CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION:
CONTEXTUALISING THE DEBATE ON A UNION GOVERNMENT FOR AFRICA
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Introduction

In 1963 President Kwame Nkrumah argued that a Union Government for Africa would ultimately be the most effective vehicle for Africa's social, political and economic emancipation. At that time there was significant dissension and disagreement on this point. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was formed as a compromise between those who wanted immediate continental integration and those who saw benefits in retaining a degree of national sovereignty and autonomy in managing their internal affairs. Forty-four years after Nkrumah's visionary proposal, the leadership of the African Union (AU), the successor organisation to the OAU, is still grappling with the issue of whether to forge a Union Government for Africa. This book will contribute to this ongoing debate by drawing together the views of a selection of AU officials, AU member state representatives, policymakers, researchers, academics and civil society representatives. The chapters contained in the book will discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the proposed Union Government for Africa. This introduction will contextualise the debates leading up to the Union Government discussions and also outline the content and structure of the book.

Background and context

This book is the result of an initiative of the Direct Conflict Prevention Programme (DCP) of the Institute for Security Studies office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Prior to the 9th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Accra, Ghana, from 1 to 3 July 2007, the DCP commissioned and undertook thematic studies on issues pertaining to the 'Grand Debate on Union Government'. Eight policy-oriented research papers were produced to influence policy debates and consultations on a Union Government for Africa. On 27 July 2007 the DCP launched these papers at a seminar entitled 'Towards the United States of Africa?', held at the Alisa Hotel in Accra.

At the conclusion of the 9th Ordinary Session the AU Assembly issued the Accra Declaration (African Union 2007), following which the ISS DCP
held a public seminar entitled ‘Post-Accra Declaration: What next for the Union Government of Africa?’ in Addis Ababa on 13 July 2007. The seminar engaged with aspects of the contents of the Accra Declaration and the prospects for a Union Government for Africa. Following this seminar there was a sense that further analysis, research and debate was required. The ISS DCP subsequently commissioned additional papers to assess the issues outlined by the Accra Declaration. These papers were presented at a two-day seminar entitled ‘Towards a Union Government of Africa: Challenges and opportunities’, held at the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa on 11 and 12 October 2007. This book is a compilation of these commissioned papers and additional contributions from participants. The book seeks to advance the debate further, with a more rigorous and policy-oriented analysis of the challenges and opportunities Africa will face in its endeavour to forge a Union Government.

Rationale for the research and the book

Convening a policy seminar and producing a book on the issue of African integration under the theme of a Union Government for Africa is timely. There are proponents and opponents of the notion of a Union Government. However, it is undeniable that Africa needs to accelerate continental integration if it is to become a functional and effective partner in international relations. It is necessary to advance analysis and research on the notion of a Union Government for Africa. The book provides the vehicle through which this analysis and research can be examined and debated.

Africa is also afflicted internally by common challenges such as an over-dependence on external actors for its fiscal well-being and the under-exploitation of its enormous development potential at national, regional and continental level. In addition, the continent continues to be marginalised in world affairs. Today Africa is generally a target recipient of the actions, exigencies and demands of others, rather than a self-sufficient actor. The continent systematically seeks external assistance to deal with issues of food security and economic development even though collectively it is in a position to solve its problems. Owing to the divisions among its member states and the lack of collective action on many issues, Africa’s international bargaining capacity is still weak. There is a growing perception amongst analysts, policymakers, academics and civil society representatives on the continent that regional integration is a remedy for some of Africa’s problems. Any proposals and plans for regional integration schemes therefore need to be thoroughly debated, analysed and researched to assess whether they
can fulfil the aspirations of continental unity. This book seeks to advance this objective.

**Interrogating the idea of African unity: The historical evolution of pan-Africanism**

**The first stage in the institutionalisation of pan-Africanism**

African unity is an ideal that can be traced back to the 19th century (Adi and Sherwood 2003:vii). The attempt to forge pan-African unity has been expressed in different forms at different points in time (Murithi 2007). The first stage of institutionalisation of pan-Africanism was the convening of the pan-African congresses that were held in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second stage is represented by the establishment of the OAU. The AU can therefore be considered the third stage in this process. If it becomes a reality, the African Union Government will represent the fourth stage in the institutionalisation of the ideals, principles and norms of pan-Africanism.

**The OAU as the second stage in the institutionalisation of pan-Africanism**

The creation of the OAU was supposed to herald greater pan-African solidarity, political liberation, economic development and security (Sturman 2007). Indeed, the OAU inspired and led the struggle against colonialism and racism. Its prime objective was to ensure decolonisation and the eventual unification of the continent. At the inaugural meetings of the OAU the pan-Africanist and first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, repeatedly called for the creation of a Union Government. In effect the debate on a Union Government for Africa is more than 40 years old. However, soon after the establishment of the OAU nationalist sentiments prevailed and the machinations of cold war powers on the continent effectively distorted the vision of pan-Africanism and African unity (Mathews 2008). Once African countries became decolonised, African leaders only paid lip service to the ideology of pan-Africanism. In this context the culture of indifference became entrenched. Under the cloak of sovereignty, non-intervention and territorial integrity a majority of African leaders, most of whom were illegitimate dictators, oligarchs and kleptocrats, committed atrocities against their own people. This unfortunately laid the foundations for resentment and established the legacy of socio-economic and political turmoil that continues to plague the continent today (Qobo 2007). As an illustration, the 1994
Rwandese genocide took place in the context of the reign of the OAU and its permissive culture of indifference.

**The African Union as the third stage in the institutionalisation of pan-Africanism**

As noted earlier, the creation of the AU can be considered the third phase of institutionalisation of pan-Africanism. The AU came into existence in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002. It was supposed to usher Africa into a new era of continental integration, leading to a deeper unity and a resolution of its problems. The evolution of the AU from the Organisation of African Unity was visionary and timely. The OAU had failed to live up to all of its norms and principles. Africa at the time of the demise of the OAU was a continent that was virtually imploding owing to the pressures of conflict, poverty and underdevelopment and public health crises like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The OAU had not lived up to its original ideals of promoting peace, security and development in Africa. The AU has emerged as a home-grown initiative to put the destiny of the continent into the hands of the African people. Whether it will achieve this objective remains to be seen.

The AU is seeking to promote a paradigm shift in continental affairs. Unlike the OAU, it is endowed with the right to intervene in the internal affairs of its member states in circumstances involving war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide (African Union 2000:4(h)). The Constitutive Act of the AU, signed in Lomé, Togo, in 2000, also includes provisions for promoting and ensuring the rule of law, democratic governance and respect for human rights. Interestingly, Article 30 explicitly forbids the ‘unconstitutional change of government’ (African Union 2000). The AU’s peace and security architecture includes innovative structures for peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building, such as the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and the Panel of the Wise, which are yet to deliver comprehensive peace to the continent. These institutions have to be given a chance to work, since the ASF, CEWS and the Panel of the Wise are not yet operational. In terms of governance and development the AU has established the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) programme and its offshoot, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The continental judicial framework is expressed in the form of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. The AU’s consultative mechanisms also include the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC). There is a strong case to be made for consolidating and strengthening the institutions
of the AU rather than launching into the creation of a Union Government for Africa. There is also no question that there is still a long way to go before the AU’s vision and mission are realised.

An African Union Government: The fourth stage in the institutionalisation of pan-Africanism?

The agenda to establish a Union Government for Africa was launched in 2005. The need to create several ministerial portfolios for the AU was discussed during the 4th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 30 and 31 January 2005. The AU agreed to the proposals made by the Libyan government regarding the establishment of ministerial portfolios for the organisation. Specifically, in the 6th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the AU, Libya proposed establishing the posts of Minister of Transport and Communications, Defence and Foreign Affairs (African Union 2005a: EX.CL/Dec.188(VI)). In order to respond to these proposals the AU Assembly decided to ‘set up a Committee of Heads of State and Government chaired by the President of the Republic of Uganda and composed of Botswana, Chad, Ethiopia, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia’ to liaise with the chairperson of the AU Commission and submit a report by the next summit in July 2005 (African Union 2005b: Assembly/AU/Dec.69(IV)). In November 2005 the committee convened a conference under the theme ‘Desirability of a Union Government of Africa’. This meeting included members of the committee, representatives of the regional economic communities (RECs), technical experts, academics and civil society and Diaspora representatives, as well as the media. The conference came up with four key conclusions, including recognition that the necessity of an AU government is not in doubt; that such a union must be of the African people and not merely a union of states and governments; that its creation must come about through the principle of gradual incrementalism; and that the role of the RECs as building blocks for the continental framework should be highlighted. Based on the findings of this conference the Assembly mandated the AU Commission to prepare a consolidated framework document defining the purpose of the Union Government, its nature, scope, core values, steps and processes, as well as an indicative road map for its achievement. The Assembly reaffirmed ‘that the ultimate goal of the African Union is full political and economic integration leading to the United States of Africa’ (African Union 2005c: Assembly/AU/Dec.90(V), §3). The Assembly further established a Committee of Seven, to be chaired by President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, chairperson of the AU, and composed of the heads of state and government of Algeria, Kenya, Senegal, Gabon, Lesotho and
Uganda. More specifically, the Assembly requested the committee to consider ‘the steps that need to be taken for the realisation of this objective, the structure, the process, the time frame required for its achievement as well as measures that should be undertaken, in the meantime, to strengthen the ability of the Commission to fulfil its mandate effectively’ (African Union 2005c:Assembly/AU/Dec.90(V), §5).

In July 2006 President Obasanjo submitted a detailed report entitled ‘A Study on an African Union Government: Towards the United States of Africa’ to the 7th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in Banjul, Gambia. Some of the key themes emerging from this report highlighted the fact that Africa is over-dependent on the external world, particularly with regard to expatriate technicians and technology. It also noted that Africa had not fully exploited its potential at national, regional and continental level with respect to trade, education and health. It noted that ‘a United Africa would have the unique potential of producing most types of food and agricultural produce throughout the year’ (African Union 2006:7) and also that in the context of globalisation ‘the challenges of over-dependence and under-exploitation of its potentials have increased the marginalisation of the continent in world affairs’ (African Union 2006:8). The study further outlined the 16 strategic areas on which an African Union Government should focus: continental integration; education, training, skills development, science and technology; energy; environment; external relations; food, agriculture and water resources; gender and youth; governance and human rights; health; industry and mineral resources; finance; peace and security; social affairs and solidarity; sport and culture; a trade and customs union; and infrastructure, information technology and biotechnology (African Union 2006:8-13). The study noted that the ‘design and functioning of a Union Government as a tool for integration would have far-reaching implications on the existing institutions and programmes of the African Union’ (African Union 2006:14).

Civil society, the Diaspora and a Union Government for Africa

To what extent are the majority of African people aware that a debate has in fact been launched by the heads of state and government? If they are not aware, who is debating on their behalf with governments and the AU? How can a Union Government project succeed if it does not have the buy-in and the support of the people of Africa? Fortunately, civil society organisations throughout Africa have also contributed to the debates on the proposed Union Government for Africa. Over 35 African and international civil society organisations working in over 40 African countries participated in the first
Consultative Dialogue with the Pan-African Parliament under the theme ‘Building Effective Mechanisms for Civil Society Engagement with Pan-African and Regional Institutions’. After a thorough assessment of the proposals for continental government and studying the modalities of its operationalisation, participants made recommendations to the members of the PAP that were later transmitted to the Accra Summit in July 2007 (African Union 2007a). Furthermore, civil society organisations generally agreed on the importance of accelerating continental integration in order to respond effectively to the political and social challenges of the continent.

Therefore, it is important to include African people and civil society organisations in this debate on Union Government. From 28 to 30 May 2007 the AU convened an ‘All-Inclusive Continental Consultation on the Union Government Project’ at its headquarters in Addis Ababa as part of the preparations for the Accra Summit. Civil society had the opportunity through this forum to contribute to the Union Government debate. The AU has also emphasised the importance of consulting with the wider African public and the Diaspora on the issue of the Union Government (African Union 2007b). This is an important commitment, because civil society activists have always argued that an African Union Government is a pipe dream without the foundations for genuine African citizenship being laid, specifically the free movement of Africans across the continent without the hindrance of visa restrictions.

The injunction left us by the great pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah is still valid: ‘Africa must Unite, or disintegrate individually’ (Nkrumah 1963). The debates at the summit in Accra sought to capture this spirit. Efforts to lay the foundation for a Union Government can be viewed as the latest incarnation of an attempt to institutionalise pan-Africanism. It is therefore appropriate to question whether the African Union Government project will be built on a solid enough foundation to realise the aspirations of pan-Africanism and improve the well-being of Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora.

**Methodology**

Qualitative research methods were employed in gathering material for this book and primary and secondary research documentation was used, including books, journal articles, monographs and commentaries from the AU, its officials and government representatives. A diverse group of pan-African researchers, policymakers, diplomats, academics and civil society representatives were commissioned to draft papers on the themes outlined above.
Content and structure of the book

The commissioned papers and discussions in this book address the proposals and recommendations stipulated in the Accra Declaration (African Union 2007c). This involves identifying the areas on which African countries, RECs and the AU should focus in order to lay the foundation for the formation of the Union Government. The book also assesses the performance of the AU and its organs and RECs in the integration process at regional and continental levels and explores alternative mechanisms for financing the Union Government programme and projects.

The book furthermore assesses the potential structure and functions of the proposed Union Government and proposes the type of relationship that it should have with regional and national structures. It then examines strategies for galvanising support from African citizens across the continent as well as in the Diaspora and explores mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in the policy debates leading to the formation of the Union Government. This book will ultimately contribute towards the policy debates related to the Union Government initiative launched by the Accra Summit.

The book is divided into three parts, with the different sections:

1. providing a conceptual framework for a Union Government for Africa
2. engaging with the Accra Declaration, and
3. identifying innovative strategies for fostering an African Union Government

This introduction contextualises the debate and outlines the contents of the book.

Part one of the book includes a chapter written by Admore Kambudzi, an AU official of Zimbabwean origin, who discusses his views on the transition towards a single government for Africa. This is followed by a chapter in which distinguished Ethiopian academic Kinfe Abraham, who passed away in November 2007, assesses the challenges of accelerating economic and political integration.

Part two of the book engages directly with the Accra Declaration and its contents. The French analyst Delphine Lecoutre provides her assessment of the proceedings of the Accra Summit of July 2007. The Senegalese academic
Ismail Fall debates the potential relationship between a Union Government and national governments. The Ghanaian analyst Marilyn Aniwa assesses the role of RECs in the implementation of the Abuja Treaty, while the Kenyan analyst Irungu Houghton examines the domains of competence of an African Union Government. The Ghanaian scholar and activist Emmanuel Akwetey identifies additional sources of financing for the activities of a Union Government and the Egyptian analyst Hakima Abbas explores the role of the Diaspora in forging a Union Government for Africa. Civil society and gender issues are discussed by the Togolese analyst Désiré Assogbavi and the Nigerian Roselynn Musa respectively.

Part three then assesses some innovative ways in which a Union Government can be developed. The distinguished Tanzanian diplomat Msuya Mangachi explores the ways in which the AU’s specialised technical committees (STCs) can be used to foster an African Union Government. The Cameroonian researcher Chrysantus Ayangafac discusses how the management of natural resources can provide a basis for forging deeper African unity. The Cameroonian academic and activist Maurice Tadadjeu proposes ten hypotheses that an African Union Government constitution should include. The conclusion by Kenyan researcher Timothy Murithi will briefly assess the prospects of the Union Government going forward.

Conclusion

This book will contribute towards advancing the debate on the advantages and disadvantages of forming a Union Government for Africa. It will influence policy options that could be relevant to the establishment of a Union Government. Ultimately, the book will provide a theoretical context for the debates on a Union Government, raise awareness of the need for a Union Government, assess the level of engagement of national, regional and continental actors with regard to the establishment of a Union Government, identify key issues and factors that will accelerate or hinder the move towards a Union Government for Africa, and stimulate further debate on Africa’s continental integration.

Notes

1. These papers can be accessed and downloaded from www.issafrica.org. Click on ‘Publications’ and then ‘Papers’.
2. Furthermore, the summit recognised the importance of strengthening the Commission in order to enable it to undertake its responsibilities effectively.
Ultimately, the Accra Summit concluded by establishing a ministerial committee to examine the issues pertaining to the formation of the Union Government.

References


