

# Foreword

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The last two decades will be remembered as the period with the longest sustained economic, social and political development in Africa's post-colonial history. This period will also be remembered for the continent's heightened aspirations for regional integration, considered from the outset as an instrument for ushering in the ideational values of pan-African solidarity, cooperation and shared socio-economic development. One can safely argue that the building blocks for African integration have been laid at the continental level with the bold move from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), and more recently the promulgation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018. Furthermore, the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were engaged in frenetic efforts to consolidate and reshape their regional integration and development institutions and instruments in response to the changing context of regional and global development. Therefore, the current momentum towards deeper African regional integration has been created by the continent's craving for structural economic transformation. Africans have recognized that now is the time for the continent to embrace economic diversification and specialization through industrialization. Concomitantly, it is my conviction that the more heterogeneous, diversified and interdependent the African economies, the better they will become integrated and develop together.

The African RECs' institutions are so central to regional integration that, time and again, these institutions are called upon to respond to a myriad of challenges, ranging from the free movement of people, trade in goods, inter- and intra-state conflicts and external economic partnerships. Africa's insistence on having a continent-to-continent partnership with the European Union and other entities is a bold move, revealing a continent confident enough to shed itself of past divisive approaches. In a sense, Africa has shown its strength in pooling its efforts and resources and always strive towards articulating a Common African Position (CAP) in all prospective partnerships. My hope is that a continent-to-continent arrangement could be an answer to the questions raised in this book on the continuity and change in Africa's emergent external partnerships, also with multiple regions. Consider, for example, the African Union's currently

recognized external regional partnerships with China (institutionalized in FOCAC, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation), the Arab world, the European Union (through the EU–AU Summit), South America (in the Africa–South America, or ASA, Summit), Japan, the United Nations and the World Bank (in the TICAD), India, Turkey, the United States, Korea and Australia.

However, two major challenges are confronting Africa. First, there is the multiplicity of and overlap among African regional integration institutions, where only eight are recognized by the African Union: the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Second, the existence of multiple regional communities produces multiple asymmetries related to area size, location, population, gross domestic product (GDP), natural resource endowments, industrialization, infrastructure and many other dimensions, reflected in inter- and intra-regional trade and investment. In Africa, asymmetries within and between regions create gainers and losers. For example, countries that find themselves on the losing side on trade with the establishment of the AfCFTA, and in the absence of policy instruments to redress their concerns, might cling to sovereignty in the face of what they may consider a trade regime that poses a threat to their national economies. Comparatively, for instance:

European regional development policy is based on the political principle that the richer countries and regions need to maintain solidarity with the poorer ones, and on the economic principle that the lower levels of output of the poorer Member States and regions, or those with high levels of unemployment, are a loss of potential and opportunity for the Union as a whole. (European Union 2009: 4)

Although African regionalisms, as stated in this book, have not yet developed into full-fledged regional communities, returning to the ethos of pan-Africanism and solidarity which kindled the decolonization struggle, is still a guiding principle. Therefore, the solidarity ethos must have been in the minds of the African people and governments when they conceived *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* (African Union 2015a). Make no mistake: if insufficient serious thinking is put into how to deal with asymmetrical regionalisms, the multiple asymmetries analysed in this book may become the major bones of contention that will eventually retard Africa's ambitious regional development project.

The authors of this book have lived up to their promise of offering the reader a well-argued overview of the theoretical and policy implications of the development of African regional asymmetries. They have done this in six well-integrated chapters, delineating African regionalisms from a comparative perspective. In its engagement of the debate on the multiplicity of and overlap in African Regional Economic Communities, one of the strongest points of the book is the authors' attempt to interrogate African regionalisms in their own right, instead of as failures or successes in mimicking other regional development experiences. Three aspects of this book are to be highlighted here. First, the authors are able to synthesize the literature and theorizing about African regionalisms and elsewhere in a condensed space without losing sight of accessibility and flow. Second, although it is not about the history of African regionalism, the book presents the reader with sufficient and succinct historical background to help them appreciate the depth of African regionalisms and the impact of history. Third, the book straddles the academic and policy debates, and engages with the most pertinent contemporary issues in Africa's long-term objective to develop into an integrated regional community, and the promises and challenges informing it.

As a former Deputy Executive Secretary and Chief Economist at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and prior to that a Director for the New Partnership for Africa's Development and Regional Integration Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Senior Policy Advisor, Trade and Development Bank (TDB), I appreciate that this excellent analysis echoes some elements of the ongoing debates on Africa's regional cooperation and integration. This book is a 'must read' for senior management and staff of the AU, RECs and other regional institutions, as well as academic and professionals working on regionalism in Africa and other developing countries. It is also a welcome addition to the reading lists prepared for undergraduate and graduate students focusing on African and other developing-country regionalisms.

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