

Regional Integration Process Must Involve All – Dr. J.L.S. Abbey

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Participants at a forum in Accra to discuss "Regional Integration in West Africa" on Friday agreed that the lack of appreciation of issues on Regional Integration among citizens was an obstacle to the process.

"Policies and programmes about regional integration need to be understood and well explained to the citizens".

Dr. Joseph Abbey, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), said issues such as regional integration were not only a matter of political will, but rather the need for proper coordination and implementation of policies.

The forum organized as part of the on-going European Union Week celebration, brought together participants including Mr. Mike Hammah, Minister of Transport, Mr. Ekow Barton Odro, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and technocrats from the Ministries of Trade and Industry.

Dr. Abbey said regional integration was a process and not an event and to get it going, politicians should not prescribe and impose issues on people, rather people should be part of the decision making process to enable them help in the implementation of policies.

He noted that Africa and for that matter West Africa was not homogenous as many people tend to assume, reminding participants that there were a lot of other issues that needed to be considered to enable the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) become as functional as expected.

"Even all Ghanaians are not homogenous, we still deal with the cultural differences and all these issues need to be properly analyzed to facilitate the regional integration process", Dr. Abbey added.

On issues related to smooth and effective transportation between one West African country and the other, Mr. Hammah said there had been policies in place to deal with those issues and what was left was the implementation aspect.

He advocated for the building of the railway system to link various African countries and to further promote trade and movement between countries.

Mr. Hammah named the border check point as one other challenge facing regional integration and urged all African countries to work towards removing such physical barriers that hindered the achievement of a borderless West Africa.

Mr. Odro said Ghana had made some progress in terms of relating with other neighbouring countries at the governmental level and expressed hope that the relations would soon be passed onto the citizenry to help achieve total regional integration in West Africa.

Mr. Claude Maerten, Head of the European Union (EU) Delegation to Ghana, said the EU considered Regional integration as a vehicle to help developing economies integrate into the world economy and was fully supportive of that.

He announced a 6.5 billion Euro support for African countries which were ready to build the capacity of their small and medium scale enterprises to enable them become competitive on the international market.