


What's next after "African unity"?

Enhancing the AU-African Civil Society Relationship

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Abstract

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) provided a foundation for African state leaders to officially unite and collectively pursue a common interest in African independence. Subsequently, the African Union (AU) replaced the OAU with a similar vision of advancing an integrated Africa that is more prosperous, peaceful, and driven by its own people in the global arena. Despite its aspiration to maintain the African Unity agenda, the AU requires a more inclusive and cooperative approach to African regional governance, one that is based on the active participation of African civil society in its decision-making processes. This paper challenges the state-centred approach to African regional governance that has hitherto existed in the OAU by exploring how the AU can effectively engage its non-state actors, especially African civil society and NGOs, in enhancing global governance in Africa. It argues that while the creation of a globally recognised institution, such as the AU, continues to unite African states in building a common interest for the continent, the idea of enhancing the AU's relationship with African civil society groups is essential for promoting cooperation and global governance in Africa.

Keywords: African civil society, the African Union, Organisation of African Unity, Pan Africanism, Africa's global governance, AU regional norms

Introduction

The idea of ‘African unity’¹ became very popular when many African states were seeking political independence, and their leaders had decided to collectively unite and pursue this common interest through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Primarily, African state leaders at the time were viewed as the primary drivers of Africa’s socioeconomic and political development agendas. Some scholars even posit that it was an era in which African state leaders became “agenda-setters” in decision-making processes that were mostly geared towards the transformative and development objectives of the African continent (Hartmann, 2018; Saideman, 1994; Nyaxo, 2004; Blaauw, 2015).

The OAU, which was an important African regional organisation to be formed at the time, adopted a state-centred approach to governance and provided opportunities to African state leaders and elites. According to Welch (1991), the OAU was characterised as “a club of presidents, engaged in a tacit policy of not inquiring into each other’s practices” (p.537). Essentially, the OAU continued to focus on the integration of formal political institutions and states rather than the integration of African peoples and civil society (Opuku Mensah, 2006). Recent research, however, suggests that the African Union (AU), which later replaced the OAU in 2001, has moved beyond the state-centred approach to governance while incorporating the role of African people, including civil society groups and NGOs, as actors for enhancing cooperation across Africa (Mickler and Sturman, 2021; Bischoff, 2021; Auwal and Aluaigba, 2021). The new AU is currently guided by its vision of “An integrated prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena” (African Union, 2024). Besides the AU’s hopes of continuing the African unity agenda that it inherited from its predecessors (the OAU), it also holds a key objective of adopting a “people-centred” governance,

1 **African Unity** as difficult the concept may be to conceptualise is used here to describe the developments leading to the formation of the OAU and eventually the AU. Particularly, it refers to the period where 32 independent African states collectively united and decided to pursue a common interest of independence through the creation of an African regional organization, the OAU. Later in May 2001, the numbers grew from 32 to 53 African states uniting to form the AU as a substitute for the OAU. For more details on African unity, see Magliveras, Konstantinos D., and Gino J. Naldi. “The African Union—A New Dawn for Africa?.” *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2002): 415-425.

contrary to the past OAU, which was predominantly state-focused (Muchie et al., 2006).

More recent literature on African regionalism further suggests that building strong global governance has centred on the existing relationships between NGOs and their international organisations (Scholte, 2012; Muldoon, 2018; Ahmed, 2010; Willets, 2010; Tallberg et. al., 2018). Therefore, the AU's role of maintaining closer relationships with its civil society groups can enhance integration and promote regional cooperation across the African continent (Söderbaum, 2016). This article primarily contributes to the literature on building effective African global governance through the role of African civil society and NGOs in the AU. Specifically, it addresses the key question of 'what is next after African unity?', by revisiting the role of African civil society in shaping African regional integration outcomes. It also seeks to understand how African civil society's engagement with the AU can contribute to a more inclusive approach to global governance in Africa.

The recent rise of globalisation suggests that international organisations (IOs) and NGOs are increasingly engaging with one another, allowing for greater freedom in interactions (Stroup, 2019; Ahmed, 2010; Barnett and Finnemore, 1999). Some NGOs, through their participation in regional organisation activities, have acquired more legitimacy, enabling them to operate within and beyond their spaces of influence (Reimann, 2006). According to Soderbaum (2007), NGOs, states, and multinational institutions have become constitutive of the sociocultural and political contexts of world regions. Other scholars of regionalism, such as Mittelman (2004) and Hettne (1999), have explored Karl Polanyi's work and suggested that NGOs are humanitarian bodies in the sense that they help protect economically disadvantaged citizens against exploitative market forces through advocacy, the promotion of democracy and the women's movement. Others also suggest that some NGOs command deference from various powerful audiences and are well-positioned to influence the practices of states and corporations (Stroup and Wong, 2017). Given these new developments, many have argued that NGO activities present a stronger force and a 'voice of the people' for global regimes (Falk, 2013; MacKenzie, 2012). At the same time, the opening up of spaces by international organisations and the granting of access to NGOs have broadly shaped and transformed global governance (Armstrong et al., 2011; Tallberg et al., 2013).

This paper argues that, in addition to the unity the AU aspires to maintain, it should also consider collective engagement efforts with African civil society that result in meaningful relationships and effective global governance in Africa. In this context, collective engagement refers to participatory efforts that involve sharing knowledge, norms, ideas, and activities, helping to inform decision-making processes and foster interactions among institutions and actors. Fundamentally, this study is important because the AU represents an international actor in global governance that symbolises Africa's response to globalisation (Edozie and Gottschalk, 2014). As the leading international organisation on the African continent (Tieku, 2017), the AU advances the tenets of a common African culture through the resuscitation of Pan-Africanism while constructing a shared African personality and identity through political mobilisation (Edozie and Gottschalk, 2014). Therefore, the goal of African unity continues to rest on the AU and how it conducts its affairs between African states and non-state actors. This study inspires confidence in the AU as an influential regional organisation in Africa that can provide political backing to both African states and non-state actors through various partnerships and institutionalised regional norms, thereby supporting African initiatives. As a result, providing a more empirical context to the dynamic relationship between the AU and African civil society is essential for understanding and promoting global governance in Africa.

This paper is structured as follows. The first part examines the concept of Africa's global governance through existing literature and demonstrates how multiple interactions among various actors collectively drive Africa's global governance. The second part of this paper discusses 'what is next after African unity' by revisiting the AU's institutional role as an African regional organisation that creates avenues for African civil society and NGOs to participate. Specifically, it evaluates the various participation mechanisms for African civil society and NGOs within the AU and how they can effectively contribute to global governance in Africa. The third part further highlights the importance of upholding the AU's regional norms in enhancing global governance in Africa. Overall, this paper concludes that, with regard to the AU, what follows 'African unity' is a collective engagement approach that is purposely driven by multiple stakeholders and state actors – one that moves beyond a state-centred approach to also embracing African non-state actors and the AU's institutionalised regional norms.

Africa's Global Governance

The term 'global governance' is a dynamic, complex, and increasingly important aspect of international politics. While there is no universally accepted definition of the concept, it denotes collective action among state governments to identify, understand, or address global problems that go beyond the capacities of individual states to solve (Weiss, 2012). Global governance is often achieved through interaction, engagement, and cooperation with formal and informal networks of actors on the global stage (Thomas, 2012; Rosenau, 2021). Recently, the interactions between international organisations (IOs) and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) at the intersection of the societal sphere and government have become a model for the emergence of 'global governance' and an inclusive cooperative approach to steering political affairs and the global economy (Scholte 2012; Steffek, 2013; Clark 1995).

The global governance debate dates back to 1989, during the post-Cold War era, when national politics underwent a significant transformation due to globalisation (Knight, 2009; Edozie and Gottschalk, 2014). The power of states began to diminish due to the increasingly global age, and states became more subject to huge political, economic, and cultural processes of change (Held, 2004). According to Rosenau et. al. (1992), global governance is more inclusive than state government relations as it embraces "governmental institutions and informal, non-government mechanisms whereby needs and wants are fulfilled" (p.4). In other words, it is a response to the global nature of the markets and communication networks, which requires not only intergovernmental responses, such as those carried out by the United Nations (UN) system, but also a response from NGOs and voluntary organisations operating at a regional and international level (Fernando and Heston, 1997). Some scholars observe that the discourse around global governance has followed a series of developments: initially focusing on the emergence of international governance regimes and norm setting within regimes, then the growth in the number of international regimes in the 1980s and 1990s, and finally research on the influence of the regimes on policies pursued by nation-states (Biermann et al., 2017). Nonetheless, most studies in global governance often point to whether and how non-state influences are growing in importance vis-à-vis states (Bernstein, 2011; Arts, 2006).

Africa's global governance is seen as evolving "through the sponsorship of states, through the efforts of actors other than states at the transnational or subnational levels, or through states and other types of actors jointly sponsoring the formation of rule systems" (Rosenau 2004, p.15). The new wave of Africa's global governance, in the form of international organisations (IOs) and NGO relationships, was stimulated in the post-1980s era. It was powerfully shaped by the strategies of state and non-state actors (Bach, 2015). Such a revolution, conditioned by an increased activism in IO-NGO relations and issues of global governance, expanded rapidly (Cogan et al., 2016). Despite these developments, there were criticisms levelled against Africa's global governance and its post-independent experiences as one that was largely informed by paternalism; a condition that allowed economic policies to be designed in the headquarters of the advanced capitalist economies without inputs from the supposed beneficiaries of such policies (Oloruntoba, 2020). However, recently, there has also been much discussion on building a more democratic global governance that focuses on the role of civil society and NGOs (Scholte, 2012).

Global governance in Africa can be challenging to explain and understand, particularly given the continent's extraordinary diversity, as exemplified by its varied religions, politics, economics, and sociocultural practices (Tieku and Gelot, 2017). Some have argued that the diversity in Africa makes it challenging to apply the concept of global governance, and may lead to a tendency of over-generalising, homogenising, and essentializing different views on the topic (Smith 2011; Mbembe 2001). Undoubtedly, Africa's global governance can be conceived in many ways. It may suggest a formal regulatory space that is highly hierarchical, structured, and interconnected, with diverse informal expressions of global and transnational networks and interconnections (Triandafyllidou 2017; Beswick and Hammerstad 2013). According to Martin Welz, global governance in Africa remains an important task that begins from examining an organisation's internal dynamics and scrutinising the conditions for common positions that lead to governance beyond borders (Welz, 2013). Others have argued that it is mainly about creating new economic, political, and socio-cultural circumstances that can serve to transform state powers (Held 2000; Zürn, 2010). Hence, it was this global context that birthed the creation of regional IOs in Africa, such as the AU. The AU, in turn, has helped to prepare the stage for the continent's symbolic response to globalisation and increased the political, economic, and cultural roles of African states, peoples,

and communities to utilise such institutions through collective action (Edozie and Gottschalk, 2017).

From a constructivist IR standpoint, Africa's global governance can be thought of as one significant enterprise among diverse attempts to construct ideas of an African identity and African political order that enables collective action and independence (Kanneh 2002; Ackah, 2016). A more relevant way to situate this idea is to point to the AU as "one way to grasp a transnational encounter, between traditional cultures and modernity, between particularism and universalism, and between Africa's regional transnational elite and the global environment" (Tieku and Gelot, 2017, p.120). The transformationalist globalisation² Perspective, for instance, suggests that in terms of global governance in Africa, regional organisations often possess a political role whereby African states, peoples, and communities utilise such institutions through collective action (Edozie, 2012; Held, 2004; Munck, 2005). This perspective describes global governance in Africa as having institutions of complex relationships; ones that seek to partner with while also superseding the regional, national, and subnational layers of a political society (Held, 2004).

Others also emphasise the need for a more relational approach to understanding Africa's global governance (Tieku and Gelot, 2017). Since the decision-making of any society is a collective endeavour and many African societies predominantly exhibit strong features of collectivist cultures (Ma and Schoeneman 1997; Stagner 1961), relationality (a mixture of individualism and collectivism in practices and decision making by political elites) becomes essential for building an enhanced agency in Africa's global governance (Fisher, 2018; Tieku 2012). In practising relational governance, the AU, for example, has the capacity to build a collective claim that prioritises group preferences over the specific interests of the states it represents at the global level, and a tendency to ensure group harmony and solidarity in dealing with issues pertaining to global governance. This allows national state members to voluntarily interject themselves into collective foreign policy networks of

2 The 'transformationalist globalization' is a perspective on globalization that was framed by global studies scholar David Held. The theory portends that globalization has a complex set of interconnecting relationships through which political power is exercised indirectly. For more on this perspective, see Held, D. (Ed.). (2004). *A globalizing world? culture, economics, politics*. Routledge.

regional cooperation that help them pursue new challenges emanating from globalisation (Scholte 1997).

Evidently, the understanding of Africa's global governance requires a more collective engagement effort; one that allows for multiple interactions among several actors and institutions, including African civil society and the AU. Since the African Union took over from the OAU, it has consistently pursued the vision of African unity in an effort to achieve a better life for the people of Africa and establish greater credibility in its relations across the globe (Oloruntoba and Falola, 2020; Agupusi, 2021). With its symbolic position as a transnational and collective action agent, what is next after African Unity is for the AU to encourage member states and African civil society groups to push for a more pragmatic common political space and positions for Africa in global governance.

What is next after “African Unity”?

Although conceptualizing the term ‘African unity’ remains challenging given the existing diversity among African states’ interests and the recurring patterns of conflicts across Africa, the unification of 32 independent African state leaders on May 25, 1963, to establish a common regional organization that would pursue a common interest on behalf of all African states was the starting point of envisioning African unity (Demana, 1996; Edo and Olanrenwaju, 2012; Van Walraven, 2019). The formation of the OAU emerged from the Pan-African idea that African states should be strong and united against colonial subjugation and racism by working together to improve the lives of African people (Packer and Rukare, 2002; Falola, 2022). With this objective in mind, the structure of the OAU rested heavily on the individual sovereignty of African states rather than African civil society groups and NGOs (Austin, 1966).³ Later, many African states achieved independence,

3 The principles of sovereignty were heavily embedded in the OAU's institutional structure. There were four ‘principal institutions’; The Assembly of Heads of State and Government; The Council of Foreign Ministers; The General Secretariat; and The Commission of Mediation, Conciliation, and Arbitration. The OAU Charter had five main objectives: a) To promote unity and solidarity of the African states; b) To coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa; c) To defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence; d) To eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa, and e) To promote international cooperation, having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

and their leaders saw that to maintain the unity, there was a need to refocus their attention from the fight for decolonisation and ridding the continent of colonialism and apartheid (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020), to increasing cooperation and integration among African leaders and civil society groups (Mule, 2001).

On May 26, 2001, 53 African leaders decided to form the AU, a new regional intergovernmental organisation that aspired to maintain African unity by bringing together several states on the continent.⁴ The AU's objectives are intended to be realised mainly through its *African citizens* and the 15 structures and organs (Agupusi, 2021). Most important among them are the Assembly, the Executive Council, Permanent Representatives Committee, Peace and Security Council, Pan – African Parliament, Specialised Technical Committees, AU Commission, NEPAD/AU Development Agency, AU Foundation, Financial Institutions, Judicial, Human Rights and Legal Organs, Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), African Peer Review Mechanism, Regional Economic Communities, Specialized Agencies and Institutions.⁵ While the AU aspires to maintain African unity through the above institutions, it also aims to adopt a more cooperative approach to African regional governance- one that rests on the participation of the African people (Gelot and Söderbaum, 2024).

Following its creation, the AU, as a facilitative agent of global governance, has currently united 55 African member states under one common regional organisation. This, however, raises questions about what is next for the AU after it has maintained African unity through a common regional body. And how can this unity influence global governance in Africa? This paper considers two key propositions in response to these questions.

Proposition 1: *The collective engagement efforts by the AU and African civil society can promote unity and enhance global governance in Africa.*

Proposition 2: *African states and non-state actors can enhance global governance in Africa by upholding AU regional norms.*

The AU, as a regional international organisation, recognises the importance of engaging African civil society and NGOs in shaping its regional integration agenda on the African continent (AfriMap 2007). More recently, there has been a growing interest in the activities of NGOs within international

4 See the AU Handbook 2019, page 13 for more details

5 Refer to the AU website for full details about the organs and structures: <https://au.int/en/overview>

organisations and their increased participation in global initiatives (Willetts 2010; Princen et al., 2013; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Historically, NGOs became consultative parties in intergovernmental discussions after the Second World War, as Article 71 of the UN Charter established consultative status practices regarding NGOs (Caceres, 2012). Subsequently, international organisations no longer represented mere forums for inter-state collective action. Still, a large number of them formalised a sort of consultative or observer status with NGOs, giving them varying degrees of access to their meetings, negotiations, and the implementation of policies (Vabulas 2013; Rebasti 2008; Jönsson & Tallberg 2010). NGOs' formal status in international bodies, however limited it may be, helps to strengthen the effectiveness of their informal tactics and engagement (Schoener 1996).

While most literature on global governance tends to focus on theorising NGO access to international organisations and the concrete dynamics of their interplay (Rebasti, 2008; Tallberg, 2010; Betsil, 2001; Arts, 2004), research on how the AU, as an African intergovernmental body, can promote cooperation among its member states while enhancing global governance remains scarce. For instance, the rise of African NGOs is currently evident as local NGOs are establishing headquarters within Africa and routinely working with about 50% of their contributions derived from Africans or the African diaspora (Hearn 2007; Nzimakwe 2008; Vakil 1997; Bratton 1990). Nonetheless, it is uncertain how the AU can harness such opportunities to collectively engage with its African civil society and enhance global governance in Africa.

The AU's Collective Engagement Effort with African Civil Society

The AU ECOSOCC is an institution established to give African civil society organisations a voice in the AU's decision-making processes (Adejumobi, 2009; Mbaya, 2023). Since its inception, the AU ECOSOCC has made concerted efforts to foster partnerships between governments and all sectors of civil society, thereby strengthening solidarity and cohesion among the African people and the region (Moyo, 2008; Rai, 2024). The AU Constitutive Act, for instance, provides for an ECOSOCC that serves as "an advisory organ composed of different social and professional groups of the Member States of the Union". The objective of the ECOSOCC is to provide an opportunity for African Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to play an active role in contributing

to the AU's principles, policies and programmes.⁶ Although its emergence is considered to have been delayed and described by many as politically motivated, it has become an opportunity for African civil society to shape its own future engagement with the AU before state governments get around to doing it for them (Sturman and Cilliers 2003, p. 72).

Besides ECOSOCC, the AU also has the Citizens and Diaspora Organisations Directorate (CIDO)⁷ This is entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the AU's vision of a people-oriented and driven organisation based on a partnership between governments, civil society, and diasporas. The directorate comprises the civil society and diaspora divisions. While the civil society division is responsible for mainstreaming civil society engagement into the AU's processes and departments, the diaspora divisions help build a global African family by ensuring the participation of the African diaspora.⁸ In the integration and development agenda of the continent. Essentially, the AU recognises the key role of the African Diaspora and their collective contribution to the continent's development. This is enshrined in Article 3 of the Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the AU, which invites states to encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an integral part of the Continent in building the African Union.

Furthermore, there exists the African Commission on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). This institution was established in 1986 in accordance with the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and works to protect and promote the rights set out in the Charter (Murray, 2019). The ACHPR allows African and international human rights organisations and NGOs to obtain observer statuses as they engage with the AU. Once they are granted such statuses, they can submit documentation and contribute at the Commission's sessions (Musila, 2013). Most of the key documents adopted by the Commission are also drafted with the assistance and support of human rights NGOs. These are all institutional mechanisms set out by the AU to collectively engage with its African civil society and NGOs.

6 Refer to the AU Constitutive Act Article 22 for more details.

7 <https://au.int/en/diaspora-civil-society-engagement>

8 "The African Diaspora consists of peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and building of the African Union." Read more at: <https://au.int/en/diaspora-civil-society-engagement>

Notably, the AU ECOSOCC and CIDO, along with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), are among the institutional structures within the AU that provide various participatory mechanisms for African civil society groups and NGOs. The AU allows non-state actors to keep oversight and accountability of their work as they participate in the decision-making processes (Bekele 2006). Despite the structures that the AU offers as opportunities for engagement, a key question that remains is whether African NGOs and civil society groups have effectively adopted such a pathway to enhance interactions and strengthen global governance in Africa. The AU can provide home-based credibility and legitimacy to African civil society groups seeking to participate in and engage with its activities.

Enhancing global governance in Africa requires substantial efforts from African civil society and NGOs. In fact, state sovereignty must no longer take precedence over regional integration goals, especially in terms of interactions between states and non-state actors across the continent (Kodero, 2023; Soulé, 2020; Houghton, 2008). It is also important to emphasise that the current global economic landscape leaves Africa with little choice but to decisively consolidate and collectively build its regional organisation. African state leaders must realise that true collective engagement efforts require them to think beyond the state level and embrace participation from all sources of networks and actors. There are good reasons for African NGOs to engage with the AU. It is the premier inter-governmental organisation for the African continent, and the body responsible for the realisation of African unity and political and economic integration. The AU also helps to promote Africa's social, political, economic, and cultural development (Houghton 2005; Oxfam and AfriMap 2010). Above all, it is the principal organisation for promoting Africa's global governance, its image, and the interests of its citizens. While the AU is now well-positioned to enter a phase of accelerated and more durable economic growth, the next phase is to consider deepening its engagement with African civil society, through which it can enhance global governance in Africa.

Upholding AU Regional Norms: Implications for Africa's Global Governance

Regional norms⁹ that are established by regional IOs for member states and relevant actors can enhance global governance (Leininger, 2014; Nash, 2021; Witt, 2019). Over the past two decades, the African continent has witnessed the evolution of a whole range of regional norms and institutions in the areas of peace, security, and democratic governance that set new standards for and help monitor developments within African states (Engel and Porto, 2010; Legler and Tieku, 2010). According to Nash (2021), norm creation in Africa took a different form, where African independence-era leaders did not simply localise international norms but rather chose existing norms and adapted other norms in ways that would best protect the sovereignty of independent African states. Essentially, regional norms in Africa evolved based on the experiences of African people and for their own purposes. The African Union in contemporary African regionalism is a norm entrepreneur that creates regional norms intended to shape the behaviour of both state and non-state actors on the continent.

Mumford (2021) argues that regionally bound norms can help to structure the politics amongst relevant actors and shape the development of regional organisations. They also create normative traps that make states and non-state actors converge on a particular institutional outcome. Despite the existing plethora of regional norms in Africa, Fagbayibo (2019) observes that there has been a high degree of non-compliance with these norms by member states and other non-state actors at both sub-regional and continental levels. Nonetheless, African civil society groups can effectively enhance Africa's global governance by adhering to and upholding existing regional norms on the continent.

As Africa's largest continental organisation, the AU advances the upholding of certain standards of behaviour that are binding on all its member states and non-state actors, aiming to foster a sense of collective belonging and unity. Some scholars even maintain that African international actors are locked in a Pan African rhetorical trap – “a normative environment on the continent in which certain outcomes become irresistible for a variety of actors because they accord unambiguously with the norms of the African community” (Mumford,

9 For a broader definition of norms, refer to Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization* 52, 4 (1998), pp. 891–893.

2021, p.6). It is therefore essential to consider the implications of these norms and how they can effectively enable African civil society to engage with the AU and enhance global governance across the continent.

Generally, the AU regional norms were largely shaped by interpretations of pan-Africanist ideas and regional interests (Nash, 2021; Witt, 2019). Therefore, many consider them to be Pan-African norms, which are described as standards of appropriate behaviour that privilege the (imagined) African community and its institutions and emphasise collective African action to develop or strengthen that community (Mumford, 2021). Two of such AU regional norms that African NGOs can adopt to enhance their global governance are: the '*African solutions to African problems*' norms and the *Pan African solidarity norm*. The former suggests that home-grown solutions based on African experiences and driven by African actors should be privileged as a means of strengthening African self-determination (Ani, 2019; Dersso, 2012). The latter also stipulates that African leaders must not publicly criticise each other but rather take a consensus-based approach to decision-making (Tieku, 2012).

The notion of 'African solutions to African problems' provides a remedy for Africa's regional security issues. This norm reflects Africa's shared values and the mission to embody them in addressing the continent's challenges. In the context of the AU and its global governance agenda, such a norm can help instil in African civil society groups a sense of belonging and a commitment for African individuals to work closely together with the AU (Chirisa et al., 2014; Franke, 2007). Such a norm may also 'conjure amalgamating politics with action, emphasizing pride, indigeneity, self-reliance, and taking ownership and responsibility' (Nathan 2013, p.48). The AU has the capacity to collectively uphold such norms in collaboration with African civil society and explore how African practices and principles can help address pertinent issues facing the continent at the global level.

The *Pan African solidarity norm* also aspires for relevant state actors and non-state actors to achieve solidarity among themselves. The norm evolved from the actions of post-independence African state leaders who led a popular campaign for Africa's independence and freedom from colonial rule. According to Bareebe (2018), the contemporary Pan-African solidarity norm enforces "the idea of solidarity with, and support for, African populations

facing dire threat from famine and epidemic diseases, terrorist groups, rebel movements, and their own repressive regimes” (p. 78).

Others suggest that the norm can help African civil society groups to collaborate with the AU as a more influential collective actor in global governance (Glas and Balogun, 2020). The Pan African solidarity norm is imperative for African civil society, as it fosters collective engagement and an independent pathway to the prosperity and economic well-being of the African people. In the drafting of the AU Constitutive Act, African leaders were influenced by the Pan African solidarity norm to build a partnership between governments and all segments of civil society to take up the multifaceted challenges that confront Africa and its people while considering the social, economic, and political changes taking place in the world (Dirar 2015; Murithi and Ndinga-Muvamba, 2005; Opuku-Mensah 2007).

Conclusion

While the AU seeks to maintain the African unity agenda that it inherited from its predecessor (the OAU), it is also committed to establishing the necessary conditions that will enable Africa to play its rightful role in global governance. The state-centred approach to African regionalism that previously existed in the former OAU has collapsed, paving the way for a more people-oriented approach to governance in the AU. This paper highlights the need to contextualise and understand the implications of African unity by exploring global governance in Africa from the perspective of the AU and the relationship between African civil society and the AU.

The AU institution is committed to facilitating the continued and structured “participation of African peoples in the activities of the Union” (AU CA, Art. 3 (c)). At the same time, it is expected to foster the networking of civil society groups by encouraging them to launch joint campaigns, uphold regional norms, present their experiences and influence decision-making. This paper has demonstrated that, with the help of certain institutions, such as the AU ECOSOCC and CIDO, along with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), African civil society groups can gain access to spaces within the AU and work collectively to enhance global governance in Africa.

The African Union is best equipped to represent Africa’s interests at the global stage, given that it adopts a more inclusive approach that is less elitist, less state-driven and closer to its citizens (Adejumobi, 2009). This will

further help in maintaining unity and addressing its problems continentally and beyond. Overall, the AU's attempt to engage African civil society rests heavily on the participatory mechanisms of knowledge sharing, norms, ideas, and activities by multiple states and non-state actors. This practice can help establish common positions for pursuing global governance in Africa.

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