



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The foundation of good policy is good information, which is often lacking. High-quality research will enable policy to target issues of greatest concern to those outside government, thereby inviting their involvement.
- Public education must be undertaken to sensitise civil society and the business community about regional integration initiatives, while inviting their participation and making it clear how the latter can be achieved. It will be necessary to decide whether individual governments or regional institutions should take the lead on this.
- Civil society and business need to organise themselves to engage with regional integration – a precondition for any degree of involvement.
- Regional integration should look to the needs of the informal sector, although this may be difficult, especially at policymaking levels. Integration policy and its implementation must be sensitive to the projected impact on this part of the economy.
- Extra-governmental stakeholders' enthusiasm for regional integration will dissipate if it cannot produce tangible benefits. Policy initiatives must be paired with upgrading infrastructure so Africa's citizens and business people can take practical advantage of opening borders.

Opening Borders: Extra-governmental Involvement in African Regional Integration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drawing extra-governmental constituencies into regional integration initiatives is important in ensuring that durable systems emerge. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) shows that in Africa, as in much of the world, involving civil society and business in regional integration efforts has been difficult. The primary reasons for this are a lack of awareness of integration processes, along with underdeveloped civil society and business organisations (especially organisations geared at transnational relations). Bodies set up to help facilitate such engagement – notably the continent's regional parliaments – have failed to alter this dynamic. To foster broader engagement, public education must be undertaken, together with better organisation and mobilisation by civil society and business.

INTRODUCTION

Regional integration describes the processes through which countries strive for closer co-operation and increased trade by lowering the barriers between them and establishing common institutions to regulate their mutual interests. In the words of Pretoria University academic Professor Lorenzo Fioramonti, regional integration has typically been 'led by the few and imposed on the many'.² But a recurrent theme around regional integration is the importance of mobilising support among civil society and the business community – in other words, to draw on the insights, interests and concerns of those outside government. Doing so would be a potent asset in creating stronger, more durable and

more practically meaningful systems of integration.

Finding a formula for broader involvement in regional integration is an important matter for the APRM – a voluntary governance assessment and review process. Regional integration is a key priority of the APRM, which it seeks to advance ‘through [the] sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs for capacity building’.³ The APRM’s concern with expanding involvement in regional integration processes speaks to these objectives: both to the practical benefits of doing so, and to the underlying philosophy of the APRM – steering the continent towards a governance ethos of inclusion, openness and participation.

Arising from a recently published analysis of what the 17 Country Review Reports (CRRs) produced by the APRM have revealed about regional integration,⁴ this policy briefing explores the involvement of non-state parties in integration and offers some suggestions as to a promising future trajectory.

CITIZENS: LOCKED OUT?

A considerable body of research from across the continent has shown that African civil society wishes to be involved in regional integration.⁵ The APRM supports this, with the Ghana and Nigeria CRRs describing widespread societal endorsement of regional integration.⁶ It is unclear, however, whether this is uniformly true across the continent – or how deep this supposed commitment runs. Certainly, the APRM has identified dynamics suggesting a more ambivalent public attitude to integration. The Mauritian report questions the island nation’s cultural identity, implying that despite its involvement in regional and continental structures, its people feel little kinship with other Africans.⁷ The South Africa CRR notes the stresses arising from migration, manifesting themselves in xenophobia⁸ – borne out in 2008 and 2014 by xenophobic riots.

A more prominent issue is that most of Africa’s citizens are disengaged from regional integration processes. This comes across strongly in many of the CRRs, including those of Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda.⁹ This situation and its consequences are summed up by the Tanzania CRR, which draws attention to ‘low

levels of public awareness about regional integration, thus constraining the ability of Tanzanians to take full advantage of emerging opportunities from the integration process’.¹⁰

Moreover, little opportunity exists for public participation in integration processes. Indirectly elected regional assemblies exist in the Economic Community of West African States and East African Community (EAC) regions, and for the continent as a whole, there is the Pan-African Parliament. Although viewed as the foundations of bodies with real representative and legislative functions, their impact has thus far been limited. This is illustrated by the general lack of attention paid to them in the CRRs – these say very little about Africa’s transnational legislatures, despite the extensive inquiries the APRM makes into regional architecture.

BUSINESS: SHUTTERED AT THE CUSTOMS BOOM?

Successful integration is intended to enhance business prospects; as this happens, economic ties will solidify the political dimensions of integration. Incorporating business into the design and implementation of integration is therefore important. In reference to the Southern African Customs Union region, an analysis by SAIIA researcher Mark Schoeman argues that business involvement is increasingly a matter of strategic importance for countries: with tariff revenues falling, countries need to harness business resources. These are not just financial in nature but also include skills and, perhaps more importantly, insights to inform policy change to encourage growth.¹¹

In practice, the absence of a strong voice from business has long been recognised as a key hindrance to regional integration. In the 1990s, two Ghanaian academics, Prof. Ernest Aryeetey and Dr Abena Oduro, offered this observation:¹²

[A] feature of integration in Africa is the lack of active involvement of the private sector in the formulation of decisions, protocols etc. This is largely because most of the regimes at the time the agreements were ratified were statist in outlook. Domestic economic policy did not actively encourage private enterprise. Second,

the integration arrangements were negotiated among leaders of regimes that were in most cases not democracies ... The result was often a lack of sufficient knowledge about some of the provisions of treaties by both the private sector and national agencies whose activities should have been affected by the decisions made at the heads of state and ministerial levels.

The APRM's enquiries indicate that this remains substantively true. In some countries, such as Burkina Faso,¹³ the business community is small and not adequately formalised and organised to make a significant contribution to policy debate (chambers of business, or business lobbying organisations, are embryonic). These problems are widespread in Africa's extensive informal sector: its traders have an interest in easier cross-border movement but seldom have the sort of organisation or policy-analysis capacity to participate meaningfully in policy debates.

In other cases, mirroring the situation of ordinary citizens, insufficient information has been made available to encourage involvement. This is the case even in countries with relatively well-developed business sectors. A number of CRRs – those of Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda – emphasise this point.¹⁴

This is not to say that business has taken no interest in integration initiatives, or that no effort has been made to involve it. The CRRs indicate, generally, that whatever the difficulties integration has encountered, it appears to have produced some growth in trade and the availability of goods.¹⁵ Integration appears to have worked to business's advantage. There have also been attempts to draw business into integration processes. This has been most notable in the EAC, where the East African Business Council has 'observer status' in the EAC's institutions and attends meetings of the Council of Ministers and Heads of State.¹⁶

A few of the CRRs offer positive case studies. In Mauritius, the business community is mature and organised. It has developed close, productive relations with the government; and the government in turn has integrated business into its external strategies, including involving business in trade negotiations. The CRR credits this relationship with

playing an essential role in the country's economic success.¹⁷ In West Africa, Ecobank shows how private sector regional co-operation can 'promote transnational investments and regional integration on the Continent'.¹⁸ It demonstrates that an enterprising business community can benefit by seeking opportunities available across national borders – and can help realise the benefits that regional integration aims for.

CONCLUSION

In the field of regional integration, Africa's desire for a meaningful and participatory partnership between states, citizens and business remains a work in progress. Although the importance of mobilising broader support for integration is recognised, and some institutional architecture has been established for that purpose, regional integration remains a state-centric endeavour.

For the most part, Africa's people and to a significant extent its business communities cannot play a meaningful role in integration because of an overall information deficit: too little is known about the plans of the continent's regional bodies to prompt involvement. There are also few opportunities to enter debate around these processes, as the limited impact of the continent's nascent transnational legislatures illustrates.

These problems are accompanied – with some exceptions – by a lack of organisation (and sophistication) among citizens and businesses; they generally do not have the muscle and resources to assert themselves as part of the process. This is a capacity that must be built. It is encouraging, from a business perspective, that chambers of commerce, professional bodies and Institutes of Directors are taking root across the continent. In time, they may strongly articulate business voices on integration.

It is equally true that existing groups do not necessarily regard regional integration as a priority. And it is to this area that governments and regional organisations must pay serious attention – there is a need to encourage African civil society and business to commit themselves to assisting in developing good, implementable systems. Encouraging broader input will itself produce new considerations, as interest groups may harbour competing perspectives

and demands on integration – a necessary but difficult policy debate, if participation is wanted.

However, all of this is likely to be a long-term project. In the interim, Africa will move hesitantly forward with its integration initiatives. In the absence of solid, reliable processes for facilitating dialogue and partnership, policymakers must at least ensure that they are operating on the bases of solid evidence and valid information. Sponsoring research into the needs, aspirations and concerns of African citizens and businesspeople, and adopting integration frameworks accordingly, would be a sensible next step.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Terence Corrigan is a political and governance consultant and SAIIA Research Fellow.
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- 13 Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of Burkina Faso*, APRM Secretariat, May 2008, p. 240.
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- 15 Burkina Faso CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 236; Kenya CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 153; APRM, *Country Review Report of the Kingdom of Lesotho*, APRM Secretariat, June 2010, p. 130; Panel of Eminent Persons, APRM, *Country Review Report of the Republic of Mali*, APRM Secretariat, June 2009, pp. 187–188; Mozambique CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 190; Nigeria CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 200; Tanzania CRR, *op. cit.*, pp. 133, 135; Uganda CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
- 16 Palm R, 'Private Sector Involvement in African Regional Economic Integration', GIZ study on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Eschborn: GIZ, May 2011, p. 17.
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- 18 Benin CRR, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

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