FOREWORD

African Agency Toward Global Powers in Africa's Sub-regions

News media reporting and social media posts constantly remind one that global powers have an abiding interest in engaging with Africa, almost always, to their advantage. Almost organically, the subject of global powers in Africa has found its way into academic spaces, be it in teaching, research or public intellectual work. The link between the varied practices of global powers in Africa and the rise in public and intellectual work on the continent's diverse geopolitical implications was bound to happen. It is for this reason that the University of the Witwatersrand thought it relevant and timely to focus on the "African Agency Towards Global Powers" project, to dedicate effort in understanding the unrelenting dynamic.

Anybody looking to make sense of the global powers in Africa theme through African lenses is bound to confront several epistemological and ontological problems. While African countries, societies, businesses and people are being impacted, much of the academic and intellectual literature in the so-called mainstream platforms is from outside the continent. The vast majority of what is projected, and consumed by the global policy and intellectual community is presented through the perspective of the global powers, the same global powers that impact the continent. By contrast, African standpoints have been muzzled out of debates, discussions and analyses of Africa's engagements with global powers. This translates to a circumvention of African agency at the continental level.

This book is part of a project dedicated to addressing the discrepancy between Africa as the region of focus for global powers and the muted response that we see from Africans. This edited volume is dedicated to Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs), out of the realisation that Africa's sub-regions often fall through the cracks in analyses of global

powers in Africa. As seen in the volume, this is often because the focus is directed at global power engagements at the continental and national levels. The seven chapters in this volume provide nuance to the relations between the United States, the European Union, China, India, Russia, the Middle East, and other global powers, on the one hand, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). The chapters analyse, probe and interpret the intricate, multilayered and evolving engagements between the sub-regions and key external powers; identify challenges and opportunities; they provide pathways for equitable and sustainable partnerships forged in African interests.

All the contributors are seasoned scholars based in the five regions, hence, well-placed to provide perspectives on the means and ways of reversing the trend in which global actors influence African sub-regions to one in which the sub-regions can act in their own interest in the global system. The assumption is that self-interest by African actors in the sub-regions can help advance African priorities, such as reforming the multilateral international system into an equal and equitable one. The argument that informs this approach is that African agency must be strengthened at all levels: continental; national and sub-regional. As such, the contributors analyse and proffer pathways for questioning the practice where African sub-regions have become battlegrounds for ideological, geopolitical and economic competition by global powers.

This book does not stop at the analytical level. Each chapter draws on analyses to make suggestions on how the analytical capacity of the officials of the RECs, civil society activists, media practitioners, businesspeople, scholars and citizens can be enhanced as far as engagements with global powers are concerned. The objective is that stakeholders at the sub-regional level should understand the impact and implications of the strategies being employed and deployed by global actors if they are to fashion their own strategies that permit equitable relations. As readers will note, the positioning of African sub-regions as major

interlocutors with global powers is nothing new, as the global powers themselves are engaging in sophisticated strategies that mingle relations at the continental, national and sub-regional levels. Knowledge-informed projection, strategic positioning and amplification of the African voices at the sub-regional level can ensure that African voices are amplified in such a way that global powers understand and appreciate Africa's development needs. The practical dimensions of the book aim to ensure that African sub-regional agendas, negotiations, agreements and action plans with each global power are based on clear sets of priorities, goals and aspirations developed and agreed upon in advance. Indeed, in some of the chapters, it will be evident that while RECs have broad strategic plans, these plans need rethinking if they are to be relevant to a self-help international order in which global powers have no qualms exploiting the continent if an opportunity arises.

The introductory chapter deals with the communicative dimensions of the RECs, vis-à-vis global powers. This is followed by the five chapters, each dedicated to a specific region, developed based on a mixed methods design. The authors reviewed the strategic plans from the RECs, seeking to find out what official documents from the RECs report about engagement with various global powers. The desk reviews also included readings of documents from global events in which RECs have participated, such as the global powers-plus-Africa summits. An important area of documentary review was the analysis of literature related to the presence of global powers in the sub-regions, through their governments, foreign aid agencies, companies and other strategic engagement vehicles.

The authors enhanced the quality of the information and data from the desk reviews with qualitative interviews at the headquarters of the official RECs. The exception was ECCAS, where the shift of the headquarters from Libreville, Gabon, to Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, during the study, made it difficult to do physical interviews. Hence, interviews in the ECCAS sub-region were done online. The researchers sought responses across the themes of politics and governance; diplomatic engagements; economics, trade and investments; peace and security; media and communications and civil society engagements. As readers will note in the chapters, the

global powers position themselves differently in each of the sub-regions. As a result, some global powers have assumed greater prominence in each of the sub-regions against their competitors. This raises the question of the soft power that each of the global powers wields in the sub-regions. An interesting development over the last decade has been diplomatic representation by each of the global powers at the headquarters of each of the REC. Yet, the RECs do not have diplomatic representation in the diplomatic capitals of the global powers. In fact, in varying degrees, all the global powers have strategic objectives for each of the RECs, whereas the RECs do not have well-formulated counter-strategies.

This book is both academic and policy-inclined. The policy end of both can be seen in the recommendations sections of each chapter. This is where the authors suggest pathways for overcoming the barriers that the sub-regions face in effectively engaging with global powers. Readers will read about the opportunities that exist for enhancing African agency at the African sub-regional level by leveraging the innate advantages that Africans have over global powers. The authors base their recommendations on the emerging trends and future projections for Africa's relationships with global powers based on the review of literature and the empirical data from the interviews. This approach ensures that the recommendations are not mere musings, but are founded on analytical considerations.

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