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Chapter 12: African regionalism: the complex role of regional trade



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Extract

In May 1963, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana stood before the leaders of 32 newly independent African states and proclaimed: We must unite now or perish. I am confident that by our concerted effort and determination, we shall lay here the foundations for a continental Union of African States . . . Independence is only the prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic and social affairs; to construct our society according to our aspirations, unhampered by crushing and humiliating neo-colonialist controls and interference. (Nkrumah 2013) He called for a common currency and market, common development policies, and a central bank, as well as a common foreign policy and military. The next day, the leaders founded the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a weaker union than the United States of Africa that Nkrumah had dreamed of, but still an expression of their aspirations for true independence from colonial influence. Fifty years later, the African Union (the successor to the OAU) declared 2013 the Year of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance. Nkrumah and his fellow leaders' vision from 50 years ago helps explain the regional trade agreements we see throughout Africa today as well as the enduring idea for a continental economic union. Yet, as this chapter shows, the African regional trade agreements which are meant as building blocks to the continent-wide union have a long way to go before accomplishing even this part of the pan-African dream.

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Regional trade integration has long been a strategic objective for Africa yet, despite some success in eliminating tariffs within regional communities, the African market remains highly fragmented. A range of non-tariff and regulatory barriers still raise transaction costs and limit the movement of goods, services, people and capital across borders throughout Africa. Barriers to trade continue to limit the growth of trade throughout all African regional groupings. By imposing unnecessary costs on exporters these barriers raise prices for consumers, undermine the predictability of the trade reg ITUC-Africa Statement on the Tigray crisis and recent massacre – call for calm and cessation of hostilities. The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (www.itucafrica.org) is very concerned about the ongoing crisis in Tigray region. We strongly condemn the recent massacre of innocent and defenseless people perpetrated in western (...) 21/10/2020. African Human Right Day 2020: Advancing a new social contract to ensure the protection of rights and to build back better. Africa's regional integration record is not impressive. The fact that the large number of RIAs has done little to promote intra-regional trade raises questions about the appropriateness of this linear model for addressing the real challenges that inhibit regional trade (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). The specific factors that have resulted in Africa's, and sub-Saharan Africa's, relatively disappointing economic performance over the past few decades have been the focus of much enquiry. the complex compromise that is necessary within a diverse group of countries. African countries have definitely contributed to the proliferation of regional trade agreements; a defining feature of global economic governance in recent decades.