



# HESPI

The Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute

## The Africa Integration Paradox: Progress, Challenges, and Alternative Paths

Danilo Desiderio

The Horn Economic & Social Policy Institute (HESPI)



January 2026

# *The Africa Integration Paradox: Progress, Challenges, and Alternative Paths*

Danilo Desiderio\*

Senior Associate at HESPI

(Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8819-0799>)

---

\* Danilo Desiderio is a lawyer leveraging two decades of legal specialization in customs, trade, and transport policy and regulation. A former Head Researcher at the Centre for Studies and Services of the Italian Council of Customs Brokers and consultant at the Italian Ministry of Trade and the Italian Cabinet of Ministers (Department for EU Policies), Danilo established in 2019 Desiderio Consultants Ltd. in Nairobi (Kenya), spearheading critical customs and trade reforms across Africa. As a Senior Associate at the Horn Economic and Social Policy Institute (HESPI), his research informs trade policy analysis and development in Africa. Danilo also serves as Senior Customs and Trade Specialist at the World Bank.

## Abstract

The classical theory of regional integration, which prescribes a linear, step-by-step progression from Free Trade Areas to Political Unions, has long served as the blueprint for African continental and regional frameworks. However, this paper argues that the rigid application of this model has resulted in an integration paradox: while institutional frameworks have proliferated, practical economic integration remains stalled due to Africa's unique structural, institutional, and political-economy complexities. By examining the limits of the linearity assumption and the "circularity" of current African integration efforts, this study demonstrates that African nations are increasingly pursuing alternative trajectories. These approaches are more flexible, adaptive, and explicitly non-linear, prioritizing functional cooperation, sector-specific initiatives, and corridor-based integration over rigid, sequential institutional milestones. The paper concludes with targeted policy recommendations for the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and national governments, advocating a shift toward a modular integration framework centered on variable geometry and measurable development outcomes.

**Key words:** economic integration, regional integration, linearity, non-linearity, AfCFTA, Abuja Treaty, African Union, Regional Economic Communities

## Acknowledgements

This document was presented at the *Consultative Workshop on the Readiness Assessment Towards the African Customs Union and Common Market*, organized by the African Union Commission (AUC), Department of Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Energy, Industry and Minerals (ETTIM) in Lusaka, Zambia, from 2 to 4 December 2025. The workshop, supported technically and financially by the European Union (EU)-Technical Assistance Facility (TAF), aimed to consult key stakeholders and initiate preparations for a forthcoming Conference on the establishment of the African Customs Union and Common Market. The workshop brought together representatives of African Union Member States, African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Export–Import Bank (Afreximbank) and the EU-TAF.

This paper presents key findings and updates an earlier study mandated by a Decision adopted on February 2022 by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union [Assembly/AU/Dec.829(XXXV)], to assess Africa’s readiness for the establishment of a Customs Union and Common Market, in accordance with the Abuja Treaty (1991) establishing the African Economic Community (AEC).

The author expresses sincere appreciation to the officials of the ETTIM Department, UNECA and Afreximbank, as well as to all participants in the Lusaka workshop for their substantive contributions. Their insights and first-hand updates on the state of regional integration—particularly progress toward the establishment of customs unions—have directly informed and strengthened the analysis presented in this paper.

## 1. Introduction

The ambition for regional economic integration has long been a cornerstone of development policies in Africa. Rooted in post-independence pan-African aspirations<sup>1</sup> and reinforced by global trends toward regional economic blocs,<sup>2</sup> this vision rests on the premise that collective action can expand markets, foster industrialization, and strengthen Africa's bargaining power on the global stage (Aemro & Nsoh, 2024).

Over the past five decades, efforts to integrate African regions have led to the creation of numerous treaties, frameworks, and institutional structures at both continental and regional levels, resulting in a complex mosaic of integration models (Oppong, 2011). Many of these initiatives have drawn inspiration from the European Union (EU), whose achievements in economic development, reduction of political and cultural divides, and promotion of stability have made it a compelling reference point for African policymakers and elites seeking to replicate similar gains on the continent (Kitipov, 2012).

The linear approach to integration, as exemplified by the EU, postulates that the various stages of integration should unfold in a rigid and predetermined sequence, where States progressively move from loose cooperative arrangements to increasingly sophisticated forms of economic and political convergence. In practice, Africa's integration trajectories have often diverged from this linear path. Factors such as institutional and regulatory heterogeneity, geographic and social fragmentation, uneven economic development, and diverse national policy priorities have led to asynchronous and sometimes conflicting approaches. These realities produce complex, non-linear integration patterns that classical models fail to capture (Asche, 2021).

This study examines these emergent pathways, showing how African nations are adopting more flexible, adaptive, and context-sensitive strategies. It argues for a reconceptualization of classical integration theory, proposing frameworks that better reflect the continent's unique geographic, social, economic, and institutional complexities. A detailed critique of the applicability limits of the linear models is presented in a dedicated section below.

## 2. Africa's evolving approach to Regional Integration

Despite the initial embrace of the linearity paradigm by the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, integration processes in many African regions have followed in their practical application a more erratic and fragmented course. Many of them have leapfrogged critical integration stages, for instance, by advancing towards the adoption of elements of a Common Markets or Monetary Unions without fully establishing a robust Customs

---

<sup>1</sup> "Pan-African aspiration" refers to the deep desire and ambition for the unity, solidarity, and empowerment of people of African descent worldwide, both on the African continent and in the diaspora. This ideology is based on the belief that people of African ancestry share a common history, cultural heritage, and destiny, often shaped by shared experiences of slavery, colonialism, racism, and exploitation (Kumah-Abiwu, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> The latter half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1960s onward, witnessed a discernible global trend toward the creation of regional economic blocs. While Europe, with the establishment of the Economic Community for Steel and Coal first and the European Economic Community (EEC) after, emerged as a frontrunner in this integration movement, other regions concurrently embarked on establishing their own economic blocs. Notable examples of this trend include Latin America, which saw the formation of the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) in 1960, then followed by the Andean Pact and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). Similarly, in Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967. Initially driven by broader political and security imperatives, ASEAN progressively shifted its focus to encompass significant economic cooperation objectives.

Union first. Others have selectively implemented components from different integration stages in parallel, rather than adhering to a strict, sequential progression.

The landscape of African integration has also seen the emergence of mergers between existing blocs. Some of them, like the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA)<sup>3</sup> have seen successful realization, albeit after a protracted gestation period. Other ambitious merger proposals have not come to fruition. These include for instance the proposed unification of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), as well as the more expansive attempt to consolidate the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) into a single REC (examined in Section 12).

Efforts toward monetary union convergence within Africa continue to face significant challenges. The proposed monetary union between ECCAS and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), and a similar one between ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)<sup>4</sup>, remain ongoing but are encountering considerable difficulties in their progression. This situation highlights the inherent complexities in achieving deeper economic integration and currency harmonization across diverse regional blocs.

All these deviations should not be viewed as failures to implement a linear model of economic integration, but rather as symptoms of its limited applicability to African realities. The continent's profound structural heterogeneity, weak industrial bases, limited economic diversification, pervasive infrastructural deficits, policy asymmetries, and varying levels of political commitment among African nations, render the rigid application of the classical regional integration patterns too idealistic for Africa's unique needs (Kimenyi & Kuhlmann, 2012). Consequently, a more flexible, context-sensitive approach is required. Achieving robust and effective regional integration in Africa demands a fundamental shift from pre-defined models to embrace more endogenous and pragmatic schemes.

### 3. The Classical Theory of Regional Integration

The study of regional economic integration as a distinct academic field emerged in the mid-20th century, specifically in the immediate post-World War II scenario. This period was characterized by a profound desire among nations to foster peace and stability, rebuild war-torn economies, and prevent future conflicts through increased interdependence and cooperation. In particular, the devastating impacts of the war highlighted the need for new mechanisms to manage international relations and promote economic prosperity. This environment provided fertile ground for scholars to investigate how countries could collectively advance their economic welfare and diminish the probability of renewed hostilities through structured regional arrangements. The initial theoretical frameworks for regional economic integration were profoundly influenced by the contributions of several prominent economists. Jacob Viner (1950) laid critical groundwork by analyzing the trade-creating and trade-diverting effects inherent in customs unions. James Meade (1955) further refined these concepts, delving into the broader welfare implications of economic unions. Béla Balassa (1961) articulated a highly influential five-stage model of economic integration, which has

---

<sup>3</sup> The TFTA was launched in June 2015 as an inter-regional co-operation and integration arrangement among the countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

<sup>4</sup> Better known with the French acronym UEMOA (*Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine*).

become a cornerstone of regional integration studies. The model outlines a sequence of progressively deeper levels of economic cooperation among sovereign states, with each stage building upon the previous one:

- i. **Preferential Trade Area (PTA):** this initial stage involves member countries agreeing to reduce tariffs on a select range of goods traded among themselves. It represents usually a foundational step to economic integration, signaling an early commitment to trade liberalization within a bloc.
- ii. **Free Trade Area (FTA):** often building upon a PTA, an FTA is characterized by the substantial, and ideally complete, elimination of tariffs (and sometimes, non-tariff barriers) on all trade among member countries. Crucially, each member retains independent trade policies with non-member countries. In the African context, a clear example of this progression from a PTA to an FTA is COMESA. COMESA was initially established as a Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTAESA), which came in existence since 1981, becoming an FTA after 12 years, in 1993.
- iii. **Customs Union (CU):** unlike FTAs, a Customs Union not only eliminates internal tariffs among members, but also implies the establishment of a Common External Tariff (CET). A CU reaches becomes “perfect” when member states not only implement and adhere to the CET without any exceptions, but they fully delegate their trade policy authority to a supranational body, thereby granting it full autonomy over the conduct of external commercial relations.<sup>5</sup> This authority includes the power to negotiate and conclude trade agreements with third countries, to administer trade defense measures,<sup>6</sup> and to impose both tariff and non-tariff barriers (Ovádek & Willemyns, 2019). In such a configuration, exemplified by the EU, the tariff treatment of imports from third countries is identical regardless of the member state of entry. In stark contrast, no existing CU in Africa fully aligns with this “perfect” model.
- iv. **Common Market (CM):** this stage represents a deeper level of integration, extending beyond trade in goods. In a CM, in addition to the features of a CU, there is free movement of factors of production, namely: capital and labor, as well as goods and services, across member States’ borders.
- v. **Economic and Monetary Union:** an economic and monetary union builds on a CM by incorporating macroeconomic policy coordination mechanisms among members. This often includes harmonized fiscal policies and, most notably, the adoption of a common currency managed by a central monetary authority, signifying a significant surrender of national sovereignty for deeper economic alignment.

The above sequence can ultimately culminate in the establishment of a Political Union, which implies a full political integration involving the total unification of fiscal and social policies under the auspices of a supra-national authority making binding rules and decisions for its members. In Africa, the only REC that has explicitly included the objective of achieving this highest level of

---

<sup>5</sup> Importantly, full autonomy in the conduct of external commercial relations is a key condition for a customs territory to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO), as set out in Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the Organization. Consequently, regional or continental bodies in Africa, such as the African Union, cannot attain WTO membership unless their member states fully transfer to them the authority to conduct external trade relations.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., anti-dumping, countervailing duties, safeguard measures.

integration in its founding treaty is the EAC (art. 5), which outlines the ultimate goal of building a political federation among its States.

#### 4. Applicability Limits of the Classical Integration Theory to Africa

As noted in the previous section, Balassa's model presents economic integration as a natural, linear progression through successive stages. In his conceptualization, each stage provides the foundation for the next, gradually giving rise to more complex forms of integration and to supranational governance structures that progressively incorporate sovereign functions from member states. This sequential model—clearly exemplified by the evolutionary integration path followed by the EU—is primarily driven by economic rationales, including the pursuit of greater economies of scale, the creation of interconnected economies that capitalize on members' comparative advantages, and the efficiency gains and increasing returns enabled by deeper cooperation.

However, despite the appeal of this linear blueprint, Africa's integration efforts have so far produced unsatisfactory outcomes (OECD & AfDB, 2002; Qobo, 2007; Unya, 2016). This paper argues that these shortcomings are not the result of poor implementation, but rather reflect the intrinsic limitations of the linear model when confronted with Africa's unparalleled geographical, social, economic, regulatory, and institutional complexities.

When applied to the African context, the linear model articulated by Balassa and much of classical integration theory reveals significant constraints. Its assumptions—homogeneity in economic development and institutional capacity, the ability of countries to harness comparative advantages, a willingness to cede sovereignty, and the existence of effective enforcement and dispute-resolution mechanisms—are rarely met on the continent. Specifically:

- 1) **Homogeneity in economic development and institutional capacity:** The classical model presupposes a certain degree of uniformity among participating countries regarding economic development and institutional strength. In contrast, African nations display vast disparities in economic structures, the concentration of economic activity, and the robustness of their institutions (Michael et al., 2021).
- 2) **Ability to harness comparative advantages:** Unlike the EU, where diverse industrial and service-based economies facilitate inter-country trade based on comparative advantage, many African nations have largely undifferentiated economies. Reliance on primary commodities and limited industrial diversification results in low trade complementarity (UNCTAD, 2024), constraining the development of regional value chains that require segmentation of production across countries with complementary capabilities.
- 3) **Political will to cede sovereignty:** The classical model presupposes a strong and consistent commitment to transfer national authority for anticipated long-term gains. African states, however, often exhibit reluctance to relinquish sovereignty, reflecting domestic political priorities and developmental concerns (Okhonmina, 2024).
- 4) **Enforcement mechanisms and dispute resolution:** The traditional linear integration model assumes the existence of strong and effective supranational institutions capable of enforcing agreements and adjudicating disputes among member states. In the African

context, such mechanisms are either weak, underdeveloped, or underutilized.<sup>7</sup> While some RECs and the African Union have established dispute settlement frameworks, their practical effectiveness is limited, and enforcement generally relies on voluntary compliance. Historically, African governments have tended to resolve differences through diplomatic negotiation rather than formal adjudication, particularly in areas such as trade, reflecting both concerns over national sovereignty and the limited capacity of regional institutions to compel compliance (Erasmus, 2022). Even when regional courts—such as those of the EAC, COMESA, or ECOWAS—issue rulings, there are no mechanisms to guarantee enforcement, leaving implementation entirely contingent on the willingness of member states. This highlights how, in practice, many AU and REC decisions remain largely unenforceable (Salami, 2013).

In many instances, these structural, economic, and political realities have pushed African integration along alternative, non-linear trajectories, deviating from the sequential progression envisioned by classical theorists. Institutional and regulatory heterogeneity, persistent geographic and social fragmentation, uneven development, and diverse national priorities have all contributed to this divergence, producing multi-speed, context-sensitive integration pathways. Consequently, African integration processes have assumed novel configurations that demand a rethinking of traditional models, highlighting the need for flexible, adaptive, and practical approaches that reflect the continent's unique realities.

## 5. Trade Deflection Vulnerabilities in African Customs Unions

Lower forms of economic integration, such as PTAs and FTAs, are particularly susceptible to trade deflection, often referred to as “transshipment” or “dumping”. This phenomenon occurs when goods are rerouted through member countries with lower external tariffs to avoid higher duties imposed by other members. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is not immune to this risk. Although Rules of Origin (RoO) are designed to mitigate trade deflection by differentiating between goods originating within the FTA/PTA and those from third countries,<sup>8</sup> their effectiveness can be undermined by circumvention tactics employed by traders. In the African context, these challenges are exacerbated by the high porosity of national borders. Illicit traders often exploit these weak points by importing goods through States with lower tariffs or separate preferential agreements with third countries<sup>9</sup> and then moving them informally across borders to countries with higher tariffs. Akakpo (2021) provides a compelling illustration of this phenomenon along the Ghana-Togo border where consignments arriving in Lomé are transported by trucks near

---

<sup>7</sup> This weak enforcement is illustrated by the findings of the 2017 Kagame Report, which identified a “chronic failure” to implement African Union decisions, describing it as an “implementation crisis” of continental regulation. Among more than 1,500 resolutions adopted by the AU Assembly, the report found no reliable information on how many had been implemented at national or regional levels. It also highlighted that the AU Commission lacks effective enforcement mechanisms for ensuring compliance, except in very limited cases such as delayed member contributions or unconstitutional changes of government.

<sup>8</sup> Goods originating in third countries, once imported in a member of a PTA or FTA, retain their country-of-origin status and are subjected to a customs duty in the state of entry of the FTA or PTA. From there, such goods do not change their origin even if they are reexported from that state to another country in the FTA, where they therefore attract another customs duty.

<sup>9</sup> An example is the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) concluded by some African nations or groups of Nations with the EU or with the United Kingdom (UK). Traders can import goods originating from the EU or the UK through one of the countries that has signed these agreement and re-export them in other African States through informal borders, avoiding the payment of customs duties.

informal crossing points, broken into smaller loads carried by local residents, and reconsolidated inside Ghana for onward distribution—bypassing official customs controls and duties.

The risk of trade deflection is particularly acute in African regions with a high density of borders and a concentration of small states. West African coastal countries illustrate this vulnerability, with over 30,000 km of land borders separating them. Such geographic fragmentation increases the likelihood that goods may bypass official trade channels to exploit tariff differentials between neighbouring states. To counteract this risk, many governments implement stringent control measures, including rigorous border inspections, multiple checkpoints along road corridors, and customs escorts. While these measures aim to curb illicit trade and protect national revenues, they directly conflict with the foundational objectives of Customs Unions and the AfCFTA, which seek to reduce internal border controls to facilitate free movement of goods and foster regional integration.

In principle, a Customs Union should neutralize trade deflection because the external tariff is uniform across all member states. Traders have no incentive to choose one entry point over another, since the same duties apply regardless of which member state the goods enter through. This uniformity explains the minimal internal border controls that are typically found within Customs Unions, while stricter enforcement is maintained at the external borders (Yasui, 2014).

In practice however, even CUs are not entirely immune to trade deflection, although their degree of vulnerability depends on union's characteristics. In a highly integrated (perfect) CU, such as the EU, uniform application of the CET and consistent enforcement of prohibitions substantially reduce trade deflection. Yet, rerouting of cargo still occurs, such as in Southern Europe, where importers favor Northern European ports perceived as more efficient, cost-effective, and better connected to hinterlands (SRM, 2014). Ports and border crossings unable to guarantee rapid customs clearance or competitive costs consequently lose traffic.

In less integrated, “imperfect” CUs, the risk of trade deflection is far higher due to multiple exceptions to the CET and the absence of centralized trade policy authority. Importers may exploit loopholes, rerouting shipments to countries with fewer restrictions or the most efficient entry points within the customs territory before redirecting goods to their final destinations. As discussed in Section 3, all African CUs fall into this “imperfect” category, consistently allowing national exceptions to the CET and lacking a full transfer of trade policy authority from national to supranational institutions.<sup>10</sup> For example, in the EAC, Article 12(3) of the Customs Union Protocol establishes a “stay of application” mechanism, allowing Partner States—subject to authorization by the Council of Ministers and publication in the EAC Gazette—to temporarily deviate from the CET. This flexibility enables States to address domestic economic pressures by applying higher or lower duties to protect infant industries, stabilize prices, or respond to supply shocks and inflation, while remaining within the Customs Union framework. A second EAC mechanism is the Duty Remission Scheme, established under Section 140 of the EAC Customs Management Act (2004) and regulated by the EAC Duty Remission Regulations. It allows manufacturers to import non-locally available inputs or inputs used for extra-EAC exports at reduced or zero duty. Although

---

<sup>10</sup> It is however important to note that, under the Abuja Treaty, the adoption of a common trade policy vis-à-vis third states is envisaged as a prerogative of the African Economic Community, representing the final stage of the integration process outlined in the Treaty (art. 4.2.f). Instead, such prerogative is not inherent in the establishment of a Continental Customs Union alone.

intended to support industrialization and competitiveness, the scheme effectively results in differentiated tariff treatment among Partner States.

In ECOWAS, deviations from the CET take the form of prohibition lists, governed by Articles 21 to 24 of the ECOWAS Customs Code. These include a Community-wide list applicable to all Member States and nationally defined prohibition lists, permitted under Article 22, reflecting country-specific policy priorities such as public health, environmental protection, or moral considerations. While these mechanisms serve legitimate economic and regulatory objectives, they weaken the uniformity and predictability of CETs and introduce asymmetries that can undermine the coherence of regional customs unions.

Even the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), Africa's oldest CU, illustrates these limitations. Although SACU has established mechanisms for coordinating the negotiation of collective trade agreements,<sup>11</sup> its supranational institutions do not have the authority to independently conduct external commercial relations or to fully replace member states in formulating and implementing trade and customs policies. This persistent retention of national trade policy prerogatives among member States highlights a fundamental divergence between African CUs and the European Union integration experience, underscoring the structural and institutional constraints that continue to shape regional trade dynamics on the continent.

## 6. The Functionalist and Neo-Functionalist Perspectives

Functionalist theories do not propose an alternative sequence for economic integration processes. Instead, they offer a core logic for why States should delegate essential economic functions to a supranational body. This idea aligns with the classical regional integration theory's baseline concept that by delegating decision-making power in specific policy areas (like trade) to regional organizations, nation-states can achieve better and more effective economic outcomes.

In the European context, functionalist theories gained widespread support after the second World War, as they were seen as a powerful way to overcome the deep divisions and rivalries that caused the conflict. Transferring parts of national sovereignty to supranational institutions was considered necessary to build solidarity among European nations, better align their interests, ease political tensions, boost economic growth, and ultimately prevent further military conflict (Draper, 2010). In contrast, in Africa functionalist theories have largely failed to take hold. This is mainly due to the reluctance of newly established nation-states to cede authority over economic governance functions to supranational (regional or continental) institutions and to the strong emphasis on national sovereignty that African nations continue to have (Glickman, 1987; Grant et al., 2023).

The neo-functionalism is a modern version of functionalism. While the basic principles of both theories are the same, the neo-functionalist theory suggests a gradual approach to regional integration which starts with the initial transfer of responsibilities within limited policy areas from States to a supranational entity. This process then gradually expands to other related areas, creating a "knock-on effect" where successful cooperation in an initial sector incrementally extends to other interconnected policy domains. This fosters a cumulative and progressively expanding integration process, where advancements in one area generate momentum for further collaboration and integration across other policy spheres (Manboah-Rockson, 2021).

---

<sup>11</sup> SACU is the only REC in Africa to have collectively concluded FTAs with external blocks. An example are the SACU-EFTA FTA of 26 June 2006 and the SACU-MERCOSUR PTA of 15 December 2008.

## 7. The New Regionalism Perspective

By the 1990s, a wave of scholarly critique to the classical integration theories gave rise to the new regionalism theory. This theoretical paradigm emerged in response to the growing proliferation of regional agreements, particularly those outside the traditional European and North American contexts. Pioneered by influential scholars such as Hettne and Söderbaum (1998; 2003), this theory fundamentally seeks to identify the diverse drivers of economic integration, arguing that the relevant process may be motivated by reasons extending beyond the purely economic rationales advocated by Balassa and, more generally, the classical integration theory (Fawcett, 2025). These considerations lead to the conclusion that economic integration processes can also exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Politically driven:** Regional integration initiatives often arise from motivations that go beyond purely economic interests. These may include security concerns, such as the desire to promote stability in politically or socially turbulent regions. Additionally, states may choose to cooperate to address common challenges or pursue shared pragmatic interests in specific sectors, thereby broadening the rationale for integration. In Africa, a notable example is the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), the predecessor of today's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). IGADD was established primarily to combat drought and desertification by bringing together countries facing similar environmental threats. Its creation was inspired by the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), founded in 1973 by the vulnerable Sahelian economies to coordinate responses to the region's severe climatic challenges.
- **Multidimensional:** rather than being confined solely to economic liberalization, economic integration processes may be driven by a broad spectrum of factors, including social cohesion, political governance, and broader developmental objectives. The EAC provides a clear example of this approach, as Art. 3.2 of its establishing Treaty stipulates that the admission of new members is contingent upon an assessment of the homogeneity of the prospective member's social and economic policies with those of the existing Partner States.
- **Non-linear and overlapping:** the new regionalism theory acknowledges that integration rarely follows a rigid, sequential path. Instead, it often involves multiple RECs coexisting and engaging in cooperation across diverse sectors. This approach recognizes the so-called "*spaghetti bowl*" effect, which refers to the complex and often confusing web of overlapping and sometimes contradictory regional trade agreements and preferential arrangements that can emerge when countries are simultaneously members of multiple blocs. In effect, the spaghetti bowl phenomenon complicates trade rules, customs procedures, and the overall business environment. For example, a single product might face different ROO or tariff rates depending on the specific agreement under which it falls, even if the trading partners are part of a broader regional grouping. This complexity can increase transaction costs for businesses, deter investment, and hinder the full realization of economic benefits from integration (COMESA & UNCTAD, 2023). Despite these challenges, the New Regionalism perspective views such overlapping arrangements not necessarily as failures, but as a reflection of the multifaceted and often non-linear nature of contemporary regional integration processes, driven by diverse political, economic, and social objectives.

- **Embedded in global processes:** regional integration is rarely an isolated phenomenon, as it is usually shaped by broader global trends. Ongoing globalization, liberalization pressures, and shifting international power dynamics significantly influence these initiatives. For example, as global markets become more integrated or new economic centers emerge, some countries may be incentivized to form regional blocs to achieve a critical mass able to boost their collective competitiveness and increase their bargaining power on the world stage (Mussa, 2000).

Examining African integration phenomena through the lens of New Regionalism is particularly useful to understand the processes undergone by African RECs. Many of these Communities originated from political symbolism, driven more by aspirational politics, ideological pronouncements, and the desire to project a specific image or ideal, rather than by concrete, immediate, and fully implemented economic integration plans (Bischoff, 2021). From this perspective, Africa's diverse and seemingly chaotic integration attempts can be reinterpreted as reflecting a deeper, more nuanced logic encompassing State-building efforts, complex geopolitical situations, and dynamic sectoral cooperation experimentation.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), serves as a prime example, demonstrating a dual emphasis on security cooperation and economic integration. Its proactive engagement in regional peace and stability initiatives runs parallel to its efforts in fostering trade liberalization and market integration (Mouthaan, 2022). The frequent utilization of various regional institutions as platforms for diplomatic mediation and conflict resolution further underscores that African integration is fundamentally a politico-strategic exercise, which extends beyond mere economic considerations (African Economic Conference, 2013).

In summary, the approach taken by African RECs differs significantly from the historical origins of the EU. The EU's construction process was rooted in efforts to build regional value chains, particularly in two strategically vital sectors: coal and steel. This strategy was embodied in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which aimed to foster economic interdependence and integration as a means of preventing future conflicts in post-war Europe. The underlying rationale was that by pooling essential resources under a common authority, the likelihood of inter-state warfare would have significantly diminished, thereby creating a foundation for lasting peace through economic integration. In stark contrast, African integration often begins with a broader, more holistic vision that intertwines political stability and diplomatic solidarity with economic objectives. These economic goals are frequently just one component of a comprehensive package of cooperative areas, which often include peace and security, social development, infrastructure connectivity, and cultural exchange. This inherent multidimensionality reflects a distinct historical trajectory and set of priorities where the pursuit of stability and collective problem-solving often precedes or runs parallel to purely economic liberalization efforts (Iqbal & Khan, 1997).

## 8. Institutional and Political Economy Theories

Understanding African integration necessitates a critical reexamination through the lens of institutional capacity and political economy constraints. Insights from scholars like North (1990), Li & Abiad (2009) and Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) are particularly pertinent, as they underscore how institutions (comprising formal rules and their enforcement structures), fundamentally shape the trajectory, pace, and credibility of integration efforts. Applied to the African context, key institutional and political economy challenges are:

- **Limited institutional harmonization across RECs:** African RECs often struggle to develop consistent and harmonized institutional frameworks among their diverse member States. Even when such frameworks are established, their inconsistent application, primarily due to a lack of political will and robust enforcement mechanisms, leads to regulatory fragmentation and inefficiencies. A prominent example of this challenge is the varied implementation of Protocols for the movement of persons. While many RECs have formally adopted such frameworks to facilitate free movement across their member States' borders, their practical application is often uneven. This disparity results in arbitrary border controls, inconsistent visa requirements, and varying interpretations of rules, hindering the intended benefits of integration for citizens and businesses alike. For instance, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, Right of Residence and Establishment, despite being adopted as early as 1979, continues to suffer from unharmonized implementation across ECOWAS member States, since barriers to the movement of persons still persist, such as harassment at borders, multiple checkpoints, as well as the common practice of imposing undue fees on travelers (Adepoju & Clotney, 2015; Conteh, 2025).
- **Fragmented infrastructure and border inefficiencies:** Across Africa, the absence of high-quality infrastructure is a major impediment to economic integration. This deficiency not only raises transaction costs for traders but also hampers the smooth movement of goods, services, and people across borders. Much of the problem stems from the historical design of transport networks, which were largely developed during the colonial era based on a “spoke-and-wheel” model. These networks were primarily intended to link resource-rich inland areas to coastal ports for export, rather than to promote inter-country connectivity and regional trade (Adeyemo, 2019). As a result, cross-border travel in Africa is still today difficult and costly. Even journeys that cover relatively short distances can take several days due to poor road conditions, missing rail links, and inadequate infrastructure.
- **Capacity deficits in customs, tax administration, and regulatory oversight:** Significant shortcomings persist in national customs and tax administrations in Africa, as well as broader regulatory and oversight capacities (Montagnat-Rentier et al., 2025). These deficiencies hinder the effective formulation, implementation, and enforcement of common policies essential for deeper integration, such as harmonized customs and transport procedures, coordinated trade regimes, and unified regulatory frameworks across RECs. The limited institutional strength in these critical areas directly impedes the smooth flow of goods, services, and capital, ultimately undermining the goals of economic integration.
- **Power asymmetries and the vested interests of domestic elites:** The pace of regional integration often depends on how well necessary reforms align with the interests of powerful actors and the existing balance of power among member States. Nigeria's experience within ECOWAS provides a pertinent example. During the negotiations for the ECOWAS CET, Nigeria—possessing higher import duties and a more protectionist trade policy than other member states—notably slowed the process. Even after the adoption of the ECOWAS CET in 2015, Nigeria remained reluctant to abandon its protectionist development strategy. Oyejide (2016), reports that the country introduced a series of accompanying measures to deviate from ordinary CET rates, established national lists of manufactured goods subject to additional restrictions, and implemented import bans on products from third countries which were not applied by other ECOWAS members. As Venables (2003) points out, regional integration is rarely a neutral process. It inherently

creates both winners and losers. States with dominant economic roles and actors with vested interests (such as import lobbies, monopolistic traders, or bureaucracies benefiting from border rents) can obstruct integration attempts. Often, regional integration initiatives are not used as genuine tools for economic transformation, but as means to consolidate national power or gain diplomatic leverage. As a result, integration initiatives are often shaped not only by economic theories, but by political feasibility, elite consensus, and the institutional capacity - and willingness- to implement reforms.

## 9. The Linear Integration Model and Its Application in Africa

The linear model of regional integration, as outlined in classical economic integration theory, has served as the official framework adopted by African continental institutions since the 1980s. This approach was first articulated in the Lagos Plan of Action and subsequently formalized in the Abuja Treaty of 1991,<sup>12</sup> under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).<sup>13</sup>

The Abuja Treaty codifies a staged progression toward continental integration, ultimately culminating in the establishment of an African Economic Community (AEC), planned for the year 2028. This vision is explicitly outlined in Article 6 of the Abuja Treaty, which sets out a six-stage roadmap for integration. These six stages are as follows:

Table 1: The Abuja continental integration pathway

Stage	Objectives	Timeframe
1	Strengthening of existing RECs and establishment of new RECs in regions where they do not exist	1994-1999 (5 years)
2	Stabilization of tariffs and other barriers to regional trade and strengthening of industry and energy sectorial integration, particularly in the fields of trade, agriculture, finance, transport and communication. Strengthening coordination/harmonization mechanisms between RECs.	1999-2007 (8 years)
3	Establishment of FTAs in each REC, followed by their further transformation in CUs.	2007-2017 (10 years)
4	Coordination and harmonization of tariff and non-tariff systems among RECs in view of the establishment of a Continental Customs Union through the adoption of a unified Common External Tariff (CET).	2017-2019 (2 years)

<sup>12</sup> The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) is a landmark policy framework adopted in 1980 by African Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the OAU. It was designed to promote self-reliant and sustainable development across the African continent, particularly in response to the failures of externally-driven development strategies and the economic crises of the 1970s. The Abuja Treaty was signed on 3 June 1991 by the African Heads of State and Government of the OAU. It envisages the creation of an African Economic Community through a gradual process of co-ordination, harmonization and progressive integration of the activities of RECs in Africa, both existing and future.

<sup>13</sup> The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was an intergovernmental organization founded on May 25, 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with the aim of promoting unity and solidarity among African States. It played a significant role in decolonization and promoting cooperation among African nations. In 2002 it was subsequently transformed into the African Union in 2002.

5	Establishment of a Continental Common Market through the adoption of common policies, notably in the fields of agriculture, transport and communication, industry, energy and scientific research. Harmonization of monetary, financial and fiscal policies. Implementation of the principle of a free circulation of persons (including the rights of residence and establishment) and establishment of a system of proper resources of the Community to fund its budget.	2019-2023 (4 years)
6	Integration of all sectors, with the establishment of a Central Bank and a single African currency, with an African Monetary Union and creation and election of the first Pan-African Parliament.	2023-2028 (5 years)

Source: UNECA, ARIA XI report (July 2025), author's adaption

The integration sequence designed in the Abuja Treaty is fundamentally structured around two main steps. First, African RECs (whether pre-existing or newly established), are expected to evolve from FTAs to customs unions, and then successively merge into a continental customs union. The continental customs union is subsequently projected to advance toward a common market and ultimately culminate in a full economic and monetary union.

Unfortunately, the trajectory outlined in the Abuja Treaty has diverged significantly from its original roadmap. The African integration process has encountered substantial challenges in advancing beyond its initial stages due to a range of challenges. While some of these challenges mirror those faced by European nations during the early phases of European integration (e.g., inter-country discord, conflicting priorities, and trust deficits), key difference lies in the institutional architecture of decision-making (Moghadam, 2014). Unlike the European Union, which involved an early and deliberate delegation of authority to supranational institutions, the African integration process remains largely intergovernmental in nature. Both within the AU and RECs, decisions are primarily taken by consensus, a mechanism that—while inclusive in theory—in practice often proves ineffective, especially within large organizations (Gourguechon, 2022). This occurs because the no-objection mechanism underpinning the consensus rule operates as a veto, thereby creating frequent conditions for institutional paralysis in the decision-making process (Bonilla Bolaños, 2016; Anami, 2025).<sup>14</sup> This intergovernmental model, marked by a strong preference for preserving national sovereignty over delegating authority to supranational institutions, continues to shape—and often delay—the pace of economic integration across the continent (Mangeni & Atta-Mensah, 2022; Ewi, 2024).

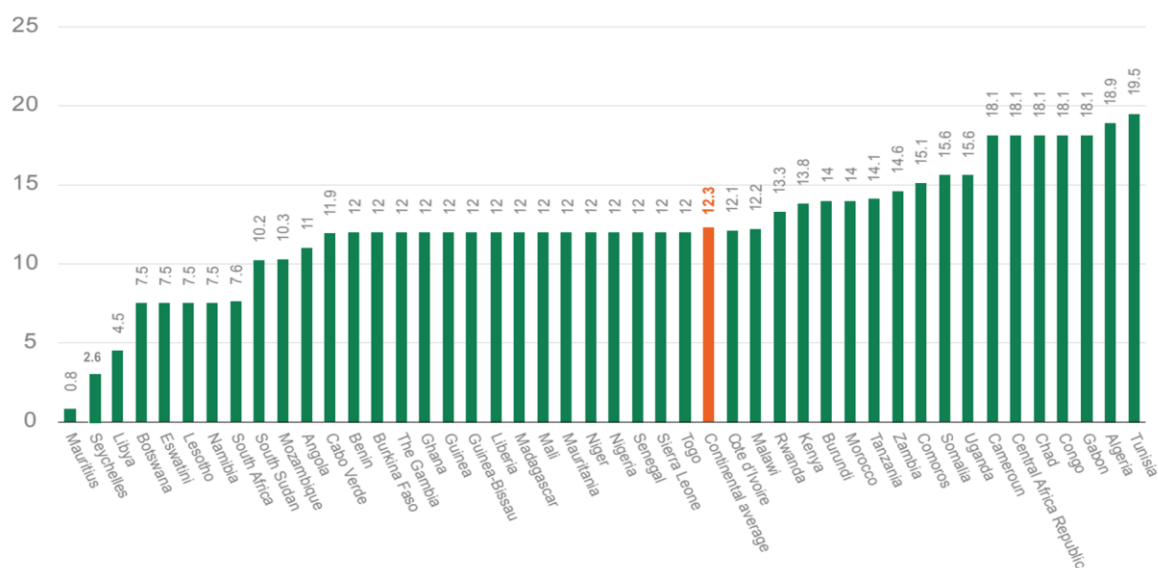
As a result, the ambitious targets set by the Abuja Treaty—including the attainment of a continental Customs Union by 2019 and an African Common Market by 2023—have not been met. In particular, the realization of a continental CU remains a distant goal, hindered by a complex set of structural, institutional, and political economy challenges. A main obstacle lies in the divergence of national tariff structures and in the diverse average Most Favored Nation (MFN)<sup>15</sup> rates adopted

<sup>14</sup> In this regard, an important initiative taken by Kenya within the EAC is the proposal made in August 2025 to replace the consensus rule with a two-thirds majority rule.

<sup>15</sup> MFN tariffs are the tariff rates that a country applies to imports from all its trading partners which are not part of a preferential trade agreement (such as an FTA or CU). In practice, they show the highest (most restrictive) tariffs a country can charge on imports.

by African nations and CUs in Africa, making their harmonization extremely challenging (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average MFN duty rates in Africa and continental average



Source: WTO World Tariff Profiles, 2025

The heterogeneity of existing tariff rates makes the adoption of a continental CET a formidable task. Historical experience within Africa's RECs illustrates this complexity. The EAC, for instance, required nearly nine years of negotiations before its CET could be implemented. In both ECOWAS and CEMAC, the entire process—from political decision to operationalization—spanned approximately a decade. By contrast, SADC and COMESA continue to face significant obstacles in progressing toward the customs union status. In SADC, persistent difficulties in harmonizing widely divergent national tariff structures have impeded this transition. In COMESA, the customs union was formally launched in 2009—with full implementation initially targeted for 2012 and later postponed to 2014—but it remains largely non-operational. This stagnation reflects a complex interplay of economic asymmetries, concerns over national sovereignty, limited institutional capacity, and the practical complications arising from overlapping regional commitments among its twenty-one member states (Khandelwal, 2004).

These difficulties underscore how achieving the required levels of political commitment and economic convergence across larger African RECs is extremely difficult. In contrast, integration initiatives started with a smaller number of States (such as the EAC and SACU) have achieved better progress. The reduced scale of such organizations has facilitated greater consensus-building and helped to overcome implementation hurdles quickly.

However, limited membership alone is not a guarantee for success. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), for instance, despite comprising only five countries, has achieved minimal substantive integration. In this case, persistent political tensions (particularly between Algeria and Morocco) have limited progress, demonstrating that political alignment and mutual trust are as critical as institutional design in driving effective integration.

A further complicating factor to the achievement of a continental CU is that a single CET among African nations will inevitably have asymmetric effects across countries, leading to an uneven

distribution of gains and losses. More industrialized economies are likely to benefit more from expanded markets and economies of scale, while less developed states, characterized by fragile or nascent industrial sectors, may face greater adjustment pressures, increasing the risk of an unequal distribution of benefits. If not addressed through revenue redistribution mechanisms based on solidarity, or specific compensatory policies, these disparities can exacerbate concerns over economic polarization, making CET negotiations politically contentious and potentially stalling progress toward deeper continental integration. The European integration experience provides an illustrative example of how such uneven impacts can be mitigated. The European Structural Funds<sup>16</sup> have played a central role in promoting territorial, economic, and social cohesion throughout the EU integration process by redistributing financial resources from wealthier to poorer regions. This mechanism has contributed to reducing regional disparities, supporting lagging economies, and facilitating a more balanced and politically sustainable integration process (Pociovălișteanu and Dobrescu, 2009). In a similar vein, Article 6 of the Abuja Treaty envisages the establishment of a system of “proper resources,” clearly inspired by the European model, although its implementation is deferred to the fifth stage of integration, namely the creation of a Continental CM (see Table 1 above).

Beyond tariff harmonization, the establishment of a continental CU would also necessitate a significant transfer of sovereignty from national governments to a supranational authority—such as the African Union Commission or the AfCFTA Secretariat, which would in this scenario need to be reconfigured as a CU Secretariat. This transfer would be essential for negotiating external trade agreements, coordinating the uniform application of the continental CET and administering trade remedies. In the African context, however, where many states are relatively young and place a high premium on their hard-won sovereignty, the delegation of such powers to supranational institutions remains largely unrealistic, particularly in the short to medium term. Persistent concerns over constraints on national sovereignty (Muzee & Enaifoghe, 2019; Geda and Kibret, 2002) help explain the political hesitancy, delays in ratifying agreed conventions or protocols, and, in some cases, the unilateral reintroduction of trade barriers or deviations from agreed tariff schedules that continue to characterize integration dynamics in Africa, even within existing regional customs unions.

Finally, the effectiveness of any CU hinges on the presence of robust institutional capacity and harmonized operational systems. This requires effective customs administrations, streamlined border procedures, and effective cooperation among Customs and other border authorities. Many African countries still face significant capacity constraints in these areas. Fragmented infrastructure, weak border management, and uneven levels of administrative competence further undermine the smooth functioning of customs operations and the realization of a truly integrated trade area. While several RECs have formally established Customs Union frameworks, their effective domestication and implementation at the national level remain slow and often incomplete. Progress is frequently hindered by limited institutional capacity, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and conflicting national laws and policy priorities.

In response to these complexities, the AU introduced in 2015 an intermediary step not originally envisaged in the Abuja Treaty: the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This initiative aims to reinvigorate a stalled Abuja process through a market-oriented, pan-African

---

<sup>16</sup> The EU Structural Funds are solidarity-based financial instruments central to the European integration process, designed to reduce economic, social, and territorial disparities by reallocating resources from more prosperous to less developed regions, thereby mitigating the asymmetric effects of market integration and promoting cohesion.

framework. Unlike the Abuja approach, which relied on gradual, bottom-up consolidation of RECs, the AfCFTA adopts a top-down strategy by establishing a continent-wide free trade area as the foundation for strengthening regional frameworks. While Art. 3 of the AfCFTA explicitly seeks to accelerate the transition to a Customs Union and eventually a Common Market, the agreement goes beyond a linear integration model. It represents a bold experiment in economically driven, continent-wide unity, aiming to generate momentum from the continental level downward rather than waiting for full REC consolidation and convergence first: a process that has historically been slow, uneven, and inconsistent.

The AfCFTA extends beyond the reduction of tariffs and non-tariff barriers to include progressive liberalization of services. Moreover, it incorporates provisions and complementary protocols to facilitate the movement of investment, capital, and persons across the continent. Additionally, it encompasses competition policies (covered by a specific protocol), which are typical features of Common Markets, as they aim at preventing anti-competitive practices that could distort the integrated market. The agreement also addresses mutual recognition of technical and sanitary standards, harmonization of conformity assessment, transit facilitation, and customs cooperation typically go beyond the traditional scope of FTAs, being these agreements historically focused primarily on tariff reduction and market access.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the AfCFTA embodies elements characteristic of deeper forms of regional integration, such as Common Markets and Economic Unions (Manboah-Rockson, 2021).

In conclusion, while the establishment of a continental CUs in Africa holds significant promise by fostering larger markets and economic benefits, its realization faces substantial challenges. A primary concern is the persistence or exacerbation of trade deflection if this union will remain imperfect. Such imperfections may occur if member states will retain individual trade policies and the prerogatives to introduce exceptions to the CET, as observed in all African RECs with existing Customs Unions. These deviations undermine the core principle of a Customs Union, which requires a unified external trade policy to prevent goods from entering the union through the lowest-tariff member and freely circulating thereafter. Failure to address this issue risks distorting trade patterns and eroding the anticipated benefits of integration.

## 10. Contradictions and Inconsistencies in the Implementation of the linear model

Despite its elegant logic, the linear model embedded in the Abuja Treaty and in the establishing Treaties of all African RECs encounters significant implementation challenges. As highlighted in the previous sections, there is a growing disconnect between the sequential framework of this model and the complex operational realities on the ground.

Another prominent challenge to the adoption of the linear approach is the issue of the overlapping memberships, with many African States simultaneously belonging to multiple RECs operating at different stages of integration. For instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a member of the EAC, which functions as a Customs Union transitioning into a Common Market, while also being part of SADC, COMESA, and ECCAS, all of which operate as FTAs.<sup>18</sup> This intricate web of overlapping memberships greatly complicates the alignment of external tariff regimes, the

---

<sup>17</sup> However, there is a clear tendency in recent FTAs to include many of these deeper policy areas as integration objectives have broadened. For more details, see: Mattoo, Rocha & Ruta (2020).

<sup>18</sup> Despite these multiple memberships, DRC has not yet included the preferential tariff rates in its national customs tariff that are necessary to participate in these FTAs.

coordination of trade policies, and the harmonization of customs regulations across blocs, resulting in significant inconsistencies and inefficiencies.

Additionally, there is significant variation in the institutional strength and operational capacity of Africa's RECs. Some of them, such as ECOWAS and the EAC, have developed relatively strong supranational structures and mechanisms to support policy implementation. Others, including CEN-SAD and the AMU, remain institutionally weak or largely inactive, often lacking the capacity required to effectively advance regional integration (Khadiagala, 2011). This institutional asymmetry results in fragmented and uneven integration across the continent, making it difficult for RECs to harmonize their progress or align their frameworks.

These disparities are also reflected in the differing trajectories RECs have taken in pursuing integration. In practice, several have followed paths that diverge significantly from the linear sequence envisioned in traditional integration theory. For instance, WAEMU and CEMAC have successfully established a common currency—typically the final stage of economic integration—without having first achieved earlier milestones such as the free movement of persons or comprehensive labor market integration. Such cases highlight both the flexibility and irregularity of Africa's integration processes, calling into question the practical relevance of the linear model when applied to the continent's complex institutional landscape.

Missed implementation deadlines further illustrate the limitations of the linear integration framework. Several RECs, including AMU, CEN-SAD, and IGAD, have yet to establish even a basic Free Trade Area. In other cases, such as COMESA and SADC, FTAs exist only in partial form. COMESA's FTA includes just 16 of its 21 member states, while SADC's FTA includes 13 of its 16 members, with Angola, Comoros and DRC yet to join fully.<sup>19</sup>

These delays are often the result of unrealistic timelines and inadequate consideration of on-the-ground conditions. The Abuja Treaty and other foundational agreements frequently overlook the diversity in national institutional capacities, the vulnerability of domestic industries, bureaucratic and logistical inefficiencies, and the broader political, security, and geographical challenges affecting REC members. As a result, many African nations struggle to domesticate and implement regional agreements, leading to fragmented and inconsistent integration outcomes.

Taken together, these contradictions suggest that the linear model of integration is ill-suited to the African context. It assumes a uniformity of institutional readiness and political will that does not reflect the continent's heterogeneous socio-economic and governance landscapes. Rather than serving as a practical blueprint, the linear model often functions more as a rhetorical framework: symbolically aspirational but largely disconnected from the complex, often ad hoc, realities of regional integration in Africa.

## 11. Cases of deviations from linearity in Africa

Despite the formal adoption of the linear model by the AU and the various African RECs for their regional integration pathways, the actual trajectory of integration across the continent has been significantly more complex, fragmented, and adaptive than this model suggests.

---

<sup>19</sup> Angola accession to the SADC FTA is however imminent, as in June 2025, the Committee of Ministers of Trade (CMT) approved Angola's accession to join, with an indicative date to start the implementation in January 2026 (SADC, 2025).

A key example is the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), launched in 2015 and entered into force in 2024 with the purpose to consolidate three major RECs (COMESA, EAC, and SADC) into an enlarged FTA. The TFTA has progressively expanded its scope beyond the traditional focus on trade in goods. It now includes additional protocols aimed at facilitating the free movement of persons and enhancing cross-border services, particularly road transport services. These provisions reflect characteristics typically associated with deeper forms of integration, such as Common Markets, which involve not only tariff reductions and elimination of non-tariff barriers, but also the liberalization of services and the removal of impediments to people and labor mobility. Importantly, these objectives are being pursued without the prior establishment of a Customs Union. Notable instruments supporting these goals are the Tripartite Agreement on the Movement of Businesspersons, the Vehicle Load Management Agreement (VLMA), and the Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement (MCBRTA).<sup>20</sup> By integrating these wider dimensions, the TFTA exemplifies a pragmatic and flexible approach to regional integration, aiming to address the immediate practical needs of member states while progressively advancing toward more ambitious integration objectives as conditions permit. This evolution underscores the dynamic and adaptive nature of Africa's integration processes, which frequently depart from rigid linear models to address complex political, economic, and infrastructural realities.

Another striking illustration of non-linearity is found in the integration patterns of North African countries, particularly Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. These states exhibit deeper trade and investment ties with external partners than they do with the rest of the African continent. This orientation reflects a form of multi-track regionalism, in which countries engage in multiple, and sometimes overlapping, regional integration frameworks that serve different strategic purposes. If on the one hand, they commit to broader, politically motivated continental initiatives (such as those promoted by the AU and various RECs), to demonstrate regional solidarity, secure political legitimacy, or access development funding, on the other hand they simultaneously pursue opportunistic, interest-driven integration pathways that are shaped by pre-existing economic ties, geographical proximity, and geopolitical considerations. For example, North African countries such as Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia maintain strong trade and investment links with the EU through bilateral Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, while also participating in Middle Eastern arrangements like the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA). These parallel trajectories often reflect a pragmatic emphasis on concrete economic opportunities rather than strict adherence to formally agreed (often policy-driven and aspirational), continental and regional integration frameworks. As such, multi-track regionalism underscores the adaptability of African states in navigating complex and evolving regional landscapes, even if this situation complicates efforts to achieve coherent and unified integration both continent-wide and within sub-regional blocs.

In contrast, the experiences of WAEMU and CEMAC offer a particularly compelling evidence of a “reverse sequencing” in regional integration theory. Both unions have successfully established a common currency (the CFA franc), which is pegged to the euro, and operate with regional central

---

<sup>20</sup> These agreements were approved by the Tripartite Council of Ministers in March 2023. Specifically, the MCBRTA is a multilateral agreement aiming at harmonizing the legal framework for cross-border road transport operations in the continental member States of the Tripartite (insular States are excluded as road transport operators in these nations do not perform cross-border transport operations in the other Tripartite member States' territories). The MCBRTA aims at replacing all the bilateral cross-border road transport agreements existing in the region, by defining the requirements for operators, vehicles and drivers to carry out cross-border transport operations in this area, including the relevant quality standards to be achieved and maintained for continued participation in cross-border transport operations.

banks endowed with supranational mandates: the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) for WAEMU and the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) for CEMAC. The achievement of these monetary unions, that the classical regional integration theory postulate as a later stage following the establishment of a Common Market, has been realized without first achieving full integration of all the factors of production. Specifically, both WAEMU and CEMAC have implemented monetary unions without first achieving full labor mobility or fully integrated capital markets among member states, directly contradicting traditional economic integration assumptions.

Similarly, WAEMU and ECOWAS are pursuing ambitious efforts to adopt a single regional currency, the ECO (intended to replace the CFA franc in WAEMU countries), without establishing a Common Market first. In attempting to replicate the EU's Eurozone model, including its strict macroeconomic convergence criteria, the process has repeatedly stalled due to member states' difficulties in meeting these requirements and the lack of sustained political consensus. This case illustrates the limits of directly transplanting EU-style integration mechanisms to the African context and highlights the need for more flexible, context-sensitive approaches to regional integration.

## 12. Unsuccessful inter-REC merging experiments

Inspired by the Tripartite, other African nations have attempted similar inter-REC merging experiments as a strategy to deepen regional integration. However, these efforts have largely remained inconclusive. In January 2012, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government mandated<sup>21</sup> the formation of a second consolidated bloc comprising ECOWAS, ECCAS, CEN-SAD, and AMU. To guide this process, a concept note<sup>22</sup> was developed and presented in December 2013 in Johannesburg, outlining possible modalities for the merger. Despite initial interest, no concrete institutional or legal steps followed, and the initiative has since stalled.

Similarly, in October 2013, during an AU Extraordinary Summit in Addis Ababa, the Heads of State and Government of IGAD and the EAC mandated their respective Foreign Ministers to explore the feasibility of a merger between the two RECs. However, both the feasibility study and the ensuing discussions have been indefinitely put on hold (Zewdie, 2019).

Central Africa has made more structured efforts. In 2007, ECCAS and CEMAC launched a roadmap toward merging into a single, more coherent regional entity. This process gained momentum with the creation in October 2009 of a Steering Committee for the Rationalization of RECs in Central Africa (COPI/CER-AC). Over the following years, the committee produced a draft Constitutive Treaty, along with legal frameworks for key institutions, including a Court of Auditors, a Community Parliament, and a Court of Justice and Human Rights. Draft protocols were also prepared for a High Monetary Authority and a High Authority for Financial Markets. Despite this progress, the original merger deadline of 2023 was missed. To revive momentum, ECCAS and CEMAC Heads of State convened a high-level meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on July 18, 2025. However, new complications have emerged. Political instability and inter-state tensions (most notably Rwanda's formal withdrawal from ECCAS),<sup>23</sup> have cast further doubt on the viability of a

<sup>21</sup> Decision Assembly/AU/Dec.392(XVIII).

<sup>22</sup> Available at: [https://au.int/web/sites/default/files/newsevents/conceptnotes/12571-cn-concept\\_note\\_-\\_proposed\\_modalities\\_for\\_the\\_creation\\_of\\_a\\_2nd\\_bloc.pdf](https://au.int/web/sites/default/files/newsevents/conceptnotes/12571-cn-concept_note_-_proposed_modalities_for_the_creation_of_a_2nd_bloc.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> See the Communique of the Rwanda Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Communication of 7 June 2025, available at: <https://www.minaffet.gov.rw/updates/news-details/rwanda-withdraws-from-eccas>

unified Central African REC. Moreover, attempts to incorporate the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC)—which includes Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda—into the merged entity, have further complicated negotiations.

Despite significant planning and political endorsements, these inter-REC merger efforts have consistently failed to materialize due to a combination of political, institutional, and structural challenges. Chief among these are:

- a) Diverging national interests and political rivalries, which have undermined trust and consensus-building among member states.
- b) Institutional overlaps and a lack of clarity regarding the redistribution of authority, resources, and governance structures in the proposed merged entities.
- c) Weak enforcement mechanisms at the continental level, which leave the Decisions of Heads of State and Government, both at AU and REC level, largely unenforceable.
- d) External shocks and regional instability, including security crises and leadership changes, which frequently derail long-term planning.

Ultimately, without strong political will, consistent follow-through, and a clear framework for harmonizing overlapping mandates, these merger initiatives are unlikely to succeed. The repeated delays and reversals suggest that regional integration in Africa may need to refocus on strengthening existing RECs before attempting broader structural consolidations.

### 13. New regional integration trends in Africa

A compelling illustration of non-linear regional integration in Africa is provided by the recently established Alliance of Sahelian States (AES—*Alliance des États du Sahel*), comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. From its inception, the AES articulated an ambitious goal of deep integration, notably the establishment of a monetary union. This stated objective represents a marked departure from classical theories of economic integration, as it envisages the attainment of one of the most advanced forms of integration without first consolidating the conventional intermediate stages, such as a fully functioning Free Trade Area or a common market. More recently, and notably without the adoption of a comprehensive treaty formalizing a sequential integration roadmap, AES member states have begun advancing initiatives associated with customs integration, including the introduction of a common levy on imports from non-AES countries and announced plans to develop a Common External Tariff and a regional Customs Code (Bespalova, 2025). The emergence of these customs-related measures—introduced *ex post* and in parallel to the monetary objective—further underscores the AES's departure from linear integration sequencing. Rather than following a predefined, treaty-based progression, the AES appears to be assembling elements of economic integration pragmatically and selectively, in response to immediate political, security, and fiscal priorities.

Although Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger remain members of WAEMU and participants in the AfCFTA, the emergence of a parallel AES integration initiative carries important legal, economic, and institutional implications. The introduction of AES-specific customs instruments may overlap with or complicate existing WAEMU and AfCFTA commitments, particularly in relation to tariff alignment, rules of origin, and trade policy coherence, potentially increasing administrative complexity and affecting trade flows. From a political perspective, AES's evolving integration agenda may be perceived by ECOWAS as a challenge to regional cohesion, thereby heightening

the likelihood of inter-regional frictions. At the same time, the AES framework enables its member states to respond more flexibly to escalating security threats, new development constraints, and logistical vulnerabilities specific to the Sahelian context. This reflects a pragmatic, priority-driven, and exigency-responsive approach to integration, in which cooperation progresses first in strategically critical domains, such as security (Adjei Arhin, 2025), and expands into related sectors, while broader regional commitments are selectively reinterpreted to fit current realities.

The Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI),<sup>24</sup> is another new integration model that emerged in 2018, which functions as a cooperation forum between Ministers of Finance across seven African countries (of which at the moment only five are active in the Initiative). All participating nations, namely Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan, are concurrently members of IGAD and (with the exception of South Sudan, of COMESA). The HoAI dedicates the first two of its four core pillars specifically to regional infrastructure development (roads, energy and digital) and trade and economic integration.<sup>25</sup> This integration is not pursued through traditional treaty-based or institutionally-driven mechanisms, but rather through a pragmatic, results-oriented process. Common priorities are identified at country-level, emerging from discussions among national stakeholders within various government agencies and the private sector, coordinated by national focal points. Once agreed, these priorities are presented to Ministries of Finance for formal endorsement and implementation at the national level. This structure underscores a bottom-up integration process coupled with a high-level political commitment, which operates effectively without reliance on conventional supranational institutions, which are notably absent. The Initiative operates through a “light” Secretariat whose main role is to facilitate consensus-building discussions with national counterparts. These discussions focus on potential initiatives that can increase economic policy convergence, which are then addressed in specific Ministerial Meetings. The collaboratively decided priorities are subsequently translated into defined policy goals, which are articulated within sectoral roadmaps. Ultimately, these policy objectives are operationalized and advanced through the development and implementation of regional projects that span across two or more member countries, critically supported by a pool of Development Partners. This methodological approach fosters a flexible, demand-driven pathway to integration, focused on tangible, multi-country initiatives that strongly and directly align with shared economic development objectives.

#### 14. Sector-led and Corridor-based Integration

African regional integration has in several cases taken the form of functional, sectoral, or corridor-specific initiatives, many of which have been developed and operate outside the formal frameworks of established RECs. These initiatives reflect a pragmatic, demand-driven approach to regional cooperation, emphasizing targeted sectors and shared or complementary interests over abstract institutional harmonization. Notable examples include the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) Corridor, the emerging Djibouti-Ethiopia South Sudan-Uganda (DESSU) Corridor Management Authority, the Lobito Corridor, and the Northern and Central Corridors.

---

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.hoainitiative.org>

<sup>25</sup> The other two pillars include: fostering pastoralist resilience against climate and natural shocks, and supporting human capacity development.

The LAPSET initiative is a multi-country project designed to enhance connectivity and trade across the Greater Horn of Africa.<sup>26</sup> Unlike many regional projects anchored in REC mechanisms, its institutional foundation was laid domestically by Kenya, exemplifying a model of regional integration initiated, financed, and governed at the national level despite clear transnational objectives. By linking Kenya with landlocked neighbors Ethiopia and South Sudan, LAPSET aims to address critical infrastructure gaps, expand access to maritime trade routes, and foster economic interdependence in one of the most conflict-prone regions in Africa (WHO, 2024). With a focus on hard infrastructure—including ports, highways, railways, and oil pipelines—the project illustrates how states can advance regional integration by aligning political will and shared interests with their neighbors to reap common benefits.

A more recent corridor-based integration initiative is the DESSU Corridor Management Authority, established through a March 2025 Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministers of Transport and Roads from Djibouti, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda. This initiative represents a functional and infrastructure-driven form of regional integration, focusing on improving access to the sea for three landlocked countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda), so to expand their logistical options, lower transport costs and enhance trade resilience. The DESSU Authority's mandate includes coordinating diverse public and private stakeholders, facilitating trade and mobility, and promoting broader regional economic development (TMA, 2024).

The Lobito Corridor exemplifies a functional, sector-led, and logistics-oriented form of regional integration. Centered on the rehabilitation and modernization of the Benguela Railway, which links the Atlantic port of Lobito in Angola to mineral-rich regions in the DRC and Zambia, the corridor aims to improve efficiency in cross-border transport and trade. Its sector-focused approach distinguishes it from broader, multi-sector corridor initiatives, as its primary objective is to facilitate mineral exports and strengthen regional value chains within the mining industry. The Lobito Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency (LCTTFA), established in January 2023 by Angola, the DRC, and Zambia, serves as a facilitative mechanism rather than a supranational authority. Its role is to support coordination among Member States by aligning policies, harmonizing operational standards, coordinating infrastructure development, disseminating traffic and logistics information, and implementing trade facilitation measures. These functions help reduce bottlenecks, lower transport costs, and increase participation in value chains—particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). By emphasizing procedural and operational coordination over formal institutional authority, the Lobito Corridor demonstrates how targeted, sector-focused governance mechanisms can strengthen regional connectivity, improve trade efficiency, and foster economic integration.

Similarly, the Northern and Central Corridors have advanced corridor-specific integration, focusing on transport and trade facilitation across East and Central Africa. These corridors link key inland hubs to major ports such as Mombasa (Kenya) and Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), streamlining the movement of goods and people across borders. Like the DESSU and Lobito Corridors, they exemplify a pragmatic, logistics-driven model of regional cooperation, rooted in shared national priorities and mutual economic benefits. Their development has been enabled by joint political commitment, pooled technical expertise, and shared financial resources. Dedicated institutional and regulatory frameworks further coordinate implementation, harmonize standards, and ensure effective corridor functioning.

---

<sup>26</sup> The Greater Horn of Africa includes Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how infrastructure- and sector-led collaboration can drive meaningful regional connectivity and functional integration in Africa.

## 15. Towards a Non-linear Theory of African Economic Integration

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that the trajectory of African economic integration often unfolds through non-linear and adaptive pathways, shaped by a complex mix of political, economic, and institutional factors, as well as practical considerations. Rather than strictly following classical theories of linear progression—which envision a step-by-step evolution from a Free Trade Area to a Customs Union, then a Common Market, and ultimately a Monetary or a full Political Union—the African experience reflects a more flexible, context-sensitive approach. This evolving model is marked by pragmatism, regional diversity, and responsiveness to shifting priorities and needs across the continent. From this perspective, two key features consistently emerge across Africa’s integration landscape:

- a) **Differentiated Speeds and Configurations:** Integration in Africa increasingly unfolds at multiple speeds and through varied configurations, often extending beyond traditional economic domains such as trade and infrastructure to encompass areas such as security cooperation. Initiatives like the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) demonstrate how specific areas of cooperation—particularly in customs and monetary coordination—can advance while entirely bypassing foundational steps prescribed by classical theories of economic integration, including the prior establishment of a fully functioning Free Trade Area. In this regard, AES member states have announced plans for the development of a Common External Tariff (AES-CET), signaling an embryonic move toward customs cooperation despite the absence of comprehensive intra-regional trade liberalization. The AES experience thus exemplifies a broader shift in African economic integration where States are increasingly advancing through selective and recombined integration stages, experimenting non-linear, context-sensitive pathways. This evolution departs from rigid, previously agreed integration sequences that, in many cases, no longer align with evolving political, security, and development imperatives.
- b) **Coalitions of the Willing:** African integration is often driven by “*coalitions of the willing*”, i.e., groups of countries that share common interests and possess the political will and institutional capacity to push forward specific reforms or projects. These coalitions act as pioneers, testing new models of cooperation and setting precedents for others to follow. The Horn of Africa Initiative illustrates how progress often stems from bottom-up, interest-driven alliances rather than top-down, continent-wide initiatives.

## 16. Core Principles of a Non-linear Model

A non-linear theory of African integration fundamentally rests on two main foundational principles that diverge significantly from conventional, linear models. First, integration is most effectively advanced by addressing concrete, practical problems rather than being solely driven by top-down political commitments established in formal Treaties. In contrast to models where the establishment of formal institutions is expected to dictate the pace of integration across various sectors, non-linear integration emphasizes that the imperative of practical problem-solving creates the impetus for deeper economic and political convergence. This allows integration to evolve

organically where it demonstrates tangible value to participating States and their populations, fostering a bottom-up approach to regional cooperation.

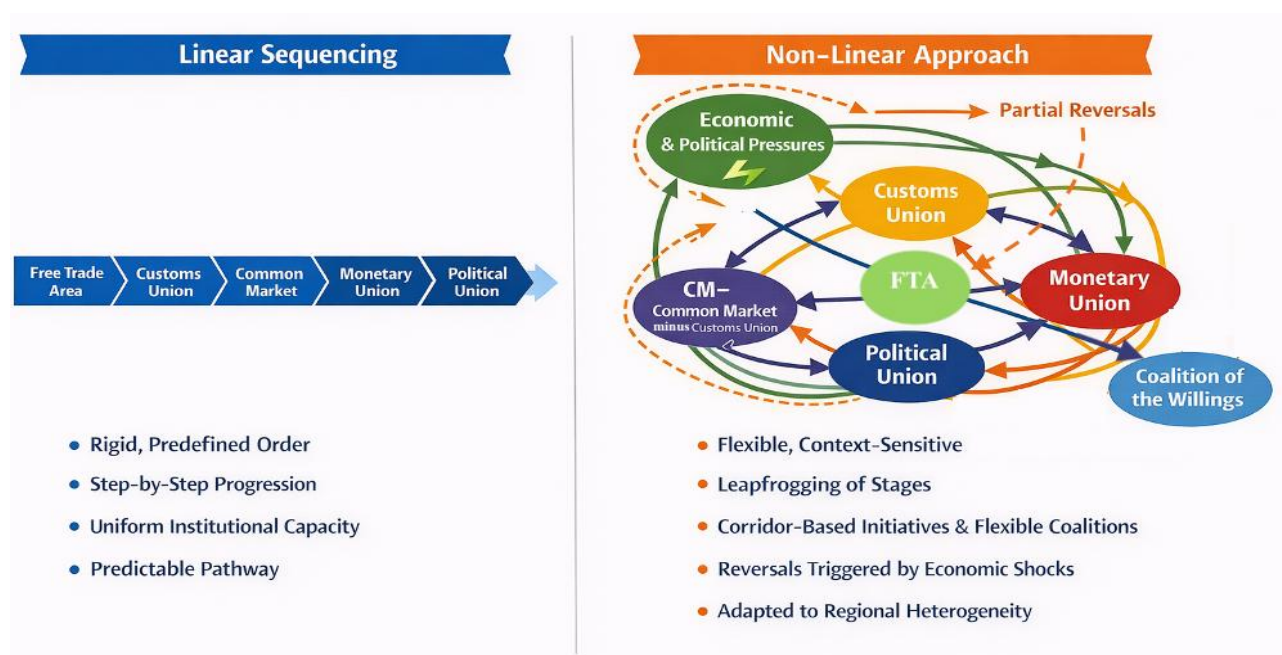
Secondly, different countries or regions can integrate at different paces and along different trajectories. This contrasts with the typical tenets of classical economic integration theories, which often prescribe a rigid, sequential progression through pre-determined stages. A compelling illustration of multi-speed integration has been observed in WAEMU and CEMAC experiences, which represent instances of CUs that incorporate substantial elements of monetary unions. Contrary to the typical tenets of classical and neo-classical economic integration theories, which consider the monetary union as a subsequent stage to the establishment of a Common Market, both WAEMU and CEMAC have adopted functional common currencies without prior attainment of a level of integration implying the full cross-border mobility of persons, services, labor, and capital.

### 17. Circularity of integration

It is important to recognize that regional integration can follow a circular trajectory, whereby States revert to earlier stages (e.g., re-imposing tariffs or restrictions to trade) when confronted with changing political or economic circumstances. A prominent example of this phenomenon can be observed within the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). MERCOSUR was established in 1991 with the ambitious goal of creating a CU among its founding members (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay). It aimed to eliminate internal tariffs and adopt a CET. While it succeeded in establishing a free trade area and adopting a CET, its implementation has been characterized by significant circularity. From its inception, MERCOSUR allowed member states to maintain national lists of exceptions to the CET, permitting individual countries to apply higher tariffs on certain products (Bouzas et al., 2002). A similar pattern is evident in many African Customs Unions, particularly ECOWAS. Within this REC, member states retain the authority to maintain exceptions to the CET. During economic downturns, currency devaluations, or periods of domestic industry pressure, such states have frequently used these exceptions or other non-tariff measures to protect local markets. SACU provides a further example: since early 2022, Botswana and Namibia have repeatedly introduced temporary import bans and restrictions on certain horticultural products, citing national food security concerns, despite being both members of a CU—which in principle does not allow these practices (NIPDB, 2024). Similarly, in the EAC, the CET has been undermined on multiple occasions, as Partner States—often under pressure from domestic lobbies—have implemented unilateral exemptions or suspended duties on widely traded regional commodities such as rice or sugar to protect local producers (Bünder, 2018).

These experiences illustrate that States, responding to national economic realities, political pressures, or sector-specific interests, may revert to protectionist measures, effectively reapplying tariffs or tariff-like restrictions to goods theoretically covered by a free trade or customs union arrangement. The repeated use of exceptions, often unilaterally, produces a non-linear, circular pattern of integration, where progress toward deeper stages can be interrupted or even reversed. Figure 2 below summarizes this contrast between the classical linear approach to integration and the more dynamic, fluid, non-linear trajectories observed in the African context.

Figure 2: Linear vs. non-linear approach



## 18. Implications for Policy

The analysis of endogenous economic integration experiences made in this paper reveals insights that are essential for developing a non-linear theory of integration in Africa. These insights carry substantial implications for various stakeholder groups:

**For policymakers:** African integration strategies must move beyond rigid, stage-based models and embrace flexibility, adaptive coordination, and continuous experimentation. Rather than focusing primarily on achieving predefined institutional forms (such as customs unions or common markets), integration efforts should prioritize functional outcomes. Policymakers need to address pragmatic, context-specific questions: Which problems require solutions? What approaches are most effective? For whom do they work, and under what conditions? This results-oriented perspective aligns more closely with Africa's diverse socio-economic and political realities. In this framework, integration is not an abstract legal goal but a practical tool to solve concrete problems on the ground, enhance resilience, and advance cooperation and development.

**For the AU and the RECs:** For the African Union and regional economic communities, resolving the integration paradox requires a fundamental shift: moving beyond strict adherence to legalistic, sequential roadmaps and prioritizing convergence around tangible development outcomes. Rather than merely tracking progress through the theoretical stages of the Balassaian model, continental and regional institutions should aim for developing tools of measurement of progress across multiple dimensions of regional integration. This calls for a holistic perspective that goes beyond monitoring intra-regional trade, infrastructure connectivity, and cross-border mobility. A pivotal tool in this regard is the African Synthesized Regional Integration Index (ASRII).<sup>27</sup> By incorporating layered dimensions such as peace and security, good governance, human capital, livestock, agriculture, and social and cultural integration, the ASRII operationalizes the non-linear perspective advanced in this paper. It actively informs decision-making by highlighting areas where functional integration is progressing, identifying lagging sectors, and guiding targeted interventions to accelerate progress. Including an additional dimension that tracks collaborative

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.asrii.africa>

research and development initiatives within each regional group would further strengthen the ASRII's capacity to capture real, on-the-ground integration dynamics.

This evidence-based, adaptive approach enables continental and regional institutions to promote sector-specific advances, adjust policies to evolving realities, and ensure that integration is driven by practical needs and tangible results, rather than rigid adherence to formal legal benchmarks. Such a framework is essential for the effective operationalization of the AfCFTA, as it shifts attention from idealized end-goals to the functional, practical steps achieved through incremental action.

## 19. Policy Recommendations

The applicability of the conventional linear progression model for African economic integration, requires a fundamental reorientation. A different approach is essential for the effective design, implementation, and evaluation of integration efforts across the continent. This revised perspective necessitates targeted policy recommendations for continental institutions, RECs, national governments, and Development Partners.

### A) For the AU and AfCFTA Secretariat:

The AU and AfCFTA Secretariat should move beyond the rigid, linear roadmap outlined in the Abuja Treaty with a more modular and flexible integration framework. Such a framework should explicitly allow for a temporary bypass of the continental Customs Union stage, while prioritizing the accelerated implementation of selected Common Market elements, particularly the free circulation of persons (which the Abuja Treaty formally links to the fifth stage of integration, i.e., the achievement of a continental CM), as well as of services, capital, and labor. In this context, priority should be given to the simultaneous harmonization of cross-border road transport services and the regulatory frameworks governing them. This is especially critical in Africa, where road transport accounts for approximately 80 per cent of goods movement and 90 per cent of passenger traffic (OECD, 2018). Accelerating these services and regulatory reforms, alongside measures facilitating the mobility of people and labour, would generate early and tangible integration gains.

This approach can draw valuable lessons from the ASEAN regional economic integration process, which demonstrates that a partial achievement of common market freedoms, coupled with a commitment to future expansion as parties gain readiness, can be more effective. Specifically, ASEAN countries have adopted a selective approach to liberalizing the free movement of persons and labour. Rather than fully opening borders, they have focused on facilitating the mobility of skilled workers in eight designated professions, namely: engineering, nursing, architecture, medicine, dentistry, tourism, surveying, and accounting. This targeted form of liberalization, widely regarded as one of the key engines of progress within the ASEAN Economic Community (Chantola & Mathul, 2025), has been implemented through a network of Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) concluded among member states. These agreements allow professional qualifications obtained in one country to be recognized as valid for practice in others, on the basis of a regional Framework Agreement<sup>28</sup> that provides common principles and procedures for the development and implementation of MRAs. Notably, ASEAN member states deliberately bypassed the establishment of a Customs Union as an intermediate stage between their Free Trade Area and a

<sup>28</sup> Available at: <https://asean.org/asean-framework-agreement-on-mutual-recognition-arrangements/>

Common Market. Instead, they moved directly toward selected core features of a Common Market without adopting a CET, due to the substantial disparity in MFN average tariff rates among them, which range from 0% in Singapore to 9.4% in Cambodia (WTO, 2025). This distinctive sequencing has led some scholars to characterize ASEAN's integration trajectory as a form of "Common Market minus" regional integration scheme (Soesastro, 2023).

This flexible, needs-based approach offers a compelling precedent for the AfCFTA. It allows integration to advance in areas that are politically and economically feasible, without being constrained by the overly prescriptive theoretical sequencing embedded in formal Treaties or Charters. This flexibility can be further strengthened through the adoption of a variable geometry **approach**, under which functional and sector-specific integration initiatives can advance broader continental objectives without requiring simultaneous participation or alignment by all States Parties.

### **B) For Regional Economic Communities (RECs):**

RECs should adopt a corridor-based strategy by prioritizing integration along key inter-State economic corridors characterized by significant trade flows, rather than focusing on abstract, undifferentiated, regional geographies. In practical terms, this implies directing integration initiatives toward territorial areas where there are already observable and measurable movements of goods, services, and people. Such a targeted approach—rather than a uniform geographical focus across the entire territory covered by RECs—would ensure that integration efforts are channeled to locations where they can generate the most tangible impact and effectively leverage existing economic and social linkages. This selectivity enhances the efficiency of resource allocation and increases the likelihood of successful integration outcomes by building on established patterns of interaction and exchange. Implementing corridor-based integration initiatives requires close collaboration with national governments and private operators to align policies on transit procedures, safety standards, and payment systems within these corridors. In parallel, RECs should focus on coordinating regulatory approaches, sharing best practices, and agreeing on interoperability standards. To support these efforts, the existing inter-REC coordination platform<sup>29</sup> can be utilized as a repository for information and lessons learned from concrete cooperation initiatives. A notable example of such practical collaboration is the development of shared cargo tracking systems, such as the Tripartite Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS), which enables the electronic monitoring of cargo and truck movements across the EAC, COMESA, and SADC.

### **C) For National Governments:**

National governments should focus on domestic reforms that directly facilitate cross-border trade and transport. This can be achieved either through corridor-based initiatives that operate outside formal regional treaties (such as the LAPSSET or Lobito corridors), or by concentrating trade facilitation efforts within established corridor institutions that already possess mature operational frameworks, such as the Northern and Central Corridors. In the latter case, government action should emphasize the effective implementation of harmonized procedures, interoperable data systems, and coordinated border management practices. The Northern and Central Corridors have been at the forefront of this pragmatic approach, pioneering solutions including One-Stop Border

---

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.reccerafrica.org>

Posts (OSBPs), electronic cargo tracking systems, automated border processes, smart gates, and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems<sup>30</sup> at key border crossings.

#### **D) For Development Partners and International Institutions:**

Development Partners should channel financial support toward cross-border projects that deliver measurable trade facilitation outcomes, rather than rigid, REC-centric planning initiatives. This includes supporting the creation of diagnostic tools to monitor corridor performance (such as transport observatories),<sup>31</sup> identify and address physical, procedural, and administrative bottlenecks, tackle non-tariff barriers, and pinpoint regulatory and operational frictions through instruments like corridor-specific scorecards. Support for pilot programs, innovation labs, and institutional learning platforms that allow countries to experiment with integration reforms and share outcomes is also essential.

Crucially, Development Partners should avoid adopting “one-size-fits-all” solutions, prioritizing context-sensitive approaches that are specifically tailored to the unique characteristics of each country and region. This means understanding the local economic, social, political, and geographical landscapes before launching any development initiative. For instance, a strategy that works well for improving trade infrastructure in a landlocked nation with a strong agricultural base will likely not be effective in a coastal country whose economy is mainly based on transit trade. Development Partners should therefore conduct thorough needs assessments and stakeholder consultations to identify the most pressing challenges and opportunities unique to each area. This tailored approach not only ensures that resources are used more efficiently, but also increases the likelihood of sustainable and impactful development outcomes.

#### **E) For Academia and Policy Research Institutions:**

Academic and policy research institutions should develop comprehensive metrics to monitor regional integration processes, encompassing logistics performance, digital trade readiness, and the engagement of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in cross-border value chains. They should also establish integration observatories, regional knowledge hubs, or scorecards to systematically track innovations, identify structural bottlenecks, and document deviations from formally established integration pathways.

Moreover, these institutions should actively engage stakeholders at all levels—continental, regional, and national—by raising awareness of key integration themes, building institutional and individual capacity, and fostering participation in integration initiatives across both the public and private sectors.

In addition, academic and policy research institutions should promote the adoption of adaptive, dynamic models of integration through curricula, research publications, and high-level policy dialogues. Comparative analyses of other regions, such as Asia and Latin America, can yield valuable insights on sequencing flexibility, corridor- or sector-focused integration, and context-

---

<sup>30</sup> ANPR, also known as License Plate Recognition (LPR), is an advanced technology that automatically captures and reads vehicle license plates, converting them into machine-readable text. This eliminates the need for manual vehicle registration at border posts and along transport corridors.

<sup>31</sup> Transport Observatories are data-driven monitoring tools that track key performance indicators along major trade and transport corridors. Their primary function is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based view of corridor performance by measuring critical variables. Despite their potential to improve trade efficiency and infrastructure management, the development and deployment of transport observatories in Africa remain limited.

sensitive approaches, thereby informing more practical and effective strategies for advancing regional integration.

## 20. Conclusion

The classical theory of regional integration, which envisions a linear progression from free trade areas to economic unions, has increasingly proven inadequate in the African context. This paper examines Africa's Integration Paradox: the persistent disconnect between the formally articulated integration steps established in the various treaties and the heterogeneous dynamics of regionalism on the ground. Drawing on comparative experiences from Asia and Latin America, it highlights the limitations of the linearity assumption, arguing that African integration must be approached through a non-linear, context-sensitive lens. Evidence shows that substantive cooperation often arises in practice before formal frameworks are laid down, reflecting the adaptive and pragmatic character of integration on the continent. Even where formal frameworks exist, they require frequent recalibration to stay aligned with evolving integration trajectories, enabling regulatory and institutional arrangements to learn continuously and respond effectively to emerging needs and shifting regional dynamics.

Rather than viewing Africa's non-strictly sequential and circular integration patterns as deficiencies, this study considers them intrinsic structural characteristics of African integration, signalling a non-linear readaptation of formally predefined integration sequences. It therefore advocates a "modular" integration framework in which functional convergence and variable geometry take precedence over rigid adherence to sequential treaty steps. Corridor-focused and sectoral studies demonstrate that targeted cooperation in transport, energy, and labor mobility can yield tangible, early benefits even without full-scale treaty implementation.

The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations for the African Union, the AfCFTA Secretariat, RECs, national governments, development partners and international institutions and academic research bodies. These include adopting diagnostic tools, such as the ASRII, to track progress in specific clusters or sectors independently of a single continental roadmap; regularly updating treaties and regulatory frameworks to accommodate deviations from traditional integration patterns and support "variable geometry" implementation; enhancing institutional capacities at national and regional levels to implement and monitor sectoral initiatives; and establishing platforms for cross-country and cross-region learning and collaboration. Advancing continental regional integration processes and realizing the full potential of the AfCFTA requires a flexible, results-oriented approach, where integration is driven by concrete, on-the-ground initiatives (such as corridor-based trade improvements, sectoral or multi-sectoral cooperation initiatives, and pilot projects) rather than by rigid, predetermined sequences.

## References:

- Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J., 2012. Why Nations Fail, : The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty, Profile Books, 2012. Retrieved from: [https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=PLIOCUIAh88C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_g\\_e\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=PLIOCUIAh88C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_g_e_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Adepoju, A. & Clottey, E., 2015. Operationalizing the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons: Prospects for Sub-Regional Trade and Development. In: Panizzon, M., Zürcher, G., Fornalé, E. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of International Labour Migration. Palgrave Macmillan, London. Retrieved from: <https://www.migrationinstitute.org/files/events/clottey.pdf>
- Adeyemo, B., A., 2019. Colonial Transport System in Africa: Motives, Challenges and Impact. African Journal of History and Archaeology, Vol. 4 No. 1 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.iardjournals.org/get/AJHA/VOL.%204%20NO.%201%202019/AJHA.pdf>
- Aemro T. B. & Nsoh C., 2024. Regionalism and Africa's future: the imperative of unity, International Journal of Research in Education Humanities and Commerce, Volume 05, Issue 02 "March - April 2024. Retrived from: [https://ijrehc.com/uploads2024/ijrehc05\\_34.pdf](https://ijrehc.com/uploads2024/ijrehc05_34.pdf)
- African Economic Conference, 2013. Report on Regional Integration in Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa, October 28-30, 2013, p. 15. Retrieved from: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Knowledge/AEC\\_2013\\_Report\\_-\\_Regional\\_Integration\\_in\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Knowledge/AEC_2013_Report_-_Regional_Integration_in_Africa.pdf)
- Akakpo, S. B., 2021. Informal Trade Routes and Security Along the Aflao-Lomé Border Region (Ghana-Togo). Journal of Borderlands Studies, 2021. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357217412\\_Informal\\_Trade\\_Routes\\_and\\_Security\\_along\\_the\\_Aflao-Lome\\_Border\\_Region\\_Ghana-Togo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357217412_Informal_Trade_Routes_and_Security_along_the_Aflao-Lome_Border_Region_Ghana-Togo)
- Anami, L., 2025. Kenya in push for removal of consensus rule in EAC. The East African, 16 August 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-in-push-for-removal-of-consensus-rule-in-eac-5156440>
- Adjei Arhin, C., A Theoretical Analysis of Security-Led Integration: The Case of Alliance of Sahel States (AES). International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), 8 October 2025. Retrived from: <https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/articles/a-theoretical-analysis-of-security-led-integration-the-case-of-alliance-of-sahel-states-aes>
- Asche, H., 2021. Regional Integration, Trade and Industry in Africa, Springer Ed. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-75366-5>
- Balassa, B., 1961. Towards a Theory of Economic Integration, Kyklos. International Review for Social Sciences. Retrieved from: <https://2024.sci-hub.se/937/c4ded200c460b8621483a62d6c35da77/balassa1961.pdf>
- Bespalova, A. 2025. Alliance of Sahel States and Togo discuss modernisation of customs systems, African Initiative, 6 October 2025. Retrieved from:

<https://afrinz.ru/en/2025/10/alliance-of-sahel-states-and-togo-discuss-modernisation-of-customs-systems/>

- Bischoff, P-H., 2021. The Politics of Regional Integration in Africa, Oxford University Press, International Studies, May 2021. Retrieved from: <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-612?d=%2F10.1093%2Facrefore%2F9780190846626.001.0001%2Facrefore-9780190846626-e-612&p=emailAuxjLNHezOo%2F2>
- Bonilla Bolaños, A., 2016. A step further in the theory of regional integration: A look at the Unasur's integration strategy, University of Lyon, Working paper GATE 2016-17, 2016. Retrieved from: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2780799](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2780799)
- Bouzas, R.; Da Motta Veiga, P. & Torrent, R., 2002. In-depth analysis of MERCOSUR integration, its perspectives and the effects thereof on the market access of EU goods, services and investment, Observatory of Globalization, University of Barcelona - Science Park of Barcelona, November 2002. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/opalc/sites/sciencespo.fr.opalc/files/in-depth%20analysis%20of%20mercosur%20integration.pdf>
- Bündler, T., 2018. How Common Is the East African Community's Common External Tariff Really? The Influence of Interest Groups on the EAC's Tariff Negotiations, SAGE Journals, Volume 8, Issue 1, January-March 2018. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244017748235>
- Chantola, S. & Mathul, K., 2025. ASEAN's Free Mobility of Professional Labor: Benefits and Challenges for Cambodia, Journal of Mathematics Instruction Social Research and Opinion 4(2):305-318, April 2025. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390392962\\_ASEAN's\\_Free\\_Mobility\\_of\\_Professional\\_Labor\\_Benefits\\_and\\_Challenges\\_for\\_Cambodia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390392962_ASEAN's_Free_Mobility_of_Professional_Labor_Benefits_and_Challenges_for_Cambodia)
- COMESA, 2020. Why the COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area is Ideal for Strengthening African Continental Integration. Retrieved from: <https://www.comesa.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tripartite-FTA-is-ideal-for-strengthening-AfCFTA.pdf>
- COMESA & UNCTAD, 2023. The Utilization of Trade Preferences by COMESA Member States Intra-regional Trade and North South Trade, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://unctad.org/publication/utilization-trade-preferences-comesa-member-states>
- Conteh, F., 2025. The hidden cost of travelling around West Africa. The Republic, 10 August 2025. Retrieved from: <https://rpublic.com/august-september-2025/travelling-around-west-africa/>
- Desiderio, D., 2025. Deconstructing the Linearity Assumption: Towards a Non-linear Theory of African Economic Integration. International Journal of African Studies, SvedbergOpen Editions, Cape Town, South Africa, Volume 5, Issue 1, June 2025. Available at: [https://www.svedbergopen.com/files/1752658520\\_\(6\)\\_IJAFRS202516344US7NG\\_\(p\\_49-54\).pdf](https://www.svedbergopen.com/files/1752658520_(6)_IJAFRS202516344US7NG_(p_49-54).pdf)

- Draper, P., 2010. Rethinking the (European) foundations of sub-Saharan African regional economic integration: a political economy essay, OECD Development Centre, Working Paper No. 293, September 2010. Retrieved from: [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/rethinking-the-european-foundations-of-sub-saharan-african-regional-economic-integration\\_5km5zrs9075k-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/rethinking-the-european-foundations-of-sub-saharan-african-regional-economic-integration_5km5zrs9075k-en.html)
- East African Community (EAC), 2025. EAC Champions Harmonised Africa Resource Mobilisation Strategy as it assumes EAC-COMESA-SADC TFTA Leadership, 14 July 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.eac.int/press-releases/155-resource-mobilization/3402-eac-champions-harmonised-africa-resource-mobilisation-strategy-as-it-assumes-eac-comesa-sadc-tfta-leadership>
- Erasmus, G., 2022. But how do they settle their trade disputes if they never litigate against each other? Tralac (Trade law centre) blog, 10 February 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.tralac.org/blog/article/15502-but-how-do-they-settle-their-trade-disputes-if-they-never-litigate-against-each-other.html>
- Ewi, M., 2024. The African Union's fight for relevance in 2024, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 3 January 2024. Retrieved from: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-african-unions-fight-for-relevance-in-2024>
- Fawcett, L., 2025. The changing regional faces of peace: Toward a new multilateralism? Contemporary Security Policy, 46(2), 372–401. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2025.2460130#abstract>
- Geda, A. & Kibret, A., 2002. Regional Economic Integration in Africa: A Review of Problems and Prospects with a Case Study of COMESA, University of London, SOAS, January 2002, Final Draft. Retrieved from: <https://www.soas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-10/economics-wp125.pdf>
- Glickman, H., 1987. Reflection on State-centrism as ideology in Africa, the African State in Transition, Macmillan. Retrieved from: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-18886-4\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-18886-4_2)
- Gourguechon, P., 2022. Seven Reasons Why Decision-Making By Consensus Is A Bad Idea (And What To Do Instead). Forbes magazine, 25 January 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/prudygourguechon/2022/01/25/7-reasons-why-decision-making-by-consensus-is-a-bad-idea-and-what-to-do-instead/>
- Grant, A.J., Abdiasis, I., Söderbaumhttps, F. & Badriyya, Y. I., 2023. Regionalism beyond state-centrism: African regionalism in comparative perspective, Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis, Volume 77, Issue 3, 2023. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368343615\\_Regionalism\\_beyond\\_state-centrism\\_African\\_regionalism\\_in\\_comparative\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368343615_Regionalism_beyond_state-centrism_African_regionalism_in_comparative_perspective)
- Hettne, B. and Söderbaum, F., 2003. Theories of New Regionalism, Palgrave Editor. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259580400\\_Theories\\_of\\_New\\_Regionalism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259580400_Theories_of_New_Regionalism)
- Hettne, B. and Söderbaum, F., 1998. The New Regionalism Approach. Politeia, Vol 17, No 3, pp. 6-21, 1998. Retrieved from: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2399180](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2399180)

- Iqbal Z. & Khan, M. S., 1997. Trade Reform and Regional Integration in Africa - IMF eLibrary. Retrieved from: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781557757692/9781557757692.xml>
- Khadiagala, G., M., 2011. Institution Building for African Regionalism, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Working Paper Series on Regional Economic Integration, Working Paper n. 85. Retrieved from: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/109596/1/wp-085.pdf>
- Khandelwal, P., 2004. Comesa and Sadc: Prospects and Challenges for Regional Trade Integration. International Monetary Fund Working Paper WP/04/227, December 2004. Retrieved from: [https://www.imf.org/-/media/websites/imf/imported-full-text-pdf/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/\\_wp04227.pdf](https://www.imf.org/-/media/websites/imf/imported-full-text-pdf/external/pubs/ft/wp/2004/_wp04227.pdf)
- Kimenyi, M. S. & Kuhlmann, K., 2012. African Union: Challenges and Prospects for Regional Integration in Africa, Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations. Retrieved from: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4126691](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4126691)
- Kitipov, J., 2012. African integration and inter-regionalism: the regional economic communities and their relationship with the European Union, Strategic Review for Southern Africa, Vol. 34, Issue 1, University of Pretoria, Institute for Strategic Studies, May 2012. Retrieved from: <https://repository.up.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/c4f8eb26-3bbd-4ccc-9862-817afc01847c/content>
- Kumah-Abiwu, F., 2024. Global African Thought and Movements: Reflections on Pan-Africanism and Diasporic Discourses, MDPI, Social Sciences, 13(10), 554. Retrieved from <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/13/10/554>
- Li, W. & Abiad, V., 2009. Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performances, SSRN Electronic Journal, June 2009. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228179880\\_Institutions\\_Institutional\\_Change\\_and\\_Economic\\_Performance](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228179880_Institutions_Institutional_Change_and_Economic_Performance)
- Manboah-Rockson, J. K., 2012. Grabbing the Bull by the Horns: A Critical Analysis of the Establishment of AfCFTA, Open Journal of Political Science, 2021. Retrieved from: [https://www.scirp.org/html/8-1670979\\_108676.htm](https://www.scirp.org/html/8-1670979_108676.htm)
- Mangeni, F. & Atta-Mensah, J., 2022. Existential priorities for the African Continental Free Trade Area, UNECA, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://repository.uneca.org/entities/publication/e60729d2-f2f9-4123-a44b-6b60cca36cee>
- Mattoo, A.; Rocha N. & Ruta, M. (2020). Handbook of Deep Trade Agreements, World Bank Group. Retrieved from: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/685311594363725995/pdf/Handbook-of-Deep-Trade-Agreements.pdf>
- Meade, J. E., (1955). The Theory of Customs Unions, Amsterdam, North Holland. (not available on-line).
- Michael E. B., Kararach, G. & Malk I., 2021. Inequality and the role of macroeconomic and institutional forces in Africa, African Development Bank, Working Paper Series n° 353, October 2021. Retrieved from: [https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/wps\\_no\\_353\\_inequality\\_and\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_macroeconomic\\_and\\_institutional\\_forces\\_in\\_africa\\_f.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/wps_no_353_inequality_and_the_role_of_macroeconomic_and_institutional_forces_in_africa_f.pdf)

- Moghadam, R., 2014. Europe's Road to Integration, International Monetary Fund, Finance & Development, March 2014, Vol. 51, No. 1. Retrieved from: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2014/03/moghadam.htm>
- Montagnat-Rentier, G.; Brimble, B.; Dudouyt, G. & García-Sanjinés, J. M., 2025. How to Modernize Customs Procedures to Successfully Implement the African Continental Free Trade Area, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Technical Note n. 2/2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/imf-how-to-notes/Issues/2025/04/11/How-to-Modernize-Customs-Procedures-to-Successfully-Implement-the-African-Continental-Free-565744>
- Mouthaan, M., 2022. Regional Integration Alongside Securitisation? The Statebuilding Ambitions of ECOWAS States in Migration Cooperation. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16(3), p. 328–348. Retrieved from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17502977.2022.2065160#d1e139>
- Mussa, M., 2000. Factors Driving Global Economic Integration. International Monetary Fund, Paper presented at a symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming on “Global Opportunities and Challenges”, August 25, 2000. Retrieved from: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/sp082500>
- Muzee, H. & Enaifoghe, A. O., 2019. Towards an Inclusive Model of African Regional Integration: How Effective has the Linear Model been so Far? *Journal of Economics and Behavioral Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 55-65, February 2019. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331659437\\_Towards\\_an\\_Inclusive\\_Model\\_of\\_African\\_Regional\\_Integration\\_How\\_Effective\\_has\\_the\\_Linear\\_Model\\_been\\_so\\_Far](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331659437_Towards_an_Inclusive_Model_of_African_Regional_Integration_How_Effective_has_the_Linear_Model_been_so_Far)
- Namibia Investment and Production Development Board (NIPDB), 2024. Namibia's restriction policy on importation of horticultural products, part 1. December 12, 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.nipdb.com/post/namibia-s-restriction-policy-on-importation-of-horticultural-products-part-1>
- North, D. C., 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228179880\\_Institutions\\_Institutional\\_Change\\_and\\_Economic\\_Performance](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228179880_Institutions_Institutional_Change_and_Economic_Performance)
- Ovádek, M. & Willemys, I., 2019. International Law of Customs Unions: Conceptual Variety, Legal Ambiguity and Diverse Practice Free, *European Journal of International Law*, Volume 30, Issue 2, May 2019. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/30/2/361/5536733>
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018. *Enhancing Connectivity through Transport Infrastructure: The Role of Official Development. Finance and Private Investment, The Development Dimension*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved from: [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/08/enhancing-connectivity-through-transport-infrastructure\\_g1g936a1/9789264304505-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/08/enhancing-connectivity-through-transport-infrastructure_g1g936a1/9789264304505-en.pdf)
- Okhonmina, S., 2024. Pursuing Unity: Pan-Africanism in Practice, *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, Fall 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/pursuing-unity-pan-africanism-in->

[practice/#:~:text=In%20a%20major%20way%2C%20the,consensus%20on%20Pan%2DAfricanis%20unity.](#)

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) & African Development Bank (AFDB), 2002. Regional Integration in Africa, Development Centre Seminars. Retrieved from: [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2002/04/regional-integration-in-africa\\_g1gh29ab/9789264194427-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2002/04/regional-integration-in-africa_g1gh29ab/9789264194427-en.pdf)
- Oppong, R.F., 2011. Legal Aspects of Economic Integration in Africa, Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289064829\\_Legal\\_aspects\\_of\\_economic\\_integration\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289064829_Legal_aspects_of_economic_integration_in_Africa)
- Oyejide, T. A., 2016. Regional Context: ECOWAS Lessons and Proposals for CFTA Negotiations on Goods, Note prepared for ECOWAS/UNCTAD/GIZ Stakeholders Consultation on the Development of a Regional Strategy for the CFTA Negotiation; Accra, Ghana (March 9-11.2016), 10 March 2016. <https://unctad.org/system/files/non-official-document/ditc-ted-09032016-accra-doc-oyejide.pdf>
- Pociovălișteanu, D. M. & Dobrescu, E. M., 2009. The Role of Structural Funds in Economic and Social Cohesion Process. European Research Studies, Volume XII, Issue (2) 2009. Retrieved from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/159922647.pdf>
- Qobo, M., 2007. The challenges of regional integration in Africa In the context of globalisation and the prospects for a United States of Africa, ISS Paper 145. Retrieved from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/98933/PAPER145H.pdf>
- Salami, I. 2013. African Economic Integration and Legal Challenges, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Great Insights magazine 29 November 2013. Retrieved from: <https://ecdpm.org/work/boosting-intra-african-trade-volume-1-issue-1-jan-feb-2012/african-economic-integration-and-legal-challenges>
- Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), 2025. Angola prepared to implement the SADC electronic certificate of origin. SADC News, November 4, 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/angola-prepared-to-implement-sadc-electronic-certificate-of-origin#:~:text=November%204%2C%202025-,Angola%20prepared%20to%20implement%20the%20SADC%20electronic%20certificate%20of%20origin,the%20implementation%20in%20January%202026.>
- Soesastro, H., 2003. Regional integration initiatives in the Asia Pacific: trade and finance dimensions, 15th Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), General Meeting Brunei Darussalam, September 2003. Retrieved from: <https://www.google.pecc.org/resources/finance-1/89-regional-integration-initiatives-in-the-asia-pacific-trade-and-finance-dimensions-1>
- SRM, 2014. Port competitiveness in Mediterranean and Northern Europe: comparison among regional systems, paper for the XVI Conference of the SIET (Italian Association of Transport Economics and Logistics), 8 to 10 October 2014, Florence, Italy. Retrieved from: [https://www.sr-m.it/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce\\_uploads/2014/10/competitivita-porti-eng.pdf](https://www.sr-m.it/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2014/10/competitivita-porti-eng.pdf)

- Trademark Africa (TMA), 2024. Djibouti–Ethiopia Trade Corridor to Benefit from New Management Authority and Transport Observatory, Press notice, March 10, 2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.trademarkafrica.com/driving-trade-forward-djiboutis-bold-move-to-transform-its-trade-corridor/>
- United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2024. Trade and Development Report. Rethinking development in the age of discontent. Geneva, Switzerland, 2024. Retrieved from: [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdr2024\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdr2024_en.pdf)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), 2025. Delivering on the African Economic Community: Towards an African Continental Customs Union and African Continental Common Market. Assessing Regional Integration in Africa (ARIA) XI report, July 2025). [https://www.unece.org/sites/default/files/fullpublicationfiles/ARIA%20XI\\_Book\\_EN\\_12June\\_rev1.pdf](https://www.unece.org/sites/default/files/fullpublicationfiles/ARIA%20XI_Book_EN_12June_rev1.pdf)
- Unya, I. U., 2016. Historical overview of African integration: constraints and prospects, International Journal of African Culture, Policies and Development. Vol. 10, No. 2, 2016. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359733908\\_THE\\_HISTORICAL\\_OVERVIEW\\_OF\\_AFRICAN\\_INTEGRATION\\_CONSTRAINTS\\_AND\\_PROSPECTS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359733908_THE_HISTORICAL_OVERVIEW_OF_AFRICAN_INTEGRATION_CONSTRAINTS_AND_PROSPECTS)
- Venables, A. J., 2003. Winners and Losers from Regional Integration Agreements, The Economic Journal, Volume 113, Issue 490, October 2003, Pages 747–761. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/ej/article-abstract/113/490/747/5079609>
- Viner, J., 1950. The Customs Union Issue. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York. Retrieved from: [https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9780199389513\\_A23607386/preview-9780199389513\\_A23607386.pdf](https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9780199389513_A23607386/preview-9780199389513_A23607386.pdf)
- World Health Organization (WHO), 2024. Greater Horn of Africa (GHOA) - Food Insecurity and Health Crisis: Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA), 9 July 2024. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/greater-horn-africa-ghoa-food-insecurity-and-health-crisis-public-health-situation-analysis-phsa-9-july-2024>
- World Trade Organization (WTO), 2025. World Tariff Profiles 2025, Geneva, Switzerland. Retrieved from: [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/world\\_tariff\\_profiles25\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/world_tariff_profiles25_e.pdf)
- Yasui, T., 2014. Customs Administrations Operating Under Customs Union Systems, World Customs Organization (WCO), Research Paper No. 29, January 2014. Retrieved from: [https://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/research/research-paper-series/29\\_customs-unions\\_yasui\\_en.pdf?la=en](https://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/research/research-paper-series/29_customs-unions_yasui_en.pdf?la=en)
- Zewdie, A., 2019. Intergovernmental Authority on Development & East African Community: Viability of Merger, International Journal of African Development v.5, n.2, Spring 2019. Retrieved from: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/ijad/vol5/jiss2/7/>

