COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AMONG THE YOUTH IN THE EAC: THE ROLE OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY YOUTH AMBASSADORS' PLATFORM

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Abstract: *Collective identity, institutions, and culture are the most analysed social structures in studying regional integration. On the other hand, instruments such as culture, media, language, youth and education are crucial for homogenisation of regional groupings and instilling collective identity in regional communities. This paper asses the role of the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform (EACYAP) in promoting a collective regional identity among young people in Tanzania and Kenya from the year 2012 - 2018. The paper reviews different literature on collective identity and on how the youth groupings are relevant to integration and identity. The study also evaluates the quality of institutionalization of the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform by looking at the existing institutional and policy frameworks as well as documenting the experiences of the EAC Youth Ambassadors in promoting collective regional identity among their peers. Lastly the paper gives recommendations for making the platform more effective in playing its role. The study employed a mixed method for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Respondents were drawn from the EAC youth ambassadors from Tanzania and Kenya were the Universal set of ambassadors was taken, also officials from the EAC secretariat and Nyerere Centre for Peace Research were interviewed and their responses recorded. The study found out that the EACYAP has done a lot of activities and reached thousands of university students in the region. However, the platform has divorced the people centeredness of the EAC as it involves elites only and forgets the youth out of the education system. The study also found that, the EACYAP is characterized by too much intra-cohort collaboration with less inter chapter collaboration which is not positive for collective identity creation. The study recommends institutionalization of the EACYAP with a clear leadership structure and action plan as well as involvement of the youth outside of the academic institutions for making the platform more effective in playing its role.*

Key Words: Collective identity, East African Community, East African Community Youth Ambassadors' Platform, Youth

1.1 Introduction

Lack of participation of the private sector, the civil society and youth in the integration process was one of the factors that led to the collapse of the first East African Community in 1977. In its treaty for the establishment of the East African Community which was signed in 1999 and came into force in 2000, the EAC aims to be a people centred and private sector driven integration. A lesson from 1970s made the EAC keen on drawing its legitimacy directly from the people of East Africa by involving the relevant stakeholders of the private sector and the civil society in the integration process. Taking that into consideration the East African Community through its secretariat and the Nyerere Centre for Peace Research (NCPR) thought of a need to involve the youth in the integration process as one of the key stake holders in the EAC integration. This is in line with, Article 120 (c) of the *Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community* which provides for adoption of a common approach for involvement of the youth in the integration process through education, training and mainstreaming youth issues into EAC policies, programmes and projects as one of the strategic interventions towards the realization of a fully integrated Community. The East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform (EAC-YAP) was therefore established with the objective of bridging the information gap on the EAC integration, fostering youth participation in the integration process and finally creating the spirit of "*East-Africaness*" among the youth.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The East African Community in its treaty aspires for the establishment of a political federation as the ultimate goal of the community. *Article 5(2)* of the Treaty on the Establishment of the East African Community states that "*…the Partner States undertake to establish among themselves and in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty, a Customs Union, a Common Market, subsequently a Monetary Union and ultimately a Political Federation in order to strengthen and regulate the industrial, commercial, infrastructural, cultural, social, political and other relations of the Partner States…"*. From the Treaty itself, it is clear that attainment of the aspired political federation by the EAC is not an overnight event but rather a process that requires collective efforts from different stakeholders in the EAC integration. Etzioni (2001: xxii) argues that, in the regional integration process what is required to attain full "supranationality" is consistent with the attributes of a federal state namely adoption of binding institutions to which states are accountable but must also include a transformation of relations among people to the extent that they see themselves as one people sharing a common fate and a common destiny. This is to say, for the East African Community to have a fully-fledged political federation, it is important to promote a sense of common identity and belongingness especially amongst the majority groups of the population. In that effect several initiatives to promote the spirit of "*East-Africaness"* have been employed by the East African Community. The initiatives include; declaring Kiswahili as an official language of the community, establishment of a common EAC passport and the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform.

The EAC Youth Ambassadors platform is made of EAC youth ambassadors from the partner states who are appointed during the annual EAC students' debate. On merit basis the EAC secretariat shortlist 6 students from each partner state to compete in the EAC students' debate each year. This makes the total of 30 participants. From the debate the EAC Secretariat appoints (5) EAC Youth Ambassadors and (5) deputy EAC Youth Ambassadors from each partner state on a one year non-

renewable term. The EAC Youth Ambassadors act as focal points in their respective partner states and Universities, to collaborate with the EAC Secretariat in sensitizing their peers on the EAC integration processes, benefits and challenges. The rest of the debate participants, the young people that the youth ambassadors have or will engage with and the alumni youth ambassadors all become members of the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform. The EACYAP is therefore an initiative by the EAC secretariat to involve the youth in the EAC integration process and as a result foster the people centeredness as stipulated in the treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community. However, in as much as it is known that there is such a youth platform to promote collective regional identity among the young people in the region, how this platform came into existence its functions and how its character influence it in doing its work is still unknown. Moreover, this method seems to divorce the people centeredness as it involves elites only and forgets the people out of the education system famously known as the "common mwananchi". Therefore based on these grounds, this study seeks to assess the role of the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform in promoting collective regional identity among the young people in the East African community.

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study reflects on the functionalist theory of identity creation which argues that "the more indirect social relations are, the more important become social carriers such as texts or songs or buildings which store collective identities" (Mitrany, 1966:99-104) sited by Biira (2017:53). The extent that collective identities are linked primarily to individuals in concrete interaction situations, emotional ties such as the sense of pride and shame become an important mechanism for instilling collective identities to the extent that, collective identities are linked to objects as their carriers, these objects become carriers of generalized emotions that are built into the object, into images or texts. Such generalized emotions are embodied in what can be called "narratives". The argument takes seriously the emotional aspect of identity constructions to bring a concept that, there is something in the social relations that goes beyond the sense of shared interests and reciprocal solidarity (Gioia, 1998: 74).

Functionalists further argue that, a practical response to common problems, concerns and interests cannot be solved by a federation of states unless the political divisions with other units are integrated. This is to say, even if federations are adopted, the political division with other units would obstruct the necessary coordination of interests which are common to the populations belonging to different territorial entities. Functionalism develops a very strong argument for this study; the political federation in East Africa if adopted will be obstructed by the divisions in the political units that belongs to different partner states. Given the fact that youth are the majority of these population units in EAC, it is important that this East African identity is instilled in them before constitutional federation of states.

The study also draws insights from essentialist views on collective identity especially among regional groupings. Essentialism is an approach that believes in and looks for the 'essence', or 'true core', of objects, values, identities and cultures. There are essential core values and beliefs, essential cultural characteristics, and essential aspects of a way of life that make people X identify themselves as X (Crenshaw, 1995:26). Essentialism looks on the true core of identity by not only looking at what is to be an East African for example but by going deeper and look at critical

questions such as: *How one gets to be an East African? Do they claim or are just assigned? And for what essence.* Citing Benhabib (2002:5), Berg, Holtug and Lippert-Rasmusses (2010:39) highlight that, grouping identity requires essentialized and naturalized conception of groups as internally homogenous, clearly bounded, mutually exclusive and maintain specific determinate interests. The core quality of a particular group of people in inherent, eternal and unalterable. According to essentialists, these qualities of essence categorise race, ethnic, national as well as social groupings (ibid). Collective identity in the essentialist conception looks much on the thing that the group (substance) wants to realize. Linking the essentialism theory of identity to this study, the most important attribute is what the EACYAP wants to realise through their efforts to promote collective regional identity. The theory gives a foundation for a critical assessment of the platform in promoting collective regional identity among the youth by looking at what the platform seeks to realise after this collective identity is created. The theory also provide grounds to the author to meet the objectives of this study by adding a critical question of essence. This is to say, in this study I will not only be able to meet the objectives according to the study but also I will be able to show the essence of the findings of this study to several stakeholders in EAC integration process.

1.4 Literature review

I also look on the different studies on collective regional identity among the youth that have been done by other scholars in different regional blocs around the world. The aim is to find out what was the problem that necessitated such studies, the methodology or techniques used, findings and how those findings informed policy decisions in that regional bloc. The rationale is to know what is similar to or different from this study and to find out what value these studies can add in my study.

The European Union

In the European Union EU the Eurobarometer showed that there was lack of young people's participation in European Union Integration (Flash Eurobarometer 2004). Following the rejection of the European Constitution in 2005 (Flash Eurobarometer 2005: 11) and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 (Flash Eurobarometer, 2008: 6) whereby most of the young people voted no, a study on the potential European political identity among young people was conducted by Petra Huyst from Centre for EU-studies Ghent University Belgium. The study presented a research framework that combined both a quantitative and a qualitative approach drawing upon an in-depth case-study of a specific target group, namely young Europeans between the age of 17 and 24, in the European Union. Another multidisciplinary and multiregional research project entitled *Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity* (Jamieson 2005) whereby young Europeans (18-24) from different regions in different countries (Spain, UK, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic, Germany and Austria) were asked about their orientations to European identity, their feelings of being European, and their sense of European citizenship (research on young people and European identity).

Findings in these studies helped the European Union Commission to renew its youth strategy by presenting the *Engage, Connect and Empower* youth strategy. By "engage" the commission aimed at fostering young people's participation in civic and democratic life whereas "connect" aimed at connecting young people across the European Union and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding. The youth strategy

also aimed at supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. Furthermore, these studies have helped the European Commission over the last couple of years to make more effort to connect with its youngest citizens to raise interest and to stimulate participation. Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, for instance, mentions a focus in its communication strategy on young people and the importance of getting them involved. The commission also came up with a new position of EU youth coordinator whose role is to channel voices of young people to the Commission, hence allowing young people to contribute to shaping EU policies across areas. The coordinator's role is also to strengthen the dialogue with young people, especially through the European Youth Portal and the EU Youth Strategy Platform. This is more or less similar to what the EAC secretariat is doing through the Nyerere centre for peace research. Although the EU commission is not conducting students' debate as the EAC does, the roles of the EU youth coordinator are similar to the roles of the EAC youth ambassadors and this makes studying the approached used valuable to this study. Scholars in these research such as Du Bois-Reymond (1998) and Jamieson (2005) suggest that qualitative research and focus groups, in particular, are well suited for the task of unfolding the different dimensions of identity. This study has therefore borrowed some of the techniques (including the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative research methodology also known as triangulation) from these studies to understand and document promotion of collective identity by the EAC Youth Ambassadors.

Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

A study by Jones (2004) titled *Forging an ASEAN Identity* is also be used to examine the similar approached to this research. Jones' study was aimed at answering questions such as: - *How might ASEAN develop strategies to enable citizens in transitioning from nation-state mentalities to regional and possible cultural citizenry? How will the regional and national governing bodies facilitate the necessary empowerment of diverse populations to form an ASEAN identity? What sorts of affiliations will engender the necessary social capital to develop civic-minded people with a sense of belonging together?* As well as, *how might education play a role in this process?* In his study Jones employed both qualitative and quantitative methodology. He sampled a certain group that went through trainings on ASEAN integration with the aim of spreading information on ASEAN integration to their peers and another group that has not been in any training about ASEAN integration. He then studies the sense of identity that these two different groups have by looking at the levels of cooperation and communication between youth from different ASEAN countries between these two groups.

ASEAN is an association with great diversity that is composed of societies and political constituencies. The study hence employed a research framework that combined both a quantitative and a qualitative approach in order to understand the foundation of ASEAN identity formation. Through that study ASEAN has been able to come up with the project named "Forging ASEAN identity". The project aims at instilling collective ASEAN identity among the youth. The youth comprises 60 percent of the ASEAN population. For this reason, the ASEAN Foundation aims to instil the Southeast Asian Identity to the youth sector; targeting the future leaders of the nations for active involvement in workshops and conferences and providing opportunities for them to build genuine friendships.

The study by Jones (2004) is effective in answering the third research question of this study by giving out suggestions on how to ensure that the youth that have undergone through the trainings by the EAC secretariat and the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform have real knowledge about the EAC integration process and have the capacity to promote collective regional identity among their fellow young people. The study also informs improvement in the methodology form this particular study by including focused group discussions which provide a more critical analysis and interpretation of findings.

1.5 Methodology

In this study, triangulation method has been used; this is a procedure for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting both quantitative and qualitative data in the research process within a single study to understand a research problem more completely (Brayman, 2001:44). When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for more complete analysis. There are incidences where there were contradictions in responses and the researcher had to get back to the respondents and ask for more clarification on their responses. In other cases, when more information was needed from respondents outside the scope of this study, the researcher also looked for additional or supporting information from those respondents.

Respondents in this study were all the debate participants including serving and alumni youth ambassadors from Tanzania and Kenya, officials at the political federation department of the EAC secretariat, Nyerere Centre for Peace Research and the Ministries of EAC affairs in respective partner states. The reasons for selecting debate participants is their active participation in sensitization activities with different segment of population in their respective partner states whereas the selection of officers from the Nyerere Centre for Peace research and the EAC secretariat was influenced by their role not only as coordinators and guardians of the EAC-YAP but also as the initiators of this platform. The desk officers of the ministries of EAC affairs in Tanzania and Kenya have also been tracking and keeping records of the sensitisation activities done by the EAC youth ambassadors hence their inclusion as respondents in this study was crucial. Hence in this study the respondents were as follows: 72 EACYAP members from Tanzania and Kenya, 3 officers from EAC secretariat and the Nyerere centre for peace research and 2 officers from Ministries of EAC affairs. Therefore, the total number of respondents in this study was 77.

1.6 Findings
EACYAP institutionalization
On the institutionalization of the EACYAP All of the respondents from EAC secretariat indicate that there is an agreed concept note and terms of reference guiding the establishment of the EAC youth ambassadors platform. Responding to the interview question on the existing institutional and policy framework guiding the establishment of the EAC Youth Ambassadors one of the EAC secretariat officer said:
"…the terms of reference explain the rationale for the establishment of the EAC youth ambassadors, their appointment process, their role as the EAC youth ambassadors, the reporting mechanism and the expected output"

Respondents also mentioned that there is the EAC Youth Policy of 2013 which acts as a policy framework regarding engaging the youth on regional integration and hence complementing the

role and functions of the EAC youth ambassadors in promoting collective identity among the youth in the East African Community.

However, (60%) of the respondents from the EACYAP didn't know of any existing policy or institutional framework guiding the EAC YAP. (30%) of the Youth Ambassadors are aware of the existing institutional framework whereas 10% of the respondents had no opinion on the existence of policy or institutional framework for the EACYAP. When breaking down these findings basing on nationality and gender the results are. 70% of the 60% who don't know about any existing policy and institutional framework are from Tanzania and 30% of the same are Youth Ambassadors from Kenya. 55% of the 10% who are not sure about the existence of policy and institutional framework are from Tanzania and 45% are from Kenya. Furthermore, out of the 30% of respondents who are aware of the existing policy and institutional framework guiding the EAC-YAP 60% of them are from Kenya whereas Tanzanians constitute 40%. Basing on respondents' gender, results shows that 65% of the 60% percent with no information about existing policy and institutional framework about the EAC-YAP are female whereas the male constitute 35% out of 60%.

EACYAP Chapters organization
Table 1. Response to whether the EACYAP chapters are well organised with a work plan

	Yes		**No**		**No opinion**	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Tanzania	9	14.1	20	31.2	3	4.7
Kenya	10	15.6	22	34.4	-	-
Total	19	29.7	42	65.6	3	4.7

Source: Field data, 2019

Findings on table 1 shows that, majority (65.6%) of the respondents are of the view that the EAC YAP chapters are not well organized and do not have a work plan. On the other hand, 29.7% agree that the chapters are organized with a work plan where as 4.7% of the respondents had no opinion on whether the chapters are organized with a work plan or not. Kenya has more respondents who said the chapters are not organized (15.6%) than Tanzania (14.1%). This can be interpreted that the EAC YAP Kenyan chapter is less organized than Tanzanian chapter. Furthermore, findings shows that, 4.7% of the youth ambassadors have no opinion on whatever is happening in their chapters. This could translate to either less information about the activities in the respective chapter or the respondents are not engaging themselves in the activities of the chapter. An interesting part is that, all the "no opinion" response have been recorded from the Tanzanian respondents of which Tanzania has less "no" answers on whether the chapters are well organized with a work plan. This means that the Kenyan chapter despite of having no work plan and organization, it has managed to keep its members together than the Tanzanian chapter. The researcher wanted to know further, why these 4.7% of the ambassadors don't know of anything that is going on in their chapter. The response was that they are not involved or at least informed about the activities in the chapters.

On the EAC youth policy, respondent from the EAC Secretariat highlighted that the youth policy is a policy framework guiding youth engagement in the East African integration process. In the foreword of the youth policy, the former EAC secretary general Ambassador Dr. Richard Sezibera comments "the youth policy provides for a common approach to address the various youth issues at EAC level and ensures that the programs initiated at regional level are youth centred. It also aims at ensuring that the youth in general are fully engaged and play their roles and responsibilities alongside other citizens in the development of their countries and in the EAC integration process" (EAC Youth Policy, 2013).

When asked about the process for the adoption of the EAC youth policy an officer from the EAC secretariat responded:
"…There are several processes that have led to the development of this policy. They include Council Decisions based on the recommendations of the EAC Forum of Ministers responsible for Social Development made during its first, second and third meetings held in Kigali, Bujumbura and Nairobi"

He further added that, the policy has been developed by the EAC Secretariat after wide consultations both at Partner States level and at the EAC regional level. National consultations involving a myriad of stakeholders including government, development partners and civil society were conducted to ensure ownership and understanding of the obligations and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

On the other hand, Majority (59%) of the EAC YAP members are not aware of the EAC youth policy as well as the processes used to formulate the EAC youth policy. 30% of the youth ambassadors have little knowledge about it and its existence whereas the 11% of the Youth ambassadors participated in the draft of the EAC youth policy. Contrary to the response from EAC secretariat, majority of the EAC youth Ambassadors shows that they were not involved in the processes for the development of the EAC youth policy. From these findings it is noted that the youth policy came into force after the establishment of the EAC Youth Ambassadors platform however majority of the EAC YAP members claim not to be involved in the whole process of the EAC youth policy drafting as one of the youth ambassador commented:
"...we were just invited to participate in the 2ⁿᵈ EAC youth convention in 2014 where one of the items on the agenda was launching of the EAC youth policy. Personally I didn't know what that was until that same day at the launching"

Findings on the quality of institutionalization of the EAC-YAP shows that there are some agreements, terms of reference and concept note guiding the establishment of the EAC YAP. Findings further shows that there is an EAC youth policy which is a policy framework regarding engaging the youth in the EAC integration. However, there has been a disconnection between the formulators of such policies or documents and those that the policies are being formulated for. The study has also found out that the EACYAP has no clear leadership structure and the chapters are not well organised with no work plans. It is important that both the youth ambassadors and the EAC secretariat sit together to formulate the EACYAP leadership structure at both regional and national levels. This will help solving the disjointedness that has been highlighted in this study and make the platform work effectively and efficiently.

Experiences of the Youth Ambassadors in promoting collective identity among the youth
The study also aimed at documenting experiences of the youth ambassadors in promoting collective regional identity among the young people in the region. In this the study looked at the activities and population segment that the EAC Youth Ambassadors engaged with, the Engagement between the EAC YAP and other Stakeholders in EAC integration, as well as experiences in EACYAP chapters. The findings are presented here below as follows:
Activities
On the activities that the EAC youth ambassadors conduct finding shows that Youth ambassadors conduct sensitization programs in the higher learning institutions in the partner states. The terms of reference for the EAC youth ambassadors highlights that the first function of the EAC youth ambassadors is sensitization. The targeted population for these campaigns are the young people in the higher learning institutions. Sensitization activities are conducted by the youth ambassadors in collaboration and guidance from the Nyerere Centre for Peace Research, the Political Federation department of the EAC secretariat and the ministries of East African Affairs in the partner states.

The objective of the sensitization activities include; to increase awareness on the EAC integration process among the university students; to discuss with the youth on opportunities and challenges of integration as well as the role the youth can play in fostering a prosperous East African integration. The East African Community secretariat through its Nyerere Centre for Peace Research upon selection of the EAC Youth Ambassadors conducts a training of trainers, advocacy and campaign program to the appointed youth ambassadors. During this training youth, ambassadors are equipped with the knowledge, methods and techniques of advocacy, which is the essential component of Sensitization. Youth ambassadors are also trained on communication and diplomacy to help them communicate with different population segment in their campaigns. At the end of this training together with the EAC secretariat, youth ambassadors from each chapter identify the higher learning institution they want to visit in their country. They further identify areas of interest for the targeted groups of students and then propose themes for different sensitization programs. The youth ambassadors are given a month period to go and look for all necessary requirements for the sensitization campaign including permits from the university administration to allow them conduct these sensitization programs in that particular university. Upon the receipt of the confirmation, the EAC secretariat provides the youth ambassadors with the necessary resources for implementation of the intended activity. The youth ambassadors provide feedback in terms of quarterly reports to the EAC Secretariat on all sensitization program conducted.

An officer at NCPR said that, in a year, each platform conducts an average of 10 sensitization activities and one activity has an average of 200 participants. This means one chapter reach an average number of 2000 students each year, which translate, to a 10,000 students in a year by all five chapters. The officer added that the number of activities could be multiplied to reach a larger number of youth but budgetary constraints makes it difficult. As sensitizations programs are conducted by each chapter separately, different chapters have been using different methods of sensitization. The Tanzanian chapter for example has been using the media to sensitize the youth on the EAC integration where as the youth ambassadors in Kenya have been using the internet to conduct their sensitization projects to reach the larger population. The youth ambassadors in Kenya have been using Twitter and Facebook to spread awareness on regional integration to the youth in

Kenya. The chapter started a twitter account with a handle "EACYAPkenyanchapter" which they use to pass different information, conduct discussions and seek opinions on youth engagement on the EAC integration process. The feedback on these engagements is sent to the EAC secretariat for further considerations.

Engagement between the EAC YAP and other Stakeholders in EAC integration
The terms of reference for the EAC youth ambassadors mandates the youth ambassadors to liaise with the EAC ministries in the respective partner states to conduct sensitization programs to the youth. Upon appointment by the EAC secretariat, youth ambassadors are introduced to their respective ministry of EAC affairs by the EAC secretariat. In the introduction letter, the EAC secretariat explains the reasons for the appointment, expected functions, outcomes and requests the ministry to provide the youth ambassadors with necessary support for the effective conduction of sensitization programs.

The Kenyan chapter has received support from the EAC ministry in all of their sensitization campaigns. When asked to rate the level of support the youth ambassadors have received from the ministry of EAC affairs in Kenya, 80% of the respondents responded that the ministry has been supportive in the sensitization programs. The ministry dedicated an officer to deal with the youth matters. This officer has been working hand in hand with the youth ambassadors in Kenya to identify, plan and coordinate sensitization programs in different higher learning institutions. The ministry has been giving not only sensitization materials to the youth ambassadors but also experts to talk with the youth in the sensitization program. An officer from the Ministry of EAC and regional development in Kenya commented that, the ministry is ready to work with the youth in Kenya in creating awareness on EAC integration

On the other hand, findings from Tanzania shows little support from the EAC ministry. Respondents from Tanzania said that, there was some kind of support from the ministry before it was merged with the ministry of foreign affairs to form the ministry of foreign affairs and East African cooperation. One of the respondent argued that, it is difficult now to know who to go to in a big ministry like that. The same contact person that used to attend youth issues is no dealing with foreign relations and not EAC issues anymore. When interviewed for this research officers from the ministry of foreign affairs and EAC cooperation in Tanzania acknowledged that the merge has made the cooperation between the ministry and the youth ambassadors to face difficulties.

The EAC YAP has also been collaborating with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) in several programs such as sensitization programs and petitions. EALA sensitize the citizens of East Africa on opportunities and challenges of the EAC integration. The assembly conducts sensitization activities in all the EAC partner states. EALA engage different stakeholders including the youth ambassadors in these sensitization programs. Youth ambassadors commented that, they are happy that EALA recognise them as one of the stakeholders in the EAC integration process and invite them to their sensitization programs. Although EAC YAP and EALA are not having a formal agreement on the terms of cooperation and partnership, the informal cooperation seems to work perfect well between the two. The EACYAP has also been inviting EALA members to participate in their sensitization programs and this has helped to increase the capacity of the EAC-YAP to conduct more sensitization events.

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Petitions is another way in which the EAC YAP has been engaging with the East African Legislative Assembly. EALA rules of procedure provide that any citizen of the Partner States, natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Partner State, shall have the right to address and seek answers from the Assembly, individually or in association with other citizens or persons, through a petition to the Assembly on a matter which comes within the Community's fields of activity and which affects him, her or it directly. Using this clause, the EAC YAP has petitioned EALA two times. The first petition was on youth inclusion awhile the second was on harmonization of student's fee policy in East Africa.

Findings in this research shows that all of the two petitions by the EACYAP to EALA originated from the voices of the youth during the sensitization programs that the EACYAP conducts. The two petitions were registered, forwarded to the speaker of EALA and later to the committees responsible. The youth ambassadors have also been called to appear before these committees responsible for the two petitions for hearings where the feedback from these committee was sent to the speaker and tabled for discussion in the assembly. The assembly agreed to the motions and the deliberations were forwarded to the council of ministers for further deliberations. Furthermore, the EAC YAP has been engaged with different youth networks in the region. The EAC YAP has been engaging with the national youth councils and youth organizations in the respective partner states. The republic of Kenya has a functioning youth council and hence the EAC YAP Kenyan chapter has directly been engaged with the Kenyan youth council in its different programs. Findings also shows that a partnership between the EACYAP and the youth council is beneficial not only to the EACYAP activities but also to the Youth Council growth. On the other hand, the EACYAP in Tanzania has been championing the establishment of the National Youth Council in Tanzania. The EACYAP Tanzanian chapter has been involved in the discussion, dialogues and lobbying meetings with the parliament of Tanzania on the bill for the establishment of the national youth council in Tanzania

Challenges facing the EACYAP in playing its role

Table 2. The challenges facing East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform

The challenges faced by the EAC youth ambassadors	Replies of respondents	Number of respondents	Percentages (%)
Insufficient support from relevant and concerned National offices such as the National Youth Councils and MEACs	Strongly Agree	69	95.8
	Agree	3	4.2
	Disagree	-	-
	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Total	72	100
Delays in Funds	Strongly Agree	67	93
	Agree	3	4.2
	Disagree	2	2.8
	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Total	72	100
Lack of an established network with key resource personnel	Strongly Agree	66	91.6
	Agree	4	5.5
	Disagree	1	1.45
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.45
	Total	72	100
Lack of knowledge and understanding of the EAC matters among the young people	Strongly Agree	70	97.1
	Agree	1	1.45
	Disagree	1	1.45
	Strongly Disagree	-	-
	Total	72	100
Lack of coordination between east Africa youth ambassadors and the EAC secretariat	Strongly Agree	46	63.9
	Agree	12	16.6
	Disagree	9	12.5
	Strongly Disagree	5	7
	Total	72	100

Source: Field data, 2019

Findings from the table above (table 2) show that; Insufficient support from relevant and concerned national offices such as MEACs, delays of funds, Lack of an established network with key resource personnel, Little knowledge and understanding of the EAC matters among the young people and lack of coordination between East African youth ambassadors and the EAC secretariat, are the challenges facing the EAC youth ambassadors platform. Majority of the respondent have strongly agreed that the mentioned challenges are the major challenges facing that EAC youth ambassadors platform

1.7 Conclusion and recommendations
This study sought to do an assessment of the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform (EACYAP) in promoting a collective identity among the young people. I looked at the platform's institutionalization by focusing on the institutional and policy framework guiding the platforms activities. I also documented experiences of the EAC youth ambassadors in promoting collective regional identity among the young people by looking at the activities conducted, segment of population engaged with as well as collaborations with different stake holders in the EAC integration process. In this study I have also explored similar studies and techniques used in other regional blocs to promote collective regional identity among the young people. I have looked on studies and mechanisms to promote collective regional identity among the youth in the European Union and Association of the South East Asian Nations. Not only that but I have also looked at the challenges facing the EACYAP in promoting collective regional identity and provide for suggestions or recommendations to make the platform more effective in playing its role.

For the platform to be more effective and perform its activities efficiently, there is a need for strong commitment to support the platform from both the EAC secretariat and the members of the platform themselves. The EAC secretariat as the mother to this platform has the obligation to sustain the platform by committing strongly to support its activities. The EAC secretariat should also push the ministries of EAC affairs in the partner states to give necessary cooperation and assistance to the youth ambassadors and their activities. Youth ambassadors should not be left alone in their chapters without a guidance from the EAC ministries. In cooperation with the EAC ministries and the members of the platform, the EAC secretariat should also after a reasonable time of period conduct an assessment to see whether the platform is playing its role or not. There should be timely evaluations to see the extent to which the objectives for the establishment of such a platform are met. This will not only help the platform to improve its efficacy in promoting collective identity among the youth in the East African region but also it will help the EAC secretariat and the ministries of EAC affairs in the respective partner states to assess the effectiveness of the methodology employed to promote that collective regional identity among the youth.

There is also a need for institutionalization of the platform. This starts with an established leadership structure of the platform at both levels that is regional and national level. There is a need for a clear work plan and allocation of duties and responsibilities so that it is clearly known who does what. Institutionalization of the platform also involves formal registration of the platform at regional level and national level. This study has found out that, the platform lacks formal recognition from some of the stakeholders in the EAC integration due to lack of formal documentation of the platform at both national and regional level. Registration of the EACYAP at those two levels will not only foster its recognition from the stakeholders but also it will make the EACYAP activities to be featured in the EAC secretariat or Nyerere Centre for Peace Research calendar and hence make the platform play its role effectively and efficiently. I therefore recommend through this study that, the East African Community Youth Ambassadors Platform organize to have a clear leadership structure and a formal registration bot at national and regional level.

Lobbying for funds from other partners apart of the EAC Secretariat is another mechanism that will make the platform effective. The platform is supported financially by the EAC secretariat

through its Nyerere Centre for Peace Research and donors such as the GIZ. However, there is no clear budget allocation for the platform from the EAC secretariat a situation that has hindered effectiveness of some of the activities of the platform. University students' debate which has been declared as an EAC annual event be the council of ministers has failed to take place in the planned time due to delays of funds from the EAC secretariat. Through findings in this study, I therefore propose that the platform adopts a clear leadership structure so that it is known who the leaders are in both the chapters and the platform as a whole. This will not only help the platform through its leadership to be able to lobby for funds from other stakeholders apart from the EAC secretariat but also it will solve the communication barriers between the EAC secretariat and the EACYAP. I also recommend through this study that, the EAC secretariat should support the EACYAP in lobbying for funds so as to give the platform a bigger voice in front of the funders. Availability of funds will change the platform from being event based as it has been portrayed by some of the respondents in this study to being an active platform with regular engagement and activities.

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