effective national growth and development based strategies is required if regional integration must succeed. The study emphasised that wrong priorities accounted for the failure of regional integration efforts in Africa in the past. It also added that non-implementation of commitments which has been traced to lack of focus and willingness by

African leaders to sacrifice narrow nationalistic concern for regional interest. In other words, defending sovereignty has been more important than the real commitment to growth and development which is the means to a well-managed integration process. The study affirmed that bold economic reforms that are undertaken at the domestic level remained a strong based for effective regional integration. It further emphasized that achievement of success at the domestic level is a strong condition for success at the regional level. Premised on this, sound policies that focus on economic development are suggested. Gradual and pragmatic steps remain a precondition if the “United States of Africa” is not to be another stillborn dream. Determined efforts to improve the overall political and economic environment, which would in turn stimulate investment in the region is required for combating the aged long problems such as small markets, a narrow production based, poor infrastructure and a high dependence on external financing. Finally, normative values that capture a commitment towards democratization, upholding of the rule of law and respect for human rights are needed if progress is to be sustained. This along with greater integration with developed countries in the north, according to the study will help create the necessary conditions for restraint that will guard against reversal.

From the above review, it can be seen that a very few studies has dealt with this topic, particularly with focus on the AU integration agenda and development in Nigeria and Niger, using the integration theory as a theoretical framework. The present study therefore attempts to cover this research gap so as to address the long aged developmental problem in Africa generally and that of Nigeria and Niger republic in particular.

3.0 METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

This paper is a qualitative study, designed to investigate on the African Union regional integration agenda and socio-economic development in two West African sub region of Nigeria and Niger republic. It is a qualitative research that uses interview data with open-ended questions. This was also supported with documents data. In terms of theoretical lens, this study adopted the integration theory of international relation as advanced by David Mitrany (1943). The earliest trace of “functionalism” here referred to as integration may be seen in the writings of David Mitrany (1943) and in the utterances of a statesman, Jean Monnet, who was said to have advanced the argument of a peaceful, unified and co-operative world (1948). The advocates were said to have discovered the cause of international tensions and conflicts in the crudely organized international system, looked at the national exclusivism and arbitrary fragmentation of the world as an outdated and a dangerous legacy of the pre-industrial age. The traditional doctrine of sovereignty and any form of aggressive and chauvinistic nationalism becomes a matter of aversion for the functionalists and as a solution to the war prone mentality of the world states, they optimistically lay emphasis on the need for regional co-operation and integration of the states that would naturally give way to the emergence of a new and war free world. Some writers of international political theory as Karl Deutsch, E.Hass, Leon Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold have picked up threads to develop the idea of “integration” to denote either a process towards or an end-product of political unification among separate national units. Since they have taken a cue from functionalism, their integration theory should be taken as a developed form of the idea of “functionalism” (Johari; 2013).

Generally speaking, integration theory is based on the following arguments as contained in Johari (2013; 145-146). The theory believed that since the political rivalry of states is so intense and since state sovereignty is so firmly entrenched, these areas must be by-passed and habits of cooperation must be established and expanded in non-political matters. The reason according to the proponent is that “the problems of the social and economic spheres are relatively free from the conflict of “national interests” which appeal to the human sense of social justice and needs international cooperation for solution, and the resolution of which works to the mutual advantage of all. That an over increasing amount of economic and social cooperation would eventually build habits of interaction and a broader base of common values that will “spill over” into the political sphere. More importantly, the theory looked at the world in terms of the politics of cooperation and reason rather than politics of conflict and irrationality and hoped that with the accumulation of a large variety of functional organizations linking people and their interests across national boundaries, a transformation in both national attitudes and institutions will relegate the nation states to the museum of institutional curiosities. Finally, it argued that as the goal of the world unification is to be achieved, it may be done piecemeal by forming regional organizations and widening their area of operation. Thus, functionalism is said to lead to the emergence of “integration” theory pertaining to regional organizations.

However, the theory of integration suffers from these drawbacks; first, it is wrong to draw a clear boundary separating political and economic spheres and more importantly to hope that progress in the economic direction would lead to similar progress in the political direction as well (the case of the E U in the contemporary international system is a good example); more importantly, integration of states even at the regional level is not so easy a task as the advocates of this theory visualize. Conflicts and tensions at the regional and continental levels form the warp and woof of international relations and politics. In spite of these shortcomings, the necessity for integration among states in the contemporary international system cannot be overemphasized. It is more beneficial for African countries to form international bloc while interacting with the developed world rather than their individual engagement. This may not be unconnected with structural differences existing between the two groups of countries which in turn put the developed world on advantage over Africa. The theory represents important tools of analysis in international relations and its application to this study would help in unifying and explaining the basis for economic unification of some distinct economies into a single economy. Application of the theory helps in exposing the benefits accrue to Nigeria and Niger from regional integration. Finally, the theory is a peace theory which can help in fostering cooperation and indeed explain reasons why states cooperate in the global system.

4.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULT

Findings from this study revealed that integration agenda has been there right from the OAU to its transformation to the AU and the guiding objective is to bring about socio-economic development of the region and the member states. The AU is said to come up with agenda 2026 so as to ensure peaceful and prosperous Africa and peace, security and stability in member states and also to ensure that democracy is deeply enthroned in member states because without peace, there cannot be development in any of the member states.

In terms of the impact of AU regional integration agenda on socio-economic development of Nigeria and Niger republic, the findings from the study, based on the views of respondents,

revealed that there has been a lot of achievements. The two countries are said to be like one because of religion, cultural and linguistic affinities between them. Hausa is said to be a common language by majority of the people in the two West African countries. There are many Nigerians in Niger as there are many Nigerien in Nigeria. The two countries are said to be intertwined politically, religiously and socio-culturally and any other forms one can think of. There is arrangement with the customs and immigration working hand in hand to ensure peace and stability between the two countries and the sub region at large. They both belong to the Multinational Joint Task Force to ensure peace, security and stability within the sub region and the continent at large. This is said to be an evidence of a very close interaction between the two countries. The duo are also said to be signatory to the 1979 ECOWAS protocol on movement of persons, goods and services and also the right of residence and establishment which is one of the major pillars of integration. The protocol had been the major plank and pillar that has really integrated the two countries together. The two countries are also said to have gone very far in this regard and evidence of this can be found in trading and economic activities between them. This corroborates the 2021 report of the Observatory of Economic Complexity; the world's leading data visualization tool for international trade data. As contained in the report, in 2021, Nigeria exported \$180m to Niger and the main products exported from Nigeria to Niger were said to be Electricity (\$54.2m), Rolled Tobacco (\$45.1m), and Cement (\$38.3m). The report further established the fact that during the last 26years, the exports of Nigeria to Niger was said to have increased at an annualized rate of 6%, from \$39m in 1995 to \$180m in 2021. Similarly, in the same year, Niger exported \$56.8m to Nigeria. The main products exported from Niger to Nigeria according to the report were Bovine (\$8.23m), Tropical Fruits (\$7.62m) and Refined Petroleum (\$4.26m). It further revealed that during the last 26years, the exports of Niger to Nigeria have decreased at an annualized rate of 1.05%, from \$74.8m in 1995 to \$56.8m in 2021 (<https://oec.world>nga>partner>). However, this statistics has been updated by the United Nations COMTRADE data base on international trade's report of 2021 up dated on April 2023 when it confirms that Nigeria exports to Niger was US\$195.85m (<https://tradingeconomics.com>niger>).

To further reiterate the socio-economic tie between Nigeria and Niger republic, Anthony (2022) affirms that in July 2018, Nigeria and Niger republic agreed to collaborate to construct an oil pipeline and refinery. The duo were said to have agreed that while the proposed refinery will be located in Katsina, northern Nigeria, crude supply will be through the pipeline from Niger republic's oil fields, in the Tenert desert. The MOU for the two projects, which are expected to cost about \$2billion, was said to have been signed by the two countries energy ministers and witnessed by president Buhari and his counterpart from the republic of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou. The ministry of petroleum resources in justifying the MOU stated that the Soraz Reinery in Zinder, Niger republic has an installed capacity to produce 20,000 barrels per day while the country's domestic requirement was just 5,000 barrels per day, thereby resulting in a surplus of 15,000 barrels per day. Nigeria's minister of state for Petroleum Resources Timipre Sylva justified the federal government decision to enter into such agreement with her neighbor Niger republic and said that "Nigerians should be proud that we are doing that to encourage sub regional trade because we have been talking about sub regional trade for a long time, and this is how it should be between neighbouring countries. According to him Niger should import from us what we have, and we should import from Niger what they have. In his words, let us encourage intra-regional trade, and this is one good example of trading

within West Africa". For him, the development should be seen as a means of encouraging intra-regional trade, rather than seeing it as an embarrassment for Nigeria (www.businessday.ng).

On the challenges of the AU towards regional integration in Africa and Nigeria and Niger republic in particular, findings from the study has revealed that Nigeria and Niger have been in strong socio-economic and political relations for a long time which appeared to have been contributing immensely in the development and improvement of the two countries. However, in spite of this long time relations between them, they are yet to find an enduring solutions towards sustaining and developing their economies. It has been established in the introduction section that the motivating factor for regionalism and economic integration in Africa is for the unity of African nations in order to achieve large markets for themselves, reap the benefits of economies of scale, and attain a coherent political cooperation. These benefits notwithstanding, regionalism and economic integration in Africa has often been plagued with several challenges. Some of these challenges as it affect Nigeria and Niger relation in particular and Africa nations in general include; lack of political will and misplacement of priority, political instability, civil strife, proliferation of small arms and light weapon, illicit trade and trans-national crimes across member states, the underdeveloped nature of infrastructure on the continent, security issues, and minimal intra-regional trade among others. But at this time the major challenge the continent is facing is change of government in an unconstitutional means i.e resurgence of military coup d'état in a number of African states because it has gone up to Sudan and Chad as we have witnessed in recent time. Particularly, the resurgence in West African state is a thing of great concern to stake holders and well-meaning Africans which serve as a great challenge to integration and affect the major objective for which the regional organization was set up.

One of the major challenges before the African Union as revealed by the findings from this study is the political will of the governments and peoples of Africa. This has always been a problem to effective trade and integration in most regional organisations and manifests itself in the behaviour of some countries to resist liberalization and move towards protectionist policies to protect trade. It would be recalled that among the problems that prevented the defunct OAU from effective performance is lack of political will on the part of African leaders to translate regional plans into national policies and actions. African leaders usually are quick to sign treaties establishing institutions for the achievement of specific objectives, but they do not always take the necessary steps to ensure that these institutions work effectively in the interest of the people. This confirms the study of Bruce and Jan (2015) which observed that there exist a long term desire for economic connectedness in Africa. The study emphasised that despite the rhetoric and apparent policy consensus, implementation of related commitment on the part of African leaders lags seriously. The lack of progress towards the free movement between national markets of goods, services, people and capital according to the study is frequently blamed on a combination of lack of political will and capacity. The implication of this is that, if African countries cannot abide by a consensus reached by themselves after discussions, then we may not achieve the unity necessary and needed to propel the African Union. Manifestation of this can be seen in the August 19, 2019 pronouncement by Nigeria government to close her land border. The government closed its border against its neighbours in a bid to stem rampant smuggling across the border, and perhaps the exportation of insurgency. The closure seems to have generated issues between Nigeria and her neighbours (including Niger republic) and to that extent been criticized by them. Their criticism of Nigeria policy was based on the existing Free Trade Agreement in the sub region and the continent at

large (to which Nigeria is a signatory) which seeks to eliminate restrictions on trade among African countries. The AU African Continental Free Trade Area's objectives is to create a single continental market for goods and services and expand intra-African trade across the Regional Economic Communities and African continent by extension. Although, Article 26 of the Protocol on Rules and Procedures on the Settlement of Disputes permits states to take certain restrictive measures so as to ensure compliance with their own local laws and Article 27 of the same Protocol permits restriction on the basis of security but members are not expected to apply the measures arbitrarily to cause unjustifiable discrimination between state parties. The border closure, although justified (evidence has revealed a deleterious impact on not just local food production, but also the growth of cross-border transactions of legitimate businesses), was in defiance of both AU Constitutive Act and ECOWAS treaties on trade liberalization and freedom of movement. Amidst the foregoing scenario, how the AU hope to realise its integration agenda particularly as it affects Nigeria and Niger republic remains a serious challenge. However, findings from the study has also revealed that for Nigeria and Niger republic, there seems to be no much problem in this regard as the two countries have been doing things together and get things done because of those affinities mentioned earlier which also affects their commitment to ensure implementation of all the programmes and policies put in place.

Another challenge to regional integration agenda of the AU as revealed by findings from this study is limited intra-African trade which has continue to impede regionalism and economic integration and development of the continent. Trade among countries in regional and economic groups is relevant to the development of the region. Intra-regional trade is said to contribute positively to the widening of the markets; has a high capacity of creating jobs and speeding investment and growth; and has the ability to position countries to take advantage of even greater trade with countries outside the region. In spite of these potential benefits, African countries have not made enough efforts to enhance intra-regional trade. Trade creation, trade diversion, and economies of scale form the basis of regionalism and economic integration among countries. This problem has been linked to the similarities of the economies of state within the continent, which reduces the level of complementarity in trade commodities. Consequently, Africa is deprived of some revenue that it could use to develop, as more trade within Africa would imply more internally generated funds to support the integration process and development of the continent. This finding supported the study of Daniel and Eric Evans (2014) which affirms that, major hindrances to the success of regionalism and economic integration in Africa among others are; transportation and mobility of factors of production, limited intra-African trade, multi-memberships, macroeconomic divergence, and conflicts. These problems notwithstanding, the study stressed that there are opportunities and possibilities in the power and energy sectors, the manufacturing sector, and private-public partnerships that the continent can explore to accelerate Africa's speed of regional and economic integration, crucial for economic growth and development. Similarly, Raji, (2014) opined that, though the primary focus of most sub-regional development institutions in Africa is tilted towards functional cooperation and integration to promote sustainable development in the continent, current statistics as at the time of the report indicated a partial success of such efforts, especially towards regional integration. For example, intra African exports and imports as of 2010 were 13.6 percent and 11.2 percent respectively as virtually all African countries according to the study relied on trading arrangements with their Western trading partners rather than to one another (UNDP, 2011). More importantly, the United Nations Conference on Trade

and Development (UNCTAD), Economic Development in Africa Report (2019), revealed that the degree of complexity and restrictiveness in rules of origin should consider the levels of product diversification, sophistication and competitiveness in member countries; too restrictive and complex rules of origin at low levels of regional productive capacities can provide incentives to member countries to trade outside the African continental Free Trade Area rather than within. Such incentives it is said may be greater for small and / or low income countries such as LDCs, in which productive capacities and competitiveness levels may be lower. It further emphasizes that the nature of rules of origin that is, how they are designed and their requirements and procedures, and the associated compliance costs affect export performances and more. Rules of origin can, to varying degrees, restrict trade, misdirect investment, inhibit productivity growth and reduce welfare from levels otherwise attainable, depending on how they are been specified. The report however affirmed that, rules of origin have a functional role to play in stimulating the development of regional value chains as well as the participation of downstream and upstream in Africa to achieve the goals of the Abuja treaty.

Another challenge according to the findings from this study is the underdeveloped nature of infrastructure on the continent which begs for solution; lack of adequate infrastructure by way of roads, energy, power, rail, telecommunications and other links for the facilitation of the free movement of goods, capital, services and persons, including the right of residence. The situation is said to be a reflection of weak productive and industrial sectors in the two countries and the sub region at large due to poor infrastructural conditions. This contradicts the objective to promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies stipulated in Article 3(j) of the Union's Constitutive Act. The level of infrastructural development in Nigeria is not encouraging; an economy that runs on generating sets and ever increasing diesel prices obviously cannot compete within the sub regional market not to talk of the continent. In term of infrastructure, Nigeria appears to be clearly unprepared for the led protective AU Common Tariff and that of ECOWAS in the sub region which is one of the key pre-requisites for economic integration of the continent. Removing the tariff shield in the present high operating cost situation will stifle manufacturing operation in Nigeria. This situation is also applicable to Niger republic, thus complicating the integration process. Niger republic for example depends on Lagos for most containers heading to the country and due to the absence of a rail line, containers take up to two weeks from Lagos to Niger and vice-versa by road. Free movement of people, capital, goods and other factors is imperative to the smooth functioning of regionalism and economic integration, as with integrated economies, people have to be able to move easily from one place (economy) to the other, with no structural impediments.

A developed transport system is a sine-qua-non for economies to operate efficiently, enhancing trade by minimizing cost and time of moving people and goods to where there are jobs and markets. The landlocked status of Niger republic, bureaucracy, difficult Customs arrangements, and poor transport infrastructure, among others, account for the country's high transportation costs. According to the 2021 report of African Development Bank, the transportation problems in Africa is said to result in lower intra-African trade and thereby posing a serious problem and almost consumes the integration dream in the continent. This finding corroborates the study of Solomon (2002) which states that Africa at her current pathetic level of infrastructure and economic development was not ready for this gigantic project known as AU. The AU according to the study was described as simply a blind imitation

of the European Union which is an outcome of several decades of gradual transformation from a mere economic cooperation outfit. The level of infrastructural development in Africa is said to be far below the European countries as transnational transportation and telecommunications are limited. The socio-economic realities of the African states require that they need to put their houses in order before embarking on a grandiose scheme like the AU otherwise, they will end up integrating poverty at continental level.

However, the recent development in the sub region and between the two countries gives hope. As reported in Daily Trust Abuja, February, 2021, a 2013 USAID baseline study on the LAKAJI (Lagos Kano Jibiya) corridor showed that it costs over \$3000 and takes approximately 12.5 days to send a 20-foot container from Jibiya in northern Nigeria to Lagos in the southwest. Conversely, it costs nearly \$5,000 and takes approximately 19.5 days to ship a 20 –foot container from Lagos to Jibiya. The high cost of transporting goods along the corridor is largely due to the lengthy clearance time and associated cost at the Lagos port. The overall cost and delivery times along the Lagos- Kano-Jibiya corridor are significantly greater than similar corridors in West Africa. The foregoing made the USAID to suggest the construction of rail network to link Lagos to Jibiya bearing in mind the huge economic activities along the LAKAJI corridor. The organization thus suggested the construction of a rail track linking Nigeria, a country with massive port activities, to the Niger republic, a landlocked country. Consequent up on this, the government of Nigeria has since begun the construction of the rail line. During his official state visit to Nigeria president at the presidential villa, Abuja, the Niger leader Mohammed Bazoum commended the Nigeria government for approving the \$1.96 billion rail project. The 284 kilometer rail project will connect Kano in Nigeria to Maradi in Niger republic. The project was believed to be crucial to rail development in Nigeria and in the West African sub-region. It was being executed by Mota-Engil Group, a multinational engineering, and construction company (the approval was given at the federal executive council in September 2020 and began in February 2021). The project, with 15 stations along the corridor, is expected to boost soci-economic activities in Kano, Katsina and Jigawa states in Nigeria, as well as Maradi in Niger republic. Bazoum said that the project is an infrastructure that will integrate the economies of Nigeria and Niger. He said that he was in Abuja to thank president Buhari for his efforts at ensuring that the project has taken off and hoped it will be sustained because the project will radically change the trading exchange between the two countries (The Premium Times 1st April 2022). It is hoped that when completed, the project would boost regional trade and end the plight of manufacturers and traders along the corridor by reducing freight cost from Lagos to other parts of the country.

More importantly, the findings from the study further revealed that funding is another major challenge confronting the AU in its bid to achieving integration objective and overall development of the continent. At present, many of the West African countries are not able to meet up with their financial responsibility to the sub regional organization and the continental body. The situation is so bad that some of them are even asking for installment payment for them to meet up with their financial responsibility to the sub region. The finding supported the study of Dokubo (2005) which analysed the transformation of OAU to AU and emphasised that it marks the long awaited turning point for Africa in terms of the quest for economic development in Africa over the years. The author however expresses reservation over the effective functioning of the organization in meeting the needs of the continent in the globalised world of today. The AU according to him composed of the same set of countries which were

not able to pay their annual dues, countries that wallowed in so much IOUS on membership dues, countries that could not make meaningful headways both at home and within the OAU collectively. Related to the foregoing is the proliferation of national currencies in Africa and West African sub region in particular, which are strongly linked to monetary systems and institutions that were established by the former colonial masters. This creates the problems of payments arrangements and convertibility with consequent difficulties for interstate commercial transactions. It needs not be repeated that African states transact their business with the use of international currencies such as the Pound Sterling, the French Franc and the US Dollar and efforts at achieving common currency in the continent has not been fruitful. The difficulty at achieving common currency in West Africa for instance has been attributed to the domination of francophone countries in the sub region (there are eight Francophone, five Anglophone and two Lusophone). The game of number will always come to play and even within the Francophone, CFA does not have the same weight. The policy to achieving common currency is on board but has not been able to further integrate the sub region and the continent. Thus, slowing down the pace at which African countries engaged in trade relations and other commercial activities.

Conflicts present another important challenge that is hindering regionalism and economic integration and development in Africa. Regionalism and economic integration can be attained in an environment of peaceful co-existence among and within countries in a given sub-region. It is very difficult for countries to be fully integrated when they still engage in conflicts. Currently, Nigeria and the Niger republic, and by extension, the sub-region is battling terrorism and internal security challenges due to activities of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, Niger, and at the Cameroon border and banditry. The implication of these conflicts is that the affected countries will continue to divert their scarce resources to the purchase of arms and ammunition, which can only bring further destruction, rather than focus on priority areas of social and economic development. These conflicts apart from fostering disunity also scare away investors and thus compound Africa's underdevelopment. The AU must intensify its effort in this regard in order to promote peace, security and stability on the continent as contained in Article 3 (f) of the constitutive Act. According to Obasanjo (2003) cited in (Raji 2014), the former Nigeria president, in his explanation of the crisis and problem of development in Africa opined that African continent remains the world's enduring development challenge, world's most highly indebted region, where poverty is endemic, pervasive and deep, where conflicts and socio-political crisis still remain a recurring feature, a region being ravaged by AIDS and tropical diseases. He concluded that the foregoing represents the feature of African society in spite of almost half a century of independence. The situation in Africa today is not too different from what was obtainable 19 years ago when the former president made his assertion. In fact, statistical evidences in contemporary African countries show that the situation is far worse today.

Related to the foregoing is the study of Bakare (2014) which affirmed that one of the most daunting problems hindering the effort of African Union in integrating the continent for developmental transformation in line with its motto: "a United and Strong Africa" is the issue of ethnic divisions which was said to be a result of Slavery? The author further stressed that, Nunn (2007:1) attested to this fact when he asserted that 'the largest numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped politically at the end of the 19th century and are the most ethnically fragmented today'. Colonialism in his opinion added salt to injury

through the imposition of artificial boundaries on Africa by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1885 where Africa was partitioned with complete disregard for existing societal and geographic boundaries. Consequently, many Africa countries were disadvantaged through the disruption of established indigenous communication and trade linkages, thus, creating an abnormally large number of landlocked states, and leaving various countries (such as Niger) without natural resources (Sachs, 2005 cited in Bakare, 2014). Throughout the colonial era, Africa was said to have witnessed nothing but political subjugation, economic distortion and human and natural resources exploitation, cultural suppression, ideological domination, and technological stagnation; which led to the underdevelopment of the continent.

Furthermore, the finding from the study shows that poverty is a great obstacle to the achievement of the integration agenda of the AU most especially as it affects Nigeria-Niger relations. The National Bureau of Statistics, in its latest Multidimensional Poverty Index report launched in Abuja, the federal capital territory of Nigeria on 17th November 2022, has disclosed that 133 million Nigerians are multidimensionally poor. The NBS said that 63% of Nigerians were poor due to a lack of access to health, education, living standards, employment and security. The index is said to offer a multivariant form of poverty assessment, identifying deprivations across health, education, living standard, work and shocks. The CEO of the Bureau and the Statistician General of the Federation, Semiu Adeniran, said that, this was the first time the NBS, would conduct a standard multidimensional poverty survey in Nigeria. The survey was said to be the largest in its series with a sample size of over 56,610 people in 109 senatorial districts in the 36 states of Nigeria and was implemented in 2021 to 2022. The survey added a fourth dimension of work and shocks which make a difference with the global MPI (multidimensional poverty index) which uses three dimensions. (Health, education and living standards). The 133 million poor Nigerians recorded by the NBS was said to have exceeded the World Bank's proportion for Nigeria. In a press release by the NBS on 17th November 2022 in Abuja titled: Nigeria Launches its most extensive National measures of multidimensional poverty. The survey was a collaborative effort between the NBS, the National Social Safety- Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI). As said earlier, the survey sampled over 56,000 households across the 36 states of the federation and FCT, and was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022. The National MPI is said to be 0.257, which indicated that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one- quarter of all possible deprivations. Over half of the Nigeria population are multidimensionally poor and cook with dung, wood or charcoal, rather than cleaner energy. High deprivations are also said to be apparent nationally in sanitation, time to health care, food insecurity, and housing. The report further indicated that 40.1% of people are poor according to the 2018/2019 National Monetary Poverty Line, and 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022. Multidimensional poverty is said to be higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor, compared to 42% of people in urban areas (Punch online 18/11/2022).

In the case of Niger republic, the country is said to be one of the poorest countries in the world with population of about 24.21 million people. Over the years, the country's situation has only worsened as the humanitarian context grows more dire due to insecurity, hunger, the climate crisis, and COVID-19. About 3.8 million people are said to require humanitarian assistance, 42.9% in poverty, earning less than \$1.90 per day with 83% of the population living in rural

areas and 20% could not meet basic daily food and nutrition needs, average life expectancy in the country is put at 62.4 years.. Despite relative peace for years, the landlocked country of Niger is fighting a virtual war against poverty and hunger. Forced migration is said to have contributed to the high poverty levels especially since 82% of Nigeriens earn their income from farming and livestock; livelihoods easily lost when people are forced to relocate. In 2021, the United Nations rated Niger the least developed country in the world (closely followed by the Central African Republic, Chad, Burundi, and South Sudan). Currently, the World Bank considers the deteriorating security condition to be one of the three main causes of poverty in Niger. The face of poverty in the country is said to be overwhelmingly female, with girls and women representing an estimated 75% of Nigeriens living below the poverty line. Social inequalities between the roles and responsibilities of men and women in society fuel disparities that very quickly become economic hardships. All of these elements make the cycle of poverty even more difficult to break for millions of Nigeriens living on less than \$1.90 per day (Concern Worldwide US Inc. 2022). What the foregoing statistics suggest is that previous efforts at developing Africa by its leaders, has achieved insignificant success. This result corroborates the study of Egiebade (2004) which posited that the transformation of the OAU to the AU constitutes a fundamental and qualitative change that would open a new phase in the history of Africa. The AU according to the author is the inevitable maturation of the idea of Pan-African unity that gave rise to the establishment of the OAU. He however noted that in spite of the transformation of the OAU to the AU coupled with the fact that Africa is said to be richly endowed in terms of natural resources, the continent was and is still the poorest in the world. This according to him is premised on the fact that almost half of the population of Africa still live in absolute poverty. The alarming rate of poverty in the continent constitutes one of the most important challenges the AU is to tackle in the process of integration and development.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has been entitled as African Union Regional Integration Agenda and Socio-Economic Development in West African Sub-Region: A Study of Nigeria and Niger Republic. The aim is to examine the impact of the continental organisation's integration agenda on the development of the two countries and Africa at large. The paper has so far revealed that Nigeria and Niger Republic share a common land boundary which covers over thousand kilometers. They were both colonial creation of Britain and France respectively which was born out of series of negotiations, treaties and conquests during the first decade of the 20th Century and by 1960, the two countries got their political independence and have since exchange diplomatic missions and entered into various bilateral relations which border on trade, industry, culture, education and politics with a view to improving the socio-economic and political life of the citizenry. However, in spite of this long time socio-economic and political relations between them, the countries are yet to find an enduring solutions towards sustaining and developing their economies towards the integration agenda of the AU. This has been blamed on many variables, some of which include; lack of political will, the underdeveloped nature of infrastructure in the West African sub region and Africa at large, security issues, and minimal intra-regional trade among others. Having made this intellectual discourse, it is very worthwhile to make the following recommendations:

- The need for strong political will and commitment by the leadership of the two countries and African leaders by extension to turn resolutions and consensus reached

into national policies and actions is a sine-qua-non if effective integration and development of the continent must be achieved.

- There is need for common front among members and avoid the issue of divided loyalty which for sometimes has served as major hindrance to the achievement of integration objectives.
- A developed transport system is necessary for economies to operate efficiently, enhancing trade by minimizing cost and time of moving people and goods to where there are jobs and markets. Thus measures must to be put in place to ensure the sustenance of the ongoing development of the transport system so as to achieve effective intra-African trade.
- Making lives better and enjoyable for Nigerians, Nigeriens and AU citizens by extension will depend to a very large extent on how the two countries and the entire AU member states are able to deal with internal security challenges such as Boko Haram, arms smuggling, kidnappings terrorism and activities of bandits which threaten the political and economic stability of member states. Nigeria has taken a lead in this direction by funding the activities of the multi-national joint task force, currently maintaining security in the Lake Chad Basin against the terrorists. Thus, the need for its sustenance.

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