

Abstract

PROSPECTS FOR FREE MOVEMENT OF PARTICULAR PERSONS IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY: A PLAUSIBLE REGIONAL BENCHMARK

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This paper advocates the thesis that free movement of persons in the current East African Community (EAC) is plausible and might provide a benchmark for all other African Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Despite developing protocols on free movement of persons (FMOP), African RECs have not gone far along the intended path and might not do so before the African Economic Community AEC) replaces them in the next decade or so. The paper underlines the point that good neighbourly relations are a prerequisite for the FMOP protocol as without them, suspicion among the REC member states negates uninhibited movement of persons. Experience of the defunct East African Community (EAC) of the decade 1967-1977 in which citizens of the partner states moved, resided engaged in their vocations freely suggests that these elements of FMOP occurred in the absence of any protocol. It is plausible that the expanded EAC which includes the traditional East African countries and the two Great Lakes Region states engaged in post-conflict reconstruction might provide the benchmark for free movement of persons provided the REC surmounts challenges and progresses as an entity of friendly neighbours. After reviewing the composition and baggage of the EAC partner states, the paper analyses the challenges to be surmounted and aspects of FOMP that could be instructive for all other African RECs. The paper calls for research on the FMOP protocol of the EAC to enable its partner states realise all stages of the process and to provide lessons for all other RECs.