

# AGENDA FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

## REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

### SYNTHESIS

#### PANEL 1: REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN AFRICA FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE NEED TO RATIONALISE REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Panel 1 served as a synthetic, critical introduction to regional economic integration on the African continent. The relevance of regional integration in this context since independence, the main historical phases of the integration processes, obstacles and difficulties, as well as future potential and successes achieved to date were covered.

Participants looked at the rationalisation of Regional Economic Communities (RECs), both in terms of the analysis of general trends in the regional blocks as a whole, and from the perspective of the specific case of Central and Southern Africa and its main RECs: COMESA, EAC and SADC. In this region, over and above the progress achieved in some sectors such as infrastructure or energy, the question of trade emerges as a priority. The overlap of RECs of different types and the multiple memberships of some countries represent a source of uncertainty for economic agents. Given the imperious need to harmonise and rationalise the situation, the 26 member countries of the 3 RECs mentioned above started tripartite negotiations in 2001 to respond to priorities such as certificates of origin or the harmonisation of external customs tariffs common to the three regions, with a view to creating a large free trade area.

The debate among the participants covered a number of questions, some of which were of great interest and reflected the current state of affairs:

- The political commitment of African governments to regional integration and common values was debated, together with the question of whether or not there is a real will to delegate authority to supranational institutions.
- The need to include other strategic private agents in the process was also examined, above all in light of the fact that the African citizens are so remote from these processes that are predominantly directed by and from high-level bodies.
- Some interventions suggested a need to strengthen regional redistribution mechanisms, along the lines of the European cohesion funds, which enable the negative effects<sup>1</sup> of integration

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the reduction in revenue from customs tariffs, which represents a high percentage of the GDP of some countries.



on the smallest, worst-off or poorest countries to be mitigated. Others mentioned the signing of the interim Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) as an element that is having a negative effect on the efforts to rationalise RECs, particularly in the region on which the Panel's analysis concentrated.

## **PANEL 2: REGIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN AFRICA AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC GROWTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Panel 2 integrated the dimension of peace and security of regionalism in the case of West Africa, the new institutional architecture, inscribed in the continental framework, and the mandate to prevent conflicts approved in the 1999 Summit.

A significant part of the Panel was dedicated to demonstrating how regional integration has diverged from the initial developmental vision, oriented to the structural crises on the continent<sup>2</sup>, and has given preference to models of freer trade. Policies of industrialisation and of increased production<sup>4</sup> disappeared as structural adjustment was applied. Currently, the intensification in the human development crisis, the ensuing intra-regional migrations (and perverse effects), and the limitation of the role of the State show that it is necessary to return to a "traditional development agenda", including, in the first instance, an increase in productive and industrial capacity, with social instruments based on solidarity (gender equality, health, education).

The following questions were raised:

- Much of the debate centred on the real ends of regional integration and its programmes (e.g. NEPAD), and the degree to which the development dimension constitutes its main aim. The question of food security in a regional context was mentioned together with, once again, the potential impact of EPAs in the context of African agricultural and food policy.
- A possible tendency towards the militarization of the peace Agenda in Africa was mentioned, in the design of the structure of the continent and its articulation by regions, and the need to strengthen judicial aspects in the mandate of conflict prevention. The role of the United Nations, in line with the AU's position, was underscored.
- Some of the founding principles of regional integration, namely subsidiarity and ownership, were mentioned. In this sense, the option of an open type of regionalism should not hinder the relative recovery of certain *political spaces*, facilitated by the multiplication of the continent's international partners and the

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<sup>2</sup> With the visions of the first regional organisations such as ECOWAS or the OAU in the sixties and seventies.



weakening of conditionalities imposed by donors and international financial institutions.

### **PANEL 3: MANAGEMENT OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL**

The third Panel examined the mechanisms for application of regional agreements on a national level, including institutional and legal (protocol ratification) mechanisms, and how they are transferred into national plans and budgets. Although the OAU envisaged that African countries would create a Ministry dedicated to the coordination of regional integration policies, this function is actually carried out by the Foreign Affairs Ministry in most cases. Economic resources were cited as a major limiting factor in the national application of regional commitments. Emphasis was laid on the need to continue strengthening institutions, recognising the central role of the State in policy design and monitoring and in the decision-making processes at three levels (continental, regional and national). The case of Ghana, the country that has ratified the highest number of ECOWAS protocols, was considered.

It was clearly demonstrated that the decision-making process, and in particular the balanced participation of all member countries of a REC, can affect time deadlines and the effective meeting thereof. The specific case of the extension of the common external customs tariff of the WAEMU to ECOWAS was studied, including the conditions laid down by Nigeria, which were not taken into consideration initially.

The debate centred on a number of points:

- Questions relating to institutional capacity, political commitment to regional integration processes and the acceptance of the delegation of authority were debated once again, with mention being made of the slow progress registered in some regions. Adherence to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs was questioned, although the role played by the national mechanism of policy coordination was underlined.
- The emergence of new values from 2000 onwards was debated. These new values are more oriented towards positive sovereignty and democracy, present in the philosophy of the AU and NEPAD.
- In terms of leadership imbalances (such as the crucial role of Nigeria in ECOWAS), it was stated that these imbalances are mitigated, to a certain extent, when the fact that decisions are taken by consensus and on equal vote principles is taken into consideration. Finally, the question of the influence of foreign partners on REC decisions arose. These include the links maintained with former colonial powers in the case of the two monetary unions of West and Central Africa (WAEMU and EMCCA), or the trade negotiations in larger spaces, such as the EPAs.



## ACRONYMS

REC	Regional Economic Community
CEMAC	Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (acronym taken from the French)
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EAC	East Africa Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
OAU	Organization of African Unity
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
SADC	South African Development Community
AU	African Union
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA, <i>Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine</i> , in French)

