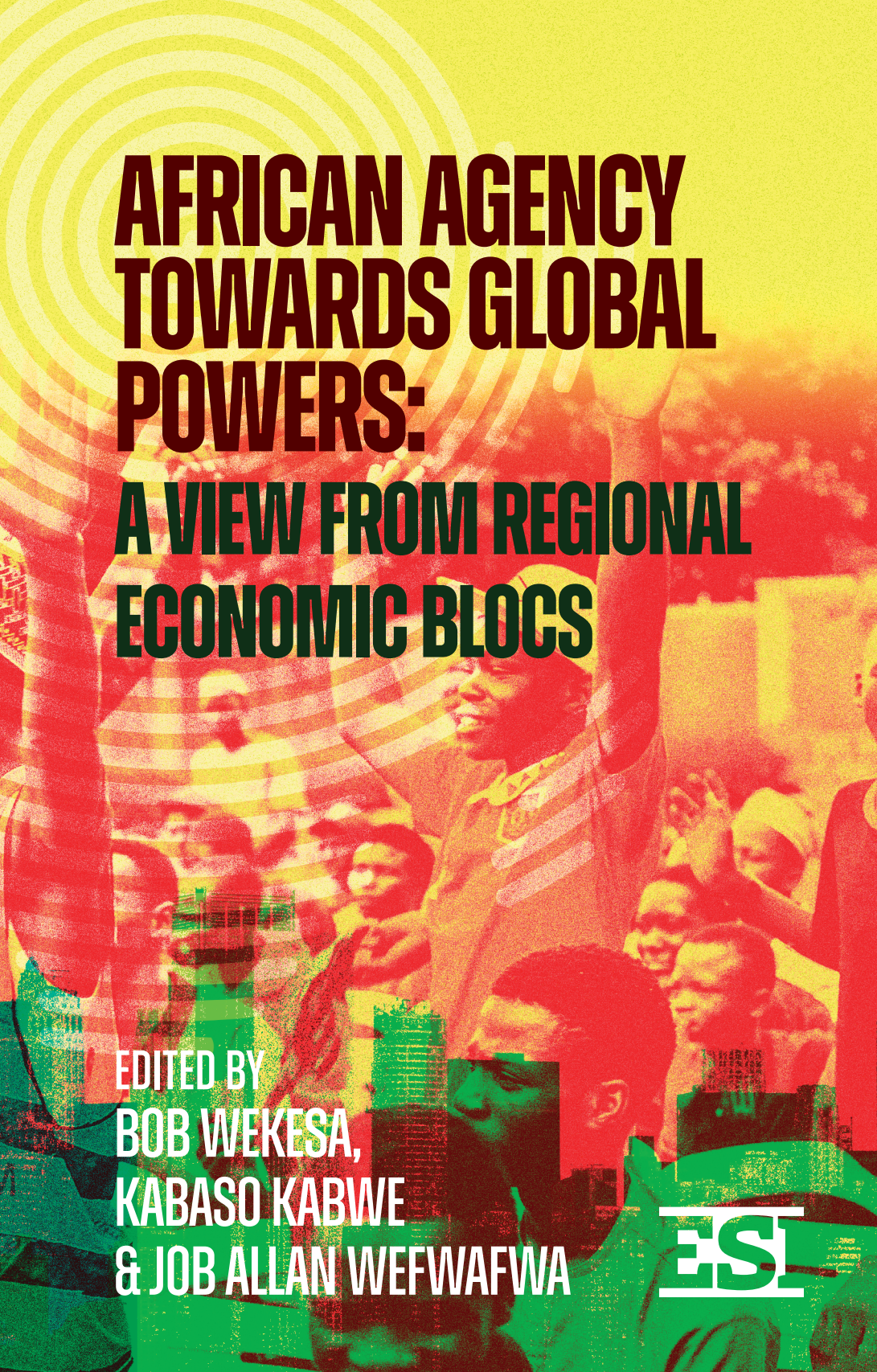
AFRICAN AGENCY TOWARDS GLOBAL POWERS:

A VIEW FROM REGIONAL ECONOMIC BLOCS



EDITED BY
BOB WEKESA,
KABASO KABWE
& JOB ALLAN WEFWAFWA

ESI

AFRICAN AGENCY TOWARDS GLOBAL POWERS:

A VIEW FROM REGIONAL ECONOMIC BLOCS



ESI Press
University of Pretoria, Lynnwood Road, Hatfield, South Africa
https://www.esipress.up.ac.za

Publication © ESI Press 2026
Text © The authors 2026

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of ESI Press or indicate that ESI Press endorses the views of the authors.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including photocopying and recording, or by any other information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

Cover design: Stephen Symons
Typography and design: Stephen Symons

First published by ESI Press 2026

ISBN: 978-1-0671823-2-8 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-0671823-3-5 (E-book / digital)



AFRICAN AGENCY TOWARDS GLOBAL POWERS:
A VIEW FROM REGIONAL ECONOMIC BLOCS

EDITED BY
BOB WEKESA,
KABASO KABWE
& JOB ALLAN WEFWAFWA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This edited volume is part of the African Agency Towards Global Powers Project, supported by the Open Society Foundations, for whom we express gratitude. Specifically, we thank Jeggan Grey-Johnson, Advocacy Advisor, Open Society- Africa, for serving not only as the manager for our relations, but also as a resource person on the topic. We also note, for avoidance of doubt, that the Open Society Foundations did not in any way influence the work that went into the production of this volume.

CONTENTS

Foreword vii
African Agency Toward Global Powers in Africa's Sub-regions
Mucha Musemwa

Chapter 1 1
Fragmented Foundations within Regional Economic Communities: The Limits and Possibilities of Collective African Agency and the Communicative Implications to Global Powers
Kabaso Kabwe
Job Allan Wefwafwa

Chapter 2 25
What are the Current Relations Between the Maghreb Arab Union and External Powers?
Nizar Messari

Chapter 3 57
Southern African Development Community and African Agency Towards Global Powers
Kebapetse Lotshwao

Chapter 4 81
Beyond Aid: The Double-Edged Sword of Development Partnerships in the East African Community
Gabriel Acaye
Achilleus Romward

Chapter 5 129
Economic Community of Central African States and African Agency Towards Global Powers
Gabriel Cyrille Nguijol

Chapter 6 217
Between ECOWAS Agency towards Global Powers, or Global Powers Agency towards the Sahel?
Bob Wekesa

Conclusion 279
Reflections on the Future of Africa's RECs in a Shifting Global Order
Bob Wekesa

List of contributors 305

Index 309

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.

Prof Mucha Musemwa
Dean, Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand

CHAPTER 1

Fragmented Foundations within Regional Economic Communities: The Limits and Possibilities of Collective African Agency and the Communicative Implications to Global Powers

Kabaso Kabwe
African Centre for the Study of the United States
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Job Allan Wefwafwa
African Centre for the Study of the United States
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction: Between ideal and reality

Africa's regional integration project has long been viewed as a critical pathway toward achieving collective development, political stability and global relevance. From the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 to the AU and the more recent push toward the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), regionalism in Africa has consistently been positioned as both a response to shared historical experiences and a strategy for navigating a shifting global order (Hettne 1994; Lee 2002). Central to this project are the continent's RECs, which were intended to serve as building blocks for continental unity. However, decades into their existence, Africa's RECs remain marked by considerable variation in performance, overlapping mandates and fragmented memberships. There are eight formally recognised RECs by the AU: Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); Common Market for Eastern and Southern

Africa (COMESA); Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The chapter (and the volume) identifies the five most influential RECs for analysis in the research, as the other three have less of an impact on the continental and global stage. Additionally, there is an overlap in the membership of countries, whereby members of the five selected RECs are also members of the three other RECs. For example, while Kenya is a member of the relatively least consequential IGAD, it is also a member of the EAC, one of the five identified RECs. This means that by selecting the five, the research does not lose out on important information required about the RECs left out. Khadiagala (2017) discusses the dominant phases in the establishment of regional institutions, highlighting the various actors and processes involved in the formation of RECs for economic integration and security collaboration. This implies that member countries choose to belong to the RECs that best meet their economic and security needs.

This chapter addresses the longstanding puzzle of African regionalism by examining what the current configuration of RECs reveals about Africa's capacity to project agency on the global stage. Rather than focussing on the institutional design or performance of any one REC, the aim is to step back and examine the broader regional architecture as a whole. In the spirit of viewing issues from a broader perspective, the chapter incorporates the communicative implications to enhance holistic understanding (see Wefwafwa and Monyani 2024). It asks the questions: What does the complex, fragmented and at times contradictory nature of REC membership suggest about the viability of a Pan-African voice in international affairs? Are RECs still useful instruments for collective diplomacy and development, or have they become more symbolic than substantive? The chapter further questions the communicative implications for the external funding of the AU and the arbitrary funding of REC member states, which result in unequal power. In a one-on-one conversation with the immediate outgoing AU chairperson, Moussa Faki, Sudan's Billionaire and Philanthropist, Mo

Ibrahim, questioned why the West finances 70 per cent of the AU's budget (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2025).

To explore these questions, the chapter adopts a conceptual approach informed by secondary analysis and synthesis of existing empirical studies and regional documents. It does not undertake new case studies of individual RECs; rather, it draws from the wealth of existing scholarship and policy literature to offer an overarching reflection on the nature of Africa's regionalism today. This approach is appropriate given the structure of the book, which dedicates separate chapters to each of the five main RECs. In this context, this chapter seeks to provide an integrative lens that can inform and frame those deeper institutional analyses.

The theoretical lens guiding this inquiry is new regionalism, a framework developed in response to the limitations of classical regional integration theories. Unlike earlier models that viewed integration as a linear and state-driven process, often inspired by the European Union (EU) experience, new regionalism emphasises the complexity, informality and external embeddedness of regional projects, particularly in the Global South (Grant and Söderbaum 2003; Hettne and Söderbaum 2000). For Africa, new regionalism offers a useful way of understanding RECs not as neat steps toward a continental union, but as messy, dynamic and sometimes contradictory entities shaped by both domestic and global forces (Lee 2022). This chapter conceptualises shaping as a communicative implication. The conceptualisation allows one to consider regional institutions not only as structures with rules and mandates, but also as communicative tools of political intent, for external influence and sometimes as sites of contestation.

This chapter, therefore, contributes to ongoing debates on African agency by focussing on the regional level, specifically, how the fragmented structure of RECs may enhance or inhibit the continent's ability to act in a coordinated and effective manner on global issues. The argument advanced is that while RECs continue to serve as important sites of aspiration and experimentation, their current configuration, characterised by overlapping memberships, weak harmonisation and uneven capacities, limits their potential as instruments of collective African agency. In some cases, this fragmentation communicatively implies to the external

actors that they can bypass or selectively engage regional bodies, thereby reinforcing Africa's marginality rather than reversing it.

In the sections that follow, the chapter presents a methodological reflection on how the analysis was constructed, followed by a findings and analysis section that explores key patterns and insights across the RECs. The chapter concludes by reflecting on what a more coherent regionalism might require if RECs are to fulfil their promise as engines of both integration and agency in a changing global order.

Theoretical framework

To analyse the fragmented nature of REC membership and its communicative implications for African agency in global governance, this chapter draws on the theory of new regionalism, as developed by Hettne and Söderbaum (2000, 2007). New regionalism provides a more nuanced and contextually grounded lens through which to understand African regionalism, not as a linear or technocratic process of integration, but as a multi-layered and contested project shaped by global political economy, state interests and the strategic behaviour of both state and non-state actors (Grant and Söderbaum 2003). Emerging in the post-Cold War era, the new regionalism approach offered a shift from earlier, state-centric and integrationist perspectives on regionalism, recognising instead the complex, multilayered and often contradictory nature of regional processes, particularly in the Global South (Hettne 1994). The framework is anchored in the International Relations area of study, even as it subtly adopts aspects of communication. This is to broaden the understanding of the social science issues within RECs.

Unlike neo-functionalism, which focussed on economic spillovers and the eventual political unity of states (Haas 1958), or liberal intergovernmentalism, which viewed integration as the outcome of rational state preferences (Moravcsik 1993), new regionalism understands regionalism as a multidimensional process. It encompasses not only economic factors, but also political, social and security dimensions, many of which are shaped by global political economy, the interests of dominant states, external actors and the agency of non-state

actors (Hettne and Söderbaum 2000). It acknowledges that regionalism does not follow a single institutional or ideological path and is often fragmented, overlapping and even contradictory.

In the African context, this perspective is particularly enlightening. African regionalism has historically been driven by Pan-African ideals and aspirations for unity, however, in practice, it has unfolded in a highly uneven and fragmented manner, often funded by external actors. The RECs, which are meant to serve as building blocks of the AU, often reflect national interests, historical colonial legacies, and the influence of external donors and powers (Bach 2016; Söderbaum 2004). This communicatively implies the neo/colonial ties. As such, new regionalism enables one to locate the RECs not only as instruments of regional integration, but as political projects that are embedded in and responsive to, a complex global and domestic landscape.

Several studies have utilised the new regionalism framework to examine African regional organisations. For example, Söderbaum (2004) applied it to analyse the political economy of regionalism in Southern Africa, examining its social construction in the post-apartheid, post-Cold War era, with a particular focus on by whom, for whom and for what purpose various forms of regionalism occur (Hettne 2004).

This chapter views such shaping as the communicative implication about where the real power lies. Similarly, this communicative implication can be traced in Lee's (2002) discussion that African regionalism is often reactive, shaped more by external shocks or elite-driven responses to crises than by sustained and coherent integration strategies. These insights caution against overly formal readings of regional institutions, instead urging scholars to pay attention to the underlying political economies and social structures that sustain or inhibit regional cooperation.

Furthermore, scholars have used the new regionalism lens to critique the overlapping and uncoordinated nature of Africa's regional landscape, which they often refer to as "spaghetti bowl" regionalism (Draper and Qobo 2011; UNECA 2006). This phenomenon, where countries belong to multiple RECs with often conflicting obligations, undermines institutional coherence and complicates efforts at collective diplomacy or trade negotiation. New regionalism, thus, directs attention to both the

structural causes of fragmentation and the agency of actors navigating it, enabling a more grounded understanding of the challenges that confront RECs.

Despite a substantial literature on new regionalism in Africa, most studies still focus on single RECs or narrow sectors (trade, peace and security) rather than the continent-wide implications of fragmentation for African agency. On SADC's evolving role, Nathan (2012) shows how SADC's security ambitions often outran its institutional capacity, complicating its identity as both a development and security actor. On the measurement side, De Lombaerde and Van Langenhove (2005, 2006) developed indicator frameworks for assessing the "depth" of regional integration across RECs, however, these tools are rarely used to link institutional overlap to external bargaining power. Few studies, however, apply the framework to explicitly assess how REC fragmentation affects African agency in global engagements, especially from a continental or cross-REC perspective.

By adopting new regionalism as the theoretical framework, we move beyond narrow institutional or legalist assessments of the RECs. The study rather focusses on RECs' political nature as regional projects embedded in broader domestic and global contexts. The framework helps to interrogate how the structural features of African regionalism, such as overlapping memberships, weak coordination and political rivalry among member states, implicitly communicate the complicated ability of RECs to speak and act with one voice in international arenas. This implicit communication contextualises how external actors, aware of these internal divisions, often engage selectively or bilaterally with African states, bypassing regional mechanisms and thereby, weakening collective agency.

The methodological approach of the chapter, which relies on secondary analysis of key documents, scholarly studies and REC positions during major international forums, is shaped by this theoretical lens. New regionalism encourages one to focus not only on what formal institutions do or say, but also on what they fail to do, and why. It points to the importance of analysing contradictions, silences and inconsistencies across RECs, as well as the broader political economy in which these institutions operate.

In doing so, this chapter can explore five key dimensions of REC fragmentation: political competition and regional diplomacy; membership anomalies; external influence in a multipolar context; sovereignty tensions and institutional weakness, as well as the aforesaid implicit communications beneath. Each of these themes reflects core concerns within the new regionalism literature and is grounded in empirical examples, such as the failed collective support for a single African Development Bank (AfDB) presidential candidate or the divergent national positions taken during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) climate negotiations. These examples underscore how African regionalism, far from being a coherent or unified process, is often riven by national competition and shaped by external pressures.

This framework is especially useful for understanding how RECs simultaneously reflect aspirations for African unity and serve as sites of institutional fragmentation. It also sheds light on how their complex architecture affects their capacity to act collectively on the global stage, thus, offering a valuable entry point for theorising African agency from a structural and systemic perspective.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach, grounded in the theoretical lens of new regionalism. As discussed in the theoretical framework, new regionalism offers a more flexible and context-sensitive understanding of regional integration, especially in Africa, where formal institutional arrangements often coexist with informal, overlapping, and externally influenced dynamics. Unlike classical regional integration theories that assume linearity and cohesion, new regionalism allows one to study African RECs as multi-layered and fragmented actors, operating within a globalised, multipolar world.

This perspective directly shapes the methodology. Rather than focussing on legal frameworks or purely institutional indicators, the chapter draws on secondary sources including existing policy reports, academic literature, AU documents, think-tank publications and recent

public events to analyse how RECs have exercised, enabled or hindered African agency in global affairs. It also recognises the subtle implicit communication beneath the REC's (African) agency, vis-à-vis the global actors. The method here is qualitative secondary analysis, however, guided by thematic concerns derived from new regionalism: overlapping memberships, external influence, inter-state competition and the role of regional institutions as both arenas and actors.

The secondary material was not treated as neutral information, but read critically through the new regionalism lens. In doing so, several themes emerged that frame the findings and analysis section. For instance, the concept of "regionness" helped assess the varying degrees of institutionalisation across RECs and their implications for collective agency. Similarly, the attention to external drivers of regionalism revealed how global powers often bypass RECs or selectively empower them, reinforcing fragmentation. The theme of hybridity, where formal regional bodies are shaped by informal political alignments or economic dependencies also proved useful in tracing why certain RECs act decisively in some areas, for example, peace and security, however, appear absent in others, for example, trade negotiations.

This method of analysis allowed the chapter to pre-emptively trace patterns that are explored in more detail in the findings section. For example, the inability of RECs to coordinate nominations for international leadership roles, or the tension between national and regional priorities during multilateral negotiations, were read not merely as administrative failures, but as symptomatic of a broader structural and political fragmentation.

Finally, by intentionally keeping the scope at a pan-REC level, rather than drilling into the internal workings of specific RECs (as other chapters in this volume do), the methodology makes it possible to observe common trends across Africa's regional architecture, without repeating case-level detail. This broader sweep is essential for the chapter's aim: to assess whether Africa's regional institutions can collectively project agency in a fragmented and multipolar world.

Findings and analysis

In this section, an integrative lens that informs and frames the deeper institutional analysis is used. It draws from the wealth of existing scholarship and policy literature to offer an overarching reflection on the nature of Africa's regionalism today.

The promise and politics of RECs

From the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) to the Abuja Treaty (1991), African regionalism has been driven by the belief that economic integration and political cooperation are essential for development and sovereignty. RECs were envisioned not merely as trade blocs, but as foundational institutions that would anchor a broader vision of continental unity. This chapter establishes that the RECs are implicitly and sometimes explicitly used to communicate messages within the RECs and the global arena. As identified, the AU formally recognises eight RECs, whose influence and functionality vary widely (African Union [AU] 2025). These are AMU; COMESA; CEN–SAD; EAC; ECCAS; ECOWAS; IGAD and the SADC. Their mandates extend beyond economics to include peace and security, infrastructure development and foreign engagement. Suffice to say, these expansive ambitions remain largely unrealised in part due to chronic underfunding.

Many RECs struggle to sustain operations, relying heavily on external donor funding, rather than consistent financial commitments by member states (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2025). This reliance significantly curtails REC effectiveness and compromises African agency. This is besides the implicit and sometimes explicit communication of REC's lack of economic independence. Take the SADC as a case in point. Recent figures indicate that less than half of the SADC's programmes are financed by member states, as the majority comes from international cooperating partners (ICPs) like the EU, AfDB and various bilateral partners. Still within the member states, South Africa is a major contributor, which communicatively implies that it has more say than the other members (Tjønneland 2006). Despite intentions to strengthen domestic financing

through the Regional Development Fund, which aimed to garner US$ 13 billion, this mechanism remains inactive due to lack of ratification (SADC 2024a). Meanwhile, critical areas like personnel costs, peace initiatives and ministerial travel depend on continued external funding (Tjønneland 2006).

The financial instability undermines regional autonomy in multiple ways, thereby implicitly communicating RECs' vulnerability to both internal and external actors. For one, it creates room for external agenda setting, where donor interests often end up determining the focus of regional programmes, with the potential to sideline what African states themselves deem most pressing (Wafula and Andrews 2023). Also, within the REC member states, the bigger financial contributors within the SADC, such as South Africa, shape the agendas (Ngwawi 2017). In the wording of this research, the shaping communicatively implies the financial power according to the financial abilities of the member states. Operationally, budget shortfalls lead to disruptions in the running of core functions, ranging from regular summits and decision-making forums to security deployments and the implementation of infrastructure projects. Even more worrying, it weakens the collective diplomatic voice of the region, without the capacity to act swiftly and assertively. As a result, the external powers read the communicative implication that RECs are often bypassed, as external powers read the communicative implication of RECs' weaknesses and choose instead to engage directly with individual countries.

An example of this can be seen in the ongoing crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). While efforts by the SADC and EAC to lead peace mediation in such a critical regional conflict have not yielded the desired results, other countries such as Qatar, a Gulf state with growing strategic interests in Africa have stepped in to mediate between the DRC and Rwanda, raising questions on African agency (Custers and Kinkoh 2025). Similarly, the United States (US) has pushed for a minerals-for-peace deal, linking access to the DRC's vast critical mineral resources to commitments around regional stability (Moncrieff 2025). At the local stage, individual countries have been seen making decisions that go against the collective REC agreements. For example, during the AU chairperson elections, the candidates campaigned directly to

the individual nations, bypassing the RECs. At the external level, these arrangements raise legitimate concerns about what is being traded in exchange for peace and highlight the long-term risk of undermining African agency in favour of transactional, externally driven solutions. Had RECs such as the SADC, EAC or even the continental body—the AU possessed the financial and operational independence to manage such crises and make decisions by themselves, the continent might not be in a position where peace and perceived national decisions are reached at the cost of sovereignty and RECs' stability.

Membership anomalies and overlaps

A critical barrier to REC coherence lies in the fragmented nature of their membership, that is mainly externally funded. African countries routinely hold dual or even triple memberships in different RECs. While this phenomenon is often justified by overlapping economic interests or political allegiances, it communicatively implies the member states' inability to form a single functional entity that can counter global entities such as the EU. Simplistically put, the external actors pick cues that enable them to detect opportunities for exploiting the RECs. For instance, the DRC belongs to both the EAC and SADC, while Djibouti aligns with both IGAD and COMESA. Such duplication has the potential to undermine the ability of any single REC to articulate a unified position, especially in global engagements where speed, clarity and cohesion are essential (Ogboye and Ochieng 2024).

In some cases, countries exist in a kind of regional limbo. Eritrea remains outside of any functional REC, while the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (a member of the AU) is absent from all major blocs. Island states such as Cape Verde and Comoros are nominally aligned with RECs, but have limited practical engagement. This patchwork undermines REC credibility and complicates efforts to represent Africa as a unified bloc in international forums such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or UNFCCC (Hess and Hess 2008). As aforesaid, this invites external powers to engage African states bilaterally rather than through regional groupings, reinforcing fragmentation.

One of the clearest recent examples of how RECs struggle to speak with one voice, even on relatively straightforward matters, comes from the 2025 AfDB presidential elections (AfDB 2025). In this case, both the SADC and COMESA endorsed Samuel Maimbo, a Zambian candidate with a strong track record in international finance (SADC 2024b), which joint endorsement could have been a moment to demonstrate regional unity and strategic alignment. Instead, it quickly became a case study in fragmentation. South Africa, despite being a member of both the SADC and COMESA, chose to act autonomously by fielding its own candidate, a move that exposed the fragility of regional cooperation. It both implicitly and explicitly communicates that even basic alignment on leadership choices can be sacrificed when national ambitions take over. We can also interpret the move to mean that South Africa funds SADC more than the rest of the member states, and this communicatively implies that it holds more power.

However, there are some instances where some REC member states, with less financial contributions, go against the unilateral decisions of the members. For example, during the recent AU chairmanship elections, although the SADC communicated to members encouraging them to back Madagascar's candidate, because it is a member state, not all the members voted for him (Mbaka 2025). The communicative implication in this kind of disunity goes far beyond elections. If RECs cannot hold together around regional candidates for Pan-African institutions, it raises serious questions about their capacity to act collectively in engagements with global powers. This is because at the global level, the stakes are even higher and the politics are more complex. The AfDB and AU episodes, in many ways, reflect a broader pattern: efforts at regional cohesion often fall apart, not due to lack of formal structures, but because member states prioritise their own geopolitical standing over shared goals.

What made these particular situations even more revealing was the underlying regional power dynamic at play. South Africa's decision could also be an implicit communication that the country is asserting its dominance in the region. It is a statement that its economic weight gives it the right to lead, regardless of broader consensus. This sense of hierarchy within RECs, where some countries behave as "first among equals" is

one of the unspoken tensions undermining their collective strength. The member states' financial contributions within the RECs fuel the situation. For smaller or less economically influential countries, this can foster frustration and disillusionment with the idea of regional solidarity.

All of these point to a deeper issue: RECs are not just struggling with technical coordination; they are wrestling with political trust and uneven power. And until these dynamics are acknowledged and addressed, even well-intentioned efforts at regional cooperation may continue to falter at critical moments.

Fragmented agency in a multipolar world

The rise of multipolarity has seen intensified geopolitical competition for African partnerships, particularly from China, Russia, the US, EU and increasingly, the Gulf States. RECs were built to provide collective bargaining power. However, too often, individual states dominate diplomatic engagement, pushing bilateral deals that undercut regional strategy. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a good example of this. Despite infrastructure frameworks shared with RECs, Chinese partnerships are almost always with individual countries, not blocs (Fan 2023; Ndzendze and Monyae 2019). Similarly, US initiatives such as the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) or the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) operate through direct state channels rather than regional institutions, and trade tools such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) are implemented nationally rather than via RECs, even though they have broader implications for the region (Engel 2020). A pattern can be seen where the external actors only acknowledge RECs when they serve their interests. The actors quickly revert to negotiating with individual member states whenever it serves their interests

There are of course some exceptions where RECs have successfully articulated joint positions and stood firm. ECOWAS, for example, took collective action during coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, imposing sanctions and suspending memberships. SADC, too, occasionally unites, such as when addressing Zimbabwe's sanctions or responding to unrest

in Mozambique (Mutsaka 2024; SADC 2022). The EAC joined forces to help stop the post-election violence that followed Kenya's hotly contested 2007 presidential elections. The alleged perpetrators of the violence were prosecuted at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague (Wefwafwa 2015). However, these examples are considered exceptional, rather than the norm. More often, national interests override regional commitments, as states may prioritise domestic stability, strategic alignments, or economic ties with global powers over a common REC stance. Locally, critics argue that, similar to the external actors, RECs' sitting presidents unite to defend their embattled colleagues (Hausken and Ncube 2015).

This pattern reflects a persistent dilemma where states must balance sovereignty and regional identity, and choose when to delegate authority. The result is a fragmented agency. One path forward would involve states ceding authority to RECs for specific issue areas, pre-agreeing that certain negotiations, such as border security, trade agreements or natural resource deals, must be channelled through REC mechanisms, even if parallel bilateral discussions occur. This model mirrors arrangements in the EU, where member states agree to let the bloc negotiate trade deals under the Common Commercial Policy. The move would communicatively imply the goodwill needed from member states to enable the RECs to function as expected. It would also imply to the external actors about Africa's desire to unite with a single voice on the global stage. This would discourage the external actors from "meddling" with RECs through funding that comes with hidden interests and bypassing RECs to negotiate with state members.

Embedding such commitments in REC protocols, perhaps using "opt-out clauses" could strengthen collective capacity without entirely eliminating national expression. Through a clarification of which issues are regional by default, RECs could build credibility and autonomy, making it harder for external powers to exploit state-to-state divisions. Doing so would not abolish state sovereignty, but it would signal strategic cooperation and help African states punch above their weight in a multipolar world (Bach 2016; Söderbaum 2004).

The tension between Pan-Africanism and state sovereignty

Similarly, the tension between the ideal of Pan-African unity and the reality of national sovereignty is another challenge. While most REC treaties promote collective goals, such as working together on security, trade or diplomacy, many member states still prefer to work alone when it really matters. This is often reflected in the uneven implementation of REC decisions and in the growing number of cases where countries pursue their own foreign policies, even when those decisions clearly affect regional interests.

Kenya offers a good example. Though key to the EAC, Kenya often uses bilateral diplomacy to enhance exports or strengthen strategic relations, opting for direct trade deals or partnerships instead of unified regional efforts (Irungu 2024). Likewise, Nigeria, the de facto leader within ECOWAS, has shifted from championing bloc unity to prioritising its own four-dimensional foreign policy agenda. This strategic posture has resulted in reduced cohesion and has, on occasion, sidelined ECOWAS mechanisms in favour of bilateral or national interests (Nwangwu 2024). These examples reflect a pattern of what some scholars call "sovereign pragmatism", a way of prioritising national interests over regional cooperation when the two seem to clash.

These differences make it difficult to agree on a unified REC position in global forums. For instance, during the Russia–Ukraine war, Africa was deeply split: 28 countries voted to condemn the invasion, sixteen abstained and nine did not vote, reflecting a mix of strategic interests and diverse foreign policy traditions (Tawat 2022). In the AMU, century-long tensions between Algeria and Morocco, especially over border disputes and Western Sahara, have consistently blocked collaboration on even basic regional issues like border security or migration (Laadam 2018). These ongoing divides significantly undermine the RECs' capacity to be credible, unified actors in international affairs. The problem here is not just a matter of political will. In many cases, REC structures do not have the authority to require members to act together. Most decisions are based on consensus, and enforcement mechanisms are weak or non-existent. Therefore, even if one country blocks a regional decision,

or ignores it entirely, there are usually no consequences. As a result, the weakness sends a communicative implication to the external actors to easily sidestep RECs and strike deals with individual countries, further undermining the idea of regional agency.

To make RECs more effective, member states might consider giving them more formal authority in certain areas, like trade negotiations, security coordination, or climate diplomacy. This would not mean giving up sovereignty entirely, it would, however, create clearer rules around when and how regional platforms should lead. Some kind of shared commitment, perhaps backed by binding protocols or opt-out clauses could help build more consistent collective action. Without this, RECs risk being sidelined by both their own members and external powers.

Institutional weakness and the limits of soft power

Finally, a key finding that emerged is the limited institutional capacity of most RECs, not just in terms of money and staffing, but also in how they implicitly and explicitly communicate their influence internationally. Many RECs depend heavily on external donors to fund their operations, which can shape priorities in ways that do not always reflect regional needs. Administrative structures are often small and under-resourced, with limited policy expertise and weak enforcement mechanisms. This makes it difficult for RECs to speak with a strong and consistent voice in international spaces, it is also a communicative implication from the external actors about who is more influential. Soft power, the ability to influence through ideas, norms and public diplomacy, is also underdeveloped. Unlike the EU, which has diplomatic missions, cultural programming and recognisable branding, most African RECs have little public visibility. There is no coordinated "REC diplomacy", and awareness of RECs among citizens across the continent remains low (Bach 2016). This weakens their legitimacy and makes it harder to build political momentum behind regional initiatives.

Still, there have been moments of real promise. The response to the COVID-19 Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver proposal at the WTO is a good example. South Africa and

India led the charge, with wide support from across the African continent. This early show of solidarity highlighted how African countries can work together to shape global rules on public health and intellectual property (Amin and Kesselheim 2022). However, as the negotiations progressed, that unity became harder to sustain. Some countries appeared to be pursuing their own vaccine agreements or took more cautious positions, partly influenced by their external partnerships (Bond and Ndlovu 2022). These shifts did not erase the value of the initial collective action, they did, however, communicatively imply how national interests and limited regional coordination can complicate long-term bargaining power.

The takeaway here is not to overlook Africa's agency, but to recognise that sustained collective influence requires stronger REC institutions and clearer coordination mechanisms. Regional solidarity is possible, and has been demonstrated, however, it needs to be backed by more robust institutional support if Africa is to speak and act more effectively on the global stages.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the fragmented nature of Africa's RECs through the lens of new regionalism, offering a conceptual overview of how their structure and operation communicatively imply the continent's incapacity to project collective agency on the global stage. While RECs remain central to the AU's vision of continental integration, the analysis has shown that the current landscape, marked by overlapping memberships, weak institutional alignment, and varying levels of activity presents both practical and political challenges to achieving that goal.

Using a synthesis of existing empirical and policy research, the chapter has highlighted key trends: the coexistence of high-performing and dormant RECs; the blurred lines between economic and political mandates and the tendency for external actors to exploit regional divisions to advance their own interests. These dynamics not only complicate Africa's internal coordination, it also hinders its ability to present a unified voice in international forums. In short, fragmentation at the regional level reverberates outward, shaping the nature and limits of African agency in the global system.

New regionalism proved particularly useful as a theoretical lens that allowed for an appreciation of the RECs as both products and producers of their environments. They are communicatively used by global political and economic forces, as well as by the local actors, to implicitly and explicitly reflect local political realities, institutional histories and evolving interests among African states. This perspective underscores the need for a deeper, context-specific theorisation of regional agency, one that goes beyond institutional design to consider how agency is structured, constrained and exercised within a complex regional and global order.

Overall, if African RECs are to fulfil their original promise, efforts must go beyond technical harmonisation or bureaucratic reforms. What is required is a political recommitment to regionalism that prioritises coherence, clarity of purpose and strategic alignment, both among African states and in their engagements with external powers. Only then can regional institutions move from aspiration to influence, and from fragmentation to meaningful agency.

References

Africa Development Bank (AfDB). 2025. The African Development Bank has one of the most democratic processes in electing the President of The Bank. [Online]. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/african-development-bank-has-one-most-democratic-processes-electing-president-bank-84082 [Accessed 15 June 2025].

African Union (AU). 2025. Regional economic communities. https://au.int/en/recs

Alden, C. and Large, D. 2011. China's exceptionalism and the challenges of delivering difference in Africa. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 20(68): 21–38. doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2011.520844

Amin, T. and Kesselheim, A.S. 2022. A global intellectual property waiver is still needed to address the inequities of COVID-19 and future pandemic preparedness. *Inquiry: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 59. https://doi.

org/10.1177/00469580221124821

Bach, D.C. 2016. *Regionalism in Africa: Genealogies, institutions and trans-state networks*. Routledge.

Wafula O. and Andrews A. (Eds) 2023. The African Union at 20 , African Perspectives on Progress, Challenges and Prospects: Pretoria and Addis Ababa, Institute for Security Studies, xviii + 408 pages. ISBN: 978-1-920678-16-6

Bond, P. and Ndlovu, T. 2022. Covid-19 vaccines and the case for a TRIPS waiver: Africa between geopolitical realities and global health justice. *Review of African Political Economy,* 49(173): 516–526.

Custers, D. and Kinkoh, H. (2025). *Qatar's mediation in the DRC-Rwanda conflict: Reimagining African agency.* CARPO. https://carpo-bonn.org/media/pages/publikationen/carpo-pulse/qatar-s-mediation-in-the-drc-rwanda-conflict-reimagining-african-agency/8fc6ce8c54-1748254778/carpo-pulse-03-desiree-custers-and-hubert-kinkoh-mai-2025.pdf

De Lombaerde, P. and Van Langenhove, L. 2005. Indicators of regional integration: Methodological issues**.** *UNU-CRIS Working Papers, SRRN.* http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.739711

— — —. (2006). Indicators of regional integration: Conceptual and methodological aspects. In: *Assessment and measurement of regional integration,* edited by P. De Lombaerde. Routledge. pp. 9–41.

Draper, P. and Qobo, M., 2011. Rabbits Caught in the Headlights? Africa and the 'Multilateralizing Regionalism'Paradigm. In: *Regional Integration, Economic Development and Global Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Fan, S. 2023. Does the Belt and Road Initiative promote bilateral trade? An empirical analysis of China and the Belt and Road countries. *Emerging Economy Studies,* 15(2): 190–214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974910123116745

Grant, C. and Söderbaum, F. 2003. The new regionalism in Africa. In:, *Theories of new regionalism,* edited by F. Söderbaum, and T. M. Shaw. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 241–264.

Haas, E.B. 1958. *The uniting of Europe: Political, social, and economic forces,*

1950–1957. Stanford University Press.

Hausken, K. and Ncube, M. 2015. Production, economic growth, and conflict in risky elections. In: *Journal of African Elections. Journal of African Elections,* 14(2): 34–49, edited by D. Kadima. https://www.eisa.org/storage/2023/05/2015-journal-of-african-elections-v14n2-eisa.pdf?x29006

Hess, R. and Hess, S. 2008. The many layers of regional organisation complicate trade agreements on and off the continent. SAAIA. https://saiia.org.za/research/a-pending-crisis-of-overlap/

Hettne, B. 2004. Foreword. In: *The political economy of regionalism: The case of Southern Africa,* edited by Söderbaum, F. Palgrave Macmillan.

— — —. 1994. *The new regionalism implications for global development and international security*. Research for Action 1994/014 Helsinki: UNU/ WIDER.

Hettne, B. and Söderbaum, F. 2000. Theorising the rise of regionness. *New Political Economy,* 5(3): 457–472. https://doi.org/10.1080/713687778

— — —. 2007. The future of regionalism: Old divides, new frontiers. In: *Regionalisation and global governance: The taming of globalisation,* edited by A. F. Cooper, C. W. Hughes and P. de Lombaerde. pp. 77–95. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203933398

Irungu, E.J. (2024). The role of Kenya's economic diplomacy in enhancing economic resilience in the East African Community (EAC) region. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*, XI(I): 208–219. https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1101017

Khadiagala G. 2017, Pan-Africanism and regional integration. In *Routledge handbook of African politics,* 1st edition, edited by N. Cheeseman, D. M. Anderson and A. Scheibler Routledge. pp. 375–389.

Laadam, J. 2018. AMU's failure: Morocco and Algeria disagreement. *Modern Diplomacy.* 8 December 2018. [Online]. Available at: https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/12/08/amus-failure-morocco-and-algeria-disagreement/ [Accessed 20 July 2025].

Lee, M. 2002. Regionalism in Africa: A part of problem or a part of solution. *Polis: Cameroonian Journal of Political Science,* 9: 103–131.

Mbaka, J. 2025. Fresh twist as SADC backs Madagascar candidate for AUC chairmanship. *The Star.* 13 February 2025. [Online]. Available at: https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2025-02-13-auc-chair-sadc-urges-members-to-back-madagascar-candidate [Accessed 29 July 2025].

Mo Ibrahim Foundation. 2025. *Mo in conversation with Moussa Faki.* YouTube interview. [Online]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqVZbMlCYrM [Accessed 19 August 2025].

Moncrieff, R. 2025. A new great lakes peace pledge marks progress but questions remain. *International Crisis Group*. 30 April 2025. [Online]. Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo-rwanda/new-great-lakes-peace-pledge-marks-progress-questions-remain [Accessed on 25 September, 2005]

Moravcsik, A. 1993. Preferences and power in the European community: A liberal intergovernmentalist approach. *Journal of Common Market Studies,* 31(4): 473–524. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1993.tb00477.x

Mutsaka, F. 2024. Southern African leaders resolve to keep troops in conflict-torn eastern Congo for another year. *AP News.* 20 November 2024. [Online]. Available at: https://apnews.com/article/sadc-congo-troops-mandate-extension-mozambique-elections-695a4986df3cdd51d2696e76cdf43681 [Accessed on 10 June 2024].

Nathan, L. 2012. *Community of insecurity: SADC's struggle for peace and security in Southern Africa* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315572987

Ndzendze, B. and Monyae, D. 2019. China's Belt and Road initiative: Linkages with the African Union's Agenda 2063 in historical perspective. *Transnational Corporations Review,* 11(1): 38–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/19186444.2019.1578160.

Ngwawi, J. 2017. *SADC has huge potential for funding own programmes.* Tralac. [Online]. Available at: https://www.tralac.org/news/article/11407-sadc-has-huge-potential-for-funding-own-programmes.

html [Accessed 02 July 2025].

Nwangwu, C. 2024. Nigeria's 4-D diplomacy and regional integration in West Africa: A peacebuilding debacle? *Peace Review*, 36(4): 754–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2024.2425854

Ogboye, M. and Ochieng, B. 2024. *Expansion versus cohesion: The East African community's turbulent journey to greater unity.* Center for Strategic and International Studies. https://www.csis.org/analysis/expansion-versus-cohesion-east-african-communitys-turbulent-journey-greater-unity

SADC. 2022. *SADC reiterates call for the removal of sanctions on Zimbabwe*. SADC. 7 May 2022. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-reiterates-call-removal-sanctions-zimbabwe [Accessed 10 July 2025].

— — —. 2024a. *SADC committee of ministers of finance and investment meets to discuss the operationalisation of the SADC regional development fund*. SADC. 7 May 2024. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-committee-ministers-finance-and-investment-meets-discuss-operationalisation-sadc [Accessed 19 May 2025].

— — —. 2024b. *SADC endorse Dr. Samuel Maimbo as a candidate for the AfDB presidency***.** SADC. 20 August 2024. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-endorse-dr-samuel-maimbo-candidate-afdb-presidency [Accessed 8 June 2025].

Söderbaum, F. 2004. *The political economy of regionalism: The case of Southern Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Tawat, M. 2022. Russia-Ukraine war: decoding how African countries voted at the UN. *The Conversation.* 8 March 2022. [Online]. Available at: https://theconversation.com/russia-ukraine-war-decoding-how-african-countries-voted-at-the-un-178663 [Accessed 03 July 2025].

Tjønneland E.N. 2006. *SADC and donors – Ideals and practices from Gaborone to Paris and back.* BIDPA. https://www.equinetafrica.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/TJOfin.pdf

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). (2006). *Assessing regional integration in Africa II: Rationalizing regional economic communities*. Addis Ababa: UNECA

Wefwafwa A. 2015. Striving media, sprawling ICC, and sacrosanct government: the Kenyan entanglement. *Global Media Journal*, 9(2). https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC184121

Wefwafwa J.A. and Monyani M. 2024. The communicative implication of the west's techno-affective democratisation in Africa. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs,* 11(2): 73–88.

CHAPTER 2

What are the Current Relations Between the Maghreb Arab Union and External Powers?

Nizar Messari
Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI), Morocco

Introduction

This chapter aims at analysing the relations of North African states with external powers. It proceeds initially with a brief presentation of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) before it analyses the relations of the region with those powers. These powers are divided into two categories depending on their stakes and their interests in the region. The first category is made up of states that have not only economic and trade interests in the region, but who have also strategic and political ones. This category consists of the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and some of its member states—mainly the southern European member states, France, Spain and to a lesser, but growing extent, Italy, China, Russia, Turkey and eventually the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Israel can also be added to this first category, although to a limited extent: its interest in the region is keenly political and strategic as it has re-established diplomatic relations with Morocco in 2020, which resulted in significant diplomatic shifts in the region.[1] In the second category, there are powers such as Japan, South Korea and India. China could also be part of this second category, while India could be part of the first category, due to a limited political role it plays in the region.

A final introductory reflection: it is relevant to note that for medium and big powers, like Russia, Japan, South Korea and India, the Maghreb is part of wider regional setting in which the Maghreb is not a key player. Indeed, in the case of Russia, the Middle East and the Sahel are more

relevant than the Maghreb per se, and for Japan, South Korea and India. Furthermore, the Maghreb is also less relevant than the Gulf states (in MENA) or other regions in the African continent. The fact that the Maghreb is embroiled in its own internal rivalries and instability adds to its relative irrelevance when it comes to these external powers.

And a final clarification note: the Maghreb and AMU are mostly used interchangeably, unless indicated otherwise. Both terms refer to the five member states of the Maghreb Arab Union, which in alphabetical order are: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.[2]

The Maghreb: A brief historical and political introduction

Abdallah Laroui, a historian, identifies old historical roots of the idea of a Maghreb (Laroui 2001). According to his narrative, referred to as the Maghreb or not, North Africa shares an extensive common history as, since the Roman empire, it was very often ruled by common rulers and went through similar periods of fast and periods of decadence, periods when it was dominated and periods when it dominated. Contemporary disputes—and this is not Laroui anymore—about whether Ibn Khaldun, Al Idrissi or Ibn Batuta are from this country or that, illustrate not only the fluidity of movement of the population of the region throughout history, but also that rulers in one part of the Maghreb were recognised as rulers in other parts of the Maghreb. The point here is that a diffuse and loose common identity existed, although it was necessarily politically instrumentalised. The great sociologist and philosopher, Mohamed Abed Jabri, showed, however, that the contemporary political roots of the idea of a Maghreb can be found in student and workers coordination in France in the 1920s and 1930s, when individuals from the three central Maghrebi states (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), all three of which under French domination, and who were in France, recognised each other as potential partners and allies and started coordinating their actions against the common oppressor/coloniser, that is, France (Jabri 1985). The strengthening of that idea and project happened in 1958 in a conference held in Tangiers, Morocco, when leading political parties from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia convened and declared that the independence of

Morocco and Tunisia was incomplete as long as Algeria was occupied by France. Those leaders launched the idea of a Maghreb and committed to constitute it as soon as Algeria became independent (Jabri 1985; Willis 2012).

Different regional and international developments, however, prevented the concretisation of that project. Tensions between Algeria and Morocco, epitomised by the Sand War of 1963 and the dispute over the Western Sahara, divided the two main states of the region. Eventually, in 1988, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia met in Marrakech, signed the treaty carrying the same name, and launched the AMU. That event represented a shifting moment in the history of the region (Deeb 1993; Mezran 1998): institutions were created, agreements were signed and regular leaders' encounters were agreed upon, all with the objective of constituting an organisation that would promote the links among the countries of the region and create a space for coordination, cooperation and agreement among its states.

Since its inception in Marrakech in 1988, the objectives of the AMU have been more internal than external: achieving economic regional integration through increasing intra-regional trade, establishing economic complementarities among member states, fostering economic complementarities among member states in order to diminish their reliance on external partners (AMU website, Deeb 1993). In an indirect manner, some saw in the strengthening of the AMU a way to allow the states of the regions to negotiate from a stronger position with their partners and to allow them to achieve better deals. This was, in part, the argument made by Alaoui (1994), which is the birth name of the current king of Morocco, in his doctoral dissertation which was specifically on the relations between the AMU and the EU. It goes without saying that the choice of that topic for a doctoral dissertation for the then future king of Morocco was not fortuitous, as it indicated the importance of the AMU for him.

Other players shared the perspective according to which Maghrebi states would gain at unifying their ranks and integrating their economies. This was, for instance, the perspective of the US administration in the 1990s too, as expressed by the Eizenstat Initiative of June 1998

(Bougherara 2013), which saw the consolidation of an integrated market in the Maghreb as an important asset in attracting US investors and increasing trade between the region and the US. From the frustration caused by the paradox of the importance of the Maghreb and its non-effectiveness resulted the concept of the cost of the non-Maghreb, which has been used by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2006), by the Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Economy and Finance (2008), and more recently in 2023 in a report by the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (Liga 2023).

However, after an initial success and some enthusiasm among the member states for the launch of AMU, soon, tensions prevailed again, key meetings were not attended—and sometimes boycotted—by some heads of states and the organisation went into disarray (Deeb 1993). There are two main internal causes: the tensions and the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco, on the one hand, and Libya related causes, on the other. As for the former, one of the first setbacks to AMU was certainly the closing of land borders between Algeria and Morocco in 1994, and since then, AMU faith has been linked to the ups and downs of the relation between those two states. As for the latter, that is, Libya, causes have changed over time. In the 1990s, the Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi complained about AMU member states—in particular Morocco—being among the first states to enforce United Nations (UN) sanctions against its regime—while Gadhafi was expecting intra-Maghrebi solidarity, which did not happen, which led the leader to freeze Libya's activity in the organisation. In the years 2010 and 2020, it is the unrest and the state of almost permanent civil war in which Libya has been engulfed—and in which the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco has not been a positive contribution, as both are attempting to hold some influence with the leaders of the country—that has represented a handicap to the consolidation of AMU. In summary, the fact that the AMU still exists and its new secretary general was appointed in 2024 despite the rupture of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Algeria and the crisis in Libya underlines the fact that even if it is moribund, the AMU is nevertheless still alive.

Recent efforts to adopt alternative frameworks to the AMU are bound to fail. Morocco's attempt to become a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has not been met by enthusiasm by member states members of ECOWAS, and the recent attempt by Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, in April 2024, to establish a separate structure without the participation of Mauritania and Morocco is also unlikely to succeed. Indeed, if history is an indication, it tells one that separate efforts have never worked and neither has isolating members.. History, however, also shows that the Maghreb has been through similar moments of weakness, but it has revamped.

In summary, AMU is paralysed, to a large extent, because of the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco. Consequently, it will be seen here that most great powers deal with the region taking into consideration the state of relations and the balance between those two states. Some of the external powers might privilege Algeria, however, they do not want to harm or undermine their relations with Morocco, while others privilege Morocco, but do not want to put their relations with Algeria under risk.

Foreign policies of Maghrebi states: A framework for analysis

Before the impact of external powers in the Maghreb is explored, and in the perspective of exploring the voice of the Maghreb as a subject and not only as an object of the policies of external powers, it is also relevant to contextualise the foreign policies of the states of the region. Over the last two decades, some efforts have been made to focus on the policies of the states of the region and not understand them only as a reaction to the actions undertaken by others. The seminal work proposed by Nonneman (2005) was certainly part of that effort. Nonneman (2005) organised an edited volume on the foreign policies of states from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) towards the EU, which was a first of its kind, since traditionally, scholars studied foreign policies of EU member states towards MENA. Two important observations were made Nonneman (2005). The first one was the use of the concept of omni balancing to refer to the fact that in MENA—and ipso facto, in AMU—many foreign

policy decisions balanced external interests and factors with internal ones. In other words, not only international factors, but internal political equilibriums to MENA states are also important factors that explain their foreign policies, and foreign policy decisions result from balancing factors from both realms (Nonneman 2005). Another relevant observation by Nonneman (2005), was the influence of Indian realist scholar Mohamed Ayoob, who argued that in what he called Third World states, the national interest is often equated with the interest of the regime. In other words, the national interest often means the survival of the regime. This insight from Ayoob was also important in a more recent special edition of The Journal of North African Studies (JNAS), which was organised by scholars based in Spain, but with mostly publications by scholars from the region. The editors of that special edition of JNAS—Fernández-Molina et al. (2019)—defended the relevance of understanding the foreign policies of North African states, and framed them within the context of subalternity. According to Fernández-Molina et al. (2019), it is important to acknowledge the "agency" of states from North Africa in the decisions they make in their foreign policies, while at the same time acknowledging their "subaltern" insertion in world politics. That work should be taken in conjunction with the work of El Qadim (2015) and that of Calkivik (2020). The latter shows what the study of foreign policy in the Global South should look like: it should decentre from the West and focus on other players, and it should decentre from the state and deal with other actors who affect and are affected by foreign policy. The former—El Qadim (2015)—showed how a state like Morocco, considered as dependent and with far lesser means than the EU, has, over the years, managed to defend what it defined as its national interest, despite the pressure put on it by the EU. This is to say that although they might have less assets than the big powers, states from the South in general, and from North Africa in particular, have their own objectives and manage to use different assets in order to achieve them.

Having framed the foreign policies of the states of the region, it is also relevant at this juncture to understand how these states are seen by others. Bougherara (2013) argues that the Maghreb is considered a sub-regional periphery, which does not mean that it is deprived of relevance, but that

its relevance is evaluated within a larger regional context. The question is, which one? Most external powers look at the Maghreb as simultaneously part of MENA and of Africa. External powers that hold regular summits with leaders from the region, such as China, India, Japan and South Korea—to mention a few—invite Maghrebi states to both summits, whenever it applies. In this sense, for these external powers, the Maghreb is relevant as part of a wider ensemble. However, for others, the Maghreb is relevant per se. That is the case of the US, the EU and some of its member states, such as France and Spain. Despite these differences, and as already hinted at earlier, the rivalry between Algeria and Morocco is a defining factor in the region: all external powers take it into consideration when they are making their policies in the region. Balancing them both and avoiding total ruptures with either one is the common characteristic of the foreign policies of all external powers in the region, to very few exceptions, and notably Israel and the UAE in their open support to Morocco on the issue of the Sahara, regardless of Algeria's reactions.

The paper initiates the analysis of AMU with external powers with the latter group: those external powers for which the Maghreb is relevant per se. The analysis moves on to the other external powers and how they see the Maghreb.

The relations of Maghrebi states with external powers: a contemporary analysis:

The relationship between the Maghreb and the external powers has evolved in many different ways over the years. From the standpoint of Maghrebi states, for a long time, and due to their colonial history, the "Other", where the threat came from, was France, not the US. The US represented a threat—and potential for partnerships—but in a remote manner, as opposed to France, which was close and constantly present. As mentioned earlier, when Morocco and Tunisia gained independence, they considered their independence to be under permanent threat as long as Algeria was occupied by France, not to mention that French troops remained in both countries. Journalist Abdellah Bekkali adds that those feelings of distrust were compelled by French actions, from the Suez

Canal crisis to pressures to keep a strong economic and cultural presence and influence in the region (interview to the author). It was only after the end of the Cold War that the US progressively acquired a strong influence and presence in the region, partly in consequence of its new status as the only remaining superpower. And if during the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and China held important and close relations with Algeria, it will be shown here later that neither sacrificed their relations with Morocco. After the end of the Cold War, and for two decades thereafter, neither Russia nor China expressed any special interest in the region, as both saw it as part of their wider relations with MENA states and with Africa.

US

For a long time, the US has considered the Maghreb as a French region of influence, and has avoided to interfere too openly in it in order to manage its European ally during the Cold War. This has not meant that the US has been absent or silent from the region. As a matter of fact, it has acted consistently to keep Morocco close to the Western camp -even as it had to close its military bases in that country in the 1970s, for instance-. But those US interventions were usually a last resort, since the US consistently deferred to France in the first place (Berramdane 1987).

Post the Cold War, the initial inclination of the US was to consider Algeria as the leading state in the region and thus, its privileged partner (Bougherara-Souibès 2013; Zoubir and Benabdallah-Gambier, 2005). Several elements lay behind that perception. Algeria was the largest and wealthiest state of the region with a large, well-equipped and well-trained army, it was already playing a leadership role in Sub-Sharan Africa through its engaged diplomacy, which was a legacy from its revolutionary recent history and its struggle against colonialism that it constantly nurtured. As significant as these factors were, the large gas and oil reserve the country had made it a significant player in the very important market of energy resources. Finally, the fact that Algeria used to have close links with the Soviet Union, which had just disappeared, left that country vulnerable, given its relative weaker links with France, as opposed to its neighbours in North Africa. That meant that in the early 1990s, Morocco struggled to

remain relevant to the eyes of the US, although the Algerian civil war in the first half of the 1990s and the political instability that accompanied it, represented a handicap for an eventual undisputed leadership of Algeria in the region. One path Morocco followed to enhance its relevance in the eyes of the US, was the role it played in the Middle East peace process, as it sent a delegation to the Madrid peace conference (1991), was present in the signing at the White House of the peace agreement between the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin (1993) and hosted in Casablanca an economic summit between MENA states, including Israel (1994). Subsequently, Morocco initiated the partial normalisation of its relations with Israel, as it opened its liaison office in Tel Aviv and agreed to the opening of an Israeli liaison office in Rabat. Liaison offices are short of full diplomatic relations, however, under those circumstances, they signalled an engagement of Morocco towards a *de jure* recognition of the state of Israel. That move jointly with the establishment of a cease-fire between Morocco and the Polisario Front—the independentist movement in the Western Sahara—and the launch of an UN operation in that region with the objective of holding a referendum of self-determination, allowed for a new stage in the US role in the region: the US believed it could deal with the region without being constantly hampered by the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry, as the issue of the Sahara seemed to matter less than before, and the US was in a position to bolster its relations with Algeria without alienating Morocco.

The following turning point in the role of the US in the Maghreb came after 9/11 and the terrorist attacks on the US. As the US elevated terrorism to an existential threat and declared a "War on Terror", Algeria, Morocco and to a lesser extent, Tunisia, all collaborated with the US and supported its effort in fighting terrorist groups. Algeria, which had just ended its own internal turmoil and its fight against an Islamist group, was still reeling from that fight, while at the same time, it had expertise and expanded intelligence data on the groups involved (Lounnas 2019; Zoubir 2004). President Bouteflika was hosted at the White House and Algeria's role in the "War on Terror" was recognised. As for Morocco, since it had also suffered its own terrorist attack in Casablanca in 2003, it offered the US prison facilities expertise as well as intelligence in order to support the

so-called "War on Terror". The extensive cooperation of Morocco on the "War on Terror" resulted in Morocco being granted a special ally status—Major Non-NATO ally. According to US sources, the signing of a free trade agreement with Morocco represented also a recognition of the special status of Morocco among US allies (White 2005). In summary, the competition between Algeria and Morocco served the US interests, as both states tried to please the only remaining superpower and strengthen its links with it, and the US managed to keep the necessary balance between both regional rivals. Despite all the rivalry, trade between the US and Algeria (US$ 3.6 billion in both exports and imports in 2022) and the US and Morocco (US$ 6.8 billion in both exports and imports in 2022) remained modest—by US standards—while US investments in the region remained limited, although a bit higher in Algeria than in Morocco (US$ 963 million in Algeria, US$ 379 million in 2022 in Morocco) (US Trade Representative n.d.).

The following significant turning point, for once, was not dominated by the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry. That was the series of events referred to as the Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia and impacted many other states from the MENA region, although the ultimate significance of the impact on both Algeria and Morocco was limited. The West, in general, and the US, in particular, were initially impartial towards what was happening in the region, and showed the hypocrisy of their appeals for democratisation and the respect of human rights: as the people of Tunisia were demonstrating peacefully in the streets and asking for the fall of the regime, the West, in general, and the US, in particular, were more concerned about political stability in the region. The lack of coherence of the US became even more blatant when it moved—jointly with other allies—to remove Muammar Gadhafi, the Libyan leader, from power, even if that has resulted in permanent turmoil in the country and in the Sahel, and even if that undermined the stability that it worried about in the case of Tunisia. However, in Tunisia, after the fall of the regime of Ben Ali, the US was forthcoming in support of democratic reforms and in support of the new regime.

The following turning point remits back to the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry. Indeed, in the last few days of the Trump administration, and after

he had lost the presidential elections, President Trump issued an executive order in which the US recognised Morocco's sovereignty on the Western Sahara and committed to open a consulate in the city of Dakhla, one of the main cities in that region. That was a major shift in US policy in the region, as the US had consistently supported Morocco militarily in the conflict, while it continuously supported the UN-led process of self-determination in the region. While Donald Trump used an executive order to operate that shift—which does not require congressional approval, for which reason it can be reversed somehow swiftly, since it engages mainly the President—the Biden administration neither confirmed nor denied the shift, evading clear cut answers whenever asked to comment on the issue. With that, status quo has remained, and for all practical matters, the US recognises Morocco's sovereignty on the Sahara. It is relevant to observe at this stage that President Trump's executive order came concomitant with Morocco re-establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, which means that any backing out on the US position on the Sahara might affect Morocco's relations with Israel. It goes without saying that by the same token, any backing out by Morocco on its relations with Israel will inevitably impact the US position on the Western Sahara, which might explain Morocco's relative passivity regarding the genocide taking place in Gaza, as well as the attacks on Lebanon (Henneberg and Ghoulidi 2023).

EU

Maghrebi states do not know a world without the European community: the treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC) was celebrated in the year following Morocco and Tunisia's independence and Algeria became independent in a world in which the EEC was already active. However, as journalist Abdellah Bakkali insisted, if those relations were for decades mainly of economic nature, they involved unequal parties and constantly favoured Europeans (interview with the author). After the evolution of the EEC into a EU, the political and societal aspects became increasingly part of that uneven relationship. The EU started pushing for political reforms—although in a moderate fashion—and it started putting more pressure on Maghrebi states on

the challenge of migration. Some of these issues have also been present in the relations of some EU member states with the Maghreb, as will be discussed hereafter.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were meetings of what was labelled "5 + 4": these were the five Maghrebi states and the four Southern European EU members (France, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Those meetings were informal and aimed at establishing common agendas and coordinating actions that could affect the region, however, they had little impact and no institutional presence. The first formalisation of the relationship between the Maghreb and the EU took place on a larger stage. That was the Euro-Mediterranean Barcelona process launched in 1995. The Southern European EU member states were alarmed by the fact that after the Cold War, Eastern Europe was casting its shadow on EU external relations at the detriment of other regions, and particularly, at the detriment of the Mediterranean. These member states called for the meeting in Barcelona to shed some light on that strategic area for the EU (Goumeziane 2019). It was with the Barcelona process that EU initiatives towards the Mediterranean basin in general, and the Maghreb in particular, were articulated around economic, political, societal and cultural aspects. As the Euro-Med partnership of the Barcelona process was subsequently replaced by the Union for the Mediterranean, Maghrebi states were also contemplated by the EU Neighbourhood policy. Moreover, Morocco was given an advanced status by the EU, while Tunisia enjoys a privileged partnership with it. However, Mohamed Benaissa insists that all these pleasantries did not translate into tangible advantages for the states of the Maghreb, as the relationship remained uneven and mostly favouring the interests of the EU, be it on trade, migration or security (interview with the author).

One aspect of the relationship between the EU and the Maghreb is that it strongly carries the EU perspective: the Maghreb is considered, defined and dealt with as the origin of threats, the source of insecurity for the EU. In December 1991/January 1992, as Algeria held democratic legislative elections that seemed to favour the Islamist party, the Algerian army staged a military coup and aborted the democratic process. France, that was calling, in conjunction with other European states, for democratic

reforms, had no qualms in accepting the military coup and showing support for it, in a blatant contradiction of its democratic wishes for the Maghreb (Willis 2012). Democracy was considered good as long as it allowed those France regarded positively to win, and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the Islamist party, was not one of those. France's concern was that a FIS victory would cause a mass Algerian exode, initially to neighbouring Morocco and Tunisia—potentially pushing them towards instability—and ultimately to France. As Algeria descended into a violent civil war that killed over 200 000 people, France accepted that level of violence under the pretext that Algeria was fighting terrorism. With that happening, two issues that have shaped the relationship of the Maghreb with the EU were articulated: terrorism and migration. In a twist of facts, since then, the Maghreb is considered a source of security threats to the EU, through migration and terrorism. Many EU funded research projects, many European foundations and think tanks, many EU conferences focus on the threat that the Maghreb represents to Europe. It is not "mighty Europe" that threatens the Maghreb, it is the other way around. Journalist Abdellah Bekkali argued that the EU poses the migration issue on wrong and misleading terms: the EU views migrants as a threat whereas not only it needs them, but it became a threat to their lives as it does all it can to stop them from landing in Europe, and forces them to seek dangerous and life threatening ways to migrate (interview to the author). This paradox is one of the shaping elements of the relationship of the EU with the Maghreb.

The EU, per se, is the first trade partner of most Maghrebi states, both in terms of exports and imports, and one of the main external investors in most countries of the region. The EU hosts the largest expatriate community. In the case of Morocco, for instance, in 2022, out of a total trade of €53.3 billion, the EU received 56 per cent of Morocco's exports and was the origin of 45 per cent of its imports (EU trade website n.d.). In the case of Algeria, in 2023, the EU was their first trading partner, as it accounted for 50 per cent of its total trade, or an equivalent of €50.2 billion. (EU trade website n.d.). In the case of Tunisia, also in 2023, the EU accounted for 56 per cent of its total trade (receiving an impressive 72 per cent of Tunisia's exports) (EU trade website n.d.). Finally, in the case of Libya, in 2020, the EU was also the largest trade partner, as it accounted for 51 per cent of Libyan foreign

trade, which was the equivalent to €7.8 billion (EU trade website n.d.). The EU also hosts the largest Maghrebi migrant community, which lives mainly in France. Indeed, in 2023, Maghrebis represented 28.7 per cent of total migrants in France (INSEE n.d.).

As with all other external powers, the dispute over the Sahara has impacted the relations of the EU with the Maghreb, mainly with Morocco (Dworkin 2024). On several occasions, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled that agriculture and fishing agreements between the EU and Morocco were invalid, because they did not carry the expressive consent of the people of the Western Sahara. The last of such a ruling took place in October 2024, referring to the accords of 2019 between both parties. However, that was not the only ruling of the ECJ in that direction, as similar rulings had already taken place in 2015 and 2016. The European Parliament has also taken rejected agricultural and fishing agreements of the EU with Morocco due to similar reasons, although the last of such a rejection is not recent and dates back to 2012. These decisions have usually cast a negative shadow on relations between Morocco and the EU and are usually met by strong condemnations of Morocco, and significant retaliatory measures: Morocco has frozen its participation in joint commissions and meetings, and it ceased to collaborate with the EU on matters that are important to it, such as controlling migration, as well as in cooperating and sharing intelligence regarding drug trafficking and terrorism. For that reason, the European Commission has consistently appealed ECJ rulings, and has vehemently reiterated the importance of the partnership with Morocco and its keen interest in keeping it by looking for ways to respect the rulings while simultaneously maintaining its partnership with Morocco.

It is also necessary to mention some individual EU member states, namely France, Italy and Spain. France was the common colonial power of three AMU states: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. After their independence, although to varying degrees, France kept strong relations with all three states, in particular as a solid trade partner, an investor in the countries' economies, and hosts their biggest expatriate communities. Culturally and socially, French remained a widely used language in all three countries, as the elites of all three countries respected France. Children

from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia would be sent to study in French universities and use French health system for serious personal health issues, not to mention vacationing in France. The fact that considerable migrant communities from all three states were present in France ensured that the special links with France were not limited to the elites, but also to larger spans of the population. However, former Ambassador Loulichki noted that as in many former French colonies, the influence of France has been receding over the last few years. Loulichki states, it is not that France became dispensable, but Maghrebi states have diversified their dependencies and have strengthened their links with other partners, including those from the West (interview with the author).

An additional comment relative to France and the Maghreb: the last two French presidents have attempted to mend fences with Algeria, in particular the historical memory of French responsibility in the independence war. Ambassador Belmahi noted that François Hollande made a speech in Algiers in which he recognised the suffering of Algerians during the colonial period, however, stopped short of apologising for the role France played in that suffering. Belmahi added that Emmanuel Macron has not made a further move in that direction, although he has tried to strengthen France's relations with Algeria … without angering Morocco. According to Belmahi, both attempts by both French presidents have ultimately failed (interview to the author). Tense relations between France and Morocco under Hollande ended with a reconciliation due to France's need for Morocco's intelligence support in fighting terrorism, while tensions between Morocco and France under Macron ended when the latter sent a letter to the king of Morocco acknowledging that it is with an autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty that the dispute over the Western Sahara should be settled. However, as much as that statement pleased Morocco and took Franco-Moroccan relations to a thaw, it angered Algeria and set back Franco-Algerian relations to tensions and mistrust.

As for Italy, it is notable that the issue of migration, important in the agenda of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her right wing to extreme right wing governing coalition, has pushed the prime minister to seek—and obtain—an agreement with Tunisia and its President, Kais Saied,

through which Tunisia cooperates with Italy in stopping illegal migrants in counterpart of financial support. The challenge with that agreement is that it is hardly replicable in other situations, hardly sustainable in time and it threw sub-Saharan migrants into the hands of the Tunisian president who has waged an anti-immigrant campaign that borders racism, and in total disregard of the legitimate human rights of those individuals. Moreover, when one country reigns in on migration, migrants flood to another country, and seek other ways to migrate to Europe, which led journalist Bekkali to argue that the EU has consistently mismanaged migration by treating it exclusively as a security issue (interview to the author).

Parallel to that, after the energy—and more specifically, the natural gas—crisis that happened in Western Europe after Russia invaded Ukraine—which resulted in sanctions imposed on Russia—Italy sought to replace, at least in part, the Russian gas with the Algerian one, as the TransMed pipeline saw its capacity increased from 21 bcm in 2022 to 30 bcm by the end of 2023. With that, Italy has strengthened its relations with Algeria significantly. However, to an extent, Italy remains a new player in the region, consequently, its impact is relatively limited.

As for Spain, it has consistently strove to keep a balance between its relations with Algeria and Morocco (Lopez et al. 2002). Occasionally, Spain attempted to establish a tripartite partnership, as in the case of the Algerian gas pipeline that goes through Morocco and from which Morocco used to take advantage. However, when Algeria cut its diplomatic ties with Morocco, it also blocked Morocco from taking gas from that pipeline, and that tripartite partnership has ceased. Spain, however, has, over the last two decades, risen to be Morocco's first trade partner, as well as a main investor. And like with France, when Spain declared Morocco's autonomy plan as the most serious, realistic and credible initiative solution to solve the Western Sahara issue, Algeria was as angered as Morocco was pleased. One of the biggest issues for Spain is migration, as the current left leaning government is under pressure by the opposition to clampdown on the flow of migrants to the country. Morocco has used its cooperation with Spain and the EU, or lack thereof, to put pressure on Spain and gain concessions and benefits from that country (the crises of Ceuta in 2021, Melilla in 2022, and most recently in Ceuta again, in September 2024).

Russia

If between 2017 and 2021, 81 per cent of Algeria's weapons import came from Russia, Morocco also heavily relied on Russia to import products worth US$ 780 Million to support its industries and its agriculture. This balance between Algeria and Morocco has been a characteristic of Russian policy in the region. Indeed, historically, Algeria has been the privileged Maghrebi partner of Russia as well as of its predecessor, the Soviet Union (Zoubir 2002). However, neither Russia nor the Soviet Union before it, shied from having solid relations with Morocco. In point of fact, Abdelkhaleq Berramdane (1987) argues that in a few opportunities in the second half of the twentieth century, Morocco was in crisis with France, hence, Morocco went to the US to try to compensate for French support, and when, for specific reasons of the historical context, the US could not or did not deal with Morocco's demands, Morocco went to the Soviet Union and struck deals that made either the French or the Americans mend fences with Morocco again. This happened more recently when King Mohammed VI visited Moscow and met President Putin, signed agreements with him, and left hoping to have made significant strides with Russia. However, as usual in that relationship, in the following test of a potential change in Russian policy towards the Maghreb, which was the vote for renewal of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) mandate in the Western Sahara, Russia abstained, showing the continuity of its position. In sumarry, Russia's privileged relations with Algeria do not impede it from having good relations with Morocco, however, that does not mean that Algeria is not Russia's privileged partner in the region. It is also true that Algeria and Morocco play the same game with Russia, as both countries find Russia a useful partner to balance Western influence (Zoubir 1987).

A good illustration of this pragmatism by both countries is their position on the Ukraine war. Both Algeria and Morocco have shown a neutrality that can be qualified as being pragmatic, which angered their European and US partners, mainly in the case of Morocco. As for Tunisia, it has sided with Ukraine and the Western position, notably in its voting pattern at the UN. However, neither Algeria nor Morocco found any

pressing reason to side with one or the other side on that conflict that is marginal to their interest. And that, per se, is a statement: just like many countries in Africa, Asia and South America, Algeria and Morocco do not see any obligation in siding with the West—or Russia—and caving to the moral predicaments of the West.

Finally, Russia has been playing a central role in the Libyan crisis since 2014 through the Wagner Group. Indeed, after the fall of the Gadhafi regime, Libya was embroiled in a civil war that in 2014, resulted in the country splitting into two parts: one, recognised by the UN, based in Tripoli, and enjoying the support of Turkey—as will be seen shortly hereafter—while the other, led by Marchal Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA), is based in Tobruk and supported by Russia as well as the UAE, which will also be briefly discussed hereafter.

To summarise, if Russia has solid political and economic ties with Algeria, it also has significant trade relations with Morocco and has consistently tried to keep a balance in its political relations between both countries by leaning slightly in favour of Algeria in the rivalry between both countries, while never reaching a point of rupture with Morocco. However, since 2014, Russia has also played a military role in the region, more precisely in Libya, as it has sided with one of the parties of the internal dispute in Libya and provided direct military support.

China

The Popular Republic of China (PRC) has essentially an economic and trade presence in the Maghreb region. Indeed, as long as the countries of the region abide by the one China policy—which means, that they avoid links with Taiwan—the PRC is ready to strike trade and investments deals with them. If, moreover, these countries abstain from condemning China's treatment of fellow Uighur Muslims, the PRC shows even more interest in the countries of the region. All five AMU member states are part of the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative, despite Libya's uncertain governing authority.

Politically, the PRC has had close relations with Algeria even before

the independence of the latter, since China recognised the Algerian provisional government in 1958, and the Algerian sovereign government in exile was among the first countries to recognise the PRC.

Politically, China and Algeria have had long lasting relations that predate Algeria's independence, which were confirmed and intensified since then. Although Algeria used to have close relations with the Soviet Union, that did not represent a handicap to strong Sino-Algerian relations. Post the Cold War, Algeria has nurtured those relations. For instance, former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was present at the first China-Africa summit, and was only one of the four African heads of states present. As with other major external players to the region, despite its close ties with Algeria, China has also kept solid and continuous relations with Morocco, as both established their diplomatic links in 1958. In this sense, China has kept a balance between the two rival North African states, including on the Western Sahara issue in which it has remained neutral.

China brings two assets to its economic and trade relations with the Maghreb: on the one hand, it often exhibits strong investment and trade ambitions, as it is willing to invest and it is willing to buy products from those countries. On the other hand, its cooperation with states from the region does not come with the explicit and implicit conditionalities that Western states often have. Chinese officers openly say that all they are interested in is to do business, with no intentions in interfering in the politics of the other countries ... as long as they do not interfere in Chinese politics (in reference to the above-mentioned issues of Taiwan and the Uighurs).

In terms of trade relations, all Maghrebi states, with the exception of Libya, have large trade deficits with China: in 2022, Algeria imported US$ 7 billion, while it only exported US$ 1.2 billion to and from China (Jackson 2024). In 2021, Tunisia imported US$ 1.8 billion and exported US$ 282 million to and from China (El Kadi 2023). In 2022, Morocco imported close to US$ 7 billion from China, while it exported US$ 383 million to China (Jackson 2024). Lastly, in the case of Mauritania, while it imported US$ 947 million from China, it exported close to US$ 1.7 billion to China (El Kadi 2023).

In terms of Chinese investments, a time dimension must be considered: while Chinese investments in Algeria have been significant over the past two decades (US$ 24 billion between 2005 and 2020), and far superior to those in Morocco (US$ 3 billion in the same time period), Morocco might benefit from a special conjuncture over the next few years. Indeed, as both the EU and the US have imposed tariff and non-tariff barriers on Chinese electrical cars over the last two years, the fact that Morocco has a free trade agreement with both the US and the EU transformed it into an attractive option to enter those two markets. Consequently, several significant investments in car battery plants have been announced in 2023 and 2024, with several of these projects expected to be operational in 2025. If these investments are confirmed and this option of Morocco as an entry port to the US and EU markets becomes lucrative, Chinese investments in Morocco might increase significantly over the next few years (Aublanc 2024).

Japan and South Korea

Japan and South Korea share several common characteristics with the Maghreb region. Both countries have a far more pronounced interest in trade and business than in the politics of the region. They both aim at reinforcing their trade links with the region, and they both seek investments for their companies. Both countries also look at the Maghreb both in terms of it belonging to Africa and of it belonging to the MENA region. Finally, both Japan and South Korea strive to keep a balance between Algeria and Morocco, as both maintain a neutral stance on the Western Sahara and avoid to say or do the minimum necessary for their relations with the region—in general—and for both countries, in particular, to remain functional and operating. However, as the last Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) meeting in Japan showed, in August 2024, even their best is sometimes not enough: Morocco and Algeria were embarrassingly engaged in a physical broil at the conference and needed to be physically separated during the conference. In the case of Japan, it is also important to notice that most of its operations take place through Japan International Cooperation

Agency (JICA) (its international cooperation agency) and through Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) (its bank for international cooperation) (Saaf 2019).

In the case of South Korea, it is notable that Algeria is the only Maghrebi state that holds relations simultaneously with North and South Korea, as North Korea was one of the first countries to, in 1958, recognise the Algerian provisory government. This has not handicapped South Korea in having strong links with Algeria, as Algeria is the only African state to hold a strategic partnership with South Korea, even if that partnership has not yet yielded significant results (Saaf 2022).

India and Israel

The cases of India and Israel share some level of similarities. For both countries the Maghreb is not a key theatre of their international action, as both see the Maghreb as part of bigger ensembles: mainly Africa for the former, and MENA for the latter. However, if India has an economic interest that is tempered by political factors, Israel has mainly a political interest that comes with side economic interests.

India has an essentially economic interest in the Maghreb in general, and in Morocco in particular. Indeed, India has shown keen interest in Morocco's phosphate reserves and production, and has had strong links with the Moroccan phosphate company. India is also interested in investing in the Moroccan economy, however, to a lesser extent. The interest of Indian companies in Morocco and of India in Morocco's phosphate translated, however, into a major reversal in India's foreign policy in the region: while India was one of the first countries to recognise and support the Sahrawi cause for self-determination, it reversed that position in the early 1990s, withdrew its recognition and has sided with Morocco on that dispute. An interesting aspect in that relation is that Morocco has warm and significant relations with Pakistan, a fellow Muslim state, which has not antagonised India.

The case of Israel is a peculiar one. Israel has been trying to break its isolation in the MENA region and establish links with states from that region for decades. Its initial success with Egypt was not immediately

followed by any other breakthrough until it signed the so-called Oslo peace accords with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Thereafter, a new wave of normalisations followed, mainly with the Palestinians themselves as well as with Jordan, and to a lesser extent, with Morocco (as already mentioned). A more recent wave of normalisation of Israel with Arab states took place during the last year President Trump was in office in the US, through what was referred to as the Abrahamic Accords. The deal with Morocco was not strictly speaking part of the Abrahamic Accords, however, the normalisation between both states ended up being considered part of that process. That normalisation with Morocco had direct and indirect consequences. The direct consequence was that, as it resulted in a US recognition of Morocco's claims on the Western Sahara, it emboldened Moroccan diplomacy to seek further Western recognitions of its claim on that region. The indirect consequence is that the arrival of Israel to the region and the establishment of open and increasingly solid links with Morocco, including the field of security, resulted in Algeria feeling under heightened risk, which led it to cut diplomatic relations with Morocco. In summary, Israel's insertion in the region is seen by Algeria—rightly or not—as a move that tips the balance of power significantly in the Maghreb. Economically, Israel and Morocco have had trade relations for a long period of time, however, they were mostly under cover (Tessler 1990). After the December 2020 deal, both Israel and Morocco strengthened their economic relations, even if they do not rise to significant levels for either country. Mauritania, which used to have official diplomatic ties with Israel—between 1999 and 2010—currently does not have any.

Turkey and the UAE

Both Turkey and the UAE have had warm and friendly relations with the Maghreb, even if those relations never rose to that of strategic levels. Indeed, Turkey has had a free trade agreement with Morocco and Tunisia since 2004, even if that agreement has not resulted in significant increases in trade between both countries. The presence of Turkish companies

in Morocco and Tunisia has, however, been noticeable over the years. As for the UAE, it also has had a significant economic and cultural presence in Morocco. Emirati investors have different investments in Morocco, and although some investments suffered a setback during the different financial crises, they exist and Moroccan authorities hope for further investments. In 2022, the UAE was the second foreign investor in Morocco, with 17.9 per cent of total foreign investments in Morocco noted that year (Marzak 2024). The investments are not limited to the financial sector as some of the main private and most prestigious health clinics in Morocco carry the name of the former Emirati leader, Shaikh Zayd, since he was the one to build them. This underlines the long and solid relationship that brings together the royal families of both countries. As a symbol of the strength of that relationship, in 2024, Morocco and the UAE signed a strategic partnership agreement that opens the possibility of major partnerships between the UAE and Morocco, but which, at this stage, remain ambiguous and need to be materialised concretely.

The Arab uprisings, however, brought a specific interest of Turkey and the UAE to the region: Turkey showed support and sympathy to the Islamist inclined governments in the region, from Tunisia to Egypt, not forgetting Morocco, while the UAE led a counter-revolutionary movement that brought down the Islamist leaning government in Egypt and eventually in Tunisia and Morocco. More significantly, both countries are significantly engaged in the internal conflict in Libya, as Turkey supports the Tripoli based National Government while the UAE supports Haftar's LNA. Although in Libya there are bigger players than Turkey and the UAE, the Libyan crisis indicates, as journalist Talha Jibril argued, that Turkey is trying to expand its area of influence in an attempt to regain some of its dominance in the region under the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

The Maghreb has been marginally operational over the last three decades, due to its internal challenges more than to external interference, although these have had some impact, mainly in the case of Libya (first,

UN sanctions, and then an intervention and now, interference by major (mainly France and Russia) and regional powers (UAE and Turkey, and marginally, Algeria and Morocco).

In this sense, the Maghreb is like a tiny train station on a big national high speed train line. The high-speed trains never stop at the station, however, each time a train passes by, the head of the station has to put on their hat and stand on the platform. The train service employs that person, pays their salary, provides them with their uniform—including the hat—however, the train station, which was used in the old times to serve the region, became idle most of the time, since the line became a high speed one, and it only exists in case there is a need to reach the region for some reason. That is what the AMU looks like: no heads of state meetings have taken place since 1994, and no major initiative has been taken by it for three decades, however, it has a headquarters, a secretary general and a small staff. It also has a Presidential Counsel (for heads of states), a Counsel of Foreign Affairs Ministers, and a Conference of Prime Ministers, among other existing, but seldom functioning institutions. All are dormant, yet, all formally exist. On a positive side, secretary generals have consistently been appointed, even now with the high tensions between Algeria and Morocco. This signals that although it is dormant, no member state wants to consider it dead and bury it.

Most interviewees (Ambassador Loulichki, Ambassador Belmahi, journalists and political observers Jibril and Bekkali) argue that the current world system opens opportunities for countries of the region to diversify their relations and show a higher level of autonomy from the US and France. The latter is seen as particularly weakened in its standing in the Maghreb. This does not mean that France, or even less so, the US, have become irrelevant. It does, however, mean that Maghrebi states now have other options, they have managed to nurture other partnerships, some of which are less stringent than the West, which has allowed them more autonomy in establishing their own objectives and achieving them.

There are two main categories of powers interested in the Maghreb. On the one hand, those for which the Maghreb is relatively marginal to their interest, or part of a wider picture. In the former category, there is

Russia and to a lesser extent, China; in the latter, there is India, Japan and South Korea. For the latter, the Maghreb is part of their wider interest in Africa and the MENA region. A commonality to all these external players is the impact of the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry. Some, like Russia, might slightly side with Algeria, others, like in the case of India, might slightly side with Morocco, despite this, all seek to balance their relations with both countries and keep an equilibrium that does not close doors on their interests.

There is a second category of external powers for which the Maghreb is relatively to highly relevant. These are the US, the EU, mainly its Southern member states and Turkey, the UAE and to a lesser and more pointed extent, Israel. Although most of these states are affected by the Algerian-Moroccan rivalry, they all have interests that have forced some of them to take clearer stands on the Sahara issue. That is the case of the US, Israel, France and Spain, which have all, to a certain extent, sided with Morocco over the last few years.

What was also observe is that, due to the morbidity of the Maghreb, its states speak and deal with the external powers in order to defend their own national interest, leaving with that the regional and Maghrebi collective interest to the level of rhetoric.

Final recommendations regarding relations of the Maghreb with external powers

As a consequence of this analysis, there are four main recommendations to be made:

1. The Maghreb should unify its internal ranks in order to be able to negotiate with external powers from a better position and in order to be able to attract foreign investors. Maghrebi states present economies that are small when taken separately, but have the potential of becoming attractive if taken together. This is particularly the case for AMU negotiations with the EU.

2. The rivalry between Algeria and Morocco and the dispute over the Western Sahara is a major handicap for the strengthening of the internal ranks of the Maghreb and for the relations it has established with external partners. Efforts should be made to solve it peacefully and quickly in order to allow the people of the region to focus on other pressing challenges.
3. The AMU has been trying to take advantage of the multiplication of poles in the international scene, and it should double those efforts. The competition among external powers should play to the advantage of AMU states, not to their detriment. For this to happen, the AMU and its members should establish their own sovereign objectives and not simply respond to what is offered to them by external powers.
4. The AMU and its member states should reverse the gaze of their relationship with their Western partners. For too long, the Maghreb has been considered the origin of threats to the West, whereas in reality, it is the West that has often represented a threat to the Maghreb. Hence, Maghrebi states should frame their relations with their partners according to their perspectives and to defend their interests.

Reference

Alaoui, M.B.E. 1994. *La Coopération entre l'Union Européenne et les pays du Maghreb (Cooperation between the European Union and the Maghreb countries)*. Paris: Nathan.

Arab Maghreb Union. [Online]. Available at: *https://maghrebarabe.org/fr/* (Accessed 10 September 2024)

Aublanc, A. 2024. *Le Maroc, porte d'entrée de la Chine sur l'Union Européenne* (Morocco, China's gateway to the European Union). *Le Monde.* 6 September 2024. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/09/06/le-maroc-porte-d-entree-de-la-chine-sur-l-union-europeenne_6305265_3212.html* (Accessed 6 September 2024).

Bchir, M.H. 2006. The cost of non-Maghreb achieving the gains from economic integration. *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa: Trade and Regional Integration Division.* [Online]. Available at: *https://hdl.handle.net/10855/13241* (Accessed 2 September 2024).

Berramdane, A. 1987. *La Maroc et L'Occident (Morocco and the West).* Paris: Karthala.

Bougherara-Souibès, A.H. 2013. *Le partenariat américano-maghrébin et l'Initiative de Stuart Eizenstat.* (The American-Maghrebi partnership and the Stuart Eizenstat initiative) *The Algerian Journal of Political Sciences and International Relations*. 6(1): 119–137.

Calkivik, A. 2020. Foreign Policy. In: *International relations from the Global South – Worlds of difference*, edited by A.B. Tickner and K. Smith. London: Routledge.

Deeb, M.J. 1993. The Arab Maghribi union and the prospects for North African unity. In: *Polity and society in contemporary North Africa,* edited by W. Zartman and W.M. Habeeb. London: Routledge: 189–203.

Dworkin, A. 2024. *The Maghreb maze: Harmonising divergent European policies in North Africa*. *European* Council on Foreign Relations. [Online]. Available at: *https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-maghreb-maze-harmonising-divergent-european-policies-in-north-africa/* (Accessed 20

September 2024)

El Kadi, T.H. 2023. China in the Maghreb: engagement, perceptions and prospects. *Real Instituto El Cano*. [Online]. Available: *https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/china-in-the-maghreb-engagement-perceptions-and-prospects/* (Accessed 18 September 2024)

El Qadim, N. 2015. *Le Gouvernement asymétrique des migrations. Maroc/Union Européenne* (The asymetric governing of migrations. Morocco/the European Union). Paris: Dalloz.

European Commission. No Date. *Trade relations by country/region*. [Online]. Available at: *https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions* (Accessed 20 September 2024)

Fernádez-Molina, I., Feliu, L. and de Larramendi, M.H. 2019. The 'subaltern' foreign policies of North African countries: old and new responses to economic dependence, regional insecurity and domestic political change .*The Journal of North African Studies*, 24(3): 356-375.

Goumeziane, S. 2019. Relations Europe-Maghreb: Quel avenir? (Europe-Maghreb relations: What future?) *Foundation Jean Jeaurès.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/relations-europe-maghreb-quel-avenir/* (Accessed 20 September 2024)

Henneberg, S. and Ghoulidi, A. 2023. Balancing US relations in North Africa without undermining the Abraham Accords. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/balancing-us-relations-north-africa-without-undermining-abraham-accords* (Accessed 18 September 2024)

INSEE. No Date. Le Tableau de Bord de l'Economie Française (the French economic dashboard) [Online]. Available at: *https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil-interactif/5367857/tableau/20_DEM/25_ETR* (Accessed 20 September 2024)

Jabri, M.A. 1985. Evolution of the Maghrib concept: Facts and perspectives. In: *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of development and integration,* edited by H. Barakat. Washington: Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies. pp. 63–86.

Jackson, S. 2024. *China in the Maghreb: Threading the needle of Algeria and Morocco*. Wilson Centre. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/china-maghreb-threading-needle-algeria-and-morocco* (Accessed 24 September 2024)

Kingdom of Morocco. 2008. *Issues of Maghreb integration - "The cost of the non Maghreb»*. Ministry of Economy and Finance. https://www.finances.gov.ma/Etude/depf/2008/2435_issuesofthemaghrebintegration.pdf

Laroui, A. 2001. *L'Histoire du Maghreb – Un essai de synthèse* (The history of the Maghreb – A synthesis essay). Casablanca: Centre Culturel Arabe. 2nd Edition.

Liga, A. (ed.) 2023. *The cost of "Non-Maghreb" - Unpacking the political and economic costs of disunion and divisions*. Milan: ISPI.

Lopez Garcia, B. and De Larramendi, M.H. 2002. Spain and North Africa: Towards a dynamic stability. *Democratization*, 9(1): 170–191.

Lounnas, D. 2019. *Le Djihad en Afrique du Nord et au Sahel : D'AQMI à Daech***.** (Jihad in North Africa and the Sahel : from AQMI to DAECH) Paris: L'Harmattan.

Marzak, A. 2024. *Industrie, Immobilier, Tourisme: ces secteurs qui attirent le plus d'investissements étrangers* (Industry, real estate, tourism: These sectors attract the most foreign investment). *Le Matin du Sahara.* [Online]. Available : *https://lematin.ma/economie/ces-secteurs-qui-attirent-le-plus-dinvestissements-etrangers/238388#:~:text=La%20France%20reste%20le%20premier,des%20IDE%20dans%20le%20Royaume* (Accessed 10 September 2024)

Mezran, K. 1998. Maghribi foreign policies and the internal security dimension. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 3(1): 1–24.

Nonneman, G. 2005. Analyzing the foreign policies of the Middle East and North Africa: A conceptual framework. In: *Analyzing Middle East foreign policies and the relationship with Europe,* edited by G. Nonneman. New York: Routledge. pp. 6–18.

Saaf, A. 2019. Le Japon et le Maghreb » (Japan and the Maghreb. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/le-japon-et-le-maghreb* (Accessed 22 August 2024)

Saaf, A. 2022. *« La Corée du Sud et le Maghreb » (South Korea and the Maghreb)*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/la-coree-du-sud-et-le-maghreb* (Accessed 24 August 2024)

Tessler, M.A. 1990. Israel and Morocco: The political calculus of a "moderate" Arab State. In: *Israel after begin*, edited by G. S. Mahler. New York: State University of New York Press: 155–186.

US Trade Representative. N.d. *Middle East and North Africa Trade Summary*. [Online]. Available at: *https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/europe-middle-east/middle-east/north-africa* (Accessed 20 September 2024).

White, G.W. 2005. Free trade as a strategic instrument in the war on terror? The 2004 US-Moroccan free trade agreement. *The Middle East Journal*, 59(4): 597–616

Willis, M.J. 2012. *Politics and power in the Maghreb – Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from independence to the Arab Spring.* London: Hurst.

Zoubir, Y.H. 1987. Soviet policy toward the Western Sahara conflict. *Africa Today*, 34(3): 17–32.

— — —. 2002. Making up for lost time: Russia and Central Maghreb. In: *Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East: New trends, old traditions,* edited by N. Kozhanov. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 191–222.

— — —. 2004. The resurgence of Algeria's foreign policy in the twenty-first century. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 9(2): 169–183.

Zoubir, Y.H. and Benabdallah-Gambier, K. 2005. The United States and the North African imbroglio: Balancing interests in Algeria, Morocco and the Western Sahara. *Mediterranean Politics,* 10(2): 181–202.

Interviews:

**All of the interviews were conducted throughout July and August of 2024 (no exact dates were recorded).*

Ambassador Belmahi, former Ambassador of Morocco in India and in the UK, senior fellow at IRES (Institut Royal des Etudes Stratégiques, or Royal Institute for Strategic Studies).

Ambassador Loulichki, former representative of Morocco at the UN and in the Security Council, Senior Fellow at PCNS (Policy Center of the

New South).

Mr Mohamed Benaissa, President of the Moroccan Observatory of Migration.

Mr Talha Jibril, Journalist from Sudan established in Morocco since the 1970s and specialised in MENA politics and security.

Mr Abdellah Bekkali, Journalist, Director of the oldest Moroccan daily, Al Alam.

Endnotes

1 Shortly thereafter, Algeria cut diplomatic ties with Morocco, and tensions have not ceased rising in the region, due to a significant extent to the impact of the surge of Israel in the region.

2 The text uses alphabetical order when it mentions Maghrebi states, unless it is necessary to act differently.

CHAPTER 3

Southern African Development Community and African Agency Towards Global Powers

Kebapetse Lotshwao
University of Botswana, Botswana

Introduction

This chapter discusses the Southern African Development Community (SADC)'s relations with various global powers, or International Collaborating Partners (ICPs). Among others, these powers include bilateral ones, such as the United States (US), Germany and China, as well as multilateral ones such as the European Union (EU), the World Bank and the BRICS group comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. In particular, the chapter, which is part of a broader study on 'African Agency Toward Global Powers' undertaken by the African Centre of the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand seeks to understand the extent to which the SADC, as one of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the Global South, can effectively project and assert its authority in its dealings with global powers, whose interests and presence in the African continent and sub-region has been increasing in recent years. The increase is among others, evidenced by annual and regular gatherings involving global or external powers and the African continent and its sub-regions, such as Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Russia-Africa summit, BRICS summit, Korea-Africa Economic Cooperation conference, and Turkey-Africa Business and Economic Forum to mention but a few. These summits and gatherings discuss a variety of issues, including development partnerships, security co-operations and emerging global issues, such as climate change and pandemics.

The countries that make the SADC region have for many years, if not centuries, interacted with various external powers. Excluding slavery, which affected a few countries, such as Angola, colonialism is perhaps the first formal point of contact between all SADC countries and global powers, as almost all countries in the region were colonised by different colonial powers. These global powers colonised for different reasons. However, the common reason was pursuit of economic benefits and geo-strategic advantages. Indeed, the region is blessed with various natural resources, including oil, minerals, timber and fertile soils, among others. The colonies and the protectorates became even more important at the end of devastating wars, such as the Second World War, which shattered and devastated European economies, leaving colonies and protectorates as valuable sources of food (Darwin 1988). While during colonialism interactions which was mostly with various colonial powers, in the contemporary period, the interaction has broadened to include not only former colonial powers, but hegemons such as the US and China, as well various multilateral institutions and some emerging powers.

To understand the extent to which the SADC can effectively project and assert its authority in its dealings with global powers, the study relied on two main sources of data. Firstly, it relied on secondary data extracted from various published works, including consultancy reports, books and journal articles. These sources are freely available online, as well as in libraries. The secondary sources provided vital data on the SADC's relations with various powers, particularly on forms of assistance received, as well as projects and initiatives that global powers have funded over the decades. Secondly, interviews were conducted at the SADC headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana, in September 2024. The interviews involved two senior officials in the SADC Secretariat, being the Director of Policy Planning and Resource Mobilisation, as well Head of Communications and Public Relations. The interviews were especially helpful in providing information on some of the current projects, the transformations that the organisation has conducted over the years, and some of the strategies the SADC employs in its engagement with global powers.

African agency in international politics

Agency refers to the capacity to exert political influence externally (Cargill 2013). Influence can be exerted through various strategies, including coercive means and through soft power. Regarding the latter for instance, western development partners used sanctions and conditionalities to promote democracy and good governance in various parts of the world in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Crawford 2001). Under the political conditionality regime, donors restricted or suspended development aid allocations to countries averse to democratisation, or those gripped by bad governance and human rights violations (Tjønneland 1998). Thus, in 1990, the then French President, Francois Mitterand declared that France 'will link its financial efforts to the efforts made towards liberty' (Crawford 2001: 4). Similarly, the World Bank made good governance a condition for development assistance, with specific reference to the African continent stated that 'Africa needed not just less government, but better government' (World Bank 1989: 5). With specific reference to sub-Saharan Africa, authoritarian rule and bad governance practices such as corruption were principally blamed for underdevelopment and the failure of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (Crawford 2001). The SAPs had been imposed on many indebted African countries by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) from the early 1980s. As a condition for lending, African countries had to undertake economic reforms such as market liberalisation and the reduction of the role of the state in the economy (Thomson 2004). Good governance was characterised by the existence of an efficient public service, an independent judicial framework to enforce contracts, the accountable administration of public funds, the existence of an independent public auditor, representative legislature, respect for the law and human rights, a pluralistic institutional structure and a free press (World Bank 1989).

However, unlike western development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, African countries, and African inter-governmental organisations have for many years lacked agency. In fact, when the current world order characterised by the leadership of the United States and international organisations under its control such as the United

Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods institutions emerged at the end of the Second World War in 1945, almost all African countries did not exist as sovereign states. Instead, as previously stated in the case of the SADC region, they were colonies and protectorates of various Europeans powers, particularly Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. It was only since the late 1950s that African countries attained independence, ending not only years of exploitative colonial rule, but also marking their entry into the global political and economic system as sovereign states able to decide their own foreign relations and domestic policies. Even then, African countries were quickly engulfed by the Cold War that followed the end of the Second World War. During the Cold War, which was characterised by ideological and military conflict between the US and the Soviet Union, African countries once again found themselves locked in a system dominated by powerful countries which dominated the global agenda that put their own interests at the centre, rather than that of the continent and its people. Indeed, due to the system of communist containment, some African countries became client states of the two super powers or their allies. In the worst-case scenarios, some African countries, such as Angola and Mozambique, became victims of proxy wars between the super powers. Effectively, the agenda and interests of African countries were secondary to the interests of these powers.

With the Cold War over, which was characterised by the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union, African countries and sub-regional organisations began to engage with more powers, including not only the remaining super power, the US, but many other actors. In their engagement, African countries not only mobilised development assistance, they also attempted to project their power and agency, such that they too could have influence in the global political and economic system. Thus, the period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s was characterised by the emergence of initiatives such as the African Renaissance and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Lala 2018). The African Renaissance for instance, which was championed by the then South African president, Thabo Mbeki, and driven by the ideology of African solutions for African problems, sought to project Africa not as weak and dependent continent, but instead, as an equal partner able to not only take charge of its destiny,

but also influence the global system hitherto dominated by powerful countries and institutions under their control (Landsberg 2011).

Besides, The African Renaissance, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which had been established to among others, liberate Africa from colonial rule, transformed itself into the African Union (AU) in 2001, seeking among others to 'establish the necessary conditions which enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations' (African Union [AU] 2001:6). The continent's leading role in international affairs is also envisaged in the AU Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 7, which states that 'Africa shall be a strong, united, resilient, peaceful and influential global player and partner with a significant role in world affairs' (AU 2024). Accordingly, the AU has over the years, demanded African representation in bodies such as the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation (Lala 2018). As previously stated, these institutions emerged at the end of the Second World War, a period in which almost all African countries were colonies that lacked self-determination. Indeed, some of the institutions, such as the UN Security Council with its permanent members, reflects not only countries that were victorious at the end of the Second World War, but also an old order in which many African countries were still colonies and protectorates of various European countries.

The history of the SADC

The SADC was established in 1992, replacing the Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC), which had been formed by the former Frontline States (FLS) in 1980 for purposes of reducing economic dependence on white minority ruled South Africa (Isaksen and Tjønneland 2001). The FLS had evolved over the period 1970-1974 through the Mulungushi Club comprising Tanzania (Nyerere), Uganda (Obote), Zaire (Mubutu) and Zambia (Kaunda). Established in 1974, the FLS was an informal grouping of countries which saw their primary role as support for the liberation struggles in Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe. It comprised Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Zimbabwe joined the FLS after attaining its independence

in 1980 (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). To reduce dependence on South Africa, each SADCC member state was allocated a sectoral responsibility, mostly in line with the member state's economic comparative advantage and resources. Thus, oil rich Angola was responsible for energy, Botswana for control of livestock diseases, Malawi for fisheries and wildlife, Zambia for mining, and Zimbabwe for food security, to mention but a few (Weisfelder 1982). While member states had sectoral responsibilities, projects were coordinated at the national level, meaning the SADCC was not closely involved in the implementation of such projects.

With the end of apartheid when the third wave of democratisation reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, SADC leaders identified the need for a more effective organisation with legal status and powers (Isaksen and Tjønneland 2001). This led to the adoption of the SADC Treaty in 1992 at the Windhoek Summit. The Treaty transformed the SADCC to the SADC and broadened the scope of regional integration from development coordination to economic, security and political integration (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). Article 4 of the Treaty outlines sovereign equality of member states, solidarity, peace and security, human rights and the rule of law, equity, balance and mutual benefit as well as peaceful settlement of conflicts as the guiding principles of the SADC (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). Between 1980 and 1992, the SADC did not have a clearly defined governance agenda, as its focus was more on reducing dependence on South Africa and supporting liberation struggles in various countries. Until the transformation of the SADCC into the SADC in 1992, economic integration was considered paramount over imperatives for political integration. However, since the 1992 transformation, the SADC started to pursue political integration in conjunction with both economic integration and security cooperation. The attainment of independence by Namibia in 1990 and the start of political transformation in South Africa implied that the political anti-apartheid agenda started to lose relevance, meaning the region had to embark on programmes that strove more economic and social welfare through a deeper regional integration (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010).

Currently, the SADC has sixteen member states, being Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eswatini,

Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Some SADC member states are also members of other regional economic communities. For instance, Angola and the DRC are members of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) (Economic Community of Central African States 2024). Alongside Tanzania, the DRC is also a member of the East African Community (East African Community 2024). Furthermore, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa are members of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) (Southern African Customs Union 2024), while South Africa is a member of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa group (BRICS) (Brics 2024). In terms of governance, except for the Kingdom of Eswatini, which is an absolute monarchy, all the other fifteen countries in the SADC region, including the DRC, are multi-party democracies. However, the countries are at different stages of democratic development, with some such as Botswana, South Africa, Mauritius, Seychelles and Namibia having attained the status of liberal democracies that are gradually consolidating, as they combine electoral democracy with constitutionalism, rule of law and respect for human rights (Matlosa 2017). Although elections are regularly held in others, such as Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Lesotho, there is occasional political turbulence, especially around election time. Finally, others, such as Zimbabwe, Angola and the DRC do hold elections whose credibility is often questionable, owing among others to violence and electoral management bodies and processes that lack integrity (Lotshwao 2021).

The SADC's principal objectives as expressed in the 1992 SADC Treaty, which was amended in 2001, are to achieve development and economic growth, alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the people of Southern Africa and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration; promote common political value, systems and other shared values which are transmitted through institutions that are democratic, legitimate and effective; consolidate, defend and maintain democracy, peace, security and stability; promote self-sustaining development on the basis of collective self-reliance and the inter-dependence of member states; achieve complementarity

between national and regional strategies and programmes; mainstream gender in the process of community building as well as to strengthen and consolidate the long-lasting historical, social and cultural affinities and links among the people of the region (South African Development Community [SADC] 2001).

To achieve its objectives following transformation in 1992, the SADC established several directorates, each responsible for various sectors and policies under the envisaged broadened regional integration project. Currently, the organisation has eight directorates, each headed by a director. These are Industrial Development and Trade, Finance, Investment and Customs, Infrastructure. Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources. Social and Human Development. Policy, Planning and Resource Mobilisation, Finance and Human Resources and Administration. Besides directorates, the SADC also has several units focussing on specific issues, such as gender, and relations with the AU. All the directorates work under the supervision of the secretariat, which is headed by the executive secretary. The creation of directorates came as a result of the amendment of the 1992 SADC Treaty in 2001. The amendment sought among others, to give the organisation a new institutional structure that would allow it to address the new objectives and challenges (Tjønneland 2006).

In terms of decision-making, the supreme decision-making body is the summit, which comprise of heads of governments of member-states. Specifically, the summit provides policy direction and oversees the organisation's functions; and adopts protocols, declarations, conventions and other legal instruments (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). The summit also elects SADC's rotational chairperson and vice-chairperson (SADC 2005), as well as the executive secretary, who heads the secretariat that oversees the organisation's day to day operations (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). The summit meets once a year, while extra-ordinary summits are convened when the need arises. Stemming from the summit, there are other organs with different responsibilities and mandates. These are the organ on politics, defence and security cooperation; the council of ministers; ministerial committees; the standing committee of senior officials; SADC national committees and the secretariat and the SADC administrative tribunal (SADC 2024b). Previously, there was the

SADC tribunal, whose mandate was to ensure adherence to, and proper interpretation of the provisions of the SADC treaty and subsidiary instruments, and adjudicates upon disputes referred to it (SADC 2005). However, the tribunal was suspended in May 2010 before being disbanded in 2013 (Van der Vleuten and Hulse 2013). The tribunal had become unpopular among member states for attempting to exercise oversight over them, particularly on issues of governance and human rights. Indeed, the tribunal's suspension and disbandment came after it had ruled against Zimbabwe's land expropriation policy (Nathan 2013). The SADC also operates a troika system, comprising of the chair, incoming chair and immediate past chair. The troika system seeks to ensure continuity and also make the organisation more effective in responding to issues of regional interest.

The SADC also has some subsidiary institutions, which are formally not part of it, though affiliated to it. One such institution is the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF), which is a regional inter-parliamentary body comprising of SADC parliaments. SADC-PF, which was established in 1997, seeks to improve regional integration in the region through the involvement of SADC parliaments. While the forum has several objectives aimed at advancing regional integration, its most important objective with regard to democracy and governance is its determination to promote peace, security and political stability in the SADC region, thus, also contributing to the creation of an environment conducive for socio-economic development (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). Beside the SADF-PF, there is The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC (ECF), which was formed in 1998 by the region's electoral commissions. The ECFs objectives are to strengthen cooperation and support among member countries on electoral issues and democracy building, to promote conditions conducive to free, fair and transparent elections in the SADC, to promote democracy as a political system of responsible government through the electoral process and finally, to encourage active participation of a citizenry which is well informed about the electoral process (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010).

The SADC, however, is still far from embarking upon the democratisation of its regional integration agenda. Lack of broad-based

civil society engagement with the SADC agenda is ironical given that Chapter 7, Article 23 in the 1992 Treaty clearly stipulates that

> "SADC shall seek to involve fully the people of the region and key stakeholders in the process of regional integration. SADC shall cooperate with and support the initiatives of the peoples of the region and key stakeholders … in order to foster closer relations among the communities, associations and people of the region" (SADC 1992: 17).

The SADC secretariat has yet to make strides to live up to this noble commitment. Likewise, organised civil society has not mounted sufficient political pressure to exhort the SADC ruling elites to live up to the expectations of this noble principle.

SADC's relations with great powers

The SADC has a long history of working with great powers. In fact, the SADC's predecessor, the SADCC, was to a large extent a mechanism for facilitating aid coordination and mobilising development finance for purposes of funding projects that could reduce economic and infrastructural dependence on apartheid South Africa (Tjønneland 2006). The assistance provided to the SADC by global powers mostly take the form of budget support, funding for special projects as well as technical assistance aimed at building the organisation's capacity (Isaksen and Tjønneland 2001). The high reliance on development partners for funding is partly caused by the fact that annual contributions from member states is insufficient and does not even cover half of the organisation's annual budget (Woolfrey and Verhaeghe 2017). In 2015/2016 for instance, development partners accounted for US$ 42.6 million of SADC's US$ 80.8 million annual budget (Woolfrey and Verhaeghe 2017). The assistance from development partners has been directed at the organisations' priorities, as stipulated in its various policy documents and frameworks, including the Strategic Indicative Plan of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (SIPO), which was adopted

in 2003/2004 and mandated to promote the development of democratic institutions and practices by member states (Matlosa and Lotshwao 2010). Besides SIPO, another priority policy framework has been the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), and its revised version, the revised RISDP (2020-2030), which is a 10-year development agenda for addressing social, economic, political and governance issues in the region. In a departure from past practice, the RISDP 2020–2030 brings together issues previously presented separately under the revised RISDP and SIPO (SADC 2020a).

The inclusion of peace, security and governance matters in the RISDP 2020–2030 is an innovation that recognises their foundational importance to ensuring the necessary preconditions for achieving the other priorities. In recent years, the organisation introduced another set of priorities in the form of SADC Vision 2050, which envisions 'a peaceful, inclusive, competitive, middle- to high-income industrialised region, where all citizens enjoy sustainable economic well-being, justice and freedom' (SADC 2020a: 1). SADC Vision 2050 has three priorities, being industrial development and market integration, infrastructure development in support of regional integration, and social and human capital development, all built on a foundation of peace, security, and good governance (SADC 2020b: 3). The SADC's relations with global powers are conducted through several channels that include diplomatic engagements with diplomats accredited to the SADC, as well as attendance of international gatherings such as the United Nations General Assembly, and bilateral forums such as the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (interview with SADC Head of Communications and Public Relations, 20 September 2024).

The Windhoek Declaration

The SADC, it should be mentioned, does not have a foreign policy framework guiding its relations with global powers. In the absence of a foreign policy shaping its agenda, the SADC's interaction with partners is guided by the Windhoek Declaration (interview with SADC Director of Policy Planning and Resource Mobilisation, 18 September

2024). The declaration, which was adopted in 2006, emphasises the organisation's principles of cooperation, which are ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability (SADC 2006). The Windhoek Declaration is heavily influenced by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which emphasises ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability (see OECD 2005). While the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration by THE SADC is commendable, the fact that it is built around the Paris Declaration is somehow problematic, as it confirms that the SADC, like many regional organisations in the developing world are not norm setters, but consumers and takers of what is initiated and led by the development partners. In other words, it is not clear why the SADC chose to localise the Paris Declaration instead of initiating its own framework that would govern relations with partners. In the sections below, the study looks at the SADC's relations with some leading partners, particularly the EU, Germany and the US. The focus is on priority areas such as infrastructure development, industrial development and market integration, peace and security cooperation and special programmes. These priority areas are expressed in SADC policy documents such as SIPO, RISDP (2020-2030) and SADC Vision 2050.

SADC's relations with the EU

The EU is one of the global powers that the SADC engages with. The relations between the SADC and the EU have been in place for several decades. In 1986, the two organisations signed the Regional Indicative Programme under the Lome Convention that guided relations between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries on issues of development assistance and trade (Van der Vleuten and Hulse 2013). Since 2000, relations between the SADC and the EU have been conducted under the successor framework of the Lome Convention, the Cotonou Agreement, which operates through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPAs). The EPAs, which the EU has with various regional groupings in the ACP countries aims at the eradication of poverty through the establishment of a trade partnerships, the promotion of regional integration, economic

cooperation, good governance and the integration of the SADC states into the world economy (Van der Vleuten and Hulse 2013).

In terms of EU support for trade and relation programmes, the EU have in recent years spent approximately € 112 million on various trade related SADC programmes. These include the Support Programme towards Industrialisation and Productive Sectors (SIMS), whose aims are to facilitate stronger dialogue between private and public sectors, as well as to improve the development and governance of regional leather and pharmaceutical value chains, including enhancing local manufacturing (SADC-EU 2023). Besides SIMS, the EU has also provided funding for the Tripartite Transport and Transit Facilitation Programme (TTTFP). TTTFP, which involves 26 African countries, seeks to boost economic efficiency by harmonising road transport laws, regulations and IT systems in Southern and Eastern Africa (SADC-EU 2023). Another EU funded SADC project is the Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP), which seeks to foster intra-regional trade by strengthening the capacities for streamlining border processes and monitoring and resolving non-tariff and technical barriers to trade. Furthermore, TFP aims at promoting implementation of the SADC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement to facilitate the integration of SADC and other ACP countries into global value chains, which is envisaged would create jobs and generate wealth in the SADC member states (SADC-EU 2023).

Considering the EU's support for infrastructure development, the EU and SADC have launched the US$ 20.2 million worth Southern African Development Community Project Preparation Development Facility in 2022 (SADC PPDF). The initiative involves twelve regional infrastructural projects covering sectors such as energy, transport and water. Some of the projects to be undertaken under this initiative include the Second Alaska-Sherwood powerline in Zimbabwe; the Angola-Namibia transmission interconnector; Kasemeno-Mwenda toll road and Luapula hydro power development both between DRC and Zambia; Mulembo Leyla Hydro in Zambia; the North South Rail Corridor involving Botswana, the DRC, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe; Mauritius Wastewater Pumping Station and Wastewater Treatment Plant; MOZISA power interconnector project between Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe; Africa Green

Co projects (all SADC member states); Kazungula Water Supply and Sanitation Project (Zambia) and Lomahasha Namaacha Cross (Eswatini and Mozambique) (SADC 2022).

Finally, the EU's support and funding for peace security and cooperation in the SADC is directed exclusively at the activities of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. The Organ was established in 1996, and tasked with the promotion of regional coordination and cooperation on matters related to security and defence and establishment of appropriate mechanisms to this end; promotion of the development of democratic institutions and practices within member states and encourage the observance of universal human rights as provided for in the charters and conventions of the AU and UN; protection of the region's people from the breakdown of law and order, intra-state conflict and aggression; and prevention, containment and resolution of intra- and inter-state conflicts. Thus, EU support has been directed at conflict prevention and resolution, early warning systems and the strengthening of the capacity of electoral management bodies among others.

In 2023, the EU and SADC renewed the EU funded Support to Peace and Security Programme (SPSS), aligning with the priorities of RISDP 2020–2030. Firstly, the programme aims at strengthening the capacity for electoral assistance in the SADC by among others training election observers on ICT election observation, building the capacity of election management bodies, providing training on domestication of the Revised Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, and support for the SADC Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC) pre- and post-election missions (SADC 2023). Secondly, the programme seeks to enhance capacity in the SADC for gender sensitive conflict prevention, management and resolution by among others developing a gender sensitive conflict tracking tool, facilitating member states with gender sensitive national social cohesion strategies, training SADC member states officials in counter terrorism, as well assisting with training for the Regional Peace Keeping Training Centre to ensure the SADC Standby Force is ready for deployment when the need arise (SADC 2023). Last but not least, the SPSS programme seeks to enhance SADC member states capacity to uphold and enhance cross border safety and security

by reviewing and strengthening Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) protocols that include SADC protocol on control of firearms, ammunition and other related materials, as well as developing the regional integrated strategy to prevent and combat transnational organised crime and its action plan (SADC 2023).

Furthermore, in recent years, the EU provided € 15 million to the SADC Mission (SAMIM) in Mozambique (Hendricks et al. 2023). SAMIM comprised of SADC peacekeeping contingents from several SADC member state states, including Botswana, South Africa, Tanzania and Lesotho. The support to SAMIM aimed at strengthening its peacekeeping operations in the Cabo Delgado province where, since 2017, Islamic insurgents invaded some districts killing thousands of civilians and displacing many others. The insurgency—there is consensus—could be a result of the Cabo Delgado's underdevelopment and exclusion by the Mozambican government.

SADC relations with Germany

Although a member of the EU, Germany has strong bilateral relations with the SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation. The German support, which has been provided since 2004, is channelled primarily through the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), which is an agency of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Thus far, Germany has provided assistance worth € 400 million. In particular, GIZ has sought to provide support for initiatives aimed at preventing and resolving armed conflicts, as well as building the capacities of electoral bodies, enhancing civic education and strengthening the capacity of civilian peacekeepers. Between 2010 and 2014, GIZ also supported the revision of SIPO to ensure it is in a position to attain its objectives of creating a peaceful and politically stable environment that enables the region to meet its socio-economic objectives (GIZ 2015).

In recent years, GIZ has supported the Cooperation for Enhancement of SADC Regional Economic Integration (CESARE) project, which seeks to improve cooperation between the SADC secretariat, SADC

member states and the relevant sector bodies, thereby deepening economic integration in the region, exploiting the potential for greater added value at the regional level, supporting the economic empowerment of women and contributing to good governance and peace in the region (SADC 2024a). Cesare has four priority areas; trade facilitation to support regional economic integration and industrialisation; support towards industrialisation and the productive sectors in the SADC region; engagement of SADC member states in peace, security and good governance and support for women economic empowerment (SADC 2024a). Furthermore, alongside the EU, from 2019 Germany was also involved in the Support towards Industrialisation and the Productive Sectors (SIPS) in the SADC region programme, which seeks to address factors impeding industrialisation in the SADC region.

SADC relations with the US

The relations between the SADC and the US were for many years conducted under the Southern African Development Community-United States (SADC-US) Forum. The relations centred on four priority areas: regional economic integration; strengthening the region's ability to address security challenges; tackling the scourge of HIV/AIDS and building the capacity to prepare for and manage disasters (US Department of State 2000). Thus, over the years, the US has provided funding for various SADC projects and special initiatives. In 2023, the US and SADC signed a five-year Regional Development Objective Agreement (DOAG) in which the US pledged over $ 223 million for projects aimed at fostering among others, economic growth, peace and stability, democracy and good governance in the Southern African region for five years (2023–2028).

As the region worst affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the SADC has received generous support from the US under the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Among others, the funding and assistance has been directed at prevention and social mobilisation; improved access to care, counselling, testing treatment and support; acceleration of development and mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS; intensification of resource mobilisation and strengthening institutional

monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (SADC 2009). Besides HIV/AIDS, the US has also through the US$ 32 400 000.00 worth Resilient Waters Programme funded by USAID helped improve health and sanitation in the SADC region by increasing access to clean water and sanitation (US Embassy Botswana 2023). Furthermore, the project seeks to improve the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems in the region; improve the management and security of transboundary water resources and strengthen the ability of key institutions and communities to adapt to climate change.

SADC relations with China

The relations between the SADC and China are conducted under the broad framework of the FOCAC. However, in recent years, China has strengthened its partnership with the REC. In 2019, for instance, China and the SADC celebrated the finalisation of the SADC and China Framework Agreement on Economy, Trade, Investment and Technical Cooperation, which seeks to enhance cooperation between China and the SADC in line with the priorities of FOCAC, which are outlined in the FOCAC Action Plan, which outlines China's priorities in its relations with Africa and its sub-regions. Still in 2019, a Chinese delegation visiting the SADC secretariat extended an annual grant worth US$ 100 000.00 to the SADC secretariat to support its operational needs and implement activities that are in line with SADC priorities (SADC 2019). Besides relations with the SADC, China, through their companies involved in trade and construction, have relations with many SADC member states. These relations have been ongoing for decades, especially after China's rapid industrialisation of the 1990s which has forced the country to seek markets and raw materials abroad. And through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is bound to increase its presence and economic relations with many countries, including those in the SADC region.

Findings and recommendations

The chapter has made several findings. Firstly, while the cooperating

partners are guided by foreign policies and frameworks guiding their relations with the SADC, the latter does not have a foreign policy framework shaping its agenda and guiding relations with the partners (Cisse 2014). Even the SADC Treaty is mute on positions that the SADC should adopt in its relations with partners or the positions that it should adopt on many pressing global issues, such as international trade, the reform of the UN system, and global warming, to mention but a few. This differs sharply with organisations such as the AU and the EU, which have foreign policy frameworks and strategies in place to shape and influence the global order. Worth mentioning, however, is that in recent years, the SADC attempted to establish a foreign policy that will going forward, guide relations with global powers. Thus, in 2023, the organisation advertised a 'Consultancy to develop the SADC foreign policy framework, defining common values to be upheld by member states and guiding the adoption of common foreign policy positions' (SADC 2023: 1).

Secondly, besides a lack of foreign policy as a tool of agency, the SADC comprises states that are economically weak. As a result of economic weakness caused by factors such as weak, undiversified economies and states designed to primarily serve elite interests, the SADC continues to rely on global powers and partners for development finance. This dependence undermines the SADC's agency. Indeed, there is no way that an organisation that depends on other actors for survival can hope to exert some level of influence in its relations with such patrons. This dependence, which undermines agency, is an opposite of what transpires elsewhere. Because of economic growth and developmental states, the Gulf Cooperation Council is for instance, able to assert influence and agency, as the organisation is not dependent on global powers for economic survival. Nevertheless, rather to strive to establish developmental states, SADC countries seem more concerned about the construction of neoliberal states. Neoliberal states are states designed for purposes of facilitating the integration of national economies into the global economy. The construction of neoliberal states is driven among others by global powers and multilateral agencies. While such states may drive economic growth, the danger lies in the fact that such economic growth mostly benefit investors and those connected to them locally,

leaving countries and the majority of their people still dependent on development assistance. Thus, SADC states are not only neoliberal, but also very predatory.

Thirdly, SADC's agency is undermined by the fact that almost all of the organisation's members are members of other regional organisations, such as ECCAS, EAC and SACU. This dual membership is counterproductive, as SADC member states are pursuing multiple agendas instead of putting their weight behind the agenda of one regional organisation. This weakens the organisation's voice and agency. Although countries with dual memberships may reap the benefits, such dual memberships could suggest a lack of confidence in the SADC to advance the holistic interests of the member states.

Regarding recommendations, the SADC should initiate and adopt a foreign policy framework that would guide its relations with global powers and also communicate the world order that the SADC envisions. Secondly, the SADC should encourage its member states to construct developmental states that could drive economic growth that creates wealth and benefits all. Not only would this result in improved living standards for citizens of SADC countries, it would also liberate SADC states from dependence on global powers for development finance. As previously stated, such dependence undermines agency as the SADC engages with global powers as a weaker partner whose very survival is made possible by the financial assistance from the global powers. Finally, the SADC must consider the issue of dual memberships by some of its member states.

References

African Union (AU). 2001. *Constitutive Act of the African Union*. [Online]. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

— — —. 2024. *Our aspirations for the Africa we want*. [Online]. Available at: https://au.int/en/agenda2063/aspirations. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

BRICS. 2024. . [Online]. Available at: https://infobrics.org/. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

Cargill, T. 2013. Back to business? UK policy and African agency. In: *African agency in international politics,* edited by W. Brown and S. Harman. Abingdon: Routledge.

Cisse, D., Anthony, R., Burgess, M. and Esterhuyse, H. 2014. *African regional economic communities' engagement with China*. Policy brief, the Centre for Chinese Studies: Stellenbosch University. [Online]. Available at: https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/99143. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

Crawford, G. 2001. *Foreign aid and political reform: A comparative analysis of democracy assistance and conditionality.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Darwin, J. 1988. *Britain and decolonisation: The retreat from the Empire in the Post-War World.* London: Macmillan.

East African Community. 2024. *Home*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.eac.int/ (Accessed 29 June 2026).

Economic Community of Central African States. 2024. *ECCAS In Brief*. [Online]. Available at: https://ceeac-eccas.org/en/2023/05/28/eccas-in-brief/. (Assessed 29 June 2026.)

GIZ. 2015. *Support for peace, security and good governance in the SADC region*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/15730.html. (Assessed 30 June 2026).

Hendricks, C., Lucey, A. and Macaringue, L da G. S. 2023. *A Double-edged sword: Peace support operations and conflict management in northern Mozambique*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Policy Paper.

Isaksen, J. and Tjønneland, E.N. 2001. *Assessing the restructuring of SADC: Positions, policies and progress*. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute.

Lala, F. 2018. *Africa in the changing global order: Does African agency matter in world politics?* United Nations University, Working Paper Series W-2018/8.

Landsberg, C. 2011. *Fractured continentally, undermined abroad: African agency in world affairs.* Paper presented to the seminar African Agency: Implications for IR Theory, 14 September 2011, London.

Lotshwao, K. 2021. *The role of political parties in the consolidation*

of electoral democracy in the SADC region. SADF Electoral Commissioners Forum.
Matlosa, K. 2017. The state of democratisation in Southern Africa: Blocked transitions, reversals, stagnation, progress and prospects. *Politikon,* 44(1): 5–26.
Matlosa, K. and Lotshwao, K. 2010 *Political integration and democratisation in Southern Africa: Progress, problems and prospects*. Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa.
Nathan, L. 2013. The disbanding of the SADC tribunal: A cautionary tale. *Human Rights Quarterly,* 35(4): 870–892.
OECD. 2005. Paris declaration on aid effectiveness. [Online]. Available at: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/ParisDeclaration.pdf (Accessed 29 June 2026).
Southern African Customs Union. 2024. *Member states*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sacu.int/member-states (Accessed 28 June 2026).
Southern African Development Community. 1992. *Amended declaration and treaty of SADC*.
— — —. 2005. *SADC major achievements and challenges: 25 years of cooperation and regional integration*. https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-12/Achievements_booklet.pdf
— — —. 2006. *Windhoek declaration on a new partnership between the Southern African development community and the international cooperating partners.*
— — —. 2009. *SADC HIV and AIDS strategic framework, 2010-2015*. [Online]. Available at:
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/SADCHIVandAIDSStrategyFramework2010-2015.pdf. Assessed 30 June 2026.
— — —. 2019. *Chinese government pledges continued development cooperation with SADC*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/fr/node/1071. (Assessed 29 June 2026).
— — —. 2020a. *SADC regional indicative strategic development plan (RISDP) 2020-2030*. https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/

files/2021-08/RISDP_2020-2030.pdf. Assessed 29 June 2026.

— — —. 2020b. *SADC vision 2050*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/SADC_Vision_2050..pdf. (Assessed 30 June 2026).

— — —. 2022. *SADC PPDF approves US$20 million for preparation of 12 regional projects*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-ppdf-approves-us202-million-preparation-12-regional-projects*. Assessed 30 June 2026.

— — —. 2023. *Consultancy to develop the SADC foreign policy framework defining common values to be upheld by all member states and guiding the adoption of common foreign policy positions.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.sadc.int/procurement-opportunities/consultancy-develop-sadc-foreign-policy-framework-defining-common-values*.

— — —. 2023. *SADC and EU reaffirm their commitment towards safeguarding peace and security in the SADC region*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/latest-news/sadc-and-eu-reaffirm-their-commitment-towards-safeguarding-peace-and-security-sadc. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

— — —. 2024a. *Cooperation for enhancement of SADC regional economic integration*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/project-portfolio/cooperation-enhancement-sadc-regional-economic-integration-cesare. (Assessed 30 June 2026).

— — —. 2024b. *Institutions.* [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/institutions. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

Southern African Development Community/European Union (SADC-EU). 2023. *The European Union's cooperation with the Southern African Development Community: Working together for a better for a better future*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/EU-SADC_leaflet..pdf. (Assessed 26 June 2026).

Thomson, A. 2004. *An introduction to African politics*. London: Routledge.

Tjønneland, E. 1998. Aid, development and politics in Southern Africa: A critical look at new conditionalities in official development assistance. *Development Southern Africa,* 15(2): 185–200.

— — —. 2006. *SADC and donors-ideals and practices: From Gaborone to*

Paris and back. Research for Regional Integration and Development (FOPRISA), Report 1.

US Department of State. 2000. *Communique: Second SADC-US Forum, Maputo, Mozambique*. [Online]. Available at: https://2001-2009.state.gov/t/ac/csbm/rd/4390.htm. Assessed 30 June 2026.

US Embassy in Botswana. 2023. *SADC-USA regional development objective agreement (RDOAG) signing ceremony - U.S. Ambassador Howard van Vranken*. [Online]. Available at: https://bw.usembassy.gov/sadc-regional-development-objective-agreement-rdoag-signing-ceremony-u-s-ambassador-howard-van-vranken/. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

Van der Vleuten, A. and Hulse, M. 2013. *Governance transfer by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). A B2 case study report.* SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, No. 48. [Online]. Available at: https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/sfb/0032478/f_0032478_26370.pdf. (Assessed 29 June 2026).

Weisfelder, R.F. 1982. The Southern African development coordination conference (SADCC). *South Africa International,* 13(2): 74-96.

Woolfrey, S. and Verhaeghe, E. 2017. *Understanding the SADC trade and transport agendas: Consolidation and corridors.* European Centre for Development Policy Management.

World Bank. 1989. *From crisis to sustainable growth – Sub-Saharan Africa: A long-term persepective study*. Washington D. C: World Bank.

Interviews

Interview with Barbara Lopi, SADC Head of Communications and Public Relations, 20 September 2024.

Interview with Dr Mubita Luwabelwa, SADC Director of Policy Planning and Resource Mobilization, 18 September 2024.

CHAPTER 4

Beyond Aid: The Double-Edged Sword of Development Partnerships in the East African Community

Gabriel Acaye
East African Law Society, Tanzania

Achilleus Romward
East African Law Society, Tanzania

Introduction

Since the cataclysm of the Second World War, cooperation between nations has become the cornerstone of a more peaceful and interconnected global order, as articulated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter (United Nations Charter 1945). The Charter remains a foundational instrument of contemporary international law, fostering cooperation and peaceful relations among states. Its architects sought to establish a harmonious international system grounded in collaboration and the reduction of inter-state tensions, recognising that cooperation was essential to advancing the economic and social well-being of all peoples.

International treaties play a crucial role in advancing the objectives of the global community and strengthening peaceful cooperation among nations. These agreements provide frameworks for addressing shared challenges, promoting economic development and safeguarding human rights. By establishing common rules and standards, treaties contribute to a more stable and interconnected international order, as reflected in the Preamble to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961).

Similarly, the East African Community's slogan, "One People,

One Destiny", reflects its aspiration for collective action and shared regional objectives, as articulated in the Preamble to the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (East African Community [EAC] 1999).

In addition to the East African Community (EAC), other regional organisations, notably the African Union (AU), have championed African unity as a means of achieving shared continental objectives. These organisations recognise that unity remains indispensable to Africa's development and prosperity. The framers of the Abuja Treaty envisaged economic integration, including the establishment of a single customs union, as fundamental to building a self-reliant and self-sustaining African economy, as reflected in Article 4(1) of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (East African Community [EAC] 1991). This initiative was intended to stimulate economic activity and strengthen trade linkages among African states.

The Abuja Treaty further provides for a six-stage progression towards economic integration, culminating in a continental customs union. As set out under Article 6 of the EAC (1991), the process begins with strengthening existing Regional Economic Communities (REC), followed by the progressive elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, the establishment of continental free trade arrangements, the harmonisation of trade policies, the creation of an African Common Market and the consolidation of its institutional structures (EAC 1991).

This integration architecture cannot be regarded as effortless; rather, it represents a deliberate institutional response to the principles of interdependence, cooperation and tolerance among nation-states, as articulated in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter (United Nations Charter 1945), while simultaneously promoting peace and justice. The EAC forms part of the RECs recognised under the Abuja framework and over the past decades, has been acknowledged as one of the fastest-growing regions. The East Africa Community has further been commended for establishing both a customs union and a common market, developments that collectively signal progress towards the aspiration of a political federation.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of "state cooperation,"

the EAC Treaty defines cooperation as the undertaking by Partner States, jointly or in concert, of activities in furtherance of the objectives of the Community (EAC Treaty 1999, Art. 1). A purposive interpretation of this definition suggests a broader scope of application that may extend to cooperation with foreign states. In the contemporary international order, developing states frequently require external support to achieve their development objectives. Scholars note that international organisations both intergovernmental and multilateral have increasingly assumed financing and facilitative roles in state cooperation, grounded in burden-sharing and collective advancement (Schiff and Winters 2012).

While cooperation with external partners may appear strategic and beneficial, structural imbalances persist between African states and major global powers. Disparities in bargaining power and economic leverage risk placing African states in positions of dependency. Such imbalances constrain Africa's economic agency and may weaken the developmental gains derived from international engagements. Scholarship observes that Africa has historically been subjected to patterns of external exploitation dating back to the early 1500s (Terreblanche 2011). The enduring legacy of transatlantic slavery, including the forced displacement of over fifteen million Africans to Europe and the Americas, deprived the continent of significant human capital, and left deep social and economic scars (Terreblanche 2011).

Therefore, this study looks at the relations between the EAC and the big powers, analysing the agreements between Africa and the big powers (USA, Germany, China, United Kingdom, Japan and Russia) and how they have affected the EAC both in terms of development and future goals (Vision 2050). The study discusses the contributions of these agreements and their negative impacts on the community, looking at the burdens and recommending the best for community and African development. This is done by analysing reports, agreements, investment treaties and agendas in big conferences.

Background of the EAC

The collapse of the former EAC was a significant setback to regional

development and marked a rupture in the historical relations among the states of the Lake Region (the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania), as reflected in the Preamble to the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community (EAC 1999) and under Article 14.02 of the Mediation Agreement for the Disposition of Assets (Mediation Agreement for the Disposition of Assets 1984). However, the enduring historical ties among these states explain the present integration of the partner states of the EAC, as reaffirmed in the Preamble to the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999).

Echoing the adage "old wine in new bottles", the EAC represents a modern reincarnation of its earlier integration framework, which was dissolved in the 1970s. The objective of this revival was to reintegrate the region and avoid the shortcomings of the past, as provided under Article 2 of the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999). The revival process formally commenced with the establishment of the Agreement for the Establishment of the Permanent Tripartite Commission for Cooperation among the founding states.

The establishment of the Tripartite Commission aimed at coordinating activities to deepen cooperation in political, social, economic and security spheres. The Tripartite Commission laid the institutional foundation for the eventual revival of the EAC in the late 1990s. The revival was formalised through the signing of the EAC Treaty, whereby the partner states agreed on various areas of cooperation, including those set out under Articles 102 and 105 of the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999).

These areas of cooperation include agriculture, human resource development, science and technology, food security and legal and judicial affairs.

The framers of the EAC Treaty were conscious that cooperation is not possible without a driving force for their attainment. The Treaty sets several fundamental principles to guide the partner states and the EAC in achieving its set goals. The EAC partner states vow to take into account the principles of mutual trust, peaceful co-existence, peaceful settlement of disputes and good governance including adherence to the principles of the rule of law, accountability and the principles of justice (EAC 1999: art 6).

The EAC, like any other diverse society, operates on the principles of

people-centeredness, conducive policies, an export-oriented economy, equitable distribution of benefits, and the principle of subsidiarity allowing for multi-level participation and involving many stakeholders in the process (EAC 1999: art 7). The legal instruments of the EAC enable the partner states to cooperate on the agreed-upon areas to harness development in the EAC.

The cooperation provided in the Treaty is aimed at concreting the integration amongst partner states of the EAC. The EAC, in furthering this agenda, works closely with development partners and other international communities (EAC 1999: art 130[3]). Development partners, however, must have an interest in the objectives of the EAC. They enter bilateral agreements with the EAC to carry on development projects and capacity building that the EAC would otherwise miss out on in a timely basis.

The EAC and development partners

This section outlines and discusses the involvement of development partners and other big powers in the affairs of the EAC. Their role in the development of the community, the opportunities available, their contribution to the EAC's growth, plans and the challenges that come as a result of such engagements.

The EAC, as reflected in the Preamble to the EAC Treaty (EAC 1999), was initially formed by three founding partner states—Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Pursuant to Article 3(3) of the Treaty, its membership has since expanded to eight partner states (EAC 1999: art 3[3]). All partner states are situated within sub-Saharan Africa, a region comprising 48 countries, of which 33 are classified as Least Developed Countries. The region continues to face significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, disease, food insecurity and recurring conflicts. A substantial proportion of the population lives below the international poverty threshold, limiting access to basic needs and clean water.

In response to these structural challenges, the EAC continually engages development partners and regional blocs to facilitate coordinated infrastructure projects and development initiatives (EAC 2024a). Development partners have invested in programmes aimed at poverty

reduction, healthcare improvement, promotion of democracy and the rule of law, food security, employment creation and peace and security (EAC 2024b). The EAC has strategically refocussed its partnerships to better respond to the needs of East African citizens, while development partners have reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the region's evolving development strategies (EAC 2024b).

The EAC is not an isolated entity pursuing unilateral ambitions; rather, it is an intergovernmental organisation mandated to promote the collective interests of its people. The objectives and areas of cooperation outlined in the Treaty require sustained financial resources, which may not always be readily available from partner states alone. Articles 130(3) and 130(4) of the EAC Treaty expressly provide for cooperation with development partners and other external actors in mobilising resources necessary for the attainment of East Africa Community objectives (EAC 1999: arts 130[3–4]). In practice, however, questions relating to financing models and burden-sharing have occasionally generated tensions among partner states.

The EAC's pursuit of its objectives has, therefore, attracted engagement from international organisations and multinational agencies. The framers of the Treaty recognised that the EAC cannot operate in isolation, but must interact with intergovernmental organisations of which its partner states are members. Institutions such as the UN and the AU have supported regional integration efforts and aligned action plans with broader continental and global development frameworks (Japan's International Cooperation Agency [JICA] 2018).

Germany's (GIZ) partnership with the EAC

Germany, through the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), is one of the key development partners supporting the EAC. Development cooperation is operationalised through institutional frameworks, and GIZ's presence within the EAC architecture reflects the German government's commitment to advancing the objectives of the EAC (EAC-GIZ 2024a).

The motivation underpinning this partnership is captured in the phrase "integration is about people", a statement emphasised in engagements between the EAC secretariat and GIZ (Mathuki 2021). This perspective underscores the people-centred approach adopted in the design and implementation of GIZ-supported programmes, which aim to strengthen regional integration, institutional capacity, and sustainable development within the EAC.

The ultimate objective of GIZ is to promote a market-driven and people-centred EAC that benefits all citizens of the East African region. Acting on behalf of the German government, GIZ supports the EAC secretariat and partner states in advancing the regional integration process (EAC-GIZ 2024a). It works in close collaboration with private sector actors, civil society organisations and academic institutions to strengthen institutional capacity and regional competitiveness.

GIZ further supports value addition across industries within the region, enhancing the quality of products and services as part of its broader partnership objectives with the EAC (EAC-GIZ 2024a). This approach aligns with the integration objectives set out under Article 2(2) of the EAC Treaty, which emphasises the establishment of a Customs Union, Common Market, Monetary Union, and ultimately a Political Federation (EAC 1999: art [2]).

The partnership between Germany and the EAC has endured for over 26 years, dating back to 1998, during which numerous projects have been successfully implemented while others remain ongoing (EAC-GIZ 2024b). GIZ has provided significant support to the implementation of the Customs Union and the Common Market, two of the four pillars of EAC integration (EAC 1999: art 2[2]).

In practical terms, GIZ supports EAC integration across multiple thematic sectors, including agriculture and food security; customs and trade; education, science and technology; gender; community development and civil society; health; peace and security; tourism and wildlife; industrialisation and SME development and investment promotion and private sector development (GIZ 2024b).

Germany's (GIZ) implemented projects in the EAC

In furtherance of its mandate in the EAC, the German government through GIZ, cooperated with the EAC in pandemic preparedness. This forms part of the key sectors that define the GIZ–EAC partnership. Though the EAC was not badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, GIZ was at the forefront of every resilient action.

GIZ also assists the EAC in fighting other infectious diseases such as Ebola, cholera and malaria. The GIZ response team has been key in running several projects to assist the community in pandemic preparedness in the region. The project played the role of advising the secretariat on the sustainable integration of "One Health" that created resilience and also had responsibility for pandemic outbreaks. The assistance has been key in providing technical expertise in the health sector in the EAC. The goal was to enable the EAC partner states to overcome infectious diseases and work closely with stakeholders in the partner states, playing a pivotal role in capacity building of workers in the health sector. Though the community partner states had different approaches towards COVID-19, GIZ took responsibility for all.

The EAC opens its doors for assistance in maintenance of peace and security, conscious that without realising peace the EAC objectives cannot be achieved timely (EAC 1999). The EAC secretariat in the past decades faced a problem of weak institutional structures and the lack of a peace and security directorate together with inadequate implementation of regional strategies in the partner states.

To this effect, GIZ was a key player in the promotion of peace and security in the EAC (GIZ 2024b). From 2009–2010, GIZ ran a cross-border project, Promotion of Peace and Security in the EAC, which involved joint efforts in the Republics of Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania (GIZ 2024b).

The peace operations, though never survived the test of time, were instrumental in peace building. It supported projects on peace and security which fostered collaboration amongst the Partner States of the Community, supported the EAC Directorate for Peace and Security, and helped in control of light weapons in the Community (GIZ 2024b).

United States participation in EAC affairs

The United States (USA) is among the development partners of the EAC through support, expertise and foreign direct investment. The USA, besides being a development partner of the EAC, also supports individual states through its institutions like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), African Growth and Opportunity Act 2000 (AGOA) and other development arrangements (United States Government 2022).

The USA entered a partnership with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under the Integrated Country Strategy (United States Government 2022). The partnership promised four mission goals including the promotion of stability and durable peace, strengthening the rule of law, preserving the Congo Basin rainforest and supporting and strengthening democracy (United States Government 2022). The mission to promote peace and security in Eastern Congo came as an effort to create firstly, peace throughout the region and secondly, to guard the interests of the USA in Eastern DRC, including citizens and property. In addition, there was a need to build a democratic DRC free from corruption and mismanagement of resources while involving the citizens of the DRC in the development of the state (United States Government 2022). The call from President Félix Tshisekedi comes at the right time when the country's defence forces are overpowered by hundreds of fighting forces in different regions of the country.

The question of whether the partnership with the USA is a solution to the Congolese problem is still in doubt, since many actors and partners like the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), France and Joint African forces have for the last twenty years worked jointly. However, this relationship cannot be gauged solely on past failed missions, given that it is a new government that brought a peaceful transition of power in the country.

The DRC had for the past decades witnessed bloody and chaotic transitions of power, and the 2023 presidential elections to a certain extent, reflect the success of the USA–DRC partnership. The Americas continue to influence the Congolese political space through privileged

partnerships for peace, prosperity, and prevention of the environment (PP4PP+P). This is done through funding to lift the lives of the people in the DRC.

The partnership, however, may be bait for the Americas to protect their interests in the DRC. Some sources have aired that the USA has always capitalised on the protection of its people and property while advancing state interests (BBC 2013). It is wise to say that many development partners on the African continent are striving to secure their interests in dependent countries and how they can use them to their advantage. This is evident from the BBC report that the DRC has been destabilised by big powers interested in reaping its natural resources (BBC 2013).

Through USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has, for decades, served as a major channel of development assistance to African, Asian and South American states. Within Africa, and specifically in relation to the EAC, the USA has concluded several bilateral agreements with individual partner states. The objectives of these agreements vary from state to state, though they are generally aimed at advancing development. The objectives address issues such as poverty eradication, health, education, research, good governance and agriculture (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

At the regional level, the USA has operated through the Regional Development Cooperation Strategy. This cooperation does not replace bilateral engagements with individual partner states, but aligns with the broader agenda of the EAC. USAID pursues three principal objectives in its engagement with the region: integration; prosperity and resilience (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

The EAC recognises that full economic, social and political integration requires addressing structural vulnerabilities, including poverty and food insecurity. USAID, in collaboration with regional institutions, has supported efforts aimed at transforming livelihood systems in affected areas (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

This cooperation also extends to the health sector, where EAC

partner states continue to face infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. USAID works with regional and international partners to strengthen health systems and enhance resilience across the EAC (USAID/Kenya and East Africa 2016).

Through the AGOA

The USA also extends support to African states through the AGOA. The AGOA targets eligible sub-Saharan African countries and provides economic support aimed at stimulating growth in poverty-stricken regions, as it is reflected in the preamble (African Growth and Opportunity Act [AGOA] 2000). The EAC falls within the sub-Saharan region covered by the Act.

Eligibility under AGOA is not automatic, but depends on compliance with criteria set out in the Act. These include the establishment of a market-based economy, adherence to the rule of law, political pluralism, elimination of trade barriers to USA investment, implementation of policies to reduce poverty and respect for internationally recognised human rights (AGOA 2000).

The Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community reflects similar principles. Article 6(d) of the Treaty recognises adherence to the rule of law, good governance and the protection of human rights, while the integration framework promotes a market-oriented regional economy (EAC 1999: art 6[d]).

AGOA grants eligible sub-Saharan African states duty-free access to the USA market (AGOA 2000). Most EAC partner states benefit from AGOA, with the exception of certain states, including the DRC and the Republic of Burundi (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The Act creates opportunities for eligible states to export goods to the USA duty-free, thereby promoting employment, industrial development and expanded markets for raw materials (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020). It also establishes a high-level dialogue mechanism between the USA and sub-Saharan African states to strengthen trade relations and address emerging challenges (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The USA has further supported the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an initiative that integrates all African REC, including the EAC (Preamble to the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA). AfCFTA seeks to establish a continent-wide tariff-free zone through the progressive elimination of internal tariffs and harmonisation of external trade policies. The USA has signed cooperation arrangements with the AU to support the implementation of AfCFTA (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

In addition to regional arrangements, several EAC partner states maintain bilateral trade agreements with the USA. For example, in 2020, the Republic of Kenya engaged in bilateral negotiations aimed at deepening trade and investment relations with the USA (Biennial Report on the Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act 2020). The Republic of Rwanda similarly maintains a trade relationship under the USA–Rwanda Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which strengthens commercial engagement between the two states (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

It may, therefore, be observed that alongside China, the USA remains a significant development partner and trade ally for African states. However, while acknowledging the positive contributions of these arrangements, it is equally necessary to examine the limitations and strategic interests that may underlie such partnerships. These issues will be analysed in the subsequent sections of this study to assess the balance of interests involved.

China and the EAC

Economic and infrastructural development

The pursuit of a fully integrated East Africa necessitates the involvement of multiple actors in order to realise the EAC's objectives. The EAC was recognised by the African Development Bank in 2014 as possessing some of the most advanced regional integration goals on the continent (African Development Bank 2014). The establishment of the customs union and the implementation of the common market protocol mark significant milestones in the integration process. The EAC's development agenda

is further embedded in the Vision 2050 framework and aligns with the six-stage integration process envisaged under Article 6 of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (1991).

The Common Market Protocol provides for two key rights—the right of establishment and the right of residence—and five fundamental freedoms: the free movement of goods; persons; labour; services and capital (East African Community 2009 art. 2[4][a–g]). The effective realisation of these freedoms, particularly the free movement of goods and capital, requires well-developed and coordinated infrastructure.

Among its development strategies, the EAC has prioritised ten international road transport corridors under the East African Road Network (EAC Development Strategy 2016–2018). These include the Northern Corridor, Central Corridor, Siari Corridor, Mtwara Corridor and Arusha Corridor. The Community's master plan towards Vision 2050 emphasises the development of a comprehensive road network by 2030 as a means of enhancing intra-regional trade (EAC Development Strategy 2016–2018).

Unlike other development partners, China's engagement within the EAC has primarily focussed on infrastructure development and trade liberalisation, both within the EAC and across Africa more broadly (Ngwenya and Lema n.d.). Prior to increased Chinese engagement, Africa faced structural challenges in establishing a coherent and effective infrastructure development model (African Development Bank 2014). China has assumed an active role in infrastructural development within the EAC, largely through its state-linked construction companies. Evidence indicates that all EAC partner states have engaged Chinese construction companies in major infrastructure projects (Ngwenya and Lema n.d.). Chinese expertise has contributed to new architectural designs and modern road construction techniques within the region. In 2019, the Chinese government reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the EAC by donating twelve vehicles valued at approximately US$ 400 000.00 to enhance capacity-building programmes within the EAC (East African Community 2019).

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represent a significant dimension of China's engagement in infrastructure and trade development

within the EAC. The BRI aims to connect markets across Asia, Africa, South America and parts of Europe, thereby enhancing global economic cooperation (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022). The initiative is framed as an inclusive model of international economic, social, and political cooperation.

Within the EAC, the BRI seeks to reduce poverty and open new urban and economic spaces through infrastructural expansion. Infrastructure development is closely linked to industrialisation, reduced transport costs and the facilitation of inter-regional trade. The BRI aligns with the AU's Agenda 2063, which envisions a fully integrated continent (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022.

China remains a leading financier and contractor in infrastructure development within the EAC. This engagement was further consolidated through the Beijing Framework Agreement between the EAC and China, which aimed to enhance trade and investment cooperation (Aspen Institute 2011). The agreement extended beyond infrastructure to promote broader EAC–China investment cooperation. It included commitments to build the capacity of EAC employees through training and human resource development. The establishment of the EAC–China Joint Committee on Trade (JCET) further strengthened economic cooperation between the parties (Aspen Institute 2011).

By 2011, EAC–China bilateral trade had reportedly grown by 39 per cent, reflecting the expansion of economic relations (Aspen Institute 2011). The cooperation framework envisaged expanded opportunities in trade, infrastructure, power generation, employment creation and industrial development.

Energy

In addition to transport and trade, EAC–China relations extend significantly into the energy sector. Several major energy generation projects within the EAC have been undertaken by Chinese companies. These include the Karuma Hydropower Dam valued at approximately US$ 1.7 billion (completed), the Lake Turkana Wind Power Project (valued at approximately US$ 858 million), the Loiyangalani–Suswa 400 Kilovolt

Transmission Line Project, and a Chinese-supported hydroelectric dam project in Burundi.

The development of the power sector plays a critical role in supporting industrialisation, urban growth and overall economic expansion within the EAC. Reliable energy infrastructure underpins manufacturing, trade and investment, thereby, reinforcing the broader integration objectives of the EAC.

Japan-EAC relations

Japan, like other developed economies, has maintained engagement with Africa since 1993 through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Through this forum, discussions are held between Japan and African states on strategies for building a sustainable and resilient African economy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). Japan's efforts to support Africa's economic revival emphasise infrastructure development and human resource development as key pillars of assistance.

In the area of peace and security, Japan has played a proactive role in various regions of Africa, including the Sahel/North Africa region and South Sudan. Japanese government programmes have focussed on peace consolidation and the reduction of terrorist activities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). In Somalia, Japanese restoration initiatives contributed to the establishment of a new government and constitution in 2012. Somalia, now a partner state of the EAC, presents prospects for enhanced stability within the region.

Available evidence indicates that among EAC partner states, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania are significant beneficiaries of Japanese aid in Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2013). Tanzania and Uganda have benefited from Japanese automobile support, while Japanese construction companies have played a notable role in road development in Kenya. The construction of roads in Kenya has implications beyond national development, as it facilitates connectivity and trade for landlocked partner states such as Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

Japanese assistance to the EAC is largely channelled through the Japan

International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which operates both at the level of individual partner states and at the regional level. Within the EAC, Kenya is regarded as Japan's largest partner in terms of the scale of cooperation (JICA 2018).

The areas of cooperation include environmental protection, industrial development, agricultural and rural development, universal health coverage and infrastructure development (JICA 2018). Kenya, being one of the more economically advanced partner states within the EAC, plays a pivotal role in regional integration. Consequently, Japan's engagement in Kenya serves as a strategic foundation for broader regional development within the EAC.

Progress towards the AfCFTA: Can Africa get it right?

Agenda 2063 and the EAC

Agenda 2063, adopted by the AU in 2015, represents a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of Africa over a 50-year period. This blueprint aims to accelerate implementation of continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development. Rooted in Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, it seeks to foster unity, self-determination, progress and collective prosperity.

The agenda encompasses seven aspirations reflecting Africa's desire for shared prosperity, unity and integration, freedom for citizens, expanded opportunities for women and youth and the full utilisation of the continent's resources and capacities (African Union 2015). These aspirations are further broken down into twenty goals and 39 priority areas, providing a comprehensive roadmap for African development.

Implementation occurs through ten-year plans, allowing periodic adaptation to changing continental and global dynamics. The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–2023) focussed on flagship projects such as AfCFTA, the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons.

For the EAC, Agenda 2063 aligns with Vision 2050, aiming for a

fully integrated regional bloc with functional infrastructure, political integration and full implementation of the customs and common market protocols. The agenda emphasises inclusivity, sustainability and innovation, prioritising women and youth empowerment, gender parity, and the elimination of violence against women and girls (African Union [AU] 2015). Environmental sustainability is also integrated, with climate resilience and natural resource management as core objectives.

Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) are critical enablers. The Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024) align with Agenda 2063, addressing areas such as food security, disease prevention and communications. The AU has established monitoring tools including the Africa Agenda 2063 Results Framework and Dashboard. Nonetheless, limited resources, capacity constraints and external shocks like COVID-19 necessitate adaptive strategies.

Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA

AfCFTA is a flagship initiative under Agenda 2063, aimed at boosting intra-African trade, enhancing connectivity, and facilitating the free movement of people and goods across the continent. It represents a transformative opportunity to reposition Africa as an active global player rather than a passive recipient of external interventions.

Agenda 2063 provides a clear framework against which AfCFTA can be implemented and evaluated. Partnerships and agreements with external actors should be aligned with Africa's long-term development objectives, ensuring collective action strengthens the continent's bargaining power in global negotiations.

AfCFTA's implementation seeks to reduce trade barriers, stimulate industrialisation and enhance regional value chains. The agreement emphasises domestic resource mobilisation and the alignment of external partnerships with African priorities. Properly executed, AfCFTA can strengthen intra-African economic integration, foster industrial diversification and accelerate progress toward Agenda 2063's overarching goal of a self-reliant and prosperous Africa.

Drips of relief: What is there for the EAC?

Post-independence Africa faced a fundamental question: whether to merely survive the legacy left by colonialism or to adopt new strategic pathways for development. The colonial legacy of integration survived through Pan-African economic and political mergers, which could only be realised through the creation of RECs serving as building blocks for continental unification (African Development Bank 2014).

New opportunities for regional cooperation and integration have emerged with greater access to capital markets by African states and REC. International financing has become a significant component of this discourse. While some African states pursue engagement with major powers individually, scholarship suggests that collective engagement through regional blocs enhances bargaining power and strengthens access to external financing (African Development Bank 2014).

External powers have contributed to regional integration efforts in the EAC and across Africa over the past decades. Historically, Africa was characterised by fragmented markets, small populations, vast geographical distances and limited connectivity. The idea of integration in the Great Lakes region can be traced back to British colonial administration, which established a customs union among the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania.

Infrastructural development has remained a major contribution of development partners to the EAC. Among the objectives of the EAC is the attainment of economic development, which requires efficient infrastructure linking different parts of the region. China, through the BRI, has played a central role in infrastructure development aimed at strengthening economic growth within the EAC (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022).

Open market for African goods

Scholarly analysis and statistical evidence indicate that EAC partner states benefit from participation in the global economy through trade in goods and services (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2022).

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) framework provides eligible African states with preferential access to the United States market, enabling the export of raw materials and finished goods (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020). Access to foreign markets allows East African states to sell products competitively while reducing oversupply in domestic markets. Participation in global production chains further enhances industrial output and market diversification.

Investment

Development partners have significantly increased inward investment in the EAC, spanning infrastructure, industry, education and health sectors. In 2018 alone, the USA invested over US$ 34 billion in sub-Saharan Africa, strengthening economic development across the region (Office of the United Sates Trade Representative 2020).

The EAC, like much of Africa, faces unemployment challenges driven by limited technological advancement and innovation gaps among youth populations. German development cooperation through GIZ has contributed to strengthening technological capacity in the EAC, thereby enhancing socio-economic development and international competitiveness (GIZ 2024b).

A digitalised economy supported by skilled labour is essential for sustainable development within the EAC. Initiatives such as academic exchange programmes coordinated through the Inter-University Council for East Africa, in partnership with institutions including the University of Dar es Salaam, Mannheim University of Applied Sciences and the German Aerospace Centre, aim to strengthen regional academic and technical capacity (JICA 2018).

Sponsoring bulky projects that would otherwise be expensive for the community to handle

Development partners have also financed large-scale projects that would otherwise exceed the financial capacity of the EAC. China, through the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation and the BRI, has supported major

infrastructure projects linking the EAC to global markets (Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership 2022). These projects contribute to trade expansion and support broader continental objectives, including the AfCFTA.

Beyond road construction, development partners have supported energy generation projects within the region. Chinese and United Kingdom-backed initiatives have contributed to the development of major hydropower plants in East Africa, strengthening rural electrification and industrial growth.

Development partner engagement has also generated employment opportunities, thereby contributing to poverty reduction and increased government revenue through taxation. Infrastructure initiatives such as the BRI projects have created jobs across Kenya, Somalia and other parts of Africa, reinforcing the developmental link between large-scale infrastructure and economic participation.

Pandemic preparedness

With limited advancement in science and technology, the outbreak of COVID-19 and other pandemics posed significant threats to the EAC. This created an urgent need for expertise, capacity building and the equipping of health centres with modern equipment commensurate with pandemic response demands. Development partners responded to this call and played a critical role in strengthening the medical sector.

The German development agency GIZ was instrumental in providing technical expertise, capacity building, and equipment to enhance pandemic preparedness within the EAC (GIZ n.d.).

GIZ has also supported healthcare innovation within the EAC through technological advancement and research development. For example, it supported the Uganda Infectious Disease Institute in strengthening research capacity and developing mobile health applications aimed at improving access to and delivery of home-based healthcare services (GIZ 2024b).

Peace and security

Several attempts have been made by the East African Partner States to address security challenges in the region. In recent years, particular areas of concern have included the Eastern DRC, Burundi and South Sudan. Regional responses have included the adoption of the EAC Strategy on Regional Peace and Security and the establishment of mechanisms under Chapter 23 relating to peace and security, including early warning systems (East African Community 2018; East African Community 2013).

The attainment of long-lasting peace has, however, required the involvement of additional actors, as envisaged under Article 131 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC (EAC 1999). Furthermore, Article 11 of the EAC Protocol on Foreign Policy Coordination underscores the importance of coordinated external engagement in matters of peace and security (EAC 2000).

Like the rest of Africa, the EAC's security and defence cooperation with global powers has become increasingly complex and multifaceted. The AU's 2015 Peace and Security Report emphasises peace and security as prerequisites for development and calls for strengthened strategic partnerships (AU 2015).

Cross-regional cooperation has also been pursued. Under the auspices of the AU, the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) convened a Quadripartite Summit on Peace and Security (African Unity 2023). The Summit commended peace dialogue efforts between the Heads of State of Rwanda and the DRC and called for the implementation of coordinated frameworks under the AU Peace and Security Council (African Unity 2023).

Peace and security concerns have attracted increased foreign involvement in the affairs of the EAC. Development partners have engaged in various initiatives aimed at restoring stability. For instance, the USA–DRC agreement on peace restoration in Eastern DRC sought to promote stability and contributed to facilitating a peaceful electoral process in the country (Kaguta 2024).

Although multiple foreign actors provide assistance, the European Union (EU) remains the principal development partner formally engaged with the EAC on peace and security matters. In 2022, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to working with the EAC to combat terrorism and transnational crime, recognising that free movement of persons and regional integration require a stable and peaceful environment (European Union [EU] 2022). EU support includes funding regional cross-border security initiatives through the European Development Fund (European Union [EU] 2022).

Despite these efforts, uncertainties remain regarding continued civil unrest and insecurity within the region. Some scholars argue that external involvement may exacerbate instability, citing claims that a significant proportion of 70 per cent of the 102 fighting groups operating in the DRC receive foreign backing (interview with Dadius Kaguta 2024). Hence, concerns persist that external actors may simultaneously contribute to and seek to manage insecurity within the region in pursuit of strategic interests.

Development partner's bullying: Navigating the EAC's dilemma of dependency and diplomacy

Though African development has been majorly affected by external markets, there are unexplored potentials on the African continent that require action from African states. For the past decades, the African economy has faced stagnation, because Africa has always been sidelined in its development and left foreigners to take a lead in its home affairs (African Development Bank 2014). This affected intra-regional investments and prioritised investments outside the continent (African Development Bank 2014).

Evidence on paper and statistics show that on the African continent, South Africa has the best performance regarding intra-continental investment. Does this imply that other African states have not been quick to this pending opportunity? The reaction to this position sees African states as receivers whose markets are incompetent to feed markets outside their borders (African Development Bank 2014).

When aid becomes a trap for political ambitions

The role of the development partners in the development and affairs of the EAC is seemingly the best of its kind. It revives the spirit of development while carrying burdens that would otherwise fall on the shoulders of the EAC secretariat (think tank of the EAC). Although the partnership is welcomed with a charming environment, its results in the political space often prove unforgiving. These historical flaws, whereby the West and China exploited Africa's territorial and political divisions for their own benefit, continue to shape the political dynamics of contemporary development partnerships. In practice, development partners have sometimes prioritised turning African states into political allies rather than focussing on their primary role—development.

The rivalry has been revealed with China's active role in the development of African states, leaving the West and Americas cautious of their fidelity with the African countries (Bachmann 2013). The battlefield is open to the three rivals, pressing the Africans in the centre stage of the battlefield that does not seem to end any time soon, but rather a resurrection of the past (Bachmann 2013). China's participation has caused resentment among the Europeans and Americas, viewing it as a new colonial agent in Africa (Toghyani and Arabahmadi 2020).

Scholarship shows that initially the USA was never interested in Africa's affairs, and Africa played little-to-no-role in USA foreign policy. From a scholarly lens, one may be inquisitive about what triggers the Americas to take interest in Africa and its affairs. While there have been speculations from different spectators, China's presence in the EAC poses a threat to the USA, with the latter seeking to maintain its position in international politics (Toghyani and Arabahmadi 2020).

The mega projects that China, as a development partner, has set in Africa (East Africa), mentioning the BRI and open trade relations with Africa, become a reflection of China's continued presence in the region, a deal that faces controversy from the rivals (USA) (Babic 2019). Albeit, this depicts the intention of the great power in East Africa to be politically dominant and not otherwise. The China-USA tensions may just be a sample of what might be happening between other powers present in the EAC (Babic 2019).

These geopolitical rivalries also intersect with regional security concerns. Over the past decades, the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda and Southern Sudan have all been the centre of conflicts influenced or supported by foreign powers. East African development partners have been directly involved in addressing these security challenges, while also seeking to ensure the stability and integrity of the region.

This issue becomes particularly controversial when considered alongside the speech of the President of the Republic of Uganda. In his address, the president outlined that the integration of the EAC is based on three main pillars: first, security; second, independence and third, working together (Museveni 2024). It is evident that the involvement of foreign powers in the region's security may undermine these objectives and potentially disadvantage the Community (Museveni 2024).

Crippling the EAC-based institutions

East Africa, like other regional blocs, has several institutions that accelerate the developmental programmes of the EAC. Some of these institutions are part of the organs of the EAC, while others have observer status or are based in the partner states of the EAC. Development partner institutions may compete with domestic institutions, often leaving the latter out-competed. This dynamic undermines the EAC's autonomous powers to determine what is best for itself.

The current trend of development in Africa has seen several states devising new strategies to boost domestic trade. This includes trade liberalisation, economic reforms and democratic governance. So far, the efforts by African states have yielded tangible progress, with some early signs of success, signalling a new trend in Africa's development that is increasingly free from foreign control (Kife et al. 1997). However, despite these efforts, progress is at risk of stagnation due to the uncontrolled involvement of foreign players. Foreign companies and development partners have flooded African markets with imported products, leaving limited room for African states to determine their own developmental priorities (Kifeet al. 1997).

The long presence of these institutions in East Africa poses a serious

challenge to the independence of African states, particularly because many of these institutions were initially established by powers that had engineered colonial domination decades earlier. The continued involvement of former colonial powers in the region can be understood as a form of indirect control, aimed at protecting and maintaining their strategic and economic interests.

In this context, the role of these actors as development partners is not purely philanthropic; rather, it can be interpreted as a way to retain influence and reclaim access to resources that were historically extracted from the continent. This dynamic underscores a broader pattern in which the legacies of colonialism continue to shape development interventions, often limiting the autonomy of African states in determining their own priorities and strategies.

It is a clear case that the current development partners in Africa are chasing their economic interests as compared to developing Africa as they claim. The USA maintains a strong trade hold with African countries through AGOA. However, despite efforts to promote economic growth and reduce poverty in Africa, USA policies often prioritise the country's own interests, as reflected in the eligibility criteria of the AGOA, which exclude the poorest East African states from benefiting

The poorest states in the EAC are not beneficiaries of the AGOA, a fact which makes the initiative selective and not fully committed to its objectives of eradicating poverty in the community (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2020).

Exploitation of African resources

Foreign states that come as development partners in Africa are seen as predators who devour their prey in daylight. The export of raw materials from African countries has been a major exchange between the development partners and the beneficiaries. For the USA, for an African state to be a beneficiary of its AGOA Aid, it must be willing to open its fields to the Americas to collect raw materials (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

The aspiring state, in addition, should be in a position to eliminate

trade barriers for USA goods. This leaves questions as to who gains more from the partnership, the answers of which are obvious: the development partners are more focussed on what they gain than what is offered (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

African states lose control of their economy by compromising the rules promoting their domestic economies while trying to please foreign powers. The USA, through the African Growth Initiative, demands that as part of the eligibility, an aspiring state should allow products of the USA to their domestic market and eliminate any trade barriers that would otherwise be denied access.

Back-dropping community goals

The accomplishments engineered by the development partners are incompatible with the community's long-term goals as outlined in Vision 2050. The Vision stands as an architecture for the future of the EAC in social and economic development (EAC 2016). The architectural makeup depicts what the EAC will be over time and a view of what it wants to be known for. The framers of Vision 2050 divide the same into four chapters, with chapter five expounding on the pillars of the community.

The community aspires to have a sustainable use of the environment and natural resources. However, the uncontrolled shipping of raw materials for the production demands somewhere in Europe and the Americas negates any efforts by the community to achieve this goal (EAC 2016). The unforgiving agreements between the African states and the development partners state the provision of raw materials as an eligibility pass for aid to Africa (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2000).

Exposing African security systems to external threat

Peace and security are some of the key factors for development in society. The African continent has been widely affected by conflicts which have led to the death of millions and displacement of people from their homes (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022). The players in peace

and security on the continent include the AU, United Nations Security Council, and various stakeholders who have found it wanting to fight insecurity on the continent (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022). The AU further delegates its mandate to the REC and urges them to establish early warning systems to spot the grey areas prone to conflicts (African Centre for Strategic Studies 2022).

The African society has recently invited external actors to take part in the security of the region. The Americans have been partial to the overall security system in Africa, taking part in policy design and active participation in security projects. Though their role is highly positive in the security sector, there is fear that the security system has been exposed to external actors. The situation in the DRC is ascribed to external support which destabilises the region to reap a free meal.

Investment agreements between Africa and foreign investors: The missing balance of interests?

Trade agreements

This part of the study discusses the investment agreements entered between African states and the big powers. While analysing this, the writer weighs the interests of African states against the foreign big powers (foreign investors). Available evidence is used to comment on whether African interests are considered while concluding these agreements. Though there are several trade agreements between Africa and the big powers, this part selects agreements signed by African states with the United Kingdom (UK) and China as case studies.

Economic transformation is at the centre of the EAC, and Africa in general was conscious that without economic development social and human development is difficult. Africa, for years, has been fond of relying on a natural resource-based economy and there springs up a need to transform to an industrial-based economy on the continent. This campaign is not a one-man dock, but rather the expansion of markets within and outside the continent.

The varying trade tariffs in different parts of Africa make the exercise

even more draining and time-consuming. This trajectory, however, is expected to accelerate through the AfCFTA to eliminate any trade barriers. The elimination of trade barriers will imply that Africa can now trade freely within, while applying common tariffs to foreigners. Further, it will create conditions sufficient to attract more investment on the continent. However, before moving heads up to boosting the investment opportunities it is even more appealing to understand the nature of agreements that Africa signs with the big nations.

UK-Africa

The UK is on the list of states that have invested in several African states and concluded several Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT) with Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020). This may be linked to its long-term attachment to the continent through colonial works or modern imperialism. The UK indisputably through its companies plays a great role in liberalising the African economy and widening the market for the finished goods (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020: 11). the UK is among the leading investors in electronics and other modern appliances.

The UK invests in Africa through the Commonwealth Development Corporation which supports commercial investment in the region (Mendez- Parra et al. 2020). The target areas for investment are the energy sector and agro-processing firms (Mendez- Parra et al. 2020). In addition, the UK Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) also penetrates areas of quarrying and mining by 51 per cent of the total UK FDI in Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020).

Investment at the international level is governed by international law and BITs signed between the foreign investors and host states. This assures security to the property of foreign investors, avoids double taxation, and states the forum for resolving disputes (Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the Promotion and Protection of Investments 1994 Art. 9). While BITs are essential in investor-state relations, most BITs signed between the UK and the African states represent a colonial existence in Africa (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020). There is enough evidence

to prove that most of these agreements did not change even after the end of colonial rule in Africa.

As a former colonial master in Africa, the UK has the largest bilateral investment agreements with the African states. This leaves a mixed understanding as to whether African states participated in the conclusion of agreements that themselves still represent colonial oppression of Africa. While some agreements of this nature were terminated, that is to say Sierra Leone terminated its Agreement in 2001 (Mendez-Parra et al. 2020), other agreements are still in force.

China-Africa

Africa has been important for China since the late 1950s, when Chinese diplomacy began to emerge, in the aftermath of the Korean War, from the shadow of the Soviet Union (Taylor 2009). During the early period of Sino-African interaction, China was ideologically motivated and provided support for national liberation movements and African states. By the mid-1970s, China had a greater number of aid projects in Africa than the USA (Taylor 2009).

African countries have also signed trade and investment agreements with China to catalyse economic development between the two sides. The Chinese-Africa Investment Cooperation (FOCAC) looks at facilitating investment negotiations between China and the African side (Ofodile 2013: 157). The BITs between China and Africa are also important in protecting labour rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development (Ofodile 2013).

However, the FOCAC documents are more lined with amplifying the interests of China as a capital exporter (Ofodile 2013). The documents outline the importance of China in capital exportation to Africa, paying little attention to African needs (Ofodile 2013). Some scholars state that China contributes to climate change on the African continent through importation of low-tech machines with high emissions (Ofodile 2013).

The BITs signed between China and some African states are ambiguous in substance (Ofodile 2013). That is to say they represent three forms of BITs including retrospective BITs, those which can apply

to circumstances after the entry into force, and those that specify the time for application (Ofodile 2013). Those that are retrospective in nature are selectively applied leaving out some events that might have occurred before it entered into force (Ofodile 2013). The BITs among other factors are concluded between the parties to assist in resolving disputes that arise in the course of business (UNCTAD 2004).

BITs steer development between the agreed parties. However, one challenge that comes with China-Africa BITs is that they do not mention the level of development between China and the African states (Ofodile 2013). In addition, the China-Africa BITs say nothing about development, either in preambles or substance which makes development a last priority after the repatriation of profits (Ofodile 2013).

While BITs may be acclaimed for accelerating FDI, statistical information is not in favour of the African underdogs (Ofodile 2013). In East Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania recently adjusted its arbitration laws on dispute resolution. The call for such changes came as a result of Tanzania's failure in arbitration cases with its foreign counterparts. Tanzania demanded amendments to the Natural Wealth Resources (Permanent Sovereignty Act) (Natural Wealth Resources [Permanent Sovereignty Act]: Preamble). The gist of the amended section requires that all disputes involving natural resources be adjudicated in Tanzania using Tanzania laws (Natural Wealth and Resources [Permanent Sovereignty] Act 2017 Preamble & Section 11).

Theorising African agency: Concepts, contexts and contention

The agency level in African international relations represents the capacity for African actors to exert influence and make autonomous decisions in their interactions with global powers. This concept is rooted in the idea that African states and institutions can shape their destinies and are not merely passive recipients of external policies (Landsberg 2018). African agency manifests in various forms, including diplomatic negotiations, economic partnerships and cultural exchanges. The AU's Agenda 2063 serves as a prime example of collective agency, outlining a vision for 'an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and

representing a dynamic force in the global arena' (African Union 2015: 2). This framework provides a foundation for African states to align their national interests with continental aspirations, potentially strengthening their position in global affairs.

Africa's role in a multipolar world: Positioning, potential and power dynamics

RECs in Africa have increasingly sought to align their strategic goals with their engagements with global powers, recognising the potential for mutually beneficial partnerships. The EAC, for instance, has prioritised infrastructure development and regional integration in its Vision 2050 (EAC 2016). This focus aligns closely with China's BRI, resulting in significant Chinese investment in East African infrastructure projects (Chatzky and McBride 2020). However, this alignment has also raised concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependence. Scholarship highlights the complex interplay between African development goals and Chinese geopolitical interests (Chatzky and McBride 2020), emphasising the need for RECs to maintain agency in these engagements. The EAC's experience underscores the importance of strategic alignment with global powers while safeguarding regional interests.

The regional initiatives have placed a strong emphasis on security and counterterrorism in its strategic plans, aligning with the interests of Western powers, particularly France and the USA (SADC 2013). The regional Counterterrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan, adopted in 2013, has attracted significant support from these global powers. This alignment has resulted in increased military cooperation, intelligence sharing and capacity building initiatives. However, critics argue that this focus on security has sometimes come at the expense of other developmental priorities. The heavy involvement of external powers in regional security affairs risks undermining regional autonomy in addressing local conflicts. This situation highlights the delicate balance RECs must strike between leveraging global power support and maintaining their agency in regional affairs.

The SADC has adopted a more cautious approach to aligning its goals

with global power engagement. The SADC Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2015–2063 emphasises the need for value addition and beneficiation of the region's natural resources (SADC 2013). This goal aligns with the interests of various global powers seeking access to Southern Africa's mineral wealth. The SADC, however, has been more assertive in demanding technology transfer and local content requirements in its engagements with global powers. This approach reflects a growing awareness among SADC member states of the need to maximise developmental benefits from global power engagements. The SADC's strategy demonstrates how RECs can align their goals with global power interests while actively shaping the terms of engagement to suit regional priorities.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) focussed on trade facilitation and market integration in its strategic plans, aligning closely with the EUs development cooperation priorities (COMESA 2024). The COMESA–EAC–SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area, launched in 2015, has received significant support from the EU through its External Investment Plan (COMESA 2024). This alignment has facilitated increased trade flows and investment between Europe and Eastern and Southern Africa.

However, challenges remain in ensuring that these trade arrangements contribute effectively to regional industrialisation goals. Scholarship highlights the need for COMESA to develop strategies that balance trade liberalisation with the protection of nascent regional industries (COMESA 2024). The COMESA case illustrates how RECs can leverage alignments with global powers to advance regional integration while navigating the complexities of global trade dynamics.

Africa and big conferences: Is the future of Africa in promising hands?

Africa is termed as the Global South and one of the least developed countries is found in Africa. The fact that Africa fell back in terms of development does not necessarily mean that Africa is isolated internationally. The big powers have an interest in Africa and its resources

and Africa has, on many occasions, been invited to join the big summit where together with other developed countries its interests are brought to the table. Scholarship looks at this form of inclusion as a new form of world diplomacy that has created a new scramble for Africa (Ngwa 2021).

The framework for Africa's partnership with the rest of the world has been defined in three distinct forms (Ngwa 2021). The first form involves continent-to-continent partnership (Africa–Europe, Africa–Asia and Africa–South America), the second involves Africa and individual states, and the third involves Africa–institutional partnership. This involves institutions like the Commonwealth, the Group of 77 (G77) and the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) (Ngwa 2021). The active membership of these three forms of partnership has been defined through attendance and agency to big summits.

Though Africa's partnership is defined in three forms, the new dimension in Africa has taken a new synergy and amplified Africa-state partnership sideling the old riddles of Africa-continent Partnership (Ngwa 2021). This section of the study will analyse the three forms of partnership weighing what is available for Africa and the Africans. This will be done through analysis of the agendas discussed in summits, agency and bargaining power on the side of the Africans.

Africa-states partnership

Russia

The Russia–Africa Summit represents a contemporary diplomatic model revealing renewed engagement by the Russian Federation with African states. Africa approached the summit with concerns over rising fuel and grain prices following the Russia–Ukraine war. The summit, held in St. Petersburg, generated significant geopolitical speculation (Bilban and Hainzl 2023).

Russia's re-engagement with Africa has centred on security cooperation, energy partnerships and natural resource extraction. The first Russia–Africa Summit in 2019 signalled Moscow's revived strategic

interest in the continent. Russia's approach often involves leveraging military and technical expertise, offering security assistance to states facing internal conflict or terrorism (Council on Foreign Relations 2023).

Several analyses describe the 2023 summit as occurring at a time when Russia faced international isolation following its invasion of Ukraine, having strained relations with Western allies (Bilban and Hainzl 2023). Convening the summit was viewed as a strategic move to demonstrate that Russia retained strong partnerships in the Global South. While Russia sought to reinforce its diplomatic standing in international politics, African states were primarily concerned with stabilising grain and fuel prices amid global supply disruptions (The Kampala G77 and Non-Aligned Movement Summits 2024). The summit also provided an opportunity for African leaders who were politically distanced from Western partners to strengthen ties with Russia and explore alternative partnershipsShifts in geopolitical alignment often reflect survival strategies in international politics, particularly for states facing reduced Western aid (Miholjcic 2020:3).

Whether the summit fully represented African interests remains subject to debate, especially given the broader political tensions affecting both Russia and certain African states. Observers argue that the 2023 Russia–Africa Summit appeared politically advantageous to Russia, rather than reflecting a balanced platform of mutual benefit (Bilban and Hainzl 2023).

Russia's growing political presence in Africa has also exposed African states to geopolitical competition between major powers, particularly between Moscow and Washington (Council on Foreign Relations 2023). The broader political environment illustrates how Africa may become entangled in strategic rivalries. While Western states have supported Ukraine, several African states have maintained relations with Russia, partly influenced by concerns over energy supply security.

South-Korea

South Korea is among the Asian states that have consistently engaged

with the Global South through diplomatic and development initiatives. In 2024, South Korea convened a summit with African states to deliberate on African development priorities (Joint Declaration 2024).

At the summit, both parties acknowledged Africa's agenda of building a sustainable economy through the establishment of a free trade area. It was noted that free trade arrangements have been instrumental in achieving economic development in many industrialised states (Joint Declaration 2024). The Korean side reaffirmed its commitment to implementing relevant UN Security Council resolutions, underscoring its alignment with international governance frameworks (Joint Declaration 2024).

Recognising that Africa has one of the youngest populations globally, education was identified as central to long-term development. The discussions covered 21 agenda points focussing on development, education, solidarity and strengthened cooperation between Korea and African states (Joint Declaration 2024).

South Korea expressed its intention to expand Official Development Assistance (ODA), pledging up to US$ 10 billion by 2032. The Korean government further committed to periodic review and implementation of the summit's undertakings, reflecting a structured and forward-looking partnership approach (Joint Declaration 2024).

Africa-institution partnership

NAM and G77 (Kampala)

NAM was founded by several third-world countries. The world was surrounded by the rivalry of two great powers, the USA and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the Global South never aligned with any of the powers. Their first summit (Bandung Conference) was held in 1961 in Italy, and the agenda was to overcome the forces of colonialism and poverty (Miholjcic 2020).

The NAM and G77 have recently been merged to be held at the same time, and recently the summit was held in Kampala, Uganda. The NAM is made up of 120 members, and the G77 has a membership of 134 member

states. Uganda, a host being a partner of the EAC, comes with many opportunities for the region, which has recently been a destination for investors. The agendas in the summit looked at the development of the global south economically, through investment and elimination of trade barriers for their goods to foreign markets (Miholjcic 2020).

The merger of two summits comes with a problem of overlapping membership, and many of these states are at different levels of development. This makes it difficult for states to discuss agendas that suit a common goal. That is to say Burundi with a purchase power parity of US$ 708 in the same summit with the People's Republic of China. NAM, which is currently made up of many countries from the Global South, is not attached to any of the Global powers. It neither falls under the East nor the West, which are the most developed parts of the world. This makes NAM fall under a new category known as non-alignment (Miholjcic 2020).

Another disadvantage of belonging to NAM is that it has no formal institutions, such as a secretariat or constitution. This is challenging on the part of agendas, since they will shift depending on the course of international politics at a time and not states' needs, as the case may be (Miholjcic 2020: 46).

BRICS

BRICS is one of the internationally recognised summits that stand to boost the development of its member states economically, socially and politically. BRICS is such an important league as far as trade is concerned among its member states and is made up of 42 per cent of the world population and 28 per cent of the global GDP. It represents two types of economy: the developed states of China, Russia, Brazil and India, and then there is South Africa, which is developing (Branco 2015).

BRICS has been acclaimed for the major role played in the world economy and steady fast growth. The South African side has greatly gained from its membership to BRICS, having a vast market to export its goods and economic assistance in case of financial loans and techno-

logical development. While Brazil, Russia and South Africa are global natural resource importers, China is a global importer of natural resources, making the market readily available for all the players (Branco 2015).

BRICS is made up of Russia, Brazil, India, China and South Africa. The last summit of its kind was held in South Africa and was mainly staged on how best sustainable development can be accelerated among member states of the summit. The summit looked at the interests of both the African side (South Africa) and other member states, all promising to defend the interests of all members (Government of South Africa 2023).

The agendas aimed at the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the support for reforms in the UN organisation to make it more democratic, effective, and efficient, support for non-discriminatory rules of the multilateral trading system, progress towards market-oriented agriculture, peace and development, partnership for mutually accelerated growth, and sustainable development (Government of South Africa 2023). In addition, the summit called for institutional development that embraces changes and is abreast with time, while deepening people-to-people exchanges (Branco 2015).

The nature of the agenda discussed in the 2023 summit was mostly general in scope, applying to situations in all member states. However, the fact that South Africa and Brazil export agricultural produce to the BRICS countries, the discussion on the development of agriculture to become market-driven is likely to boost the economy of the two states. Evidence may prove that South Africa is in a league of states where its existence makes the country vulnerable to dumping and flooding of foreign goods more than any of the other four members. With its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as low as 2 per cent of the BRICS GDP, South Africa serves more as a consumer, and its contribution enriches the already developed states. South Africa's consumption by percentage makes up to 70 per cent, making other group members benefit from its presence more than what it gains from the group (Branco 2015).

Balancing national, regional and continental interests: Charting Africa's path to sustainable development

Africa has been left in arrears whenever states have been called up to negotiate both political and investment agreements. A figure of agreements that African leaders have signed on behalf of their respective countries does not reflect Pan-Africanism. Most of these agreements are backed by corruption and selfishness on the part of the leaders. A good example of these agreements are investment treaties between African states and foreign investors, which simply give the green light to the investors and their investment, while there is little to benefit the host state (Ofodile 2013).

Various scholars have made it clear that the nature of trade agreements between African states and the big powers are contracts of a nature that, if signed between a developed and a developing country, do not yield the desired outcomes. In such agreements, African states gain little due to the technicalities intentionally lined to backslide the underdogs (Ofodile 2013).

Like the rest of the regional arrangements, since independence, Africa has worked on several reforms trying to devise what is best for the continent through policies and agendas. The African continent has set several aspirations and goals whose time frame and completion are expected to be 2063. The aspirations paint a picture of how the African continent would look in 2063, requiring much effort and commitment from the African states, stakeholders and organisations (AU 2015).

Africans wish to see a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Inclusive growth demands visionary leaders, and African states stand as key players in the development of the continent based on the ideals of pan-Africanism. However, the continued partnerships with the outside world have increased players in the form of development partners who are less concerned about the aspirations of the African continent (AU 2015).

The aspirations for the creation of a strong, resilient and influential global player and partner requires strong institutions and self-realisation

to achieve such a milestone. The African Statistical Yearbook of 2021 shows that the money supply in Africa is mainly loans from foreign states (African Statistical Yearbook 2021). The statistical information is a sign that Africa has not yet shown signs of self-sustenance, a factor which frustrates the aspirations set in Agenda 2063. If Africa is to achieve its set goals and aspirations, states should learn to build self-reliant economies that will not need much from external borrowing.

Recommendations

Africa must prioritise the development of science and technology as a strategic tool to reduce dependence on raw material exports and to manage unforeseen crises. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the continent's vulnerability when technological capacity is insufficient, disrupting trade, social services and development programmes. Achieving the aspirations of Agenda 2063 requires that technological advancement be central to national and regional development strategies. Investments in research, innovation and digital infrastructure will enable African states to address crises proactively and assert control over their economic and social destinies.

The EAC should transition from dependency on external actors toward building self-sustaining institutions. Africa's development trajectory must align with the principles of Agenda 2063, emphasising integration, autonomy and the minimisation of external interference. Initiatives such as "One People, One Destiny" and "Africa First" must be operationalised through concrete policies that reinforce African ownership of development plans. Foreign participation should be structured to support, not undermine, the continent's strategic objectives.

Regional security must be African-led and coordinated to reduce reliance on external forces. The EAC, in collaboration with other African entities, should strengthen regional mechanisms capable of addressing transnational threats. Existing initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the African Standby Force (ASF), demonstrate the potential for African-led security solutions, however, face challenges including limited

resources, uneven political will and diverging national priorities. A sustainable security framework must safeguard African strategic interests while strategically leveraging external partnerships only where necessary.

Technological development in cybersecurity is a critical component of both national and regional resilience. As African economies and governance systems digitise, the threat landscape expands, making robust cybersecurity measures essential. The AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention 2014) provides a continental framework for addressing cyber threats. International partnerships, such as collaborations with Estonia in e-governance and cybersecurity, offer opportunities for knowledge transfer, capacity building and the development of African-led digital solutions.

Africa must also exercise stringent control over the importation of arms, balancing the need for military capability with the imperative of reducing conflict and protecting development priorities. While arms imports can strengthen defence capacity, they also risk perpetuating instability and diverting resources from socio-economic development. Between 2011–2015 and 2016–2020, arms imports by African states decreased by 13 per cent, yet significant regional disparities remain (SIPRI 2021). The AU's "Silencing the Guns" initiative aims to eliminate armed conflicts by 2030, underscoring the necessity of a coordinated approach to conflict resolution, arms regulation and sustainable security solutions.

In summary, Africa's path toward Agenda 2063 requires a decisive shift toward self-reliance, innovation and African-led solutions. By investing in science and technology, strengthening regional institutions, asserting control over security and arms policy and fostering sustainable cybersecurity capabilities, the continent can reduce dependency on external actors, safeguard its autonomy and realise its long-term developmental ambitions.

References

Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the

United Republic of Tanzania for the Promotion and Protection of Investments. 1994. Signed 7 January 1994, entered into force 16 March 1996. London: UK Treaty Series.

African Agency Towards Global Powers. 2024. *The Kampala G77 and Non-Aligned Movement Summits: African agenda perspectives.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.africa-usforum.africa/the-kampala-g77-and-non-aligned-movement-summits-african-agenda-perspectives/* (Accessed 18 September 2024).

African Centre for Strategic Studies. 2022. *Africa's contemporary security challenges*. [Online]. Available at: *https://africacenter.org* (Accessed 19 September 2024).

African Development Bank. 2014. *African development report 2014: Regional integration for inclusive growth.* ECDPM. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/ADR14_ENGLISH_web.pdf* (Accessed 19 September 2024).

African growth and opportunity Act (AGOA). 2000. Public Law 106-200. United States Congress. (Signed into law on 18 May 2000).

African Development Bank Group. 2021. *African Statistical Yearbook*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-statistical-yearbook-2021*. (Accessed 17 September 2024).

African African Union (AU). 2014. African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention). Adopted in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 27 June 2014.

— — —. 2014. African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention). Adopted 27 June 2014, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

— — —. 2015. *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. [Online]. Available at: *https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview* (Accessed 16 September 2024).

— — —. 2015. *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. African Union Commission*. [Online]. *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_e_version.pdf* (Accessed 15 September 2024).

— — —. 2015. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (Popular version). African Union Commission. [Online] *https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_e_version.pdf* (Accessed 13 September 2024).

— — —. 2023. *Communique: Quadripartite summit of the East African community, economic community of Central African states, international conference on the great lake region and Southern African development community, under the auspices of the African Union. Luanda, Angola*. [Online]. Available at: *https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230627/quadripartite-summit-east-african-community-economic-community-central* (Accessed 15 September 2024).

Anami, I. 2022. EAC in crisis once again as funding model splits partner states. *The EastAfrican*. [Online]. Available: www.theeastafrican.co.ke (Accessed 16 August 2024).

Aspen Institute. 2011. *Press release: EAC and China sign framework agreement to boost trade, investment.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/images/ghd/China_EAC_Press_Release_11.17.2011.pdf* (Accessed 13 August 2024).

Babic, D. 2019. East Africa region amid China-U.S. tensions: Threats and opportunities. *The Review of International Affairs,* 70(1175): 69–88.

Bachmann, V. 2013. The EU as a geopolitical and development actor: Views from East Africa. *L'Espace Politique*, 19. 10.4000/espacepolitique.2561

BBC. 2013. DRC Congo: cursed by its natural wealth. *BBC News*. [Online]. Available: *https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24396390* (Accessed 14 August 2024).

Bilban, C. and Hainzl, G. 2023. The 2023 Russia-Africa summit in St Petersburg. *IFK Monitor International*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.bmlv.gv.at/wissen-forschung/publikationen/beitrag.php?id=3687* (Accessed 13 August 2024).

Bilateral Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania for the Promotion and Protection of

Investments. 1994. Signed 7 January 1994, entered into force 16 March 1996. London: UK Treaty Series.

Branco, R.C. 2015. *The BRICS: some of historical experiences, growth challenges and opportunities*. [Online]. Available at: *https://repositorio.fgv.br/server/api/core/bitstreams/4596185e-bb28-4fcc-917a-db53f33ed788/content* (Accessed 14 August 2024).

Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. 2022. *China's belt and road initiative: Sustainability in the new Silk Road*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/files/chinas_belt_and_road_initiative090622_en.pdf* (Accessed 13 August 2024).

Chatzky, A. and McBride, J. 2020. China's massive belt and road initiative. *Council on Foreign Relations*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative* (Accessed 15 August 2024).

COMESA. 2024. *Trade facilitation and market integration strategic plans*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.comesa.int/report-on-the-comesa-trade-facilitation-programme/* (Accessed 15 September 2024).

Council on Foreign Relations. 2023. *Russia's growing footprint in Africa*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/russias-growing-footprint-africa* (Accessed 19 September 2024).

East African Community. N.d. *African growth and opportunity Act*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eac.int/agoa* (Accessed on 11 August 2024).

— — —. 1991. *Treaty establishing the African economic community*. [Online]. Available at: *https://au.int/en/treaties/treaty-establishing-african-economic-community* (Accessed 10 August 2024).

— — —. 1999. *Treaty for the establishment of the East African community*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eala.org/uploads/The_Treaty_for_the_Establishment_of_the_East_Africa_Community_2006_1999.pdf* (Accessed 12 August 2024).

— — —. 1999. *Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eac.int/eac-history* (Accessed 9 August 2024).

— — —. 2000. *Protocol on Foreign Policy Coordination*. [Online].

Available at: *https://africanlii.org/en/akn/aa-eac/act/protocol/2010/foreign-policy-coordination/eng@2010-12-03* (Accessed 18 August 2024).

— — —. 2013. *EAC Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Mechanism*. Arusha: EAC Secretariat.

— — —. 2016. *Vision 2050: Regional vision for socio-economic transformation and development.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.foreign.go.tz/uploads/eac_vision_2050-_web.pdf* (Accessed 14 August 2024).

— — —. 2016. East African Community Development Strategy 2016–2021. Arusha: EAC Secretariat.

— — —. 2018. *EAC Strategy on Regional Peace and Security*. Arusha: EAC Secretariat.

— — —. 2019. China gifts EAC 12 cars worth US$400,000 for capacity building programmes. *EAC Press Release.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eac.int/press-releases/150-infrastructure/1616-china-gifts-eac-12-cars-worth-us$400,000-for-capacity-building-programmes* (Accessed 17 August 2024).

— — —. 2024a. *EAC partner states.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eac.int/infrastructure/60-about-eac* (Accessed 19 September 2024).

— — —. 2024b. Investment incentives. [Online]. Available: *https://www.eac.int/investment-climate-and-incentives/investment-incentives* (Accessed 9 August 2024).

— — —. 2024a. *EAC-GIZ overview*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eacgermany.org* (Accessed 11 August 2024).

— — —. 2024b. *Digital skills for an innovative East African Industry (dSkills @EA)*. [Online]. Available at: www.GIZ.org (Accessed 18 August 2024).

East African Community (EAC) and GIZ. N.d. *Pandemic preparedness in the East African Community region.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2018-en-panprep-west-east-africa.pdf* (Accessed 30 August 2024).

European Union. 2022. EU reaffirms its commitment to support EAC in curbing trans-national crimes. EAC Press Release. [Online].

Available at: *https://eac.int/press-releases/154-peace-security/2356-eu-reaffirms-its-commitment-to-support-eac-in-curbing-trans-national-crimes* (Accessed 30 August 2024).

GIZ. 2024a. *Pandemic preparedness and prevention in the East African Community*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/120719.html* (Accessed 1 September 2024])

— — —. 2024b. *Promotion of peace and security in the East African Community (EAC)*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/15668.html* (Accessed 11 August 2024).

Government of South Africa. 2023. *15TH BRICS Summit Johannesburg II declaration: BRICS and Africa: Partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism*. Sandton, South Africa. 23 August.

Group of 77 (G77) and China. 2024. *Outcome Document of the Third South Summit (Kampala Summit)*. Kampala, Uganda.

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). 2018. *JICA country analysis paper for the Republic of Kenya.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.jica.go.jp/Resource/kenya/english/c8h0vm0000bky9ok-att/jcap_kenya.pdf*. (Accessed 10 August 2024).

Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2013. *Japan's official development assistance white paper 2013: Japan's international cooperation.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/page_000043.html* (Accessed 9 August 2024).

Joint Declaration (2024). *2024 Korea-Africa summit*. Seoul, Republic of Korea. 4 June 2024.

Kaguta, D. 2024. *Interview with author on East African Community peace and security*. [Online interview]. 16 September 2024.

Kife, H., Olukoshi, A.O. and Wohlgemuth, L. 1997. *A new partnership for African development: issues and parameters*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet,

Kragelund, P. 2010. *The potential role of non-traditional donors' aid in Africa*. International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development: Issue Paper No. 11.

Landsberg, C. 2018. *African diplomacy: regionalism and the African Union*. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg Press.

Mathuki, P. No Date. Interview by GIZ on the projects implemented by GIZ. [Transcript].

Mediation Agreement for the Disposition of Assets of the East African Community. (1984). Signed in Arusha, Tanzania, on 14 May 1984.

Mendez-Parra, M., Raga, S. and Sommer, L. 2020. Africa and the United Kingdom: Challenges and opportunities to expand UK investments. *ODI.* [Online]. Available at: *https://odi.org/en/publications/africa-and-the-united-kingdom-challenges-and-opportunities-to-expand-uk-investments/* (Accessed 10 August 2024).

Miholjcic, N. 2020. The non-aligned movement: In pursuit of validity and relevance in the contemporary global order. *Caucasus Strategic Perspectives*, 1(1).

Museveni, Y.K. 2024. *Speech at the opening of the East African games in Bukedea, Uganda*. 18 August.

Natural Wealth and Resources (Permanent Sovereignty) Act, 2017 (Act No. 5 of 2017). United Republic of Tanzania.

The Natural Wealth and Resources (Permanent Sovereignty) Act, 2017 (Act No. 5 of 2017). United Republic of Tanzania. Dar es Salaam: Government Printer.

Ngwa, N.R. 2021 (eds.). *Summit diplomacy: An emerging approach of Africa's strategic partnership.* Istanbul: Afrika Vakfi Yayinlari.

Ngwenya, S. and Lema, A. R. No Date. *China's role in regional integration in Africa: The case of the East African Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Non-Aligned Movement. 2024. *Kampala Summit Declaration*. 19th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kampala, Uganda.

Office of the United States Trade Representative. 2024. *2024 Biennial report on the implementation of the African growth and opportunity Act.* [Online]. Available at: *https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2024/june/ustr-releases-2024-biennial-report-implementation-african-growth-and-opportunity-act* (Accessed 20 August 2024).

Ofodile, U.E. 2013. Africa-China bilateral investment treaties: A critique.

Michigan Journal of International Law 35(1): 131–211.
SADC. 2013. SADC development plan and counterterrorism strategy.
Schiff, M. and Winters, A. 2012. *Regional cooperation, and the role of international organizations and regional integration*. World Bank policy research paper 2872.
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). 2021. Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020. SIPRI Fact Sheet.
Taylor, I. 2009. *China's new role in Africa*. New York: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
Terreblanche, S. 2011. *The exploitation of Africa and Africans by the Western world since 1500: A bird's eye view*.
Toghyani, A. and Arabahmadi, A. 2020. U.S. strategy toward Africa and Trump's rivalry competition: a neo-classical approach. *Journal of World Sociopolitical, Studies, Tehran*, 4(1): 177–212.
United Nations Charter. 1945. Signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945.
UNCTAD. 2004. *Bilateral investment treaty between Benin and China*. Dezan Shira & Associates.
United States Government. 2022. *Integrated country strategy: Democratic Republic of Congo*.
USAID/Kenya and East Africa. 2016. *East African regional development cooperation strategy 2016-2021*.
United Nation. 1961. *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations*.

CHAPTER 5

Economic Community of Central African States and African Agency Towards Global Powers

Gabriel Cyrille Nguijol
National Research Institute of Cartography, Cameroon

Introduction

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)[1] occupies a considered position within Africa's regional integration architecture. As one of the African Union's eight recognised Regional Economic Communities (RECs), ECCAS serves as a main platform through which Central African states pursue economic integration, peacebuilding, regional security, and international cooperation. Its engagement with external powers has become increasingly important in a global environment characterised by renewed geopolitical competition, shifting partnership dynamics, and growing demands for regional agency, as part of the Africanisation of "*African solutions to African problems*" (Muchie et al. 2016, Muritala et al. 2018).

Established through the Libreville Treaty of 1983, ECCAS emerged from earlier efforts to promote economic cooperation among Central African countries, building on the earlier Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC), created in 1964. Since then, the organisation has been required to foster political dialogue, facilitate regional integration, strengthen collective security mechanisms, and improve socioeconomic development across member states. Despite these ambitions, progress has often been constrained by persistent structural challenges, including political instability, armed conflicts, weak infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, and overlapping regional commitments.

Since the 1990s, ECCAS countries have invoked the importance of forging close economic cooperation and regional integration to enhance growth and development, overcome the barriers of political fragmentation and increase regional competitiveness with the rest of the world (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a).[2] In trying to reach these objectives, ECCAS member states are engaged in the construction of sub-regional mechanisms[3] based on the development of physical, monetary and economic integration. Most of these efforts have involved integrating national and regional priorities amid competing demands and expectations. Despite the broad consensus on the benefits of integration, there has been a mixed record of national commitments to external powers and institutions. Most ECCAS member countries have, thus, been greatly relying on these commitments to achieve not only their national objectives, but also the regional goals such as those set out in the regional Vision 2025 adopted in 2007.[4]

Over the last two decades, ECCAS has increasingly engaged with a diverse range of external actors, including the European Union, China, the United States, Russia, Türkiye, multilateral development banks, and United Nations agencies. These partnerships have provided important opportunities for investment, infrastructure development, security cooperation, and technical assistance. At the same time, they have raised important questions regarding dependency, bargaining power, and the capacity of Central African states to shape external engagements in ways that advance regional priorities.

This chapter examines how ECCAS navigates these relationships and assesses the extent to which the organisation contributes to strengthening African agency in engagements with global powers. Rather than portraying ECCAS merely as a recipient of external assistance, the chapter analyses the organisation as an evolving regional actor seeking to balance external partnerships with regional interests and long-term development goals.

The geographical and geopolitical context of central Africa

The study focusses on the ECCAS zone, a large geographical area stretching from the desert landscapes of Northern Chad to the tropical rainforests and mountainous regions in the equatorial part of Southern

Congo. This region encompasses a surface area of 6 667 017 square kilometres and a population estimated at 229.4 million in 2023. It is geographically positioned along the Atlantic Ocean, with the coastline extending 3 000 kilometres from its southwest boundary (Cilliers 2024). The region covers the equator and includes the Congo Basin, which is the second largest rainforest in the world, after the Amazon.

ECCAS occupies a pivotal position within Africa's geopolitical landscape, attributable to its considerable natural resource allocations, strategic geographical positioning and the complex interplay of internal and external dynamics. ECCAS is uniquely positioned as the only REC in Africa that shares borders with almost all other RECs, such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the West, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to the Northeast, the South African Development Community (SADC) to the South, the East African Community (EAC) to the East and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) through Chad and Libya. This central position places ECCAS at the crossroads of continental diplomacy, trade corridors and transnational security threats, while also complicating institutional coherence due to overlapping regional commitments. Many ECCAS member states (*Map 1*) hold dual or multiple memberships in other RECs, reflecting the challenge of regionalism: Cameroon; Chad; Central African Republic; Congo; Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are also affiliated with *Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale* (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) (CEMAC). The Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi are both members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and ECCAS, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) additionally engaged in the SADC. Rwanda and Burundi are allied with the EAC. Chad belongs to the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and initiatives focussing on the Sahel (G5 Sahel). These overlapping affiliations, while offering diplomatic flexibility, frequently lead to fragmentation, duplication of resources and conflicting duties, hindering the prospects for unified economic integration and cohesive security strategies as well as sustainable development in a region with huge reserves of hydrocarbons and various minerals, such as diamond, gold, cobalt, copper and iron.

ECCAS member states collectively possess approximately 31.3 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves located notably in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the DRC, and accounting for about 28 per cent of Africa's reserve (ISS African Futures 2024; UN Trade and Development [UNCTAD] 2023). North Africa leads with an estimated 64 billion barrels, representing roughly 51 per cent of Africa's total reserves. West Africa follows with approximately 38 billion barrels, making up about 30 per cent of the continent's reserves. According to Williams (2025), Central Africa, with its Congo Basin, is the world's second-largest rainforest after the Amazon, playing a crucial role in global carbon sequestration. The region is also, through the DRC the leading global producer of cobalt and copper (essential minerals for modern technologies and the green energy transition) in the world with approximately 220 000 metric tons produced for the DRC only in 2024, before countries like Indonesia with around 28 000 metric tons, Russia 8 700 metric tons and Canada with 4 500 metric tons (to name a few) the same year. ECCAS also appears to be the continent's fifth biggest water reservoir, which gives it the highest hydroelectricity potential in the region. The Inga Dams comprised two single dams: the Inga 1 (351 MW) and Inga II (1 424 MW) are located in the DRC, with the capacity of 1 775 MW, behind the Gilgel Gibe III Dam (1 870 MW) in Ethiopia, Cahora Basa Dam (2 070 MW) in Mozambique or the Aswan High dam (2 100 MW) in Egypt. The region is characterised by a varied climate, vegetation and population density, and policymaking and informal rules of politics appear quite prominent in a vast territory bigger than the EU (Mehlu 2019). These resources position ECCAS as a key player in global markets, particularly concerning energy and environmental sustainability.

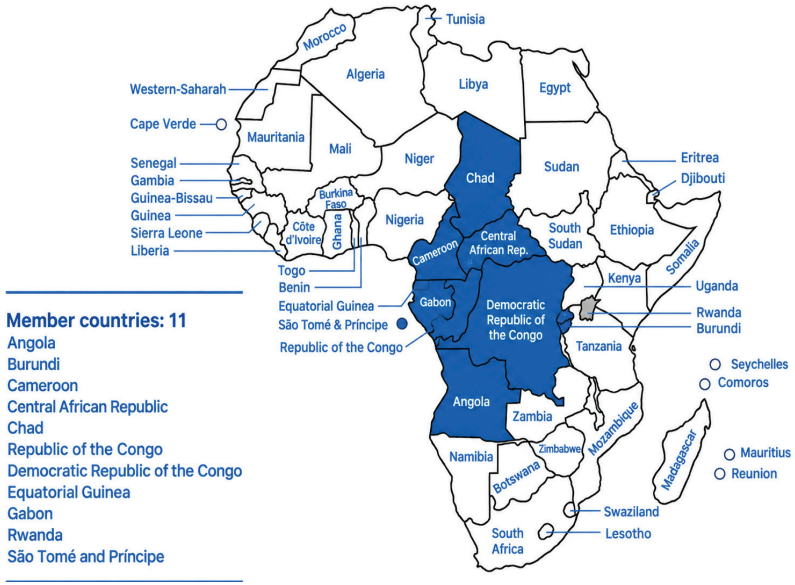


Figure 5.1: Map of Africa representing ECCAS countries. Source: 1st Fiduciary (2022: 1).

The main regional institutions are the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC, the successor to UDEAC), ECCAS, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Chad and the Central African Republic are also members of CEN-SAD. CEMAC's six member countries form a customs union and have a common currency (CFA franc) and a macroeconomic policy convergence mechanism. Burundi and Rwanda are active in the EAC, Angola and the DRC are also members of the SADC and Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda are members of the COMESA. CEMAC and ECCAS resolved to harmonise at the 13th Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government, held in Brazzaville in October 2007. Thus, a rationalised piloting committee (the *Comité de pilotage de la rationalisation des communautés économiques régionales en Afrique Centrale (COPIL/CER-AC))* was established that includes representatives of CEMAC, ECCAS, the AU, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the African Development Bank (African Development Bank 2019a). ECCAS has

since initiated an internal reform process with a view to becoming more efficient and better able to fulfil its missions.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative research design combining documentary analysis with semi-structured expert interviews. Primary data were collected during an online field mission in Libreville, Gabon, where few interviews were undertaken with senior officials, technical experts, and representatives of relevant departments facilitated by Mrs Rachel Mbako, Cooperation and Resource Management Director of ECCAS. These interviews provided valuable insights into ECCAS's institutional priorities, engagement strategies, and perceptions of relations with external powers.

Secondary data were drawn from official ECCAS documents, African Union publications, policy reports, academic literature, development partner assessments, and international databases. The triangulation of interview evidence and documentary sources enabled a comprehensive assessment of ECCAS's external engagements across political, economic, security, and development dimensions. In particular, it looks at ECCAS' foreign policy structures and approaches to engagement with external powers. Five elements of ECCAS's engagement are especially considered: (1) ECCAS's strategic plan, foreign policy, and engagement with global powers; (2) political and governance engagements; (3) communication and media perspective; (4) civil society organisations; (5) opportunities and recommendations. Beside assessing the progress made towards putting these instruments into operation, the report discusses problems and challenges that currently hamper and limit ECCAS's performance across all fields.

Globally, this chapter is part of a series of studies on the existing and emerging abilities of African agency towards global, or key external powers, conducted within the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), in its project on '*African Agency Toward Global Powers',* aiming at mapping the continent's engagement with external powers. Specific deliverables for this assignment are a mapping and scoping report

which provides an inventory of ECCAS's engagement with main global powers; a summary of various strategies and processes; a synthesis of approaches and methodologies used; a synthesis of lessons learnt in terms of successes and failures *vis-à-vis* economic development and investments in areas of activity which an overarching framework and programmes.

This multidimensional approach facilitates a holistic understanding of how ECCAS positions itself within an increasingly competitive international environment.

Overview of ECCAS's strategic plan, foreign policy and engagement with global powers

This section examines the experiences of ECCAS towards engagement with external powers, highlighting the key strategies, policy actions, as well as opportunities and challenges. In examining their historical background, engagements and performances, the analysis aims to enhance Africa's approach to, and engagement with these powers.

ECCAS's strategic plan

ECCAS has recently developed a comprehensive strategy document that falls under its Strategic Plan (SP) for 2021-2025. Before the SP, its regional development agenda was under its founding Treaty, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the "Recovery and Revitalisation Programme" adopted by Heads of States and Governments in 1999 in Malabo, after the decision to reactivate ECCAS taken in February 1998 in Libreville, Gabon. The recent SP appears in a context marked by the ECCAS's determination to promote cooperation and strengthen regional integration in all areas of political, security, economic, monetary, financial, social, cultural, scientific and technical activity, with a view to achieving collective autonomy, raising people's standard of living, increasing and maintaining economic stability, strengthening and preserving close peaceful relations between its member states and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021). The ECCAS's SP is structured around the

vision of living "a common future, in an environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, the growing improvement of living conditions of freedom and justice" (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021). The SP addresses six priority areas which are as per the below.

Political integration, peace and security are considered as prerequisites for the region to achieve its integration that generates harmonious socio-economic development. Within the period 2021–2025, political integration for peace and security in the region aims to facilitate legislative and institutional convergence in political governance between member states and harmonise their positions on political issues and in international forums, with a view of making the ECCAS region as an area of peace and stability.

Economic and financial integration aims to promote the harmonious socio-economic development of the region through a process of economic integration, the establishment of a common market and the free movement of goods, capital and services.

Environmental integration, agriculture and rural development, aims to preserve living conditions for future generations in order to guarantee sustainable development, increase productivity and competitiveness significantly and sustainably to ensure food security and access to regional and international markets.

Regional physical integration aims to strengthen the link that materialises the sense of common space, gives concrete form to the establishment of the common market in the regional space and guarantees the free movement of people, goods and services.

Human and social integration of the member states of Central Africa is to create conditions aimed at eliminating poverty in all its forms, ensuring that every citizen can live in good health, have equitable access to quality education and acquire technical, scientific and cultural knowledge in an environment where gender equality and equity are ensured. Within this framework, social and human integration is being developed along eight strategic areas, including: (1) health; (2) social affairs; (3) culture; (4) employment; (5) sport; (6) gender; (7) education, training, science, technology and innovation; (8) youth.

Institutional reform is the last area that aims to set up other ECCAS's bodies, institutions and mechanisms, as well as the revision of the legal and regulatory framework of ECCAS in the light of changes in the continental and international context and the mandate of ECCAS as a pillar of the AU and international context as well as ECCAS's mandate as a pillar of the AU within the framework of African integration.

Importantly, this strategic plan is based, among other things, on the mobilization of resources from its development, strategic and financial partners (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021).

ECCAS's foreign policy agenda and instruments

ECCAS's foreign policy outlines the vital areas in which it intends to explore its relations with the outside world. Its key approach is promoting and diversifying partnerships, and seeking financing to support the socio-economic development of its member states based on certain pilot sectors, notably agro-industry, infrastructure and energy. Since launching its activities in 1985, ECCAS has been engaging with global powers by promoting and achieving harmonious cooperation, balanced and self-reliant development in all areas of economic and social activity, with a view to achieving economic stability and contributing towards the progress and development of the African continent (ECCAS Treaty 1983). Since 2000, this goal has been extended to the promotion of peace and security. According to Article 106 of the Revised ECCAS Treaty (2019: 57), the Community shall maintain a common position with other international organisations and external partners in support of its regional integration objectives.

ECCAS's foreign policy agenda

ECCAS's founding treaty pledges member states to develop regional integration across political, security, economic and social fields. Its long-standing framework, adopted as Vision 2025 in 2007, envisages "*a common future, in an environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, [and] improving living conditions of citizens,*

freedom and justice" (Vision 2025: 12). Practically, heads of states and governments have defined six essential pillars for integration: political/peace; economic/financial integration; infrastructure; environmental initiatives; social development and institutional reforms, to actualise this aspirational vision. The strategic plan for 2016-2025, also referred to as Vision 2025, alongside subsequent Medium-Term Plan (PSIMT 2021-2025), reaffirms these objectives. As such, ECCAS endeavours to form a comprehensive common market characterised by the free movement of goods, services and people, ultimately leading to a customs union and a unified external tariff. In its foreign policy agenda, ECCAS maintains a multipronged foreign policy of diversifying partnerships (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a). This acknowledgement highlights the importance of creating and promoting relationships beyond its immediate borders in sectors including:

- *Foreign Direct Investment*: Between 2020 and 2024, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) trends in Africa, especially within the ECCAS region, highlighted global unpredictability and regional imbalances. After a steep decline due to COVID-19 in 2020, FDI in Africa bounced back to around US$ 80 billion in 2021, with countries like Angola and the DRC within the ECCAS area seeing moderate benefits. However, this recovery was short-lived; in 2022, FDI plummeted to US$ 45 billion, with ECCAS countries experiencing stagnant or decreasing inflows. Angola even faced net outflows, and the DRC remained steady at US$ 1.8 billion. Conversely, ECOWAS and SADC nations performed better. By 2023, although African FDI as a whole stabilised at US$ 53 billion, Central Africa suffered another 17 per cent drop in inflows. Early figures for 2024 show an impressive 84 per cent increase across the continent to US$ 94 billion, largely driven by a project in Egypt; even without it, Africa experienced a 23 per cent boost. Specific data for the ECCAS region in 2024 are sparse; however, preliminary signs indicate only a slight recovery, falling behind West and Southern Africa in attracting enduring FDI growth

(UNCTAD 2023), where ECCAS member states prioritise securing FDI for infrastructure development. For instance, the region has attracted about US$ 306.5 billion in 2023 (UNCTAD 2022); while in 2021, China invested over US$ 2.6 billion in infrastructure projects in the Republic of Congo, approximately US$ 2.64 billion in Angola, US$ 4.3 billion in Gabon, more than US$ 240 million for Equatorial Guinea, approximately US$ 98 million for Chad and more than US$ 56 million concessional loan for the Bugesera International Airport Road project in Rwanda. These investments included the construction of highways, airports and energy facilities (AIDDATA 2021).

- *Peace and Security:* ECCAS collaborates with global powers to stabilise conflict zones, particularly in countries like the Central African Republic (CAR) and the DRC. These external powers have, thus, been playing a significant role in shaping peace and security dynamics in the region, particularly in the conflict-ridden areas such as Eastern DRC, where the UN peacekeeping mission, United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), has been a central actor that deployed an intervention brigade in 2013 to combat the M23 armed group. The EU has been contributing through activities such as the Security Sector Reforms (SSR) and training missions, while the SADC has provided regional support. Despite these external interventions, the region continues to grapple with instability, highlighting the complex interplay of local and international actors in its pursuit of lasting peace. In CAR, the UN peacekeeping mission United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) involves over 13 000 troops, with contributions from France, the US and the EU aimed at maintaining peace and supporting governance reforms.
- *Sustainable resource management:* ECCAS is focussed on ensuring that global powers engaging in resource extraction

(like China and France) adhere to sustainable practices. For example, Congo-Brazzaville renegotiated contracts with Chinese companies in 2020 to ensure more equitable sharing of oil revenues. Some Gulf states, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia, have significantly expanded their economic and diplomatic engagements in Central Africa in recent years, focussing on resource extraction, infrastructure development, and sustainability initiatives.

- *Regional integration and economic growth:* ECCAS has been actively pursuing a range of efforts to enhance regional integration and economic development. Though ECCAS did not negotiate a collective economic partnership agreement with the EU,[5] it has instead been working closely with international institutions, including the EU and World Bank, on initiatives to enhance economic cooperation and integration within Central Africa. In 2021, the EU allocated € 80 million to support ECCAS regional integration projects, including improving trade corridors and upgrading border infrastructure (European Commission 2022).

Qatar for instance, has initiated investments in Central African countries as a form of trade for their stance to diversify investment locations and explore new opportunities. It has, thus, recently emerged as a new major player in the region, allowing it to participate in political mediations in Chad, the DRC and Rwanda, where it actively developed ties since 2023, when the US announced the arrival of Rwandan opposition figure Paul Rusesabagina in Doha after Kagame had granted him amnesty, pardoning him from a 25-year prison sentence. Rusesabagina's release came as a result of a deal mediated by Qatar, by Emir Tamim personally, between the governments of the US and Rwanda (Yasser 2023). It also acquired a 49 per cent stake in RwandAir through Qatar Airways and invested with 60 per cent in a US$ 1.3 billion project in the construction of a new international airport near Kigali, aiming to establish a regional aviation hub. In the DRC, Qatar has shown interest in mining, communications and cybersecurity sectors, with high-level discussions between President

Tshisekedi and Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani emphasising the need for a favourable business climate to support these initiatives. These investments are part of Qatar's broader strategy to enhance connectivity and economic ties within Africa.

The UAE has also positioned itself as a major investor in the region, with significant investments in mining and infrastructure. For instance, a deal of about US$ 1.9 billion was signed with the DRC in 2023, following an agreement with firm Primera Group in 2022 on export rights for artisanal mined ores (Gower 2023). Also, UAE-based companies like DP World and AD Ports Group have secured concessions to develop and operate key seaports and inland ports across Africa, including in the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville, enhancing trade routes and logistics.

Globally, Gulf states are becoming influential partners in Central Africa, combining economic investments with strategic infrastructure projects. While these arrangements offer development opportunities, they also highlight the importance of sustainable and diversified partnerships to ensure long-term benefits for the region.

ECCAS foreign policy instruments

A range of instruments to achieve these goals, including diplomatic initiatives, economic policies, security measures, and environmental strategies. ECCAS countries use several diplomatic strategies to assert their interests globally, including:

- *Multilateral engagement:* Actively participating in international forums, for example, the UN, AU, Africa-France (held in Montpellier on 8 October 2021); Russia-Africa (participated in Russia-Africa summits, including the second summit held in St. Petersburg in July 2023, during which, ECCAS and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their partnership), BRICS Summits (participated in the fifteenth BRICS Summit hosted by South Africa from 22–24 August 2023, which brought together leaders from BRICS countries, along with representatives of RECs, including ECCAS). This

engagement aims to shape global agendas on trade, security and climate change. Though ECCAS does not negotiate directly at EU-Africa summits, its member states help shape the joint priorities set by the AU and the EU.

- *Strategic partnerships:* Forming alliances with global powers that align with their strategic interests (for example, China, EU, India for infrastructure development, France, the US, Russia for security cooperation) (Afreximbank 2023, 2024). The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between ECCAS and Russia on 28 July 2023, on the principles of cooperation between the two parties.
- *Advocacy and lobbyin*g: Engaging in targeted lobbying efforts to promote specific policy goals, such as debt relief, climate finance and fair-trade agreements (ECCAS Secretariat 2020).

Foreign policy decisions within ECCAS are formulated by the ECCAS Commission, guided by the Council of Ministers and approved by the Heads of State and Government Conference. These bodies set the overall direction and priorities for regional engagement with global powers.

Key decision-makers in foreign policy formulation include the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of member states, the ECCAS Commission, and Heads of State. Influencers include national governments, international organisations, civil society, and global partners (ECCAS Secretariat 2020). Most of its member states have exhibited impressive foreign policy activities in the areas of parliamentary diplomacy, agenda setting and programme formulation, affecting the region and the continental system. ECCAS has been collaborating with the EU on issues related to peace and security. For instance, in March 2021, senior officials from the EU, AU, UN and ECCAS conducted a virtual meeting with the President of the CAR, Touadéra, to examine the political circumstances and peace initiatives in the country. For instance, ECCAS, through its headquarters in Libreville, has accredited Türkiye's embassy since 2013. This diplomatic relationship aims to facilitate cooperation in areas such as infrastructure development and education, contributing to ECCAS's regional integration efforts.

Global powers figuring in ECCAS's foreign policy plans

Alongside the implementation of measures to strengthen development mechanisms, ECCAS indicates in Article 106 of its revised Treaty signed in 2019 that the "*institution could increase its financial sustainability through greater mobilisation of resources from multilateral co-operation with various external powers*". This is a need that the ECCAS seems to have taken into account when formulating its Medium-Term Indicative Strategic Plan (2021-2025). The Plan clearly states the necessity for ECCAS to engage with key external development partners (point 5.2 of the Plan). These strategic partners were to be determined by the commission.

However, key external actors operating in the region are mainly identified within the *group of ECCAS's friends* made up of about eleven countries: the *US*, Russia, Japan, China, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco; and five representatives of international organisations: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the AU and the EU. Other organisations, such as the African Development Bank Group, the World Bank, and the UN specialised agencies, are also counted among the main external actors that operate in Central Africa's regional development and integration processes. All these external actors engage with the community's development projects through mechanisms such as the Official Development Assistance (ODA), or the Compensation, Cooperation and Development Fund of ECCAS (FCCD-AC), that operate in different domains, including transport, energy, water, information and communication technologies, peace and security, environment, etc.

ECCAS sectoral policies and engagements

Politics and governance

ECCAS's political and governance structures are designed to foster cooperation among member states, manage regional conflicts and guide

economic development. In terms of politics and governance, the region is lagging, which weakens the effectiveness of institutions and reduces the impact of public policies on development.

Diplomatic and political engagements with global powers

The diplomatic strategies of ECCAS member states reveal a pragmatic approach to international engagement. Rather than relying on a single external partner, they increasingly diversify their diplomatic relations between traditional and emerging powers from the Global South. This diversification reflects both a search for development opportunities and an effort to reduce excessive dependence on any single partner.

At the regional level, ECCAS continues to face institutional limitations in projecting a unified diplomatic voice. Unlike organisations such as the EU, ECCAS does not maintain extensive diplomatic representation abroad and largely relies on the foreign ministries of member states to advance collective interests.

Table 5.1: Summarises the data on global powers' engagements with ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023, 2024); African Economic Outlook (2024); EU Commission (2022); USAID (2022); US Department of Commerce (2022); US Department of State (2021).

External Power	Focus Areas	Key Instruments/ Initiatives	Examples
EU	Governance reforms, economic development, trade, peace, security	Cotonou Agreement, European Development Fund (EDF), Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), European Peace Facility	- Governance reforms and electoral support in Cameroon, Chad, Gabon - Duty-free access to EU markets
China	Infrastructure development, resource extraction, debt diplomacy, cultural diplomacy	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), infrastructure financing, confucius institutes	- Infrastructure projects in the DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea - Confucius Institutes
US	Security cooperation, counterterrorism, trade, democratic governance, humanitarian aid	AFRICOM, Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), USAID	Counterterrorism operations in Chad, Cameroon, CAR - USAID support for civil society and healthcare

External Power	Focus Areas	Key Instruments/ Initiatives	Examples
Russia	Security and military cooperation, resource extraction, geopolitical influence	Private military contractors (for example, Wagner Group), mining concessions, Russia-Africa Summit	- Security support and mining concessions in CAR and the DRC - Military training in CAR
India	Development cooperation, trade, technology transfer, education	India-Africa Forum Summit, Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), pharmaceuticals, agribusiness	- Pharmaceutical exports to Cameroon, Chad, Congo - Scholarships and training programmes via ITEC
Brazil	South-South cooperation, agriculture, renewable energy, climate agenda	EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), renewable energy investments	- Biofuel production in the Congo - Agricultural productivity improvements in Cameroon
Turkey	Infrastructure development, trade, education, cultural diplomacy	Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit, bilateral trade agreements, educational scholarships, Turkish cultural centres	- Construction of airports, hospitals in Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea - Educational scholarships

The lack of a regional diplomatic strategy can be explained by the fact that many ECCAS member states are hesitant to delegate authority to the regional institution for negotiation on their behalf, due to concerns over institutional weakness and national sovereignty. Historical conflicts and mutual suspicions among some neighbouring countries (DRC vs

Rwanda) have fostered an environment where states prefer to manage external relations independently, fearing that collective agreements might compromise their autonomy or favour rival nations. The diplomatic relations between ECCAS and global powers may instead reveal a dynamic interplay of economic, security and geopolitical interests. The EU, China, US, Russia, India, Brazil and Turkey have each carved out strategic footholds in the region, driven by diverse agendas. While some powers focus on infrastructure development and trade, others prioritise security cooperation and natural resource extraction. ECCAS countries, in turn, benefit from the competition among these powers; however, they also face challenges related to governance, debt sustainability and foreign dependency. This evolving diplomatic landscape offers both opportunities and risks for Central Africa's development and regional integration efforts.

Table 5.2: Diplomatic representation of external powers in ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from countries' foreign affairs ministries websites (2024).

Country	France	China	US	Russia	EU	Turkey
Angola	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Burundi	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Cameroon	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
CAR	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	N/A
Chad	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Congo (Brazzaville)	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
DRC (Kinshasa)	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Equatorial Guinea	Embassy	Embassy	N/A	N/A	Delegation	Embassy
Gabon	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Rwanda	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
São Tomé and Príncipe	N/A	Embassy	N/A	N/A	Delegation	N/A

The table reveals varying levels of diplomatic presence among global powers in ECCAS countries. The EU and China lead with a presence in eleven countries, reflecting their extensive deployment. However, the distribution of diplomatic missions reflects each global power's strategic interests and priorities in ECCAS countries. France's extensive presence underscores its historical ties and ongoing influence in the region, particularly in former colonies. China's broad diplomatic reach is aligned with its BRI, emphasising economic investments and infrastructure development. The US's targeted presence in key countries highlights its focus on security and counterterrorism, while Russia's presence in the CAR illustrates its growing role in regional security and resource extraction. The EU's wide representation indicates a commitment to development and stability, while Turkey's expanding network reflects its increasing interest in economic and cultural diplomacy. The gaps in representation for the US and Russia in certain countries suggest varying levels of strategic interest and engagement.

São Tomé and Príncipe maintains diplomatic relations with several global powers, including China, France, the US and Turkey, highlighting its strategic interests and historical links. Nonetheless, not all nations have established embassies within the country. This can be attributable to São Tomé and Príncipe's small size, its limited economic influence and the high expenditures related to operating diplomatic missions. Consequently, many countries employ non-resident ambassadors or depend on regional embassies to handle diplomatic affairs, thus, balancing international engagement with financial limitations. This strategy enables nations to preserve essential diplomatic connections without incurring the expense of maintaining a comprehensive embassy presence.

ECCAS, however, does not possess independent diplomatic representations in major global powers such as France, China, the US, Russia, the EU or Turkey. Rather, ECCAS interacts with these powers predominantly via multilateral forums as noted above, and through the diplomatic channels of its member states. The lack of individual ECCAS diplomatic missions in major global capitals is primarily due to resource constraints and the organisation's current focus on regional integration and peace and security. Globally, ECCAS countries employ a multifaceted

diplomatic approach to navigate their international relations, reflecting their strategic priorities and regional needs (*Table 3*).

By forging strategic alliances and partnerships with major global powers such as China, the EU, and the US, ECCAS nations secure economic aid and development support crucial for their growth. Their multilateral engagements within organisations like the UN and AU enhance regional cooperation and stability, enabling them to address shared challenges collectively.

Table 5.3: Political strategies used by ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023, 2024); African Export-Import Bank (2024); EU Commission (2015, 2021, 2022, 2024); USAID (2020, 2022, 2023); US Department of Commerce (2022); US Department of State (2021).

Diplomatic Strategy	Countries Involved	Purpose	Examples
Strategic Alliances and Partnerships	China, EU, US, Russia	Economic aid, military support, development projects	Bilateral agreements with China for infrastructure development.
Multilateral Engagements	UN, AU, ECCAS	Joint initiatives, peacekeeping missions, policy coordination	ECCAS's involvement in AU-led peacekeeping operations.
Economic Engagement	Various global powers	Attracting foreign investment, trade deals, economic aid	Trade agreements with the EU, economic partnerships with the US.
Security and Military Cooperation	France, US, regional partners	Counter-terrorism, conflict resolution, military training	Security partnerships with France, military training programmes.

Diplomatic Strategy	Countries Involved	Purpose	Examples
Cultural and Educational Engagement	European countries, others	Strengthening ties through cultural and educational initiatives	Student exchange programmes, cultural diplomacy with European countries.

Table 3 above clearly provides an overview of the diplomatic strategies used by ECCAS countries, but also their objectives in engaging with external powers.ECCAS member countries have direct representation within the European Commission; however, they maintain diplomatic missions in the US, China and Russia. Specifically, each country has an embassy in Washington, D.C., Beijing and Moscow, reflecting a uniform diplomatic presence across these major global powers. The absence of direct EU representation for ECCAS member states highlights a lack of dedicated diplomatic presence within the European Commission, which may limit direct influence and engagement with EU policies and decision-making processes.

ECCAS countries and their objectives in engaging with external powers

Their economic diplomacy focuses on trade and investment to diversify economic dependencies and foster growth, while security and military cooperation with powers like France and the US address regional security threats and enhance defence capabilities. Additionally, cultural and educational diplomacy strengthens global ties through exchanges and mutual understanding. This comprehensive strategy not only aims to advance national interests but also to bolster regional cohesion and influence in the international arena, illustrating the nuanced and adaptive nature of their foreign policy. On 23 June 2015, ECCAS, together with CEMAC, signed the eleventh EDF Central African Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) with the EU in Brussels. This agreement allocated €327 million to endorse regional undertakings in three primary sectors: Political integration and collaboration in peace and security: €43 million;

economic integration and commerce, encompassing infrastructure advancement and backing for the EPA: € 211 million and sustainable stewardship of natural resources and biodiversity: € 88 million (EU 2024).

ECCAS is also engaged with the UN's Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to formulate the Master Plan for Industrialisation and Economic Diversification in Central Africa (PDIDE-AC), during the sixth COPIL/CER-AC Council of Ministers Meeting held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 6 -7 June 2024. This blueprint prioritises the creation of Advanced Special Economic Zones (NGSEZs) to enhance local value generation in industries including forestry, mineral extraction, agriculture-based manufacturing, as well as petroleum and natural gas. The endeavour seeks to transform the economies of the region by advancing industrial development and increasing trade within the region.

The eleven ECCAS member countries also have diplomatic representations in major external powers such as the US, China, and Russia; they underscore a strategic focus on maintaining direct diplomatic channels with these countries. This presence reflects a broader geopolitical strategy where ECCAS countries seek to establish and reinforce bilateral relations with key global powers. It suggests that these countries prioritise relationships with major international actors to enhance their geopolitical and economic interests, likely seeking support and partnerships beyond the EU framework. In contrast, smaller or less economically stable countries, such as São Tomé and Príncipe, may lack the means to establish and sustain embassies in all great powers' capitals. Instead, they often depend on non-resident diplomats or authorise their missions from embassies situated in adjacent countries.

However, as is the case for many countries inside and outside Africa, some ECCAS members that have their ambassadors in Belgium are also accredited to represent their country to the EU. This dual role is strategic and efficient, allowing the country to handle relations with Belgium and the EU from a single diplomatic base in Brussels. The Diplomatic List by the European External Action Service as of 2 May 2025, shows multiple ECCAS countries with ambassadors accredited to both Belgium and the EU: Cameroon's Ambassador Daniel Evina Abe'e serves both; Chad's

Brussels embassy covers Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU; the Republic of the Congo's Ambassador Léon Raphaël Mokoko is accredited to Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU; Gabon's Ambassador Serge Thierry Mickoto Chavagne is accredited to Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU; Equatorial Guinea's embassy in Brussels is responsible for Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU.

This helps manage the country's diplomatic relations effectively, due to limited resources. Instead, countries like São Tomé and Príncipe may use embassies in nearby nations for representation, maintaining EU relations without opening a new mission. This strategy is similar to regional groups like the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), which share a diplomatic mission in Brussels for both Belgium and the EU. This centralised approach implies that these countries interact with the EU primarily through EU delegations in their countries rather than through specific missions within the EU's institutions.

However, the diplomatic interactions between ECCAS members and world powers are influenced by a complex mix of historical connections, economic incentives, security partnerships and strategic aims. For instance, France's colonial past in Central Africa has resulted in lasting political and military bases and defence agreements in countries like Gabon and Chad. These relationships have also sparked tensions, with growing opposition to perceived neocolonial influence prompting calls to reassess these partnerships.

China engages with ECCAS members primarily to secure access to natural resources and boost trade. For instance, in the 2000s, China funded oil projects in Chad, gaining influence after the World Bank halted loans over governance issues, showing how economic motives shape diplomatic ties.

Russia has increased its influence in the region, particularly through security aid to the CAR via private military contractors (the Wagner Group). This situation raises concerns about the neutrality of ECCAS mediation efforts, highlighted when CAR's President was appointed ECCAS mediator during Gabon's 2023 coup, evoking apprehension over potential Russian bias.

The US also works with ECCAS nations to foster regional stability

and counter security threats. In the Gulf of Guinea, it supports maritime security initiatives and cooperation with ECOWAS to combat piracy and improve ocean governance, reflecting its strategic interest in safeguarding crucial shipping routes and encouraging regional collaboration.

These examples demonstrate the intricate nature of ECCAS's ties with global powers, where historical legacies, economic goals, security requirements and strategic purposes intersect, leading to complex and sometimes contentious relations.

ECCAS economic, trade and investment environments

ECCAS maintains a delicate balance between bilateral and multilateral relations with global powers to maximise economic benefits while promoting international trade, diversification and investment. Indeed, ECCAS and its members do not show a clear preference for either multilateral or bilateral relationships. They strategically use both, leveraging multilateral frameworks, pursuing bilateral partnerships to address specific national priorities and attract targeted investments.

For instance, ECCAS has shown a commitment to regional integration through several collective initiatives, including the establishment of a free trade area and a customs union, as outlined in Article 6 of the ECCAS Treaty. Although progress has been gradual, with only about 34 per cent of intra-ECCAS tariffs reduced to zero, these steps signify a dedication to multilateral economic cooperation. While progress has been slow and only about 34 per cent of intra-ECCAS tariffs have been eliminated, these efforts reflect a dedication to economic collaboration among multiple nations.

ECCAS economic environment

The Central African region appears to be the continent's most natural-resource-dependent subregion that registered an estimated output growth of 3.9 per cent in 2023, from a contraction of 5 per cent in 2022 (Afreximbank 2024). ECA (2016) assesses the effectiveness of regional integration schemes in Central Africa, stating that only four of ECCAS's

eleven members have ratified the Free Movement Protocol and have a monetary union. Although these initiatives are embedded within ECCAS's regional framework, they align with the AU's overarching objectives of continental integration. The AU's Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, adopted in 2018, aims to promote free movement of people across all member nations. Nevertheless, advancement has been slow, with two of four ECCAS members (Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe) having ratified the protocol thus far, and has been signed by 33 member states. The region achieved a real GDP growth of 5.0 per cent in 2022, and 4.9 per cent in 2023, up from 3.8 per cent in 2021 (African Development Bank 2019b, 2023) (see Figure 5.2). This economic regain was fuelled by favourable commodity prices in a region with net exporters of not only crude oil, but also minerals and other commodities.

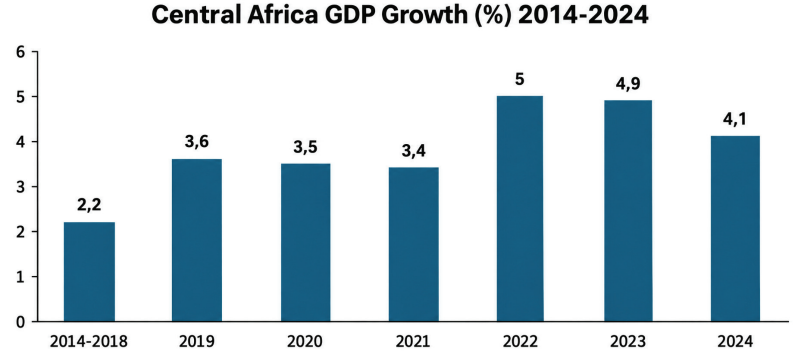


Figure 5.2: Central Africa GDP growth (%) 2014-2024. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); African Development Bank (2019b, 2023).

Figure 1 shows that the region experienced and interesting performance in 2022 and 2023. This growth was boosted by high export prices in the region with net exporters of crude oil, minerals and other commodities. This reflects the region's good economic performance compared to the African average of 3.8 er cent. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, ECCAS faced significant economic difficulties, marked by a substantial economic decline, with the average growth rate dropping to

-2.6 per cent in 2020 from 2.8 per cent in 2019. Nations with economies heavily dependent on oil exports, such as the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, were among the most severely impacted, with growth contractions of -6.8 per cent, -6.1 per cent, and -2.7 per cent, respectively (The European Business Council for Africa 2021).

ECCAS member states collaborated with various international partners to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. China contributed in medical supplies and vaccines to several Central African countries, including Cameroon, which received 200 000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine. The EU contributed € 54 million to the CAR to support public expenditures affected by the pandemic (European Commission 2020).

The US, mainly via USAID, have also offered significant aid to ECCAS member countries to alleviate the health and socio-economic consequences of the crisis: close to US$ 8 million was given to Cameroon for health and humanitarian aid, together with 303 050 Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses in July 2021; The CAR received over US$ 10 million focussed on risk communication, infection prevention in medical facilities and access to clean water, assisting vulnerable groups like refugees and those displaced; the DRC received approximately US$ 26 million, including 50 ventilators to enhance healthcare; the Republic of the Congo, about US$ 250 000 for response coordination, risk communication and healthcare worker training in infection protocols; and Chad more than US$ 3.5 million aimed at infection control, public awareness and hygiene promotion. Globally, by joining the COVAX initiative with US$ 4 billion, the US became its largest donor (USAID 2021).

It is important to note that the region's good economic performance in 2022 and 2023 varied from one country to another, and is expected to moderate from 4.1 per cent in 2024 to 4.7 per cent in 2025 (African Development Bank 2023).

Table 5.4: Real GDP growth rates for ECCAS member states from 2020 to 2023. Source: Author's own, build from African Development Bank (2019, 2023); The European Business Council for Africa (2021).

Country	2020 Growth (%)	2021 Growth (%)	2022 Growth (%)	2023 Growth (%)
Cameroon	-2.4	3.5	3.6	3.3
CAR	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.7
Chad	-2.1	-0.9	3.6	4.9
Republic of the Congo	-6.3	1.1	1.8	2.0
DRC	1.7	6.2	6.6	6.3
Equatorial Guinea	-4.8	-0.4	3.2	–5.9
Gabon	-1.8	1.5	3.0	2.3
São Tomé and Príncipe	-6.5	1.0	2.5	3.0
Burundi	0.3	3.1	1.8	3.3
Rwanda	-3.4	10.9	8.2	6.2
Angola	-5.4	0.7	3.0	2.8

Table 5.4 shows that, during the pandemic years, the CAR saw limited economic growth, with GDP rising by 0.5 per cent in 2022 and slightly more to 1.0 per cent in 2023, mainly due to improvements in agriculture, which grew from 0.3 per cent in 2022 to 1.2 per cent in 2023. Chad encountered economic declines in 2020 and 2021, however bounced back in the following years, recording growth of 2.8 per cent in 2022 and 4.12 per cent in 2023, driven by a recovery in the oil industry. The DRC maintained steady and strong growth, with GDP increasing by 1.74 per cent in 2020, 6.2 per cent in 2021, 8.92 per cent in 2022, and 8.56 per cent in 2023, largely fuelled by the mining sector's robust performance. Equatorial Guinea's economy contracted by 4.8 per cent in 2020 and dipped slightly by 0.4 per cent in 2021. The economy grew by 3.7 per cent in 2022, however, faced a significant decline of 5.7 per cent in 2023 due to a substantial drop in oil output and exports. Burundi's GDP growth showed gradual improvement, starting at 0.33 per cent in 2020 and increasing to

3.1 per cent in 2021, slightly decreasing to 1.85 per cent in 2022, then rising to 2.7 per cent in 2023. These data illustrate the diverse economic paths taken by ECCAS member states in response to the pandemic and their recovery efforts.

In 2024, the economic projections for Chad and the DRC have been significantly shaped by environmental and security elements, highlighting the necessity of incorporating these aspects into economic planning. ECCAS has, however, navigated its bilateral and multilateral relationships with external powers by leveraging its economic goals and strategic partnerships. ECCAS emphasises a balance between strengthening ties with individual countries and engaging in multilateral platforms. Through multilateral efforts, ECCAS works with UNECA to build regional value chains in industries like timber, mining, agro-industry and oil-gas, in line with the Douala Consensus for economic diversification (ECA 2024). Also, ECCAS and ECOWAS have, since 2018, collaboratively tackled security issues such as improving maritime safety in the Gulf of Guinea. On a bilateral front, ECCAS has supported public-private collaborations, exemplified by the creation of a Regional Parent Stock Farm in Cameroon to boost livestock production, though, countries like Cameroon have bilaterally signed the Economic Partnership Agreements with the EU to strengthen trade connections.

These external relations have affected ECCAS' economic performance. For instance, the geopolitical tensions, particularly the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the consequences of the earthquake that occurred in Turkey in February 2023, and the economic situation in China and the EU constrain regional economic growth, thus causing blockages in global supply chains and commodity price changes.

Key trends in trade partnerships

Trade relations between ECCAS member states and global powers have evolved significantly over the past two decades, driven by changes in global demand, trade policies and regional development strategies. Although the legal instrument of the ECCAS Free Trade Area (FTA)

were signed in 2004, the FTA is not yet in force, only three member states (Cameroon, Congo and Gabon) have adopted ECCAS preferential tariff for intra-ECCAS trade. The remaining eight countries including Angola, Burundi, the CAR, Chad, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe and Zambia, have not adopted the preferential tariff. Several reasons explain this:

- **Institutional Obstacles:** Many nations lack the necessary frameworks to enact and oversee the preferential tariff properly. As of 2018, only four ECCAS countries had set up national committees to review applications for approval of locally made goods under the preferential tariff system.

- **Economic and Structural Difficulties:** Some countries face economic issues, like limited industrial capacity and poor infrastructure, preventing them from fulfilling the preferential tariff's requirements.

- **Political and Administrative Hurdles:** Problems such as political unrest, governance issues and administrative inefficiencies can slow down the adoption and execution of regional trade agreements. This can be due to the fact that the region's export structure remains dominated by a limited number of products such as crude oil, copper, and natural gas, while showing growing engagement with emerging economies, especially China and India. This period marked a significant shift in global trade alignments for the region, with China becoming its largest trading partner by 2024, as ECCAS exported in 2023, ECCAS exported a total of US$ 111 billion, with China being the largest export destination with US$ 42.5 billion. Other key trading partners were the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which took in US$ 11.3 billion worth, India at US$ 8.05 billion, the Netherlands at US$ 5.42 billion and Spain at US$ 4.9 billion.

  The structure of ECCAS trade is characterised by dependence on commodity exports, a low level of regional integration, and underdeveloped regional value chains. Between 2016 and 2023,

intra-regional trade accounted for 2.7 per cent of Central Africa's total trade, reflecting a limited level of integration. ECCAS foreign trade is more oriented towards other continents (other than Africa), accounting for 86.1 per cent of its total trade over the period 2016-2023, this accounts for other infrastructures such as road, railway, aviation and seaport infrastructure. Non-tariff barriers like complex customs processes, inconsistent regulations and bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination among different agencies further limit regional trade, raising transaction costs and discouraging cross-border business.

Armed conflicts and instability in countries like the CAR, where ongoing civil unrest since 2013 has wrecked infrastructure, weakened the private sector and driven nearly 75 per cent of the populace into poverty; and in DRC where the M23 group dominate Eastern Congo has caused economic issues like cash shortages and disrupted supply lines due to imposed taxes on local enterprises and minerals. These conflicts obstruct trade and stymie efforts for stability and conflict prevention in the region.

- **ECCAS Regional trade dynamics:** Between 2018 and 2023, the total trade volume between the ECCAS and key external powers such as China, India, the UAE, the Netherlands and France amounted to approximately US$ 250 billion. In 2022 alone, ECCAS exported goods worth US$ 48.5 billion to China, US$ 10.2 billion to India, US$ 9.9 billion to the UAE, US$ 5.97 billion to the Netherlands and US$ 5.89 billion to France (OEC 2022). These figures highlight the significant trade relationships ECCAS maintains with these external powers, with China becoming the largest partner. On average, the annual trade volume growth is approximately 5.7 per cent, with notable jumps in the early and latter parts of the decade. Exports increased by almost 50 per cent in 2023, and recovery continued into 2024, with the ECCAS region recording US$ 123 billion exports, contributing almost 20 per cent growth and US$ 89 billion imports in 2023 (Afreximbank 2024).

- ECCAS's most exported products in 2022 were petroleum oils from bituminous minerals (US$ 63.3 billion), copper cathodes (US$ 19.2 billion), natural gas, liquefied (US$ 10.5 billion), cobalt, unwrought, matte, waste or scrap, powder (US$ 5.83 billion), and gold in unwrought forms (US$ 3.86 billion). The same year, the top internal exports of ECCAS were refined petroleum (US$ 207 million), other ships (US$ 98.3 million), engines (US$ 75.2 million), cement (US$ 68.1 million), and rice (US$ 65.6 million), and the principal destinations of internal exports were DRC (US$ 652 million), CAR (US$ 284 million), Congo Republic (US$ 219 million), Rwanda (US$ 98.3 million), and Burundi (US$ 90.6 million). Globally, the region's trade is dominated by Angola and the DRC, which account for over half of the region's exports and imports in 2022.

Intra-ECCAS trade

Over the past decade, intra-ECCAS trade has experienced a gradual upward trend, reflecting an increase in regional economic integration. However, Central Africa's share in world trade and the volume of intra-community trade remain low. The region's share in world exports remains low compared to other regions of the continent. On average, its exports accounted for 12.3 per cent of global exports in 2018–2023 compared to 16.3 per cent for West Africa and 23.8 per cent for Southern Africa (Afreximbank 2023, 2024; African Development Bank Group 2019a, 2019b, 2023; OEC 2022; UNCTAD 2023). Within this same period, ECCAS nations only captured 9.35 per cent of the region's exports, well below the 41,5 per cent and nearly 12.4 per cent, respectively, for China and the EU (Afreximbank 2023, 2024; African Development Bank Group 2019a, 2019b, 2023; OEC 2022; UNCTAD 2023). Intra-regional trade, thus, remains a relatively small portion of ECCAS's total exports. In 2023, the value of intra-regional trade within ECCAS was approximately US$ 12.7 billion (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023b). This figure represents about 6.6 per cent of the total trade within Africa (Pan-African Chamber of

Commerce and Industry 2023). The relatively low per centage highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving higher levels of regional integration and trade within the ECCAS region. This is reflective of longstanding structural challenges, including infrastructure deficits, non-tariff barriers and political instability in some member states. Despite some regional efforts to enhance economic integration, intra-ECCAS trade remains underdeveloped compared to other regional economic communities on the continent.

Extra-regional trade

There has been a shifting trade partnership for ECCAS in recent years as emerging Asian economies have become significant sources of demand and supply. In 2022, ECCAS exported a total of US$ 129 billion. During the last five reported years, the exports of ECCAS have changed by US$ 44.8 billion from US$ 84.3 billion in 2017 to US$ 129 billion in 2022 (OEC 2022).

Key trading partners

In 2022, the top external exports of ECCAS were China (US$ 48.5 billion), India (US$ 10.2 billion), the UAE (US$ 9.96 billion), the Netherlands (US$ 5.97 billion), and France (US$ 5.89 billion) (OEC 2022). Prior to this period (between 2000 and 2020) and reflected in Figure 5.2, the main trading partners of ECCAS in terms of imports were the EU (613.9 per cent) of ECCAS GDP, followed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (3.5 per cent), China (2.8 per cent) and ECCAS (0.1 per cent) (Nguetse Tegoum et al. 2024). ECCAS's latter position is essentially due to the limited diversification of the region's export products and the similarity of national production structures.

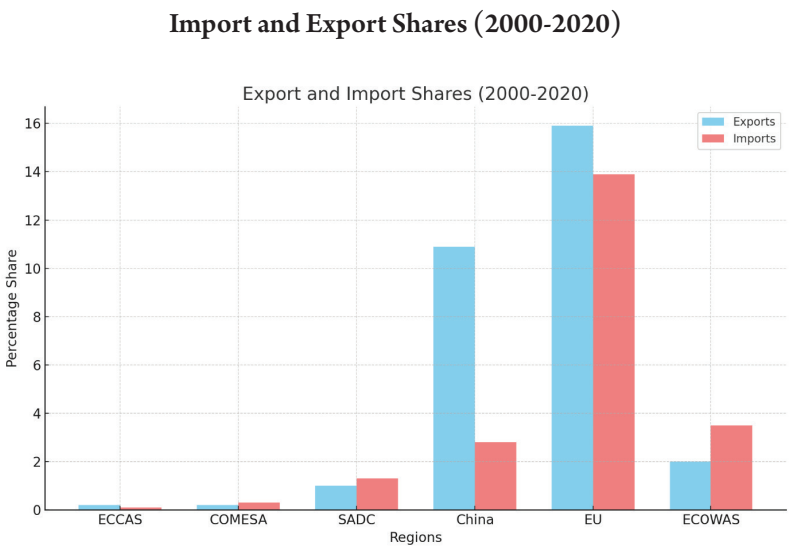


Figure 5.3: ECCAS's main trading partners' average share of exports and imports (2000–2020). Source: Adapted from Nguetse Tegoum et al. (2024); UNCTAD (2023).

Another parameter of ECCAS trade lies in the products exchanged. The main products exported from ECCAS to the rest of the world between 2018 and 2023 are mineral fuels, lubricants, and related materials (oil, natural gas, etcetera), which account for more than 60 per cent of the ECCAS exports (ECA 2024, World Bank 2023, UNCTAD 2023 data). Indeed, the oil export rate is very high in the ECCAS zone.

Since 2021, China appears to be the prominent partner of ECCAS and its member states, which have engaged extensively through bilateral and multilateral agreements (see table 5.3), particularly under the BRI. These agreements focus on infrastructure development, trade and resource extraction. In 2022, for example, China's bilateral trade with ECCAS countries amounted to over US$ 50 billion, making it one of the region's largest trading partners (Afreximbank 2023).

Key sectors of trade

Oil and Gas: Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are major oil exporters. In 2022, these countries accounted for over 80 per cent of ECCAS's total oil exports, with China, the EU and the US as primary importers (ECCAS Secretariat 2020).

Mining: The DRC is a key player in global cobalt and copper markets, with significant exports to China and the EU. In 2022, the DRC's mining exports contributed 25 per cent to its GDP, valued at US$ 6.5 billion (World Bank 2023).

Agriculture and Forestry: Cameroon and Gabon are significant exporters of timber, coffee, cocoa and palm oil. In 2022, these sectors contributed 15 per cent of ECCAS's total exports, with the EU being the main trading partner (UNCTAD 2023).

Table 5.5: Balancing bilateral and multilateral relations of ECCAS with global powers. Source: International Monetary Fund (2023).

Type of Relation	Global Power	Trade Volume (USD/EUR Billion)	Key Focus Areas	Challenges
Bilateral	China	US$ 12 billion	Infrastructure, Mining, Energy	Debt sustainability, Dependency on Chinese imports
Bilateral	France	EUR 4.6 billion	Oil, Gas, Consumer Goods	Over-reliance on French companies in certain sectors
Bilateral	US	US$ 3.1 billion	Oil, Minerals, Agricultural Products	Limited trade diversification
Multilateral	EU	EUR 8.4 billion	Machinery, Pharmaceuticals, Agriculture	Trade imbalances, Non-tariff barriers
Multilateral	AU	N/A	Intra-African Trade, Regional Integration	Implementation challenges, Policy harmonisation

Though China has become the dominant trading partner in ECCAS, the EU remains a significant player, and the US maintains steady trade relations, focusing on specific sectors like oil and minerals (Afreximbank 2023).

Table 5.6: Key sectors of trade in ECCAS (2022). Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); World Bank (2023); UNCTAD (2023).

Sector	Main Exporting Countries	Key Export Markets	Export Volume/Value (2022)	Per centage of ECCAS Total Exports
Oil and Gas	Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon	China, EU, US	1.2 million GDP/ USD 14.2 billion	40%
Mining	DRC	China, EU	300 000 tons of cobalt / US$ 6.5 billion	18%
Agriculture	Cameroon, Gabon, Chad	EU, US, China	US$ 2.3 billion	7%
Forestry	Gabon, Cameroon	EU, China	4 million cubic meters / US$ 1.8 billion	5%

The line chart illustrates the growth of trade relations between ECCAS and global powers from 2000 to 2022, highlighting the dominance of China, the EU and the US.

Table 5.7: Key trade agreements between ECCAS and global powers. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); UNCTAD (2023); World Bank (2023).

Global Power	Agreement Type	Date Signed	Key Provisions	Member States Involved
China	Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), BRI Agreements	2013-2022	Infrastructure development, loans, trade facilitation	Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon
France	ECA	Ongoing	Trade in goods, financial aid, security cooperation	Gabon, Cameroon, Chad
US	AGOA	2000-present	Duty-free access to the US market for eligible African products	All ECCAS member states
EU	EPAs	2008-present	Trade liberalisation, development cooperation	All ECCAS member states
Russia	Military and Economic Cooperation Agreements	2015-2022	Arms sales, political alliances, economic aid	CAR, Angola, Sudan

Some of these trade policies and agreements appear beneficial, and others are disadvantageous, as shown in Table 7. The AGOA has provided ECCAS countries with preferential access to the US market, boosting exports in sectors such as textiles, cocoa and minerals. In 2022, ECCAS exports under AGOA were valued at US$ 1.5 billion, a 10 per cent increase from the previous year (US Department of Commerce 2022). The EPAs with the EU have also enhanced market access for ECCAS products, particularly in agriculture and light manufacturing. However,

the impact is limited by non-tariff barriers and stringent quality standards (UNCTAD 2023)

On the contrary, the Chinese Loan Agreements under the BRI have raised concerns about debt sustainability. Angola, for instance, owes over US$ 22 billion to China, representing 60 per cent of its external debt, primarily due to loans for infrastructure projects (Brautigam et al.2020).

Table 5.8: Impact of key trade policies and agreements on ECCAS (2020). Source: Adapted from Brautigam et al. (2020); UNCTAD (2023).

Agreement	Economic Impact (USD Billion)	Positive Outcomes	Negative Outcomes	Affected Countries
AGOA (US)	1.5	Increased export volumes, diversification of markets	Limited to specific products, sunset clauses	All ECCAS member states
EPAs (EU)	8.4	Enhanced market access, capacity building	Trade imbalances, non-tariff barriers	All ECCAS member states
BRI Agreements (China)	12.0	Infrastructure development, job creation	Debt sustainability concerns, resource dependency	Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon

Table 8 brings out the asymmetric impacts of these trade agreements on ECCAS member states. AGOA and EPAs have provided market access and capacity building, however, gains are sometimes limited by product coverage and implementation challenges. BRI has brought significant volumes of infrastructure investments, however, also raises debt and dependence risks. A strategic approach that balances opportunities as well as risks is required for ECCAS nations to gain maximum benefits from these agreements.

Opportunities and risks for local businesses in partnering with foreign entities

Opportunities

Access to New Markets: Partnerships with foreign entities open new markets for local businesses, especially in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

Technology Transfer: Collaborations with multinational corporations bring new technologies and expertise to ECCAS, enhancing productivity and competitiveness.

Enhanced Infrastructure: Foreign investments in infrastructure reduce production and transportation costs, benefiting local businesses.

Risks

Competition from Multinationals: Local businesses face competition from well-funded foreign companies, especially in sectors like retail, manufacturing, and construction.

Market Access Barriers: Non-tariff barriers, such as stringent quality standards and complex customs procedures, limit access to foreign markets.

Regulatory Constraints: Inconsistent regulations across ECCAS countries can hinder businesses seeking to expand regionally.

Table 5.9: Analysis of partnership between local businesses and foreign entities. Source: Author's analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Access to international markets through trade agreements (for example, AGOA, EPAs)	High dependency on commodity exports (for example, oil, minerals)
Significant foreign investment in infrastructure and energy sectors	Debt sustainability concerns due to high levels of borrowing
Potential for technology transfer and skills development	Vulnerability to external economic shocks
Opportunities	**Threats**
Expansion of intra-African trade under AfCFTA	Increased competition from multinational corporations
Development of new sectors (for example, manufacturing)	Geopolitical tensions affecting trade and investment flows
Leveraging strategic partnerships for climate resilience	Trade disputes and protectionist policies by global powers

Sources of funding for ECCAS operations

ECCAS finances its operations through a combination of member-state contributions, multilateral assistance, bilateral partnerships, and project-specific funding mechanisms. External partners continue to play a significant role in supporting regional integration initiatives, institutional reforms, infrastructure development, peacebuilding programmes, and environmental projects.

The European Union remains one of the organisation's most important development partners, while the African Development Bank has contributed substantially to institutional strengthening and regional infrastructure projects. China, France, the United States, and other partners also support strategic initiatives across sectors including transport, energy, security, health, and agriculture (European Union 2024).

Although external financing has enabled important developmental gains, reliance on external resources raises questions regarding financial sustainability and strategic autonomy. Strengthening domestic resource mobilisation and expanding regional financing mechanisms therefore remain essential priorities for the long-term effectiveness of ECCAS' Vision 2025 (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a). This includes funding for infrastructure, security and economic development projects, for example, the African Development Bank pledged € 250 million out of the total € 403 million for the construction of the Brazzaville–Kinshasa Bridge between the Republic of the Congo and the DRC; or the Djermaya Solar Power Station (Chad) funded by the African Development Bank, the EU-Africa Infrastructure Fund and Proparco, with approximately € 60.3 million; and the EU's € 91 million funding to Cameroon over three years to enhance infrastructure, including energy, roads, and a railway linking Cameroon with Chad (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023b).

Key external investors

External investors are increasingly active in Central Africa, reflecting the region's strategic importance in contemporary global economic and geopolitical dynamics. Driven by abundant natural resources, expanding consumer markets, and emerging infrastructure needs, major international actors have expanded their investment footprints across ECCAS member states. Understanding the motivations, patterns, and implications of these investments is essential to assessing the opportunities and constraints they create for regional development, economic diversification, and African agency. This section, therefore, analyses the main external investors in the ECCAS region and evaluates their contribution to the Community's broader development objectives.

- **China**: Major investments in infrastructure and mining.
- **EU**: Focus on development aid, governance and infrastructure.
- **US**: Investments in energy, particularly oil and gas and humanitarian aid.
- **France**:Investments in various sectors, including energy and infrastructure, security, climate change and health.

- **Russia**: Investments focus mainly on peace and security technology and infrastructure.
- **Other Emerging Economies**: Brazil, India and Turkey are increasingly investing in agriculture and infrastructure.

Table 5.10: Sources of funding for ECCAS operations (2022–2023). Source: CEEAC-ECCAS (2023b); EU Special Report (2023); OEC (2022); OECD (2023); World Bank (2023).

Global Power	Funding Type	Total Funding (US$/EUR Million)	Primary Use
EU	Development Aid (EDF)	EUR 117 billion	Governance, security sector reforms, infrastructure
UAE	Development Assistance	US$ 5.97 billion	governance, health
China	Concessional Loans, Grants	US$ 48.5 billion	Infrastructure, digital economy
US	Humanitarian Aid, Security Assistance	US$ 1.9 billion	Health, education, counterterrorism
Russia	Security Assistance	US$ 1.4 billion	Arms sales, military training

Despite its unique potential, the Central African region receives fewer sustainable investments than other regions, though these external investments are crucial for the region's development, as they focus on infrastructure, energy, mining, and agriculture.

Foreign direct investment flows

The distribution of foreign investment across the ECCAS region reflects both sectoral priorities and the diversity of international partners

engaged in Central Africa. The following points summarise the main sectors attracting external investment and identify the principal foreign partners contributing to the region's economic development. Together, they provide insight into the patterns, sources, and strategic orientation of external investment flows within the ECCAS area.

Conditions attached

Economic Reforms: Aid and investments often require economic policy reforms, such as trade liberalisation and fiscal austerity.

Good Governance: EU and US aid typically includes conditions for improving governance, anti-corruption measures and democratic reforms.

Debt Repayment: Chinese investments under the BRI often require collateral in the form of investment in infrastructure (roads, railways, ports and airports); Energy and Electricity (oil, gas and renewable energy projects); Mining (extraction of minerals and metals); *and a*griculture through the development of agribusiness and food security projects.

Figure 5.4: Three charts representing sectors, partners and destination of foreign direct investments in ECCAS (2022). Source: **Adapted Africa's Development Dynamics (2023); Central Africa Economic Outlook (2023).**

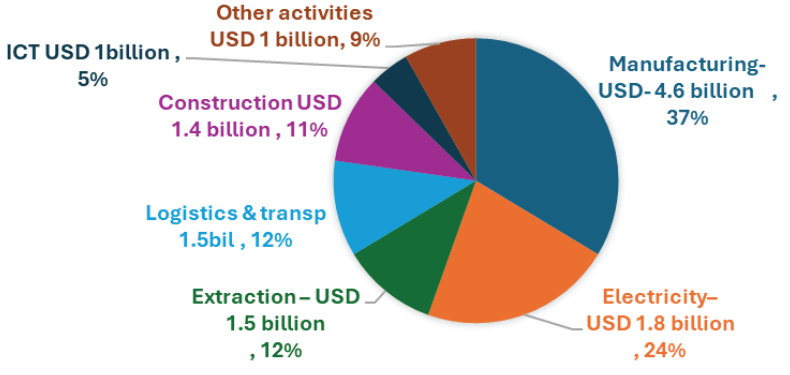


Figure 5.4(a): Sector

Figure 5.4(b): Source/partner

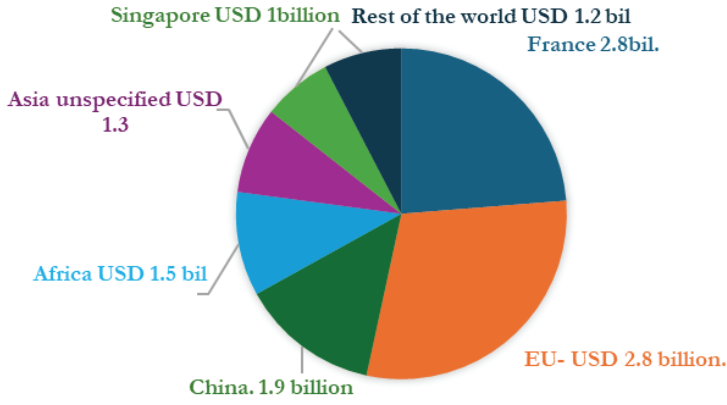
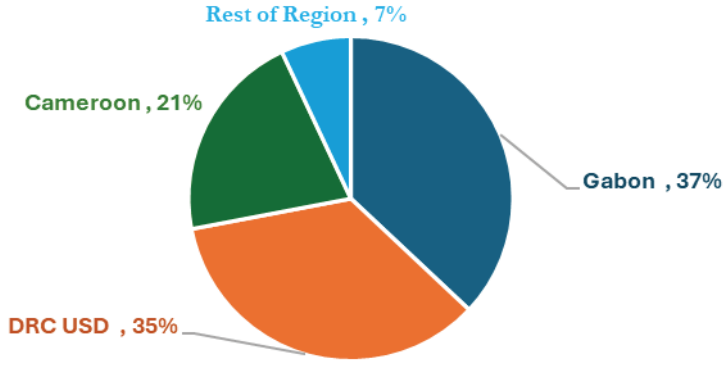


Figure 5.4(c): Destination



The chart highlights the growing diversification of FDI in ECCAS, moving beyond extractive industries to sectors critical for sustainable development, such as manufacturing, which attracted the largest share of FDI (34 per cent), mostly funded by France (US$ 2.8 billion), and Gabon was the main destination with (37 per cent). This suggests efforts to diversify economies in the region, with electricity representing 22 per cent, extraction and logistics (11 per cent) and ICT (4 per cent). Others

only account for 8 per cent, although historically dominant, investment in the extraction sector (such as mining and oil) has decreased, showing a 67 per cent decline in new projects, which is part of the ongoing reorientation away from over-reliance on raw materials.

Table 5.11: Investments and development aid received by ECCAS countries (2023). Source: Adapted from European Commission (2020); UNCTAD (2023); USAID (2023).

Source	Type of Aid/ Investment	Value (US$/EUR Million)	Conditions	Impact on ECCAS
China	Infrastructure Loans, FDI	US$ 10 billion (past decade)	Debt repayment with natural resources, no governance conditions	Improved infrastructure, increased debt burden
EU	Development Aid (EDF), FDI	US$ 5.2 billion	Governance reforms, human rights, climate action	Enhanced governance, mixed economic outcomes
India	Development Aid	US$ 2 billion	Green energy; health	-
US	Humanitarian Aid, Security Assistance Infrastructure Investment	US$ 500 million	Governance improvements, security sector reforms	Strengthened security, improved governance in recipient countries enhanced infrastructure (for example, Lobito Corridor (Angola-DRC)
World Bank and IMF	Economic reforms, infrastructure, social programmes	US$ 5 billion	Governance reforms, human rights, climate action	Enhanced governance, mixed economic outcomes

In 2023, the ECCAS region experienced substantial FDI inflows, with the EU leading at US$ 5.2 billion, followed closely by China at US$ 4.8 billion. India's investments reached US$ 2.0 billion, while Russia and Brazil contributed US$ 1.4 billion and US$ 0.8 billion, respectively.

From 2018-2023, the ECCAS region saw significant FDI inflows from several key global actors. Table 12 a breakdown based on available data.

Table 5.12: Direct investments from key external actors in ECCAS (2018-2023). Source: Future Africa (2024); OEC (2022); UNCTAD (2023).

Year	China (US$ Billion)	EU (US$ Billion)	India (US$ Billion)	Russia (US$ Billion)	Brazil (US$ Billion)	Key Sectors
2018	3.1	4.8	1.2	0.9	0.4	Infrastructure, Mining, Energy
2019	3.3	4.5	1.4	1.0	0.5	Oil and Gas, Telecommunications
2020	3.6	3.7	1.6	1.1	0.3	Renewable Energy, Transport
2021	4.5	5.1	1.9	1.3	0.6	Manufacturing, Construction
2022	4.0	4.9	1.7	1.2	0.7	Agribusiness, IT and Digital Infrastructure
2023	4.8	5.2	2.0	1.4	0.8	Green Energy, Healthcare

Table 5.12 reflects key trends in foreign investments, with sectors like energy, infrastructure and digital transformation receiving the most focus from external actors. China has been a significant investor, particularly in infrastructure, energy and construction sectors. Between 2018 and 2023, China's FDI increased steadily, reaching US$ 4.8 billion in 2023.

While the EU Investments remain one of the top contributions to FDI in ECCAS, focusing on sectors like renewable energy, manufacturing and digital infrastructure. India has increased its investments, with a notable focus on telecommunications and energy, reaching US$ 2.0 billion in 2023. Russia and Brazil have smaller, however, growing investments, with Russia primarily focusing on oil and gas and Brazil contributing to agribusiness and green energy sectors.

ECCAS cooperation on peace and security

There is growing competition and multilateral support in Central Africa, which appears to be one of the main recipients of external powers' presence. ECCAS has become one of the focal points for external competition. The CAR has become a focal point for external competition. Russian military support to the region (CAR) contrasts with the UN's peacekeeping efforts and the EU's development programmes. France has had military bases or a presence in the region since 1960, the US since 2003, and China since 2017. New actors have also emerged, with Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia all establishing a presence over the last ten years. ECCAS member states have established various security and military partnerships with global powers, which significantly influence regional stability and security dynamics. For instance, Israel and the US have boosted their security and intelligence cooperation across Africa, offering military training and equipment to bolster Central African security forces such as the Rapid Intervention Battalion in Cameroon, established in 2001 to combat armed groups and border security threats. Regionally, ECCAS has implemented measures to tackle security issues. The Multinational Force of Central Africa consists of military units from ECCAS member states and conducts peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Moreover, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct was adopted on 25 June 2013 to fight piracy and illegal maritime activities in the Gulf of Guinea, leading to the establishment of centres like the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) in 2014 in the Republic of the Congo, improving maritime security collaboration among

ECCAS members. These efforts reflect ECCAS's dedication to collective security and regional stability.

The following partnerships aim to enhance regional security, support counterterrorism efforts, and strengthen peacekeeping operations.

Key security and military partnerships

France

Military Presence and Operations: France maintains a substantial military presence in Central Africa through its bases in Chad (N'Djamena) and Gabon (Libreville). It conducts counterterrorism operations like Operation Barkhane, which targets jihadist groups in the Sahel and parts of Central Africa, including Chad and Northern Cameroon (Tull 2019).

Military Assistance and Training: France provides military training and logistical support to ECCAS member states. In 2022, France trained over 3 000 Central African troops and security personnel in counterterrorism, intelligence and peacekeeping operations (French Ministry of Armed Forces 2022).

US

AFRICOM and Counterterrorism Support: The US, through the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), provides military assistance and capacity-building programmes to ECCAS countries. The US has deployed special forces in Cameroon to train local troops in counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram and ISIS-affiliated groups (US Department of Defence 2020).

Security Aid and Cooperation: The US has allocated over US$ 500 million in security aid to ECCAS countries between 2010 and 2022, focusing on training, intelligence sharing and equipment supply (US Department of State 2021).

Russia

Russia's influence in ECCAS has grown notably since 2017, particularly in the security sector. Russia has established military cooperation agreements with countries like CAR, where Russian military trainers have provided direct military support. Russian arms exports to ECCAS countries have also increased, with weapons deals amounting to over US$1 billion by 2023. This has positioned Russia as a key arms supplier in the region. Russia has thus expanded its military influence in Central Africa by signing security agreements with countries like CAR. Russia provides military training, arms sales, and deploys private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, to support local forces (SIPRI 2023; UNSC 2022).

EU

Peacekeeping and Training Missions: The EU engages in peacekeeping and security capacity-building through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and has deployed military and civilian missions, such as the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA), to train CAR's armed forces (European Union External Action Service 2022).

Security and Governance Support: The EU allocated € 100 million for security sector reforms in CAR from 2015-2022, focusing on training, infrastructure development and improving governance within the security sector (European Commission 2015; 2022).

Table 5.13: Key security partnerships and military engagements in ECCAS. Source: Adapted from European Commission (2015); European Union (2022); SIPRI (2023); United Nations Security Council (2022).

Global Power	Type of Engagement	Key Activities	Primary Focus Countries	Estimated Support (US$/ EUR Million)
France	Military bases, training, counterterrorism	Operation Barkhane, training of 3 000 troops, logistical support	Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, CAR	EUR 250 million annually
US	AFRICOM, counterterrorism support	Military training, intelligence sharing, special forces deployment, security aid	Cameroon, Chad, DRC	US$ 500 million (2010–2022)
Russia	Military training, arms sales, private contractors	Security agreements, deployment of Wagner Group, arms sales to CAR	CAR, Sudan, Angola	US$ 150 million (2022)
EU	peacekeeping missions, security sector reforms	European Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA) training mission, governance support, security infrastructure development	CAR, Chad, DRC	EUR 100 million (2015–2022)

Impact on regional stability and security dynamics:

- *Enhanced counterterrorism capabilities*: The involvement of France and the US in counterterrorism efforts has improved the capabilities of ECCAS member states to combat extrem-

ist groups. The deployment of French forces under Operation Barkhane and US support through AFRICOM has reduced terror attacks in the Lake Chad Basin by 20 per cent between 2020 and 2022 (African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism 2023).

- *Strengthened peacekeeping efforts*: The EU's EUTM-RCA mission has significantly enhanced the capacity of the CAR's armed forces, enabling them to maintain stability and support peace processes in conflict-affected regions. Since 2015, the EU mission has trained over 5 000 CAR military personnel, resulting in more effective peacekeeping operations (European Union External Action Service 2022).
- *Increased security sector reforms*: European and French support has been instrumental in advancing security sector reforms, promoting good governance, accountability and transparency within the security forces. Reforms in CAR have led to a 30 per cent reduction in human rights violations by state security forces between 2018 and 2022 (European Commission 2022).
- *Geopolitical tensions and rivalries*: The presence of multiple global powers, including France, the US and Russia, often pursuing divergent interests, has created a complex geopolitical environment. Russian military support in CAR, including the deployment of private military contractors, has led to tensions with France, the EU and the US, complicating international cooperation efforts in peacekeeping and security. In June 2021, France and the EU suspended military cooperation and € 10 million in budgetary aid to CAR, accusing its government of failing to respect political opposition and allowing a "massive" anti-French disinformation campaign, allegedly steered by Russia (France 24, 2022). The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on companies in CAR linked to the Russian paramilitary group, accusing them of advancing Russia's destabilising agenda and undermining the nation's sovereignty through security and business operations.

China's increasing military involvement on the continent, includes utilising military training activities with African nations to boost China's expeditionary abilities and strategic goals (Nantulya 2024). An example of this is in 2018 when China held military trainings with CAR and Cameroon, involving troops and various military equipment. These actions illustrate China's broader plan to expand its presence in Africa.

- *Dependence on external security assistance*: ECCAS member states heavily rely on external military aid and training from global powers, which may undermine local ownership and the long-term sustainability of security operations. Dependency on foreign support for counterterrorism operations and peacekeeping limits the region's autonomy in addressing its security challenges (Tull 2019).

Key collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping

ECCAS and its member states collaborate with global powers on counterterrorism and peacekeeping efforts to address regional security threats, including terrorism, insurgency and transnational crime.

US

Counterterrorism training and support: The US collaborates with ECCAS member states through AFRICOM, providing military training, intelligence sharing and logistical support for counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram, ISIS and other extremist groups. The US has trained over 2 000 security personnel in Cameroon and Chad in counterterrorism tactics since 2015 (US Department of Defence 2020). The US special forces conduct joint military exercises with ECCAS member states, enhancing regional cooperation and interoperability in counterterrorism efforts (US Department of State 2021).

France

Operation Barkhane: France's Operation Barkhane targets jihadist groups in the Sahel and Central Africa, involving Chad and Cameroon in coordinated military operations. This operation has significantly disrupted terrorist networks and reduced the frequency of attacks (Tull 2019). France also supports ECCAS peacekeeping missions by providing logistical, financial and training support, particularly in CAR (French Ministry of Armed Forces 2022).

EU

EU training missions: The EUTM-RCA trains CAR military forces in peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations. The mission has enhanced the CAR's ability to maintain security and stability in conflict-affected areas (European Union External Action Service 2022).

Russia

Military advisers and contractors: Russia has steadily become the main security, economic and political partner of the CAR government since 2017. It provides military advisers and private military contractors (for example, the Wagner Group) to support ECCAS member states, particularly CAR. This engagement focusses on bolstering local security forces and supporting counterinsurgency operations (SIPRI 2023).

Table 5.14: Collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping between ECCAS and global powers. Source: Adapted from Elowson and Wiklund (2011); International Crisis Group (2011).

Global Power	Type of Collaboration	Key Activities	Primary Countries Involved	Challenges
US	AFRICOM, counterterrorism support	Military training, intelligence sharing, joint exercises	Cameroon, Chad	Coordination with local forces, geopolitical sensitivities
France	Operation Barkhane, peacekeeping support	Counterterrorism operations, logistical support, training	Chad, Cameroon, CAR	Dependency on French military presence, operational challenges
EU	EU training missions, security sector reforms	Training, governance support, peacekeeping infrastructure	CAR, DRC	Limited resources, slow implementation of reforms
Russia	Military advisers, private contractors	Arms sales, military training, Wagner Group deployments	CAR	Geopolitical tensions, human rights concerns

Challenges on collaboration in counterterrorism and peacekeeping

Some of the challenges on collaboration in counterterrorism and peacekeeping are firstly, geopolitical tensions. Divergent interests of global powers in the region lead to conflicting approaches and policies, complicating coordination and collaboration. For example, the presence of Russian contractors in CAR has led to tensions with France, affecting peacekeeping efforts. Secondly, there are limited local capacity to collaborate with international partners on counterterrorism and peacekeeping. Despite external support, ECCAS member states often face limited capacity in terms of personnel, equipment and logistics,

hindering effective collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations (Tull 2019). Finally, dependence on external support is a also a challenge for collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping. ECCAS's reliance on foreign military aid and training can undermine local ownership of security operations, reducing the sustainability of peacekeeping efforts (African Union Commission 2022).

Human rights concerns

The use of private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, has raised concerns about human rights violations, accountability and transparency in security operations (Human Rights Watch 2022).

However, France has started reducing its historical military presence in Central Africa. Following the end of Operation Barkhane in November 2022, in March 2023 France announced that its military presence on the continent would continue to be reduced. Starting originally in August 2014 to fight jihadist armed groups in the Sahel, Operation Barkhane, which represented approximately 3 000 French troops on African soil, officially finished in November 2022, following the coup in Mali. Led in cooperation with Chad, it was later joined, to a small extent, by the UK (2016), Estonia (2018) and Sweden (2021). Parallel to the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane forces, France's current permanent military presence in Gabon will be reduced from its current levels of over 3 000. The bases will be "Africanised" and become "academies" co-run by African and French armies. While the number of French soldiers present in the region will continue to decrease, there will be increased focus on training and equipment.

China is the second largest contributor to the UN Peacekeeping mission (MINMUSCA in CAR) (18.68 per cent), and about 2 464 Chinese Blue Helmets were operating in the Central African region. Since 2023, China has been contemplating opening an additional base in Bata, Equatorial Guinea.

Migration policies and practices of global powers

Global powers have diverse policies and practices regarding migration that impact their relationships with Africa, including ECCAS countries. Migration patterns and diaspora communities play a crucial role in shaping these relationships, particularly in terms of economic ties, political influence and cultural exchanges. However, armed conflicts and insecurities remain one of the main drivers of forced migration in Central Africa.

Key trends on forced migrations and external powers implications

Forced migrations in Central Africa is a multifaceted issue shaped by internal strife, foreign involvement and environmental challenges. Although external powers and organisations sometimes try to help stabilise the region, their interventions have sometimes contributed in mitigating the crisis. As of early 2024, the Central African region faces a significant forced displacement of people, with over 13.6 million uprooted due to conflict, insecurity and environmental challenges. This figure includes approximately 8.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 5.2 million refugees and asylum seekers across West and Central Africa (UNHCR 2024). The DRC continues to grapple with one of the world's most prolonged displacement crises, with over six million IDPs, primarily in the eastern provinces (UNHCR 2024). Conflicts involving various armed factions and foreign interests contribute to ongoing instability. In CAR, more than 1.4 million Central Africans have been displaced from their homes, representing almost a third of the country's total population. In 2024, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of approximately 151 000 IDPs and 20 000 refugees, indicating some progress towards stability. The Lake Chad region, considered as the '*World's most Complex Humanitarian Disaster*' (Taub 2017, p.1) due to insecurities such as Boko Haram, climate change, predatory armies and extreme hunger, converging on a fragile region encompassing part of ECCAS countries (Chad and Cameroon), has seen

over three million people displaced due to a combination of insecurities such as Boko Haram, climate change, predatory armies and extreme hunger.

Addressing forced migration in the region has prompted a multifaceted approach that considers the complexity of the interplay between internal and external actors. Collaborative efforts involving regional governments, international organisations and local communities are essential to develop sustainable solutions and provide adequate support to displaced populations. The EU, through EUFOR Tchad/RCA (2008-2009; 2014-2015), has deployed approximately 4 300 troops to Eastern Chad and Northeastern CAR to protect refugees and IDPs, facilitate humanitarian aid delivery and ensure the safety of UN personnel.

France, through "Operation Sangaris" launched in 2013, has deployed up to 2 000 troops to CAR to disarm militias, protect civilians and support the transition to UN peacekeeping forces. The operation concluded in 2016, with responsibilities transferred to the UN's MINUSCA mission. The US, via USAID, allocated over US$ 100 million in 2023 alone to support food assistance and emergency aid in CAR, the DRC, Chad and Cameroon, with about US$ 47.2 million in the DRC and US$ 26.4 million in CAR for emergency food programmes (USAID 2023). The EU has also played a key role, with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) allocating € 72 million in 2023 to the Central African region, including support for refugees, IDPs and vulnerable host communities (ECHO 2023). The UNHCR reported assisting over 1.5 million refugees and 3.6 million IDPs across the region in 2023 (UNHCR 2024). These coordinated efforts underscore the importance of sustained external engagement in responding to complex displacement crises rooted in conflict, state fragility and cross-border insecurity.

Table 5.15: Forced displacement and external aid in Central Africa (2024). Source: ECHO (2023); UNHCR (2024).

Country	IDPs	Refugees Hosted	Refugees Originating	Major External Aid (2024)
DRC	6.7 million	500 000+	1 million+	UNHCR shelter support for 911 000 displaced individuals
CAR	455 000	30 000+	738 000+	UNHCR budget of US$ 107.5 million for 2025
Cameroon	1 million+	475 000+	50 000+	UNHCR assistance programmes for refugees and IDPs
Chad	1 million+	600 000+	100 000+	UNHCR and partners providing shelter and protection
Lake Chad Basin	3.3 million+	N/A	N/A	UNHCR regional programmes addressing displacement

Table 5.15 highlights the disproportionately high level of forced migration in the region, with six million people displaced in the DRC, followed by CAR (four million) and Cameroon and Chad more than one million each. These trends reflect the region's prolonged armed conflicts, foreign interventions, and socio-political instability. However, the DRC remains the epicentre of displacement, while external conflicts like Sudan's crisis have triggered spillovers into neighbouring CAR. The humanitarian response, though supported by external actors, remains relatively productive to the scale of the crisis. This calls for sustained and coordinated regional and international engagement.

Migration policies

EU

Migration partnerships and agreements: The EU has implemented several migration partnership agreements with African countries, including ECCAS member states, focussing on managing migration flows, combating human trafficking and supporting development initiatives to address the root causes of migration (European Commission 2022).

Border control and readmission agreements: The EU has focussed on strengthening border controls and implementing readmission agreements to return irregular migrants to their countries of origin, including ECCAS states (European Migration Network 2022).

US

Visa restrictions and travel bans: The US has imposed visa restrictions and travel bans on certain countries, including some ECCAS members, based on security concerns. The US also provides limited refugee resettlement opportunities for migrants from conflict-affected areas (US Department of State 2021).

Diaspora engagement programmes: The US has programmes to engage African diaspora communities, fostering trade, investment and cultural exchange. The US African Diaspora Marketplace is an initiative to support African entrepreneurs by providing grants and technical assistance (USAID 2022).

France

Colonial ties and migration links: France has a long history of migration links with its former colonies in Central Africa. It maintains a flexible visa policy for students and skilled workers from ECCAS countries, while

also implementing stringent immigration controls for undocumented migrants (French Ministry of Interior 2022).

Development cooperation and migration management: France supports development projects in ECCAS countries to address the root causes of migration, such as poverty, conflict and environmental degradation (French Development Agency 2022).

China

Limited focus on migration: China has a limited focus on migration issues related to ECCAS countries. However, China engages with Africa primarily through trade, investment and infrastructure projects, with few policies related to African migration.

However, traders from ECCAS nations have established strong commercial footholds in Chinese cities like Guangzhou, Yiwu and Hong Kong, serving as key hubs for trade between China and Africa.

In Guangzhou, neighbourhoods such as Xiaobei and Sanyuanli qualified as "Little Africa" due to a large African community, with populations ranging between 20 000 and 200 000, mainly involved in wholesale electronics and textiles. However, stricter visa laws and economic issues have caused a decrease in the African population there, forcing many traders to move elsewhere. Despite obstacles like visa issues and cultural differences, ECCAS traders significantly facilitate trade between China and Central Africa, promoting economic growth in both areas.

Russia

Selective migration policies: Russia has selective migration policies, focusing on skilled migrants and students from Africa. Russian universities actively recruit African students, including those from ECCAS countries, through scholarships and exchange programmes (Tulle 2019).

Table 5.16: Migration policies and practices of global powers in relation to ECCAS. Source: Author from Tull (2019); French Development Agency (2022); USAID (2022); European Migration Network (2021).

Global Power	Policy Focus	Key Practices	Impact on ECCAS
EU	Migration partnerships, border control	Readmission agreements, development aid for migration management	Reduced irregular migration, increased border security measures
US	Visa restrictions, diaspora engagement	Travel bans, African diaspora marketplace	Limited migration, increased diaspora involvement in trade
France	Flexible visa policies, development aid	Student visas, support for development projects	Increased skilled migration, improved economic ties
China	Limited migration focus	Trade and investment engagement	Minimal impact on migration, focus on economic relations
Russia	Selective migration policies	Scholarships, student recruitment	Increased cultural exchange, limited broader migration policies

Influence of migration patterns and diaspora communities on global power-Africa relationships:

- *Economic influence*: Diaspora communities from ECCAS countries contribute significantly to the regional economy through remittances. In 2022, remittances from the African diaspora amounted to US$ 3.5 billion, representing 5 per cent of the region's GDP, with significant contributions from the

Congolese and Cameroonian diasporas (World Bank 2023). The flows across ECCAS countries show significant disparities, reflecting varying levels of diaspora engagement and economic reliance on these funds. The DRC and Cameroon are among the first recipients, with remittances estimated at US$ 1.3-1.5 billion and US$ 500-600 million, respectively, in 2022 (IOM 2020; World Bank 2023). In contrast, smaller economies like São Tomé and Príncipe and Burundi received approximately US$ 10.5 million and US$ 48.3 million, respectively. Notably, Angola's remittance inflows were around US$ 12 million in 2023, while CAR reported negligible figures (IOM 2017; World Bank 2023;). These variations underscore the diverse economic structures and diaspora dynamics within the region, highlighting the need for tailored financial policies to optimise the developmental impact of remittances.

- *Political influence*: Diaspora communities play a role in shaping political relations between ECCAS countries and global powers. For example, the Cameroonian diaspora in the US and France actively lobbies for political reforms and human rights in Cameroon, influencing foreign policy decisions (Mbaye 2019). Similarly, the DRC diaspora has been crucial in influencing international narratives on governance and human rights in the DRC. Organisations like the United Congolese Party in Washington DC, provide a platform for opposition voices, advocating for democratic reforms and garnering support from the Congolese community. These groups engage with global bodies to shape policies concerning the DRC (Morgan 2014).
- *Cultural exchange and soft power*: Migration patterns facilitate cultural exchange and enhance soft power. African diaspora communities in Europe and the US promote African culture, arts and values, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between ECCAS and global powers (CIVICUS 2021). Cameroonian genres like *makossa* and *bikutsi* have gained international recognition, with artists such as Manu

Dibango and Richard Bona influencing global music scenes. The Cameroonian diaspora has played a pivotal role in this cultural diffusion, establishing record labels and promoting music that blends traditional sounds with contemporary styles. For instance, between 2011 and 2023, the Cameroonian music industry experienced significant growth, partly due to remittances from the diaspora, which funded music production and distribution (Sachin 2024). Also, Congolese music, particularly *soukous* and *rumba*, has had a profound impact on global music. Artists like Papa Wemba, Koffi Olomide and Fally Ipupa, have popularised these genres beyond Africa. The Congolese diaspora in France and Belgium has been instrumental in sustaining and evolving these musical traditions, often recording and performing in European cities (Friends of the Congo 2024).

Communications and media perspective

Global powers exert influence over ECCAS member states through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media. ECCAS countries also use their own soft power to influence global powers in international forums, and through external and internal structures and processes of ECCAS or its member states in engaging with global partners. Communication infrastructure and local media are also used by both parties for communication.

Influence of global powers over ECCAS through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media

Global powers exert influence over African countries, including those within ECCAS, using various forms of soft power, such as cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media outreach. These tools help shape perceptions, build relationships and promote values that align with the interests of global powers.

Mechanisms of influence

Cultural diplomacy

France is particularly active in cultural diplomacy in Central Africa, leveraging its historical ties with its former colonies. The *Alliance Française* network, French cultural centres, and programmes such as *La Francophonie* promote French language and culture, reinforcing political and economic ties. For example, France has about twelve cultural centres in nine ECCAS countries (Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Chad, Gabon, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe), which are involved in promoting French culture, language and arts through various programmes. They also serve as hubs for cultural exchange and cooperation between France and the host countries, as well as host cultural events (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

China uses cultural diplomacy through the establishment of about nine *Confucius Institutes* in nine ECCAS countries, such as Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, the DRC, Gabon, the Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, promoting Chinese language, culture and academic exchanges. These institutes aim to foster positive perceptions of China and build long-term people-to-people connections (Alden and Alves 2017).

The US promotes its values through cultural programmes, such as the *American Corners initiative*, located in seven ECCAS countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, CAR, the DRC and Gabon), which provides cultural exchange, education and information on US policies. Additionally, US-funded initiatives like *Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI),* launched in 2010, provide leadership training to young Africans, including participants from ECCAS countries (USAID 2022). Through its "Mandela Washington Fellowship", about 7 200 young leaders from sub-Saharan Africa have participated in academic and leadership training programmes in the US since 2014. While specific participant numbers from individual ECCAS countries are not publicly available, the initiative extends to all member states.

The EU engages in cultural diplomacy by supporting local arts, culture and media development through programmes like *Erasmus+* and *Creative Europe*. These initiatives promote European values such as democracy, human rights and good governance (European Commission 2022).

Educational exchanges

France and the EU offer numerous scholarships and academic exchange programmes to African students. France provides scholarships to over 10 000 African students annually, with 2 500 originating from ECCAS countries (Campus France 2022). The Erasmus+ programme, funded by the EU, offers opportunities for student mobility and academic partnerships between European and African universities, including those in ECCAS countries (European Commission 2022).

The Chinese government provides thousands of scholarships for African students to study in China, and as of 2018, over 6 000 students from ECCAS countries were studying in Chinese universities (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] 2018). While specific enrolment figures for ECCAS nations are not readily available, the overall trend indicates a significant presence of African students in Chinese universities, yet, African students remain a notable presence in Chinese universities. In 2018, there were 81 562 African students in China, a 770 per cent increase compared to 1996. Although current detailed data is limited, reports indicate that China remains a popular choice for African students, with approximately 80 000 enrolling each year by 2024.

Numerous Chinese universities have substantial African student bodies. For example, 44.34 per cent of international students at Jiangsu University, or 4 061 individuals, are from Africa. Central South University in Hunan Province has 372 African students studying areas like civil engineering, transportation engineering, nursing and public health. The Chinese government continues to provide many scholarships to African students, supporting their education in fields such as public policy, international relations and engineering.

US Programmes such as *Fulbright* and *YALI* foster academic exchanges

and leadership development. These programmes help build networks of African leaders who are familiar with US values and governance systems (USAID 2022).

Media influence

France and the US utilise their state-funded international media outlets, such as France 24, RFI (Radio France Internationale), and Voice of America (VOA), to broadcast in the region, providing news content in French, English and local languages. These platforms help shape public opinion and promote the global narratives of these countries (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

China engages in media influence through China Global Television Network (CGTN) Africa, which broadcasts in English and French, promoting China's development model and policy positions (Alden and Alves 2017). China media such as Startimes, Xinhua News Agency, maintain an extensive network across Africa, with twenty bureaus reporting from 46 countries, including ECCAS member states such as Cameroon, Gabon and the DRC (USC US-China Institute 2021). Through these channels, China shares its views on progress, leadership and global matters, with the goal of influencing public views and strengthening cultural connections in ECCAS nations. This media presence accompanies China's wider diplomatic and economic interactions in the area. Their reporting often reflects China's perspectives on development and international relations. For example, CGTN Africa's coverage of the coups in Niger and Gabon in 2023 exhibited a distinct anti-French and pro-junta orientation, featuring segments with local populations participating in anti-French protests.

Russia uses media outlets like RT and Sputnik to disseminate news and content favourable to Russian interests, challenging Western narratives and promoting alternative perspectives (Tull 2019).

International news agencies

Outlets like BBC, CNN, CGTN and Euronews maintain a presence in

ECCAS countries, influencing public opinion and policy discussions through their coverage. For instance, CGTN Africa has a significant presence in the region, broadcasting news and cultural programmes. CNN has partnered with CGTN on in-depth reporting concerning the area. A significant example includes their collaborative investigation with The Sentry on 15 June 2021, which revealed crimes committed by the Wagner Group in CAR. These international media outlets contribute to shaping narratives and public discourse within the ECCAS region, each bringing their unique perspectives and editorial priorities to their commentaries.

Table 5.17: Mechanisms of influence by global powers over ECCAS countries.

Source: Adapted from Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) (2023); Alliance Française (2023); Fulbright Program Annual Report (2022); Erasmus+ Statistics (2021); CGTN Africa (2023); Central African Cultural Festival (2023); African Development Bank (2023); African Union Peace and Security Council Reports (2023); United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2023); European Union Funding Reports (2018-2023); FOCAC Summit Reports (2021); ECCAS Digital Strategy Documents (2023); ECCAS Media Partnerships (2023); BBC and CGTN Coverage Analysis (2023).

Global Power	Mechanism of Influence	Key Activities	Countries Targeted	Impact
France	Cultural diplomacy, media, educational exchanges	Alliance Française, La Francophonie, France 24, RFI, scholarships	Cameroon, Gabon, Chad	Strong cultural and political ties, reinforced French influence
China	Cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, media	Confucius institutes, CGTN Africa, scholarships	Cameroon, DRC, Gabon	Increased positive perception of China, growing people-to-people connections

Global Power	Mechanism of Influence	Key Activities	Countries Targeted	Impact
US	Cultural programmes, educational exchanges	YALI, Fulbright, American corners, VOA	Cameroon, Chad, DRC	Enhanced understanding of US values, increased youth engagement
EU	Educational exchanges, media, cultural programmes	Erasmus+, Creative Europe, EU delegations	All ECCAS countries	Promotion of European values, enhanced academic collaboration
Russia	Media influence	RT, Sputnik	CAR, DRC	Alternative narratives, challenging Western influence

ECCAS's collaborations with local media and journalists

- *Journalist Training in Yaoundé*: In 2021 and 2022, ECCAS, in collaboration with the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the UN Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (UNCHRD-CA), organised a workshop in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to train journalists on reporting peace and security issues. The workshop aimed to equip journalists with the skills needed to cover sensitive topics responsibly and promote human rights through their reporting (UNOCA 2025).
- *Interviews and Op-Eds*: ECCAS officials frequently participate in interviews and write op-eds for international media outlets. For example, in 2023, the ECCAS Secretary-General gave an interview to BBC World News discussing the region's efforts to combat climate change and attract green investments.
- *Media Forums*: ECCAS representatives have attended global

media forums such as the World Press Freedom Conference, where they discuss the importance of balanced reporting on Africa. In 2022, ECCAS hosted a panel at the conference focussing on the media's role in peacebuilding in Central Africa (ECCAS 2021).

- *Art Exhibitions*: ECCAS has organised art exhibitions in collaboration with international cultural institutions. The "Central African Art and Culture" exhibition held at the Louvre in Paris in 2023 showcased traditional and contemporary art from ECCAS member states.
- *Music Festivals*: The annual Central African Music Festival, supported by ECCAS and held in various member states, attracts international artists and audiences. The 2023 festival in Yaoundé featured performances by renowned musicians from across Africa and beyond.

These initiatives are part of ECCAS's broader strategy to engage with external powers and ensure that its policies and projects are well-communicated and understood across the world.

Global powers exert influence over ECCAS member states through a combination of cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media presence, shaping perceptions and promoting their strategic interests. ECCAS has limited effectiveness in using its own soft power due to resource constraints, lack of strategic communication infrastructure and fragmented regional unity. While Africa's diplomatic strategies in international forums have achieved some successes, they face challenges related to implementation, limited negotiating power and internal divergences. ECCAS needs to strengthen its communication infrastructure, engage more effectively with local media, and build a robust digital presence to enhance its influence in global engagements.

Civil society organisations in engagements with global powers

Civil Society Organisations (CSOS) in Central Africa have a limited, but

growing role in engagements between ECCAS and global powers. Their involvement is generally focussed on advocacy, capacity-building, human rights monitoring and promoting good governance.

Relevant CSOs and their involvement

Advocacy and Monitoring: RECA-RCA actively monitors human rights situations and advocates for greater transparency and accountability in ECCAS engagements with global powers. For example, RECA-RCA has criticised certain agreements between ECCAS member states and global powers, such as China's infrastructure projects, for insufficient consideration of human rights and environmental standards (Mbaye 2019).

Women's Rights and Governance Advocacy: Though it is based in East Africa, FEMNET actively operates in ECCAS (Burundi) and focuses on advocating for gender equality and women's rights within ECCAS's engagements with global powers. FEMNET has engaged in policy dialogues to ensure that foreign investments and development aid consider the needs and rights of women and marginalised communities (FEMNET 2021).

These CSOs play a limited but growing role in influencing the region's engagements with global powers. While they are involved in governance, human rights advocacy and environmental protection, their participation in formal diplomatic engagements remains constrained (CIVICUS 2021). The effectiveness of CSOs is mixed, with significant contributions in promoting transparency, accountability and social justice, but limited impact on high-level diplomatic decisions. ECCAS engages with some CSOs, such as FEMNET and the Rainforest Foundation UK, to address specific issues like human rights and environmental protection (Mbaye 2019).

Table 5.18: Involvement of CSOs in ECCAS. Source: Author's analysis.

CSO	Focus Area	Key Activities	Impact on Engagements	ECCAS Countries of Operation
Central African Network of Human Rights Organisations (RECA-RCA)	Human rights, governance	Advocacy, policy dialogue, election monitoring	Moderate influence on governance and human rights issues	CAR
Rainforest Foundation (UK)	Environmental protection	Advocacy for forest conservation, community land rights	Significant impact on climate policies and forest management	Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, DRC
African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)	Women's rights, health, education	Public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy	Limited influence, focussed on social issues	Cameroon, Chad, DRC
Oxfam	Poverty alleviation, humanitarian aid	Disaster response, development programmes, policy advocacy	Strong partnerships with international donors and governments	Chad, DRC, CAR
Open Society Foundations	Democracy, human rights	Grant-making, capacity building, legal advocacy	Influential in promoting democratic governance and civil liberties	Cameroon, DRC
Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)	Climate Justice, environmental advocacy	Policy influence, research, education, community empowerment	High impact on climate policy and international negotiations	Cameroon, DRC
Green Belt Movement	Environmental conservation, women's empowerment	Tree planting, advocacy, education	Significant role in environmental conservation and women's rights	DRC
Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC)	Indigenous rights, environmental protection	Advocacy, participatory mapping, policy engagement	Key player in promoting indigenous rights and environmental policies	Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, DRC

These CSOs collaborate with ECCAS and other regional bodies in order to have an impact on policy and advocate for many aspects such as human rights, environmental conservation and equitable resource management. Oxfam, for instance, has associated with the AU's Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC) to improve civil society participation in Africa-EU partnerships. Organisations like the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) focus on monitoring the impact of critical mineral extraction on communities and the environment.

While there is no unique organisation for CSOs in the ECCAS region, networks like PACJA and regional forums facilitated by UNOCA and ECCAS provide platforms for collaboration and engagement among civil society actors.

CSOs' perspectives on ECCAS's relationship with prominent global powers

RECA-RCA

RECA-RCA views the ECCAS-China relationship as largely beneficial in terms of economic investments, but raises concerns about transparency, human rights and environmental sustainability. The organisation advocates for more stringent regulations to ensure that Chinese investments align with regional development goals and human rights standards (Mbaye 2019).

Regarding France, RECA-RCA acknowledges France's critical role in regional security; however, criticises its selective approach to governance reforms and its support for regimes that lack democratic legitimacy (Human Rights Watch 2022).

FEMNET expresses concern that ECCAS's engagement with global powers, particularly China and Russia, often overlooks issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. It argues that agreements should explicitly address the socio-economic impacts on women and marginalised communities (FEMNET 2021). FEMNET EU and US partnerships to the extent that they promote human rights, governance reforms and gender equality, however, stress the need for more inclusive

decision-making processes that involve civil society actors (FEMNET 2021).

Table 5.19: Assessment of Benefits from ECCAS Engagements with Global Powers. Source: Author's analysis

Global Power	Benefits to REC	Benefits to Global Powers	CSOs' Perspective
China	Infrastructure development, economic growth	Access to natural resources, geopolitical influence	Power imbalance, concerns over debt and human rights
France	Security support, development aid	Strategic military presence, political influence	Mixed benefits, concerns over selective governance reforms
US	Security cooperation, trade opportunities	Market access for US goods, regional security influence	Positive, however, limited to security and specific economic benefits
EU	Development aid, governance support	Trade benefits, promotion of EU values	Generally positive, however, limited by trade imbalances and non-tariff barriers
Russia	Military support, security cooperation	Arms sales, geopolitical influence	Concerns over human rights and lack of transparency

Civil Society Organisations play a crucial role in engaging with ECCAS and global powers to promote transparency, accountability and inclusivity in regional engagements. While these organisations have limited formal involvement, their advocacy, monitoring and capacity-building efforts help shape the outcomes of these engagements to align with local priorities. Enhancing CSO participation, promoting inclusive dialogue and ensuring transparent and accountable processes are essential for maximising the benefits of ECCAS's relationships with global powers and amplifying the voices of local communities.

Challenges, opportunities and recommendations

There are many barriers to effective engagement between ECCAS and global powers, as well as opportunities to enhance the region and leverage in global engagements, emerging trends and future projections in relation to global powers, and provide policy recommendations to optimise these engagements.

Main barriers to effective engagement with global powers and how to overcome them

Effective engagement between ECCAS and global powers is hampered by several key barriers, which limit the region's ability to achieve balanced, mutually beneficial partnerships.

One of the main barriers is the asymmetry of power and negotiating capacity. Global powers often have greater economic, political and military leverage, which puts ECCAS at a disadvantage during negotiations. This imbalance can lead to agreements that favour global powers more than ECCAS, such as trade deals that primarily benefit external markets or investments that result in debt dependency (Brautigam et al., 2020). To address this, ECCAS must strengthen its collective bargaining power by enhancing negotiation skills and presenting a unified front in discussions with global partners. This can be achieved through training programmes for negotiators and building alliances with other African RECs and the AU to negotiate collectively on key issues.

Fragmented regional unity is another significant barrier. Divergent national interests, political instability and internal conflicts among ECCAS member states weaken regional cohesion and reduce the bloc's ability to present a cohesive stance in negotiations with global powers. This lack of unity undermines ECCAS's capacity to negotiate effectively on issues such as trade, climate change and security, diminishing its overall influence on the global stage (ECCAS 2024). Strengthening political integration and promoting conflict resolution mechanisms among member states are essential steps toward overcoming this barrier. Greater political and

economic integration can help align national policies with regional goals, allowing ECCAS to act more effectively in global negotiations.

Limited institutional capacity and resources also present a critical challenge. ECCAS faces institutional weaknesses, including inadequate financial resources, infrastructure and technical expertise, which undermine its ability to engage effectively with global partners. These resource constraints hinder the REC's ability to plan, prepare and participate in international negotiations, implement agreements and monitor compliance (ECCAS Secretariat 2020). Investing in capacity-building programmes, improving financial management, and mobilising additional resources through partnerships and innovative funding mechanisms can help build a more resilient institutional framework.

Lack of strategic communication and visibility further impedes effective engagement. ECCAS currently lacks a comprehensive communication strategy and a strong digital presence, making it difficult to communicate its priorities, successes and challenges to global partners and the international community (ECCAS 2024). Developing a robust communication plan that leverages both digital platforms and traditional media will enhance ECCAS's visibility and influence. This strategy should focus on promoting the region's achievements, engaging global audiences, and fostering relationships with key stakeholders.

Finally, dependence on external aid and assistance is a significant barrier to ECCAS's autonomy. The region's heavy reliance on foreign aid often comes with conditions that may not align with its development goals, limiting its capacity to make independent policy choices. This dependency can be reduced by diversifying funding sources and negotiating fairer terms in agreements with global powers (UNCTAD 2023. ECCAS should work to attract private investment, enhance intra-African trade and explore new partnerships to reduce its dependence on aid from traditional partners.

Opportunities for enhancing African agency and leverage in global engagements

Despite the challenges, several opportunities exist for ECCAS to enhance its agency and leverage in global engagements:

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a significant opportunity. By increasing intra-African trade and reducing dependence on external markets, ECCAS can strengthen its economic base and enhance its bargaining position with global powers. Participation in AfCFTA can help ECCAS diversify its economies, develop regional value chains and promote cross-border trade and investment. To fully realise these benefits, ECCAS should align its regional policies with AfCFTA goals and actively participate in its implementation.
- The region's vast natural resources offer another strategic opportunity. ECCAS countries possess substantial reserves of oil, minerals and forests. By developing value-added industries and negotiating better terms for resource extraction, ECCAS can increase revenue, reduce dependency on external aid and enhance its leverage in negotiations (World Bank 2023). Policies that promote local content, sustainable resource management and fair-trade practices should be implemented to maximise these benefits. Additionally, partnerships with global powers should prioritise technology transfer, capacity building and sustainable development.
- Digital transformation and innovation also present significant opportunities. Digital tools can be used to enhance governance, improve service delivery and boost economic growth. For example, digital platforms can facilitate regional cooperation, streamline administrative processes and improve transparency. Investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy and developing e-governance platforms are critical steps for ECCAS to enhance its capacity to engage effectively with global partners.

- Expanding partnerships beyond traditional allies is another avenue for enhancing agency. By diversifying partnerships to include emerging powers (for example, India, Brazil, Turkey) and regional blocs (for example, ASEAN, MERCOSUR), ECCAS can access new markets, technologies and political alliances. Engaging in South-South cooperation initiatives and participating in diverse multilateral forums can help ECCAS build new alliances and reduce dependency on traditional partners.
- Finally, amplifying the role of civil society offers a significant opportunity. Engaging civil society organisations in policy dialogues and decision-making processes can strengthen accountability, enhance policy outcomes and amplify the voices of local communities in global engagements. ECCAS should institutionalise regular consultations with CSOs, involve them in monitoring and evaluation processes and build partnerships to advocate for human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Emerging trends and future projections/ recommendations for Eccas's relationships with global powers

Several emerging trends are shaping the future of ECCAS's relationships with global powers:

- One notable trend is the shifting geopolitical alignments. ECCAS countries are increasingly diversifying their partnerships beyond traditional Western allies to include emerging powers such as China, Russia, Turkey and India. This diversification reflects a desire to maximise benefits, reduce dependency on any single power and leverage new opportunities. This trend is expected to continue as these nations seek to balance their engagements with a wider range of partners.
- Another important trend is the increased focus on digital

and green economies. Global powers are placing greater emphasis on digital and green investments in Africa. The EU's Global Gateway strategy, for example, prioritises sustainable infrastructure and digital connectivity, while China's BRI is incorporating green and digital projects. These areas are likely to become key sectors for future engagement, driven by both external and internal demand for sustainable growth.

- There is a growing scrutiny of foreign investments in Central Africa. Global powers and international institutions are increasingly emphasising sustainable development, human rights and transparency in their engagements with ECCAS countries. This trend is likely to influence the terms and conditions of future agreements, as these countries push for investments that align with their development goals and ethical standards.
- The rising influence of non-state actors, such as CSOs, think tanks and the private sector, is another trend to watch. These actors are playing a more significant role in shaping Africa's engagements with global powers through policy advocacy, monitoring and public diplomacy. Their influence is expected to grow as global and regional governance becomes more inclusive and participatory.
- Future projections suggest that ECCAS will play a more prominent role in shaping Africa's foreign policy and economic engagements, particularly in areas like trade, security and climate change. The emphasis on sustainable development goals is likely to increase, aligning future engagements with global powers around shared objectives such as sustainable growth, climate action and inclusive development (World Bank 2023). Additionally, digital and green sectors are projected to become key areas of focus, with increased investments in infrastructure, renewable energy and digital transformation.
- Promoting regional integration and unity is crucial. Strengthening intra-regional trade, harmonising policies

and fostering cooperation among member states will enable ECCAS to present a united front in global negotiations. A unified regional stance enhances Africa's bargaining power and promotes collective interests, leading to more balanced and equitable agreements.

- Developing comprehensive engagement strategies tailored to different global powers is also essential. These strategies should outline clear objectives, prioritise sectors of interest, and ensure alignment with regional development goals and human rights standards. By clearly defining its strategic interests, ECCAS can negotiate more effectively and secure outcomes that benefit the region.
- Enhancing capacity for negotiations and policy implementation is another key recommendation. ECCAS should invest in capacity-building initiatives to improve the technical expertise of negotiators, policymakers and implementers. Establishing specialised teams within ECCAS to handle specific areas, such as trade, security and climate negotiations, will strengthen the REC's ability to engage effectively with global powers.
- Fostering transparent and inclusive decision-making processes is critical for optimising engagements. ECCAS should institutionalise mechanisms that involve diverse stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and marginalised groups, in policy formulation and engagement strategies. This approach will increase the legitimacy of decisions, ensure alignment with local priorities and enhance the effectiveness of engagements with global powers.
- Leveraging opportunities in the digital and green economies should be a priority. ECCAS should focus on attracting investments in digital infrastructure, renewable energy and sustainable development, seeking partnerships that support technology transfer, innovation and capacity building. Prioritising these sectors will position ECCAS as a leader in sustainable growth and increase its competitiveness in the global economy.

- Strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms is essential. Establishing robust frameworks to track the implementation and impacts of agreements with global powers will ensure compliance and accountability. Involving independent oversight bodies such as CSOs in these processes will enhance transparency and trust.
- Diversifying partnerships and exploring new alliances can reduce dependency and open up new opportunities. ECCAS should actively seek to engage with emerging powers, regional blocs and non-state actors, participating in South-South cooperation to expand its networks, access new markets and acquire advanced technologies.

By implementing these policy recommendations, ECCAS can enhance its engagements with global powers, ensuring that they are balanced, beneficial and aligned with the region's development goals.

Conclusion

ECCAS stands at a crossroads in its engagement with global powers, balancing between benefiting from strategic partnerships and maintaining regional autonomy. The region's rich natural resources make it an attractive partner for foreign investments, yet this has also led to increased dependency on powers like China, France, the EU, Russia and the US for economic and infrastructural development, as well as peace and security. The study suggests that ECCAS can capitalise on its geographic and strategic importance by fostering deeper intra-regional trade and investment, leveraging global interest to achieve sustainable development, and focussing on political stability. For ECCAS to remain competitive and autonomous, it must address challenges like non-tariff barriers, political fragmentation and regional security threats through collaborative governance, strengthened institutions and proactive diplomacy with global partners. While there are challenges, the opportunities for ECCAS to assert itself as a significant actor in global

geopolitics are immense. Optimising ECCAS's engagements with global powers requires a multifaceted approach that addresses existing barriers, leverages emerging opportunities and adopts forward-looking policies. By fostering a sustainable relationship with global powers, enhancing regional integration and focussing on self-sufficiency, ECCAS can contribute meaningfully to the realisation of the AU's Vision 2063.

References

Afreximbank. 2023. *African Trade Report 2023: Export manufacturing and regional value chains in Africa under a new world order.* Cairo: African Export-Import Bank.

Afreximbank. 2024. *African trade and economic outlook 2024. A resilient Africa: delivering growth in a turbulent world.* Cairo: Afreximbank. African States.

African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism. 2023. *Terrorism in Africa report.* Algiers: ACSRT Publications.

African Development Bank. 2019a. *Central Africa Economic Outlook.* Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank.

— — —. 2019b. *Central Africa regional integration strategy paper 2019-2025.* Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank.

— — —. 2023. *Central Africa economic outlook 2023. Mobilizing private sector financing for climate and green growth.* Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank.

Africa's Development Dynamics. 2023. *Investing in sustainable development*, Addis Ababa/OECD. [Online]. Available at: *https://doi.org/10.1787/3269532b-en*. (Accessed 8 June 2025).

African Union Development Agency. 2015. *Agenda 2063: Framework Document*. Centurion: African Union Development Agency – NEPAD.

AIDDATA. 2021. *China Global Development Dashboard*. [Online]. Available at: *https://china.aiddata.org/*. (Accessed 8 June 2025).

Alden, C. and Alves, A. C. 2017. China's regional forum diplomacy in the developing world: Socialization and the 'sinosphere'. *Journal of*

Contemporary China, 26(103): 151-165.

Brautigam, D., Huang, Y. abd Acker, K. 2020. Risky Business: New Data on Chinese Loans and Africa's Debt Problem. *China-Africa Research Initiative*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/248244/1/sais-cari-bp03.pdf*. (Accessed 7 June 2025).

Campus France. 2022. Annual report on African Students in France. *Campus France Publication*. [Online]. Available at: *https://ressources.campusfrance.org/publications/chiffres_cles/fr/chiffres_cles_2022_fr.pdf*. (Accessed 12 May 2025).

CEEAC-ECCAS. 2021. *La CEEAC à la croisée des chemins: vers l'intégration de l'Afrique centrale »: Plan Stratégique Indicatif À Moyen Terme (2021- 2025).* (*ECCAS at the Crossroads: Towards Central African Integration? Medium-Term Indicative Strategic Plan [2021-2025]*). [Online]. Available at: *economic-outlook-2021?utm_source=chatgpt.com*. (Accessed 10 September 2024).

— — —. 2023a. *ECCAS in brief*. [Online]. Available at: *www.ceeac-eccas.org*: *https://ceeac-eccas.org/en/2023/05/28/eccas-in-brief/*. (Accessed 10 September 2024).

— — —. 2023b. *Start of the XXIIIrd ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of ECCAS*. [Online]. Available at: *https://ceeac-eccas.org/en/2023/06/21/start-of-the-xxiiird-ordinary-session-of-the-conference-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-eccas/*. (Accessed 11 September 2024).

1st Fiduciary. 2022. Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). [Online]. Available at: *https://firstfiduciary.ng/economic-community-of-central-african-states-eccas/*. (Accessed 3 June 2025).

CIVICUS. 2021. *State of civil society report*. Johannesburg: CIVICUS. [Online]. Available at: *crucial-appointment-i.htmlculture/?utm_source=chatgpt.comdevelopment-initiatives/?utm_source=chatgpt.com*. (Accessed 12 June 2025).

ECCAS Secretariat. 2020. *Strategic Plan 2020-2025*. Libreville: ECCAS Publications.

ECCAS. 2024. *Regional Consultation on the Post-Malabo CAADP*

Agenda: Central Africa Region Synthesis Report. May 28 -30, Douala, Cameroon.

European Commission Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO). 2023. *Humanitarian Implementation Plan (Hip) West and Central Africa.* Year 2023 Version 8 – 18/12/2023.

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). 2016. *Africa regional integration index report 2016.* Addis Ababa: UNECA.

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). 2024. Investing in a Just and Sustainable Transition in Africa. *Economic Report on Africa April 2024.* Addis Ababa: UNECA.

European Migration Network. 2022. *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021.* Brussels: European Commission..

Elowson and Wiklund. 2011. Regional Integration for Peace and Security in Central Africa. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/foi-r--3244--se* (Accessed 11 November 2023).

European Commission. 2015, June 23. *EU reinforces its support for Central Africa.* [Online]. Available at: *https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_5246.* (Accessed 11 November 2023).

— — —. 2020. Coronavirus: EU supports the Central African Republic with €54. Brussels: European Commission.

— — —. 2022. *EU support for security sector reform in the Central African Republic.* Brussels: European Commission.

— — —. 2024. *The European Union and the Economic Community of Central African States*. Brussels: European Commission.

EU. 2022. *EU training mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA).* Brussels: EU Publications.

European Union Special Report. 2023. *Screening foreign direct investments in the EU.* Brussels: European Commission.

FEMNET. 2021. *Annual Report on women's rights advocacy in Africa.* Kenya: African Women's Development and Communication Network.

FOCAC. 2018. *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021).* [Online]. Available at: *http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201809/t20180912_7933578.htm.* (Accessed 20

October 2023).

France 24. 2022. *Last French troops leave Central African Republic amid closer Bangui-Moscow ties*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20221215-last-french-troops-leave-central-african-republic-amid-closer-bangui-moscow-ties*. (Accessed 8 September 2023).

French Development Agency. 2022. *Annual Report on Development Cooperation.* Paris: French Development Agency.

French Ministry of Armed Forces. 2022. *French military engagement in Africa.* Paris: Government of France.

French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2022. *French diplomatic and cultural engagements in Central Africa.* Paris: Government of France.

French Ministry of the Interior. 2022. *Migration policies and practices.* Paris: Government of France.

Friends of the Congo. 2024. Culture of the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Congolese Culture*. [Online]. Available at: *https://friendsofthecongo.org/congolese-culture/*. (Accessed 10 September 2025).

International Crisis Group. 2011. *Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (I): Central Africa.* Africa Report N°181-7 November 2011

International Monetary Fund. 2023. Inflation Peaking amid Low Growth. *World Economic Outlook, April 2023: A Rocky Recovery*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.imf.org/en/publications/weo*. (Accessed 6 June 2025).

ISS African Futures. 2024. *ECCAS*. [Online]. Available at: *https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/recs/eccas/*. (Accessed 18 July 2025).

Gower, A. 2023. All eyes on Africa resources amidst global energy transition. *Al Majalla*. [Online]. Available at: *https://en.majalla.com/node/304466/business-economy/all-eyes-africa-resources-amidst-global-energy-transition*. (Accessed 5 September 2025).

Human Rights Watch. 2022. *World Report 2022: Democratic Republic of Congo*. [Online]. Available at: *humanitarian-disaster?utm_source=chatgpt.com* . (Accessed 12 October 2024).

Williams, G. 2025. Top 10 cobalt producers by country. *Investing News Network*. [Online]. Available at: *https://investingnews.com/where-is-cobalt-mined/*. (Accessed 5 September 2025).

International Monetary Fund (IMF). 2023. *World economic outlook: Navigating global divergences, and IMF, world economic outlook database*. [Online]. Available at: www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2023/October (Accessed 1 December 2023).

IOM. 2017. *Remittances in ACP Countries: Key Challenges and Ways Forward*. [Online]. Available at: *https://publications.iom.int/books/remittances-acp-countries-key-challenges-and-ways-forward* (Accessed 1 December 2023).

— — —. 2020. *Strengthening the management of remittances for the sustainable development of the marginalised population in Central Africa.* Geneva: International Organisation for Migration.

Mbaye, H. A. 2019. Civil society and regional integration in Central Africa. *African Journal of Political Science,* 14(2): 89 - 112.

Mehlu A. 2019. Central Africa: Regional Politics and Dynamics. In C. Nic (Ed.). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 1-24.

Morgan, S. 2014. *United Congolese Party Makes Crucial Appointment In Foreign Affairs Plank*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.modernghana.com/news/539295/united-congolese-party-makes-crucial-appointment-in-foreign.html*. (Accessed 5 December 2023).

Muchie, M., Gumede, V., Oloruntoba, S. and Check, N.A. (Eds.). 2016. *Regenerating Africa: Bringing African solutions to African problems.* Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa.

Muritala D., Mohammad Z.B.A. and Mohammad, F.K. 2018. Appraisal of African Solutions to African Problems: An Empirical Analysis of the African Union's Experience. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies,* 6(3): 60–69.

Nantulya P. 2024. *The growing militarization of China's Africa policy*. Washington, D.C.: African Centre for Strategic Studies.

Nguetse Tegoum, P., Ayiagnigni, M. E. and Badjeck Mvondo, R. L. 2024. Analysis of the potential effects and opportunities of the entry

into force of the Continental Free Trade Area on the countries of the Economic Community of Central African States. *Iosr Journal of Economics and Finance,* 15(4) Series 3: 32–48.

OECD. 2022. *ECCAS imports, exports, and trade report.* Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

— — —. 2023. *Development co-operation Report 2023: Debating the aid system.* [Online]. Available at: *https://doi.org/10.1787/f6edc3c2-en*. (5 January 2024).

Pan-African Chamber of Commerce and Industry. 2023. *Intra-African trade up 7.2% in 2023, report finds.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.pacci.org/intra-african-trade-up-7-2-in-2023-report-finds/*. (Accessed 3 December 2023).

Sachin. 2024. Cameroon Music Market Overview. *6Wresearch.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.6wresearch.com/industry-report/cameroon-music-market* . (Accessed 8 July 2024).

SIPRI. 2023. *Arms Transfers Database.* Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Taub, B. 2017. Lake Chad: The world's most complex humanitarian disaster. *The New Yorker.* 27 November 2017. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/04/lake-chad-the-worlds-most-complex-humanitarian-disaster*. (Accessed 12 July 2024).

The European Business Council for Africa. 2021. *Central Africa economic outlook 2021*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.ebcam.eu/publications/reference-reports-and-documents/2241-central-africa-economic-outlook-2021* (Accessed 12 July 2024).

Tull, D. M. 2019. The foreign military presence in Africa. *African Affairs,* 118(472): 25–48.

US Department of Commerce. 2022. *Annual AGOA report.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Publications.

US Department of Defence. 2020. *Annual AFRICOM report.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Publications.

US Department of State. 2021. *U.S. support for peace and security in Africa.* Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Publications.

UNCTAD. 2023. *Handbook of statistics.* New York and Geneva: United

Nations.
UNHCR. 2024. *West and Central Africa*. [Online]. Available at: *https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-appeal-*. (Accessed 5 January 2024).
United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). 2025. *Capacity building of journalists. https://unoca.unmissions.org/en/renforcement-des-capacites-des-journalistes.* (Accessed 8 December 2025).
UNSC. 2022. *United Nations Security Council Reports on CAR*. New York City, NY: United Nations Security Council.
USAID. 2021. *USAID provides $92 million in urgently needed food, water, and health services.* Washington, D.C.: USAID.
— — —. 2022. *African diaspora marketplace annual report.* Washington, D.C.: USAID.
— — —. 2023. *USAID Assistance in the Central African Republic*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.
USC US-China Institute. 2021. China's African Audiences. *CGTN*. [Online]. Available at: *https://china.usc.edu/chinas-african-audiences?utm_source=chatgpt.com*. (Accessed 20 October 2023).
World Bank. 2023. *World development indicators.* Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
Yasser Ahmed, 2023. *Qatar's Expanding Footprint in Africa, what is Doha looking for?* [Online]. Available at: *https://raseef22.net/english/article/1093426-qatars-expanding-footprint-in-africa-what-is-doha-looking-for* (Accessed 19 October 2023).

Endnotes

1 The signing of the Libreville Treaty in 1983 was done by eleven founding members, including Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Principe

2 Central African leaders have put in place a vision with the aim to promote "a common future, in environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, the growing improvement of the living conditions of citizens, freedom and justice", structured around six (6) priority areas 1) Political Integration, Peace and Security; (2) Economic and Financial Integration; (3) Physical Integration through the development of infrastructure and land use planning; (4) Environmental Integration and Rural Development; (5) Social Integration and Human Development; (6) The Pursuit of Institutional and Organisational Reform.

3 These initiatives included the Central African Energy Pool (PEAC) to coordinate energy issues; a plan to coordinate transport infrastructure and the launching of a free-trade area that would be established over four years (2004-2007), leading to a single regional market in 2008.

4 To meet regional challenges of integration, in line with the expressed will of the Heads of State and Government of the AU, ECCAS member countries adopted a strategic integration plan in 2007, and a vision for 2025 to make the region an area of peace, solidarity, balanced development and free movement of people, goods and services.

5 For instance, Cameroon signed an interim EPA with the EU, while other ECCAS member states did not finalise a collective agreement. The EU's approach to EPAs is tailored to specific regional circumstances, meaning that different African regions negotiated separate agreements rather than a unified ECCAS-wide deal.

CHAPTER 6

Between ECOWAS Agency towards Global Powers, or Global Powers Agency towards the Sahel?

Bob Wekesa
African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction

African agency emanates from the concept of agency, which is basically the capacity to act in one's self-interest when dealing with a counterpart. A compressed definition yields agency as predicated on the ability to act, facilitated or constrained by the structure within which the action is exercised (Giddens 1984) and the impact of circumstances such as history and culture (Bourdieu 1990; Emirbayer and Mische 1998). These universal conceptualisations have been appropriated and re-theorised in African contexts from various standpoints. Self-determination (Mkandawire, 2011) and postcolonialism and decolonisation (Mbembe 2001; Quijano 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013) are the popular African perspectives.

Drawing on scholars such as Nunoo and Adu-Boateng (2022) and Coffie and Tiky (2021), this chapter adopts a straightforward definition of African agency as the capacity of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to influence and derive desirable outcomes from countries designated as global powers. It is "the extent to which Africa (read ECOWAS) can act autonomously to shape its place in the world". ECOWAS agency is "the space available to and carved out by African states in molding the agendas of international institutions…". ECOWAS agency is the organisation's "ability to negotiate and bargain with external actors in a manner that benefits Africans themselves".

Within these conceptualisations, the chapter is focused on areas in which ECOWAS acts in its own interests. This contrasts with circumstances in which external actors act on it.

The guiding question, therefore, is: In which ways does ECOWAS exercise agency towards global powers, and in which ways do global powers exercise agency towards ECOWAS? This question seeks to determine where agency lies in the relations. Related questions are, in terms of action, where does agency lie in ECOWAS's engagement with global powers? And are there instances where agency balances out between ECOWAS and global powers? This last question is about mutual agency in which ECOWAS and a global power derive benefits from the relations, or interdependence. To respond to these questions, the chapter considers the notions of a loss or gain in agency as well as mutual agency based on engagements between ECOWAS and global powers.

Context and focus

This chapter acknowledges that studies have been undertaken on ECOWAS and global powers in various forms in the past. Recent examples include an inquiry into "whether ECOWAS genuinely functions as a guardian of West African collective interests or operates largely as an institutional proxy for external powers" (Musa 2025). One of the major conclusions was that ECOWAS was encountering mismatches between domestic and external engagement agendas. The study was focused on developments after the departure of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS. A similar study analysed the crossroads at which ECOWAS and external actors found themselves over the exit of the three Sahelian states, with Western powers supportive of ECOWAS while opposing non-Western powers such as Russia, which supported the Sahelian states. This was seen as reminiscent of the Cold War era (Sam 2025). These and other studies focus on the coups in the Sahel and their aftermath. The current chapter covers the periods before and after these developments. Additionally, as explained above, many of the analyses on ECOWAS and global powers tend to overarch ECOWAS as an institution, while this

chapter stays very close to ECOWAS. Against this background, certain choices were made to ensure the chapter's coherence.

First, this chapter does not analyse the global powers' explicit relations with individual member states or the West African region generally. It focuses on direct ECOWAS-global power relations. This helps avoid conflating broader West African issues with those dealing with ECOWAS as an institutionalised regional economic community. Individual ECOWAS nations are included in the analysis only when their engagements with the global powers are facilitated through the ECOWAS institutional arrangement. Thus, the focus is on the ECOWAS agency, rather than the agency of member states. Analogously, the analysis focuses on global-power agency towards ECOWAS. A case in point is the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). On face value, it appears to be multilaterally negotiated, yet the agreements are concluded bilaterally between ECOWAS member states and the EU (Bavier 2014). It is, however, important to note that the EU's failure to push for uniform implementation of the EPAs also constitutes a failure of EU agency. To an extent, it shows the limited agency of ECOWAS to align member countries' external trade policies and practices. It also shows the limits of the EU to influence ECOWAS as an institution to align member states around its global trade strategy.

Secondly, the narrow focus means that the chapter eschews instances in which agency is from continental African sources and only transiently ECOWAS-specific. For instance, we leave out activities, projects, and programmes in which ECOWAS is but part of the African Union (AU) and EU engagements. This might seem like a lost analytical opportunity. The justification is that there is sufficient room for an analysis of broader continental agency towards global powers in a separate research endeavour. Such an effort could take the form of an ECOWAS agency towards global powers in the African Union. For instance, the Joint Valletta Action Plan, spelling out African and European principles of engagement on migration, which was agreed in 2015 (EU 2018a), has many ECOWAS perspectives. However, it is a much broader arrangement. Matters of migration become much more relevant when they are closely aligned with ECOWAS-EU

perspectives. In the same vein, the analysis does not include the extensive engagements between ECOWAS and China through the Forum on Africa China Cooperation (FOCAC) unless there is a direct link.

Third, the relations between the global powers and ECOWAS are so extensive that it is not feasible to analyse every aspect. For instance, competing interests between Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone in the ECOWAS potentially make for an interesting investigation of agency. This is, however, left out because it would burst the analysis at the seams. This can be a useful further research inquiry. In another example, there is a density of formal meetings since 2000, so much so that analysing data and information from all of them is impossible for the current chapter. Instead, the chapter drills down to areas of engagement in which substantive agreements, such as financial commitments, are made. This is the essence of tracking agency at the official ECOWAS level.

Fourth, some of the ECOWAS external engagements are mediated through global supranational organisations such as the United Nations (UN). This chapter only analyses such engagements if they include both ECOWAS and one or several global powers, and the supranational organisation, like the UN. Direct engagements between ECOWAS and supranational organisations are eschewed because they would muddy the analysis. This chapter takes it that international organisations such as the UN are not global powers, but global governments

Fifth is the data access problem. Access to data is patchy because some of the sources about official engagements are available year-on-year, while others are not available. This forces the current chapter to use only the information and data available publicly, with the understanding that future studies would go out of their way to derive the data for a fuller analysis. This data is derived from the ECOWAS website and the websites of the respective global powers. Only lightly does the chapter use sources other than the official ones. This ensures that the chapter keeps close to secondary literature derived from primary organisational sources, in place of primary data collection. Future research can undertake more extensive secondary literature syntheses.

ECOWAS and China

Among ECOWAS's external economic partners, China has emerged as one of the most significant actors in West Africa. Official diplomatic and representational relations are, however, relatively recent, as they were formalised only in 2003 with the appointment of the Chinese ambassador to Nigeria as simultaneously the Chinese ambassador to ECOWAS (Yu Dunhai 2026). An imbalance in relations is evident from the basic fact that ECOWAS does not have a designated ambassador in Beijing.

The most recent highlight of these relations was China's handover of a new ECOWAS headquarters building, christened "The Eye of West Africa", strategically located along the Airport Road in Abuja in April 2026. To understand where agency lies in this initiative, it is worthwhile following the trajectory leading to the official opening of the building. During the handover of the building, it was noted that the initial plans for the Chinese donation had been made during a China-ECOWAS Joint Committee on Economic and Trade Cooperation in 2015 (ECOWAS 2026).

The agreement for the construction of the facility was signed in March 2018, financed through an initial $31.6 million Chinese Government grant (the figure was reported at $56.57 million in 2026), with the then Ivorian President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Brou, and then Chinese ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Zhou Pingjian, appending their signatures (ECOWAS 2018a). An implementation agreement was entered into in 2019, with Jean-Claude Brou signing for the Commission and Zhao Linxiang, the Chinese Economic and Commercial Counsellor, signing for China (ECOWAS 2019). The foundation was laid in December 2022 (ECOWAS 2022a), strategically coinciding with the 62nd Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government. Symbolically, the event was graced by heads of state, the host and donor of the land on which the facility stood, then Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, and then Chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló (deposed in a coup d'état in 2025), and President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio. Also

present were the Gambian President of the ECOWAS Commission, Omar Alieu Touray, and the then Chinese ambassador of China to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Cui Jianchun. A notable aspect during this event included the reporting that the Chinese entity responsible for the funding was China Aid. A statement noted that China was "keen on expanding diplomatic relations with Africa through support for construction projects like the new ECOWAS Commission headquarters" and "to promote and support Africa's infrastructure development" in Africa (ECOWAS 2022a). Other significant factors included the framing of the facility as "a symbol of the unity and brotherhood of ECOWAS Member States" and China, the expansion of office space for the ECOWAS Commission (the executive arm of the REC), the Court of Justice, and the Parliament (ECOWAS 2022a).

The seriousness with which the building was taken is seen in the establishment of the "Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee on the Construction of the New ECOWAS Community Institutions Headquarters" (ECOWAS 2023a, 2023b). Representatives came from Benin, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, with regular physical meetings held on site in Abuja under the auspices of the ECOWAS Commissioner for Infrastructure, Energy and Digitalisation (ECOWAS 2023b). One of the meetings coincided with a convening of the ECOWAS foreign ministers in July 2024, during which the ministers were conducted around the building by managers from the Chinese company undertaking the construction work, the Shaanxi Construction Engineering Group Company (SCEGC) International Corporation, and Chinese embassy officials (ECOWAS 2024a). During an inspection by the ECOWAS Commission's Vice President, Damtien L. Tchintchibidja, in November 2025, it came to light that aspects of the construction under the Nigerian government and the Federal Capital Territory Administration (in charge of Abuja) were lagging (while, ostensibly, the Chinese part of the construction was progressing well) (ECOWAS 2025a).

When the Chinese ambassador to ECOWAS, Cui Jianchun, bade farewell to the ECOWAS Commission President, Omar Alieu Touray, in March 2024, the donation of the ECOWAS headquarters was pointed out as a major highlight of his tour of duty. More importantly, the

Chinese ambassador invited ECOWAS to participate in the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) scheduled for later that year. This would ostensibly showcase the new headquarters as a testament to the importance of the ECOWAS-China relations (ECOWAS 2024b). When the ECOWAS delegation ultimately travelled to Beijing for the FOCAC summit in September 2024, the Commission's President was tellingly accompanied by the Commissioner for Infrastructure, Energy and Digitalisation (ECOWAS 2024c).

China's construction of the ECOWAS headquarters followed over two decades of ever-increasing engagements. Infrastructure development has been the main area of engagement. For instance, when ECOWAS signed an agreement and established a cooperation committee with China in 2012, infrastructure was highlighted as a major area of need for ECOWAS. During that occasion, the then Vice-President of the ECOWAS Commission, Toga Gayewea McIntosh, pointed out that the "2,000-kilometre Trans-African Highway between Dakar and Lagos" linking the subregion's fifteen states would "contribute to facilitating intra-community trade and movement of citizens" (Chinese Embassy in South Africa 2012).

The donation of the ECOWAS building is a perfect case where critical and supportive sentiments came to the fore. Positive sentiments included China's aid to a subregional organisation whose old office facilities had reduced its capacity for effective. It was pointed out that the member states were cash-strapped and could not have mustered the resources to put up the ultra-modern building. In fact, at that point, some member states were falling behind in their membership contributions to the organisation (see Marsh 2012).

The ECOWAS headquarters donation is but one in an ECOWAS-China relationship founded on strong trade and investment engagements. Fundamentally, China is the number one trading partner of the subregions. Chinese financing has provided many ECOWAS member states with alternative sources of development funding at a time when Western funding has lessened (see Akyeampong 2015: 11-12). Infrastructure deficits remain a major constraint to economic growth. China has contributed significantly to addressing the region's infrastructure deficits

and supporting broader economic development objectives. This is not a direct ECOWAS-China phenomenon. In a roundtable for ECOWAS ambassadors accredited to Beijing, for instance, it was recommended that "Chinese partners should also look to support cross-border and regional programmes to support regional integration effectively" (Development Reimagined ND). It, however, creates an environment in which ECOWAS as an institution engages with comfort with the Chinese. The Chinese ambassador to ECOWAS, Yu Dunhai, stated as much in an article in Nigeria in April 2026. He said that "leveraging the FOCAC and the Belt and Road Initiative, bilateral cooperation [had] extended from traditional infrastructure, such as roads and ports" (Yu Dunhai 2026).

Nevertheless, debates persist regarding the long-term implications of China's growing economic presence, particularly with respect to debt sustainability, local industrial development, technology transfer, and economic dependency. Negatives in the donation of the ECOWAS headquarters, for instance, included that, first, the building would be used by Chinese actors for surveillance of ECOWAS activities. This was particularly in the wake of charges that the Chinese were doing espionage on African leaders through tech insertions on the African Union headquarters, which they had donated in 2012. The insinuation was that the China-constructed building could be used for espionage and hacking on ECOWAS activities and data (see Marsh 2018). Second, there was no honour for ECOWAS, a 15-member organisation established in 1975, to require Chinese assistance in putting up a building to house its operations. Third, China's donation was a form of soft power to influence a favourable environment to close deals beneficial to it in the subregion through aid. Some saw the donation as a strategic calculation rather than an altruistic move that helped boost China's geopolitical position vis-à-vis Western competitors. Others insisted that the donation was genuine and well-meaning. This sentiment came from Chinese commentators who saw criticism as largely Western-driven rather than coming from ECOWAS sources. Moreover, the visibility of the Chinese-funded headquarters contributed to projecting China's soft power through infrastructure diplomacy (Olander 2026). This reinforced China's image as a development partner committed to addressing Africa's infrastructure

challenges and strengthening its strategic presence in a subregion of geopolitical significance.

The image of strong ECOWAS-China relations belies areas of positive and negative complexities. For instance, when ECOWAS sought a United Nations Security Council resolution for sanctions on a then-ECOWAS member, Mali, China and Russia used their veto power to reject the bid (Al Jazeera 2022). Yet, China has, in the past, channelled resources for peace and security in Mali through the UN (Soule 2021).

There is a need for further research on ECOWAS-China relations, particularly because publicly accessible data and information are scarce. Overall, it is evident that China prefers engaging with individual West African states, with engagements through the ECOWAS being largely symbolic. Commenting on the Forum on China Africa Cooperation Summit held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2021, ECOWAS-China scholar Folashade Soule (2021) recommended an enhanced "bridging role" for ECOWAS to play in charting more productive relations.

Agency analysis

Like the rest of the continent, China has come from a low engagement base in the 1990s to the leading trade and economic partner with ECOWAS. Likewise, Chinese agency towards Africa has been increasing, and African agency towards China has been rising. Chinese agency towards ECOWAS is founded on the fact that it is a new and rising power in the region. As such, the novelty in the engagement is a point of mutual agency capital. In this scheme of things, it is generally thought that the Chinese benefit from the relations, and ECOWAS benefits too. Analysing the relations, however, shows that Chinese agency towards ECOWAS is far more pronounced than the reverse.

Infrastructure development is the sector in which the Chinese have agential capabilities and where Africans, including those in ECOWAS, have one of the greatest needs. As we see in the data on the engagements above, one of the first areas of agreement between China and ECOWAS in 2012 was primed with cooperation in which China would help ECOWAS to address massive transport infrastructure needs. While ECOWAS and

China act towards each other in the infrastructure sector, making it a case of mutual agency, it is the bigger actor in the relations, China, that has greater agency in the relations. This creates vulnerabilities, including real or potential to be exploited by China.

China's donation of the "Eye of West Africa", the new ECOWAS headquarters completed and handed over in 2026, is a good example for the analysis of agency in the engagements. It is indeed the main source of data on ECOWAS-China relations from the available data. From one viewpoint, this project is an example of Chinese soft power as a form of agency, built around infrastructure diplomacy. On the other hand, it is a case of ECOWAS's lack of agency as read from a dependency perspective. The basic premise for critics is that ECOWAS and China should indeed collaborate as much as possible. The question is how they should go about partnering in a way that creates equality and therefore mutual agency.

The fact that the agreement for the donation of the building was made during a joint trade meeting suggests that it has mutual trade benefits, which equals mutual agency between ECOWAS and China. Power asymmetry can, however, be seen in the fact that during the signing of the agreement in 2018, the ECOWAS president, representing the whole ECOWAS regional economic community (REC), signed the agreement for the Chinese donation, while the Chinese ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS signed for China. Whether it was a logistical challenge or otherwise, the Chinese side could have been represented in the signing ceremony by someone higher up in the Chinese government or the ruling Communist Party of China. Agency was therefore more on the Chinese than the ECOWAS side. Chinese agency was again on display when an agreement for the construction work was entered into in 2019, when the ECOWAS president signed, with his counterpart being a relatively junior Chinese diplomat. Various reports on the project showed that Chinese officials, particularly ambassadors, were in constant contact with ECOWAS officials, making them perhaps the most valuable of foreign diplomats in Abuja.

The laying of the foundation during the heads of state summit in 2022 was a form of ECOWAS agency. The choice of the occasion provided an opportunity for ECOWAS leaders to showcase the project

as evidence of subregional projects being implemented. Chinese agency could be read as supporting an integration project. China was included in the commemorative event, thereby gaining soft power. ECOWAS agency was evident in the officiation of the launch of the construction by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, then Chairman of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, and President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, and President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio. Nigerian agency was palpable by dint of being the physical location on which the facility was being raised. The presence of many leaders, the photo-op, and the ceremony were a form of joint agency for ECOWAS and China.

The fact that the ECOWAS headquarters donation was delivered through the China International Development Cooperation Agency (China Aid) lent the initiative a foreign aid character. One could compare this to foreign assistance through other development assistance entities, of which the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was the most prominent before its closure in July 2026. It may be that the USAID made much more in donations to ECOWAS. However, in donating a building, the Chinese reversed the narrative, which gave them much more agency, particularly as this happened as the US and other global powers were pulling back from the subregion.

Chinese agency was evident in the fact that China Aid had only been established in 2018 and was delivering a tangible brick-and-mortar donation. Chinese agency as a strategy can be deduced from the statements made by Chinese officials, linking the donation to China's capacity and capability in infrastructure development. The implication was that, just as with the ECOWAS headquarters, Chinese actors could assist ECOWAS in addressing the many infrastructure gaps it faced. In using the language of "brotherhood," the Chinese were striking chords of fraternity, a key trope that China has leveraged under the rubric of South-South cooperation. This created a sense of mutual agency in the sense that China and ECOWAS were being treated as equal partners.

ECOWAS lost agency in the donation of the building because ECOWAS member states relied on an external actor to put up the buildings in which important official business, such as the Commission, Court of Justice,

and Parliament, is conducted. The image presented was that ECOWAS needed the building because its former facilities were dilapidated and too small to accommodate a growing number of officials. This was a loss of agency for ECOWAS because it exposed its vulnerabilities to China, over and above the questionable logic of running an organisation if it couldn't muster resources to house the various officials. Critics sought to cast the building as a danger to ECOWAS. The surveillance trope that accompanied the construction process was reputational damage to China and, therefore, a loss of agency. Similar negativity, such as China's role in the debt burden in the subregion were thrown into the analysis, requiring China to respond in damage control mode.

Interestingly, the ECOWAS officials took their role in the construction of the building quite seriously, by, for instance, setting up a construction committee comprising representatives from several member states. This is a form of partial agency because, on the one hand, there is a sense of ownership; on the other hand, the construction committee was working on a project donated by an external actor. It could have been a case of the ECOWAS agency if such a committee had mobilised resources from member states for the construction of the headquarters. Indeed, it was a loss of agency when viewed from the perspective that China was "donating" the building to ECOWAS on ECOWAS's own soil or, in a manner of speaking, a visitor came to a homestead and built a house for the homestead owner.

Chinese agency is seen in the fact that the Chinese company in charge of the construction work, Shaanxi Construction Engineering Group Company (SCEGC), was marketing itself to the foreign ministers as they inspected the works. The Chinese embassy officials who frequently updated ECOWAS member states and officials were making useful connections with influential foreign policy actors at the ECOWAS member state and ECOWAS secretariat levels. In the revelation that the Nigerian contractor handling aspects of the construction was behind schedule, ECOWAS lost agency because it was compared directly with Shaanxi Construction Engineering Group Company's meeting of its timelines.

Mutual agency can be seen in the Chinese ambassador's invitation

to ECOWAS officials to attend the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) conference in 2024. Although the Chinese extended the invitation, ECOWAS honoured the invitation, thus making it a mutual engagement. It is noteworthy that an ECOWAS official responsible for infrastructure was in the delegation, at the very least signalling appreciation for the headquarters donation, but also perhaps showing ECOWAS interest in continued partnership in infrastructure project funding. From such viewpoints, we see agency playing out at the level of the Chinese, for their invitation of ECOWAS to the FOCAC conference, and at the level of ECOWAS, for strategically including an infrastructure official in the delegation.

The building was handed over in April 2026, and a ceremony was held in July 2026. The holding of these two events nearly back-to-back was clearly a marketing and positioning strategy to publicise and raise its visibility. This is the case when you consider the many other occasions that were crafted around the project from its initiation. But publicity has an agential objective. In the 2026 events, it was stated that China was keen to collaborate with ECOWAS under the framework of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This was strategy as agency because there were no clear links between the building, ECOWAS, and BRI. If indeed there are BRI projects in the subregion, it appears that ECOWAS has not played much of a role in their being rolled out. Yet, the ECOWAS officials had been granted an opportunity to negotiate with their Chinese counterparts for subregional BRI projects. These were quite feasible given that China has demonstrated the capacity to fulfil infrastructure projects when it is committed to them.

While direct ECOWAS-China agency is positive, though imbalanced, agency shifts into negative for China from an ECOWAS official when China's broader interests come into play. A case in point, as discussed above, was China's use of its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to support the separatist Sahelian nation of Mali when it faced UN sanctions. Generally, China has not been supportive of ECOWAS's peace and security initiatives in the restive Sahel region, where military coups and terrorist-inspired instability have rendered life quite precarious. China is seen as sympathetic to ECOWAS's breakaway nations of Mali,

Niger, and Burkina Faso. It showed that mutual agency disappears when interests differ.

ECOWAS and European Union Relations

Evolution of the relations

Of all ECOWAS-global powers relations, the ECOWAS-European Union (EU) relationship is the most established, at least going by publicly available information. It is worth noting upfront that this analysis is partial for various reasons. First, this section of the chapter starts with a brief comment on the history of the relations, fully aware that an extensive historical account is necessary given the equally extensive engagements going back to colonial times. Second, there are several sources of data and information on the ECOWAS-EU relations. Analysing most, if not all, of the sources is not feasible due to space limitations. One such source left out, and potentially a source of future research, is the European Development Fund.

A brief historical trajectory of activities and projects provides a pathway for understanding how agency plays out between ECOWAS and the EU. Analysts have argued that the establishment of ECOWAS in 1975 was inspired by the European integration process that ultimately led to the creation of the EU (UK Essays 2025). The relations were, however, formalised only in 1998. Two years later, in 2000, the first ECOWAS-EU ministerial meeting, which would become an annual diplomatic fixture of the partnership, was convened at the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2000). After this meeting, a troika meeting system in practice to date was established. ECOWAS representatives in the troika include the Chairperson of the Commission or his/her representative (usually the head of a state), the incoming and outgoing chairpersons, and the ECOWAS President, who is the head of the secretariat. On the EU side are the foreign ministers from the EU nation holding the presidency and representatives of the incoming and outgoing EU presidencies.

During the first convening referenced above, the reasons motivating

the formalisation of the relations were that the EU wanted to "play its role fully on the international arena, in particular by developing a common foreign and security policy" (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2000). ECOWAS, on the other hand, was "intensifying efforts to achieve wider regional consultation and deeper cooperation … to create a single regional market in West Africa based on trade liberalisation, a common external tariff and a single monetary zone" (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2000). The partnership would ostensibly help the partner organisations achieve these respective objectives.

At this point, much of the EU aid was channelled directly to West African member states under the now-moribund European Development Fund (EDF) rather than through ECOWAS. During that first ministerial meeting, a financing agreement worth € 1.95 million was reached, towards boosting regional trade. The funds were to be provided to member states through ECOWAS. A similar amount went to support conflict prevention and stability in the ECOWAS region (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2000). Similar planned meetings were held on the issues of conflict prevention and peace mediation, alternating between a European capital and an African one, often accompanied by financial support from the EU (see, for instance, ECOWAS 2024).

For the EDF funding cycle between 2002 and 2007, a new practice emerged. Policy formulation and implementation were agreed collectively between the EU and ECOWAS, giving the latter an influential role (Saleh 2025). This collective approach was short-lived, as a major change occurred in 2008. This is captured thus:

> "Starting with the 10th EDF (2008–2013), the EU raised concerns about ECOWAS's limited absorption capacity, implementation delays, lack of transparency, and failure to meet EU pillar assessment standards. As a result, the EU reduced the funds ECOWAS could directly manage. By the 11th EDF (2014–2020), ECOWAS was no longer entitled to manage funds directly and retained only limited oversight over fund management and allocation. This has led to

> friction in the relationship between ECOWAS and the EU, with ECOWAS seeking more ownership over the funding, while the EU favours implementing projects through intermediary bodies, such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), to manage the funds" (Saleh 2025).

Following the change in funding methods in 2008, the next major shift came in 2021 when the EU changed its external funding model. This is when the EU scrapped the EDF approach and launched the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe as an aid and development finance vehicle. It constituted a lessening of ECOWAS-EU relations on several fronts. First, it further reduced the amount of money that would be channelled to or through ECOWAS. Second, it also broadened engagement partners to include non-state actors. Third, it prioritised the EU over ECOWAS's issues, thus reducing the latter's sense of ownership in the relationship (Saleh 2025).

The third shift in EU-ECOWAS relations was evident in 2023. In a communique after a ministerial meeting, it was stated that the parties would "boost public and private investment in support of large-scale sustainable investments in West Africa, supported by Team Europe Initiatives, under the EU's Global Gateway strategy" (EU 2023). The EU's Global Gateway is an ambitious initiative launched in 2021 to mobilise billions of Euros for worldwide investment in digital technologies and energy, transport, and other sectors.

Institutional and organisational engagements

As such, EU reporting on EDF funding for the 2014 – 2020 period could not be said to benefit ECOWAS alone, but to benefit other actors, including non-state actors, in the West African region broadly. Although ECOWAS has had a circumscribed role in EDF funding since 2008, formal relations have continued. This is particularly in the regional peace and security domain. A few examples suffice. The EU provided €29 million between 2013 and 2019 (Saleh 2025). A further €20 million,

jointly cofinanced by the EU (€16.4 million) and the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ (€4 million), in the peace and security sector, was made between 2019 and 2023. In the period 2016 to 2018, the EU supported the implementation of the ECOWAS Anti-Terrorism Strategy in countries in the Chad Basin region, providing resources to operationalize the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) (EU 2017).

EU's support for ECOWAS as an institution, including its day-to-day running, has been a continuous area of engagement over the years. Perhaps in appreciation of the EU support, ECOWAS awarded a certification of recognition to the Head of the European Union Delegation to Nigeria and to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Samuela Isopi, in 2023 (ECOWAS 2023e). Institutional and organizational support for the ECOWAS secretariat and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) garnered €4 million between 2019 and 2023. This was co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) (Saleh 2025). This was a case of the EU and Germany institutionally supporting an ECOWAS financial institution, the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. In a 2023 workshop to assess ECOWAS's compliance in donor-funding engagements with the EU, four areas were identified as needing improvement: a) internal control; b) exclusion from access to funding; c) publication of information on recipients; and d) protection of personal data (ECOWAS 2023c).

In a joint ministerial meeting in 2018, the EU lobbied for ECOWAS institutions such as the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) and the West African Development Bank (BOAD) to be more involved in the partnership. This was meant to "foster ownership of financing mechanisms" (EU 2018B). This was in the specific context of the roll-out of the EU External Investment Plan (EIP) (EU 2018B). In 2023, it was also reported that the EU and the German Agency for International Development (GIZ) were assisting ECOWAS in improvements in data protection and ownership of development aid programmes. While the EU lobbied ECOWAS member states to sign the Economic Partnership

Agreements (EPAs), the ECOWAS side was more desirous of "greater flexibility on the issue of the EPA, in particular the implementation schedule of the interim EPAs" (EU 2018b).

Peace, Security, and Stability

It is worth noting upfront that the area of armed conflict and stability has been a mainstay of EU-ECOWAS relations year in, year out, from the elections-inspired turmoil in Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s to military coups in present times. Over the years, the EU has sent observer missions during elections in the region, working alongside ECOWAS's own observer missions. The EU also supported the return to democratic governance in the Gambia, through the ECOWAS Mission to The Gambia (ECOMIG), and in Guinea-Bissau through the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (EU 2017). The EU and Germany are equal financiers of the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture and Operations (EPSAO). The EU encouraged the sub-region to diversify sources of funding. A communique stated that there was "the need to explore more avenues to increase the financial contributions by the AU and regional organisations such as ECOWAS to peacekeeping and other security-related missions on the African continent" (EU 2017).

The two organisations were aligned on the linkage between the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy and the EU Strategy and Action Plan for the Gulf of Guinea maritime problems, such as illegal fishing and piracy (EU 2017). The EU provided support for institutions and initiatives such as the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres (MMCCs), the West African Regional Centre for Maritime Safety (CRESMAO), the Programme to Support the West African Integrated Maritime Security Strategy (SWAIMS), and the Programme for the Enhancement of West African Regional Fisheries Governance (PESCAO) (EU 2018b). Implementation was, however, not proceeding as planned on some of these initiatives. In 2023, for instance, a delay in the operationalisation of the Multinational Maritime Coordinating Centre (MMCC) was reported. It was to be based in Cabo Verde (EU 2023). The finger of blame was implicitly pointed at ECOWAS for this delay.

Support to counter organized crime and cybercrime for the period 2020 to 2024 was reported at €41 million (Saleh 2025). Projects were thereafter devolved to the national level, but still through ECOWAS. An example is the donation in 2022 of a digital laboratory to the Gambian authorities under the EU-funded project "Organised Crime: West African Response on Cybersecurity and fight against Cybercrime" (OCWAR-C) (ECOWAS 2022b). The donation was made through a public event in Banjul. To combat crime, the two partners held a series of meetings under the auspices of the "Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking (OCWAR-T) project" to plan and implement mitigating action, with Germany providing some of the resources (ECOWAS 2023f). A similar project was launched for Burkina Faso in the same period as a partnership of ECOWAS, the EU, and France (ECOWAS 2021).

In January 2024, three then-member states, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, announced plans to withdraw from ECOWAS. This was after ECOWAS imposed sanctions following military coups in each of the three countries with continuous borders, inspiring the phrase coup belt. In July 2024, they formed the Alliance of Sahelian States, effectively a new African REC. This was a development around which the EU and ECOWAS closed ranks. A review of meetings over this period showed an increased focus on commitment to democratic values and condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government in many joint convenings from 2024 onwards. Due to the seriousness of the instability, the EU started appointing an envoy for the Sahel, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, in 2013. Indeed, the EU was visionary in creating the position of a Sahelian ambassador because, the following year, the G5, comprising the five Sahelian nations, was established in what some saw as a snub of ECOWAS conflict resolution efforts in the enclave of the broader subregion (see Welz 2022). The EU special representative appointed in 2024 is former Portuguese foreign minister João Gomes Cravinho (European Council 2024). He continued engaging on the instability in the region through ECOWAS, even as he attempted to persuade the so-called "Sahelexit", a name coined to mimic the exit of Britain from the EU – Brexit.

A link between ECOWAS, the EU, and the African Union was evident

when a workshop to review an EU-funded African Peace & Security Architecture project was held in 2023. The workshop was convened as the project was ending; it aimed to "reinforce the ownership of the project by the respective stakeholders", among other monitoring and evaluation objectives (ECOWAS 2023d). Participants, including those representing ECOWAS Peace Fund and early warning system entities, explored "other funding provisions under the European Union" and recommended continuation of the support (ECOWAS 2023d).

Migration

Migrations from the ECOWAS region to Europe were of particular interest to the EU. In 2018, it appeared the EU was keen on tackling the root causes of migration, while ECOWAS "reiterated the importance of the full implementation of the ECOWAS flagship Protocol on Free Movement of Persons to encourage skill, labour and talent mobility" (EU 2018b).

One of the major outcomes of the 2023 ministerial meeting (referenced above), during which the EU aligned its engagements with the Global Gateway strategy, was the announcement of a €100 million agreement between the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Concluded under the auspices of the EU, the money was to support climate action and environmental sustainability projects in the ECOWAS region with an emphasis on clean and renewable energy (European Investment Bank 2025). Climate change and energy as the nexus of the relations was evident in the launch of a postgraduate scholarship programme in 2022 (ECOWAS 2022c). Funding came from the EU, and nine universities from Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, and Cape Verde were selected competitively to host students. Partnership in the education sector has included a comparative exchange of ideas on the relevance of education to developmental and regional integration goals. Such was the case when officials from the two subregions met in 2025 under the Africa-Europe Partnership to Exchange on Education Reforms (PEERs) programme, with the French Agency for International Development, Expertise France, providing technical advice (ECOWAS 2025a).

Agency analysis

Based on an analysis of the sources accessed during this study, the relationship between ECOWAS and the EU is, for the most part, mutual from an agency perspective. A major contributor to this is that ECOWAS and the EU have a long-running relationship. ECOWAS officials know the EU better than other global powers, for better or for worse. The fact that the EU integration was already underway when ECOWAS was established in 1975 has been latched onto to argue that the EU provides a model that ECOWAS should emulate. Agency is therefore fundamentally with the EU rather than ECOWAS at this fundamental ideational level. The fact that formal relations between the two parties commenced only in 1998 shows a mutual lack of agency towards each other until relatively recently.

Once formal relations were solemnised, structure emerged quite quickly. The consistency of ministerial meetings since 2000 has created a stable engagement mechanism within which the partners exercise agency towards each other. The composition of the troika system suggests that each side is well represented and that the agendas are mutually agreed. Differing agency emerges once one delves into the nature of engagements. The rotation of meetings between an ECOWAS capital and an EU capital suggests mutual agency.

From the first ministerial meeting in 2000, it was evident that one of the top EU objectives was to use the partnership with ECOWAS as a showcase on the international stage. ECOWAS, on the other hand, looked to the EU to deepen internal integration at home. The EU agency motivations are therefore much more ambitious and global, while ECOWAS agency interests in the relations are quite domestic.

Over the last twenty-six years (as of 2026), the relationship has been one of donor-recipient, where agency lies with the donor. The financial support that the EU provided to ECOWAS through the European Development Fund in the early 2000s was lopsided because, although agreed multilaterally, the funding was disbursed directly to ECOWAS member states. This was a case of partial agency on the part of ECOWAS. This was corrected for the period 2002 to 2007 as a semblance of mutual

agency emerged as ECOWAS had an input in the EU's financing. This collective agency was short-lived.

From 2008 onwards to the present, the EU progressively increased its agency in the relations, just as ECOWAS has progressively ceded agency. In that year, the EU changed the terms of engagement only a decade after formal relations were established. Before the 2008 changes, ECOWAS had been managing the funds for subregional projects. The EU created new layers for disbursement of funds to ECOWAS, such as GIZ, in a manner that gave more agency in overall terms. This was in response to various concerns discussed above, including suggestions of impropriety and inefficiency. These charges were, in essence, the cause of ECOWAS's loss of agency in the relations. The friction between the two partners that was reported at the tail of the 2010s decade was a show of contestation over agency. In a donor-recipient relationship, however, ECOWAS had to make do with reduced agency because it couldn't force the EU to channel its resources to it rather than directly to member states. In fact, member states probably appreciated receiving the funds directly.

The changes in the relationship in the mid-2010s further eroded ECOWAS's institutional agency. Rather than use the good offices of ECOWAS, the EU included non-state actors, some of whom might have been critical to ECOWAS as an intergovernmental body.

The changes in the early 2020s further reduced ECOWAS's agency. It was a form of competitive agency because the EU's launch of the Global Gateway strategy, as discussed above, was partly aimed at countering China's Belt and Road Initiative globally. This shift could be read as an extension of the EU's further reduction of aid to ECOWAS in favour of investments with returns or a return on investment. Essentially, EU aid or charity was being replaced by a hard-nosed and self-interested proclivity as the region (EU) faced an economic downturn.

Realism can, however, be read in the fact that the ECOWAS has continued to engage with the EU. ECOWAS leaders and officials must have concluded that there was little they could do as the EU consistently amassed more power in the relations. Once the EU raised its agency, ECOWAS seemed to settle into the role allocated to it, particularly because the bigger partner was providing the resources. And indeed,

the reporting throughout the years shows that the EU has continued to disburse resources to the subregion, whether directly through the institutional architecture of ECOWAS or to the ECOWAS member states and non-state actors. This can be read as realistic mutual agency in that ECOWAS still, supposedly, benefits from the EU.

If ECOWAS had stood its ground to insist that the engagements be conducted on an official ECOWAS-EU basis, the relations could either have broken down or the EU could have relented. A major probable factor that led ECOWAS to live with reduced agency is that the EU funded and continues to fund its organisational operations. While this can be read as mutual agency, the fact that the EU institutional funding for ECOWAS extends its influence into practices, including decision-making, implies that the EU has great agency in the relations. The reporting on the EU's support of ECOWAS as an institution brings indications of administrative and managerial challenges in the organisation. While this is a case of mutual agency indicative of areas in which the EU assists ECOWAS to improve on delivery, it is also a case of ECOWAS's loss of agency because a partner is essentially pointing out areas that need improvement when this could have been done internally.

The EU's support for the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) is another layer of its agency vis-à-vis ECOWAS. This is intriguing because institutional or organisational support is expected to go to other parts or sections of ECOWAS, not the financial institution. It could have been mutual agency if it were an agreement on a joint financial agreement or project. In many instances, the EU has encouraged ECOWAS to take greater ownership of the joint projects. In other words, the EU is desirous of ECOWAS supporting its vision of the partnership, given that the agendas are for the most part set in Brussels. This is a case of the EU steering ECOWAS towards mutual agency on its own terms.

The one area where ECOWAS and the EU have had differing agency objectives of the partners is the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Over the years, the EU has aggressively pushed the EPAs in a manner that suggests it has a bigger stake than ECOWAS. ECOWAS's resistance is a form of agency, suggesting that the organisation does not

see the EPAs benefiting it and that attempting to buy time is meant to enable it to prepare to understand EPAs to boost its agency.

Overall, peace, security, and stability are the greatest issues of focus for the EU. Agency is directed towards creating peace so that productive relations in trade can be structured. In nearly all the peace and conflict resolution initiatives, ECOWAS loses agency by the mere fact that an external actor is involved in the internal affairs of a supposedly independent subregion. EU's support for the ECOWAS Mission to The Gambia (ECOMIG) and the ECOWAS Mission to Guinea-Bissau, for instance, shows limited internal weaknesses.

The biggest loss of agency for both ECOWAS and the EU is the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from ECOWAS and their establishment of the Association of Sahel States (AES). The main external actor that benefited from the unprecedented development is Russia, as we shall see below.

The EU was prescient in creating the G5 sub-organisation comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in 2013. It was a loss of agency for ECOWAS as it was being bypassed, perhaps due to its incapacities. Even when we consider the EU's continued appointment of envoys to the G5, it is still a loss of agency because the G5 organisation would not have been necessary had the security issues in the subregion been handled proactively.

In some of the engagements, there is a sense of EU donor fatigue. This comes through when the EU responds to calls for support by urging ECOWAS to diversify sources of funding and to mobilise internally. This is a form of EU agency because the global power is telling ECOWAS that peace and security funds should primarily come from the affected countries, the subregion, and Africa more broadly. It would have been a case of the ECOWAS agency had it taken up the challenge, making it unnecessary for the EU to express frustration at the begging from the subregional body. At the same time, this would reduce the EU's agency.

An area of close partnership, as we saw above, relates to maritime resources in the Atlantic Ocean. It is a matter of mutual agency as both parties lose out on illegal fishing. The EU region gets the bulk of its fish supplies from the subregion. Fishing is also big business, with many EU

businesses and industries involved. ECOWAS countries benefit from trade and related fishing industry activities. This raises the question of which actors are involved in illegal fishing so much so that they attract a mutual ECOWAS-EU partnership. Apart from independent cartels' involvement in illegalities, Chinese actors have been involved in the recent past. EU agency is therefore partly aimed at curbing Chinese involvement, legal or illegal, in the Atlantic Ocean.

As we saw earlier, in the delays in setting up the Multinational Maritime Coordinating Centre (MMCC) in Cabo Verde, the finger of blame was pointed at ECOWAS. The EU's expression of frustration with this project is a form of circumscribed agency, and ECOWAS's agency is limited due to a failure to meet its side of the agreement. However, why was ECOWAS not acting expeditiously in setting up the facility? It could be that this was not a priority for ECOWAS as it was for the EU.

For the most part, the EU generally favours bilateral agreements, while maintaining the subregional facilitative role of the ECOWAS agency. The security is a case in point. Ordinary crime and cybercrime, as we saw above, are among the areas where ECOWAS plays a coordinating role. This gives the ECOWAS agency. The donations of digital anti-crime gadgets and devices, in several public events in member states, are a symbolic show of mutual agency, which can, however, be read as more of an EU than an ECOWAS agency because the EU is the donor. Probably the EU opted for mutual agency because organised crime, including terrorism, transgresses borders and is better done through the subregional coordinating capacity of ECOWAS.

In the area of migration, ECOWAS and the EU have different agency motivations. A review of the engagements shows the EU was more focused on the issue compared to ECOWAS. The EU pushed for policies and projects that would stem the flow of African migrants to Europe. ECOWAS, in a laissez-faire manner, sought support for regional trade integration as a means of boosting trade as an avenue for development.

ECOWAS and the United States of America Relations

Recent evolution in relations

The most recent and perhaps the first official agreement between ECOWAS and the United States was entered into in 2014. This was a trade and investment agreement, which, among other things, established a United States-ECOWAS Council on Trade and Investment, with representation by the ECOWAS Commission and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2014). The agreement followed a 2013 meeting between President Barack Obama and the presidents of Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Cape Verde in Washington, during which the trade partnership framework was agreed (USTR 2013). The Council was meant to meet annually. However, no publicly available information shows the convening of these meetings. In 2018, ECOWAS established a technical working group to implement the agreement to "optimise the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) to boost the economy of the region through trade" (Trade Law Centre 2018). Beyond the announcement of the establishment of the technical team, however, there is no further information on the implementation of the pact. There are two speculative ways one can interpret the lack of information on the pact on online platforms. One, the agreement may have been implemented without information being divulged. Second, it is also entirely possible that the agreement was not implemented at all for any number of reasons. The latter is perhaps the most plausible explanation, because some form of information, even indirectly, would be accessible.

ECOWAS actively sought assistance from the US, sometimes in open and explicit ways. In March 2018, for instance, it was reported that then-President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, had "called on the United States of America to continue its support of ECOWAS programmes and activities in order to achieve economic integration and peace and security in the region" (ECOWAS 2018b). This solicitation was made during an event for ECOWAS ambassadors hosted by the US Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, in Abuja (ECOWAS

2018b). In November 2018, Brou advocated closer cooperation between ECOWAS and the US, focusing on the assistance the US would provide vis-à-vis the many political and stability challenges in the subregion. He is reported to have said this "while highlighting the need for the US to sustain its global role and influence given its strategic importance to West Africa" (ECOWAS 2018c). This was when a visit by then-US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy (ECOWAS 2018c).

The Pre-Trump II period

Before its closure in July 2025, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was the primary mechanism around which an ECOWAS-USAID engagement architecture was built. Engagements were structured through the USAID regional office for West Africa, which was based in Accra, Ghana. In 2016, for instance, the US, through USAID, committed to providing $221 million over the period of five years, up to 2019, to "strengthen democratic institutions, enhance economic growth, Trade and investment as well as Peace and Security in the region" (Anyanwu 2016). During the event for an agreement accompanying this funding, the then US Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, W. Stuart Symington, revealed that the US's goal was, as reported, "to support key U.S. Government initiatives including Trade Africa, Feed the Future, Global Health, Global Climate Change and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership" (Anyanwu 2016). In mid-2024, it was reported that ECOWAS and USAID were discussing a new partnership agreement. In a meeting with ECOWAS officials, the then USAID regional director for West Africa, Jo Lesser Oltheten, stated that the partnership would be for five years, with a $1 billion budget (ECOWAS 2024e). The ECOWAS side presented "stabilisation and consolidation of democracy, and peace and regional security" as the potential areas of the new partnership (ECOWAS 2024e). The US representative presented "interventions in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resource management, trade, and monetary and financial issues" (ECOWAS 2024e).

In the same year, 2024, USAID partnered with the ECOWAS Center

for Gender and Development for a project on gender equality and the economic and social empowerment of women and girls, funded by the former (ECOWAS 2024f). ECOWAS's appreciation of USAID's general assistance across security, economic development, humanitarian assistance, democratic governance, and institutional strengthening was evident when ECOWAS's Vice-President, Damtien Larbli Tchintchibidja, met a US delegation led by congresswomen French Hill and Chrissy Houlahan in June 2024 in Abuja (ECOWAS 2024g). Environmental programming was another area in which USAID partnered with ECOWAS from 2021 to 2024. In September 2024, it was reported that USAID had provided ten grants worth more than $6 million to eight community organisations in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The support was under a West Africa Biodiversity and Low Emissions Development project covering the management of forests and combating wildlife trafficking (ECOWAS 2024h).

Peace, Security, and Stability

Peace, security, and stability are major themes in the ECOWAS-US relations. Examples attest to this. As mentioned above, ECOWAS officials prioritised the capacity of the US to assist in managing conflicts in the region, ranging from election-related violence, military coups, and violent extremism. From March 2019 to April 2022, ECOWAS and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) engaged in a series of conflict prevention and management exercises. These included crisis scenario planning, early warning preparedness, preventive diplomacy, social inclusion, and prevention of election-related violence as the subregion faced mounting internal and external armed attacks (ECOWAS 2019b; ECOWAS 2019c; ECOWAS 2020; ECOWAS 2022c).

The ECOWAS and the US have always closed ranks when militaries topple civilian governments in the ECOWAS region. This is a region that has experienced the highest number of military coups, not only in Africa but globally. Such was the case in 2009 when the military took power,

with the US State Department issuing a statement that has become a standard template for subsequent coups. It read thus:

> "The United States welcomes the decision by the heads of government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to suspend Guinea's membership until elections are held. We support the efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union to speed Guinea's transition to civilian rule. We reiterate our call for a return to civilian rule and the holding of free, fair, and transparent elections as soon as possible … The United States has suspended assistance to Guinea, except humanitarian aid and programs supporting the democratic process" (Africom 2009).

When the military took power in Mali in 2020, the US supported ECOWAS's decision to impose sanctions on the country. The US supported ECOWAS's further sanctions when the military junta failed to hold elections in 2022, as it had promised (US Department of State 2022). A statement at the time stated that the US was aligned with "ECOWAS's concern over the likely destabilising impact of Russia-backed Wagner Group forces in Mali" (US Department of State 2022a). The US State Department stated in the same terms when a military coup toppled a civilian government in the neighbouring Burkina Faso. The statement stated that "extra-constitutional seizures of power erode the legitimacy of governance and limit the ability of the United States and other international partners to help the country advance peace and security", a statement that aligned with ECOWAS's decision to sanction the Burkinabè junta (US Department of State 2022b).

In the military takeover in Niger in 2023, the US, through Secretary of State Anton Blinken, not only supported ECOWAS's threat of military intervention but also echoed "ECOWAS's condemnation of the illegal detention of President Mohamed Bazoum, his family, and members of the government, as well as the unacceptable conditions under which they are being held" (US Department of State 2023). In 2024, Major General Kenneth Ekman of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) participated

in a media roundtable during which he explained that while the US helps ECOWAS where it can, the approach of choice was "bilateral security cooperation with ECOWAS members". He justified the US's preference for addressing fundamental causes of insecurity as emanating from underlying causes such as poor governance, lack of "access to services, competition for limited resources, and climate change". He also stated that US military assistance was linked to "mutually beneficial trade and investment" (African Perceptions 2024).

In August 2024, the ECOWAS Commission Vice President led the organisation's peace and security team in consultations with the then-US Deputy Secretary of State, Mallory Stewart. Discussions centred on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, hand-made weapons, and maritime security (ECOWAS 2024i). The ECOWAS officials' appreciation of the US support indicated that the US Government was funding security and anti-crime activities. There was also an indication that ECOWAS was coordinating with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the Gulf of Guinea, which transcends the areas of jurisdiction of the two RECs, particularly in matters of maritime security (ECOWAS 2024i).

Friction in the relations

The ECOWAS-US relations plummeted to perhaps an all-time low when President Donald Trump returned to White House in January 2025. First, the USAID was scrapped, and with it, the end of this foreign aid mechanism of ECOWAS-US engagements. Second, in July 2025, Trump bypassed ECOWAS and invited the leaders of four ECOWAS member states, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, and Senegal, to Washington. Discussions were based on the America First doctrine that Trump had re-introduced as the guiding principle of the US engagement with the rest of the world (Bose, N. et al. 2025). In this context, ECOWAS-US relations are off the radar, at least for the remainder of the Trump administration. Third, far from ECOWAS and the US collaborating, or even differing with decorum, open rebellion against the US has emerged. When President Trump alleged genocide against Christians in Nigeria in November 2025,

for instance, ECOWAS issued a statement partly stating that it "strongly rejects these false and dangerous claims that seek to deepen insecurity in communities and weaken social cohesion in the region" (Adeuyi 2025). Never had ECOWAS levelled such condemnation at a sitting US president before.

Agency analysis

Mutual agency expressed through a formal partnership between the US and ECOWAS is a recent development, only structured and signed in 2014, compared to ECOWAS's formal engagements with the EU, which started in 1998. This partnership took the form of a trade and investment framework agreement. The fact that the council that was established to oversee the partnership didn't commence work indicates mutual loss of agency. However, Washington is likely the one that dropped the ball. From 2016 onwards, the US administration under Trump had little interest in such a partnership. Such disinterest can also be said to be disinterest in agency. It also speaks to a shifting agency towards ECOWAS from one US Government to another. The lack of information about a technical committee established in 2018 to enhance partnership around AGOA indicates a further lack of agency on both sides. This is because the information gap suggests that the committee might have only had minimal achievements, if any at all.

ECOWAS officials have had no qualms appealing to ECOWAS for assistance on a wide range of needs, from peace and security to the internal integration of ECOWAS economies. This is the practice during the meetings that ECOWAS officials hold with their US counterparts, as we saw above. It is a loss of agency for ECOWAS, as seen through the dependency lens and the begging bowl analogy. By contrast, US officials have sometimes been brutally honest about their goals in partnering with ECOWAS. As we saw above, on one occasion in 2016, a US ambassador was clear that funding and other forms of USAID were in support of US interests. This was a blunt way of expressing US self-interest as US agency. This is an example of candid words that express US agency unambiguously, which became conventional during the Trump I and the current Trump administration.

As argued earlier, the ECOWAS-US relationship swings from periods of mutual agency to periods of weakened agency on either side, depending on the administration in power in Washington. The 2024 announcement of an imminent partnership agreement between USAID and ECOWAS was a case of mutual agency, particularly regarding alignment in peace and security and trade and investments. This was during the Joe Biden administration, which came to an end in November 2024. This is but one among many other initiatives that gave the US a pathway for agential engagement with ECOWAS in 2024. A few months later, USAID itself was no more. The closure of USAID meant the end of the structures and mechanisms through which the US and ECOWAS could engage. Even before its closure, the USAID West Africa office had been in Accra, Ghana, rather than Abuja, where the ECOWAS headquarters is based. This was somewhat a loss of agency for the Abuja-based ECOWAS.

Activities such as joint non-military peace and security exercises between ECOWAS and USAID officials in March 2022 are another example of mutual agency. However, an upper hand for the US agency can be seen in the fact that the US went to the ECOWAS territory to assist in conflict preparedness training, which seems entirely doable by ECOWAS actors. While the US collaborates with ECOWAS on peace and security broadly, the statement by an AFRICOM official cited above that military cooperation is undertaken bilaterally shows that ECOWAS has limited agency in these matters. The US prefers to exercise agency in the form by dealing directly with the armed forces of individual countries.

Given that the US and ECOWAS have invested in conflict prevention programmes over the years, it is a loss of agency, since the initiatives have not helped to stem coups in the subregion. The fact that ECOWAS and the US agree on an iron-clad opposition to unconstitutional changes of government is a case of mutual agency. However, it is a show of limited agency when the many instances of defiance by military coup leaders are factored. It is apparent that the edicts calling for a return to civilian rule and the sanctions against the coup leaders in the Sahel have not quite worked, exhibiting circumscribed agency. The coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are an indictment of ECOWAS and, therefore, a loss of

agency for ECOWAS because it presides over a coup-prone region. The US secondarily shares in this limitation to agency because its threat of military intervention alongside ECOWAS, as in the case of Niger IN 2023, did not materialise. That the former Nigerien president, Mohamed Bazoum, hitherto a strong ally of the US, could not be rescued from the detention that the military junta imposed on him shows that the US has little agency in standing up for its allies. The expulsion of the US military and the risk imposed on its military assets is another case of loss of agency. Mutual loss of agency emanates from the fact that the strong-worded statements issued by the partners over the years have not stemmed the recurrence of the coups. The condemnations are therefore hollow. The coup plotters in the region have realised that condemnations from ECOWAS and the US are hollow, therefore appropriating agency and acting contrary to subregional and international law.

The peace, security, and stability sector brings the Western powers and ECOWAS together, with collective agency, opposed to Russia and China. The US is the senior partner in this Western alliance, which nominally gives it much more agency than its Western allies. The US-led Western alliance has an upper hand in its engagement with ECOWAS compared to Russia and China, individually or collectively. The US-led Western powers have more agency compared to Russia and China as far as the condemnation of coups is concerned. However, an agency analysis changes to negative for the US and ECOWAS when one considers that Russia is today a major ally of the military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

President Donald Trump's second term in office had seen a drastic shift in agency calculations between ECOWAS and the US. ECOWAS lost agency as the US shifted to bilateral rather than collective relations in the West African subregion. An ECOWAS that was dependent on US foreign aid lost agency, as there was little, if any, interest in charity from the US. However, there are perspectives in which the US both gained and lost agency, depending on the viewpoint an analyst takes. It is a loss of US agency when one considers that long-standing engagement mechanisms and platforms were gutted. It is a gain in agency from the viewpoint of the US regaining its right of choice in focusing on its interests, the America

First agenda, over those of ECOWAS. It is also a gain in agency because the US can negotiate deals more beneficially with individual countries as opposed to negotiating with a bloc. After all, blocs are strengthened when they negotiate in solidarity.

As discussed earlier, a mix of ECOWAS and US agency was on display when the US-Nigeria fallout occurred over Trump's claims of the persecution of Christians. US agency was seen in its attempt to address jihadist terrorism in Nigeria, whether rightly or wrongly. Indeed, when the US proceeded to fire airstrikes on parts of northern Nigeria in early 2026, ECOWAS seemed to have gone quiet, which can be read as a loss of agency given its strong-worded statement earlier. Nonetheless, ECOWAS's statement against Trump was a form of agency in standing up to the US threat. It was the REC's defence of a member state. Still, it was constrained agency, because the statement was merely issued from ECOWAS but was not attributed to any ECOWAS official.

ECOWAS and France

As will be evident in this section, France is the global power that has had the most difficult relations in the ECOWAS region over the last decade. Two issues define and shape current ECOWAS-France relations, both tied to colonial histories. First is the poor relations with several former colonies. The epitome of the bad relations has been with Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The three countries formed the Alliance of Sahelian States (Alliance des États du Sahel, AES) in September 2023 after coups in 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively. They subsequently left ECOWAS in January 2025 despite attempts to retain them in the REC and solemnised their membership in the AES, which had been established in September 2023 (see Calcagno 2025).

Commentators have blamed France for the emergence of what is popularly known as Africa's coup belt (see Aina 2023). It is tempting to stick with this analytical strand. However, such an analysis would take us away from the explicit focus on ECOWAS-France relations into generalised France-West Africa relations. When the focus is trained on

the ECOWAS-France relations regarding the coups and the emergence of AES, convergence in their responses is evident. France was not only unequivocal in its condemnation of the coups, but it also more significantly threw its weight behind ECOWAS sanctions and threats of military intervention in the coup countries. From the perspective of the AES member states, France and ECOWAS share the ignominy of having failed to fend off violent jihadist attacks on their territories, the main justification by the military rulers, Captain Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso, General Assimi Goïta of Mali, and General Abdourahamane Tchiani of Niger. Moreover, the inflexible sanctions imposed on the three countries by ECOWAS with France's full support only served to motivate them to establish the AES.

The second issue is monetary and concerns ECOWAS's recent moves to create a single currency, Eco. An abbreviated context is necessary. France has sought to explain what it terms "misconceptions" about its monetary links in the ECOWAS region (French Ministry of Europe and External Affairs ND). France formally engages with the West African Monetary and Economic Union (WAEMU or Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine, UEMOA, in French), which includes former French colonies: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. This contrasts with the West African Monetary Zone, which brings together the Anglophone ECOWAS member states of Nigeria, Ghana, the Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the only French-speaking country in this organisation, Guinea. The West African Monetary Zone is not tied to the UK monetary system, in contrast to the France-ECOWAS-CFA arrangement. The West African CFA franc is the currency used in the Francophone WAEMU region. It is pegged to the French monetary system, and through it to the Euro. This has been a source of long-running anti-colonial criticism.

A new agreement between France and WAEMU was reached in 2019, including the proposed conversion of the West African franc into the Eco in line with the broader ECOWAS monetary union aspirations (see Dewast 2019). The Eco was supposed to be launched in 2020. Tension between Anglophone countries and Francophone countries is,

however, one of the reasons that has delayed the issuing of the Eco. As one researcher put it:

> "These elements have been the source of misalignment between French-speaking and English-speaking countries in terms of their preferences over the design of the Eco. Broadly, English-speaking countries want the Eco to be detached from France, while French-speaking countries, led by Côte d'Ivoire, envision it replacing the CFA franc while retaining key institutional ties with France" (Niang 2025).

Despite these challenges, ECOWAS and France have continued forging ties. During a meeting between the ECOWAS Commission President, Omar Alieu Touray, and the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Catherine Colonnat, in November 2023, it was pointed out that the French Development Agency had provided €8 million to support food security projects (ECOWAS 2023g). During this meeting, the customary commitment to democracy and human rights, including opposition to unconstitutional change of government, was restated. In contrast to the AES member states' withdrawal from the International Organisation of Francophonie, a French world cultural organisation (see Radio France International 2025), ECOWAS embraced French culture, at least at the official level. In May 2025, for instance, ECOWAS celebrated the International Francophone and French Language Day. The aim was stated as highlighting "the role of the French language as a tool of work, communication and integration" (ECOWAS 2025b). Several officials expressed supportive sentiments for the continued relevance of France and the French in the subregion.

Agency analysis

From the description of events and developments between France and ECOWAS above, France is the single global power that has massively lost agency in the ECOWAS subregion over the last one and a half decades.

The biggest blow was the string of coups in the Sahel and the eventual exit of the Alliance of Sahelian States. As discussed in the EU and US cases, ECOWAS is implicated in this erosion of agency. In the case of France, however, the loss of agency is linked to negative sentiments emanating from its colonial legacy. ECOWAS's loss of agency in the departure of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, and the establishment of the AES went in tandem with France also losing agency in losing the three former ECOWAS allies. It was a loss of agency for ECOWAS and France, not only because the sanctions they imposed did not bring the exiting countries back to its fold, but also because ECOWAS eventually attempted a diplomatic appeal approach towards the military leaders, which also did not work. It was a loss of face for both France and ECOWAS. These rapid developments, in turn, fuelled anti-France sentiments throughout the ECOWAS region. The Senegalese elections in 2024 that brought the youthful President Bassirou Diomaye Faye to power were, for instance, based in part on an anti-France agenda.

France was involved in the plan that included ECOWAS and the US for military action in Niger, discussed earlier. It was a loss of agency because the threat of military intervention by ECOWAS and France did not materialise. France, more than other global powers, was blamed for not just failing to address the underlying economic and political problems that had caused the instability, but also for exploiting the subregion for its own economic and political gain. The lack of agency in France's responses was therefore a product of lost moral ground. Some analysts went as far as to conclude that France was part of the problem, not the solution.

As if the instability troubles France has faced in the ECOWAS subregion were not enough, the regional economic community's move to create a single currency, the Eco, further reduced its agency. We see this concern in the explanation by the French Ministry of Europe and External Affairs. Attempting to explain France's complicated monetary relations with the ECOWAS subregion can be read as aimed at boosting its agency against a rising tenor of criticism, whether accurate or inaccurate. In claiming that there were misconceptions and sometimes outright disinformation, as shown above, France was responding to reputational

damage it was encountering.

The fact that France engages with ECOWAS through the West African Monetary and Economic Union (WAEMU) is a matter of mutual agency. This turns into a loss of agency for France when the fact that WAEMU is keen to delink the current CFA arrangement tied to France's treasury. Part of the reason for ECOWAS's push for a single currency is not only fiscal consolidation but also a strategic move to harmonise the Francophone and Anglophone monetary traditions. This is a form of the ECOWAS agency because the arrangement with France is quite complex, and simplifying it makes a lot of sense.

France's resistance to the creation of the Eco is a form of agency, but it is failing agency because France's resistance only begets further negativity from the ECOWAS region. France seems to have been ambivalent, attempting to ensure the longevity of the CFA franc while also bending to the demands to let go. An example of the latter was in a 2019 framework agreement. The agreement reached between ECOWAS through the WAEMU and France in 2019 was nonetheless a pragmatic step by France, which essentially involved signing away the monetary advantage it had enjoyed for many years. Even though France agreed to the conversion of the CFA franc to the Eco, it was still a loss of agency and a gain for ECOWAS. Mutual agency is seen in another aspect of the agreement, providing that the Eco, when it became legal currency, would still be convertible to the Euro, in which France is a major stakeholder.

Long-running divisions between Anglophone Africa and Francophone Africa emerged in the renewed push for the single currency, as described earlier. This is a case of split agency on the part of ECOWAS, and a form of agency for France in the fact that some of its former colonies still value monetary connection.

Even with the differences between ECOWAS and France, relations were not completely terminated, a pragmatic form of mutual agency. As we saw above, entities such as the French Development Agency continued to engage on mutual developmental matters, where mutual development essentially means ECOWAS attracting French donations. And as we have seen in the cases of US, Chinese and European relations, donations are

tantamount to ECOWAS's deep dependency on France, even amid the equally deepening differences.

Perhaps the most perturbing development for French foreign policy strategists was the dent that French culture encountered with the AES countries' declining participation in the International Francophone and French Language activities. It was a loss of agency in the form of France's cultural diplomacy in one part of the ECOWAS region, even as other parts of the ECOWAS continue relations, albeit on a scaled-down level. Cultural diplomacy is the ideological dimension of linking France to its former colonies, providing a soft landing for trade and economic engagements. Perhaps due to the widespread antipathy, France shifted its Africa Forward summit to Kenya, an Anglophone country, in 2026, in what was interpreted as France taking the agency to try its African policy elsewhere on the continent.

ECOWAS and Germany

Of all the European powers, Germany has some of the most extensive relations with ECOWAS. Already, in the section on ECOWAS-EU relations, it was evident that Germany plays an important role in terms of funding projects and initiatives. Upfront, this section of the chapter is indicative only of the engagements, based on an analysis of online data and information from the ECOWAS website. A perusal of the GIZ, or Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, and the German Corporation for International Cooperation in English shows that there are one hundred and four data points that can provide further details on the engagements.

One has to start with the point that the development of the ECOWAS Vision 2050, the comprehensive strategic document to guide the subregion's development priorities and approaches, was not only funded by GIZ, but also handed over to ECOWAS after completion in 2022 (see News Ghana 2022). It appears that GIZ is the new USAID of ECOWAS. A comprehensive analysis of these and other data sets would stretch the chapter beyond the limits of this edited volume. Instead, the chapter used

the ECOWAS website to try to provide some of the projects that indicate areas of cooperation.

Migration is a major issue around which the relations are structured. In a meeting between the ECOWAS Vice President, Finda Koroma, and the German ambassador to ECOWAS, Bernhard Schlagheck, in 2018, there was concurrence on the need to address the root cause of illegal migration of youth from West Africa to Europe (ECOWAS 2018). ECOWAS officials saw migration as a form of brain drain, while the German ambassador highlighted its negative impact on Germany, Europe, and West Africa itself. It was apparent that Germany was supporting ECOWAS in handling the problem.

In a structured two-day event in October 2019, the partners identified regional trade competitiveness, enhanced institutional support for the ECOWAS secretariat, alignment of ECOWAS and German priorities, and stability through sustainable development as areas of mutual engagement (ECOWAS 2019d). The consultations led to the signing of an agreement, including the establishment of the Fund for Regional Stabilisation and Development (FRSD), focused on fragile regions in the subregion (ECOWAS 2019).

As with the US, the EU, and France, peace and security are a priority area of engagement between ECOWAS and Germany. An example is the February 2020 meeting between the ECOWAS President Jean Claude Kassi Brou and the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Gerd Müller. The former sought the support of Germany and the international community to stem the tide of terrorism-inspired attacks arising from state collapse in Libya. While agreeing that international partners needed to do more, Müller also "called on African countries to step up their contributions" (ECOWAS 2020b). In the same month of 2020, when Philipp Ackermann, the Director General for Africa in the German Foreign Office, called on the ECOWAS secretariat, ECOWAS officials had several requests to make. Key among these was a donor conference scheduled for later in the year and aiming to raise $1 billion for the implementation of a security strategy (ECOWAS 2020c).

A high point in the relations was the visit to the ECOWAS

headquarters in Abuja by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in October 2023 (ECOWAS 2023h). Granted that Scholz detoured to the ECOWAS headquarters as part of his official visit to Nigeria. Still, few heads of state pay courtesy calls on ECOWAS when they visit Nigeria. It was noted that ECOWAS and Germany had entered into a cooperation agreement worth €80.75 million for the period 2023-2024 to support projects in peace and security, climate, energy, and youth training, among others. Scholz emphasised peace and security, an indication that stemming developments such as unconstitutional changes of government and terrorism are priority areas for Germany. Peace and security were the subject of discussion, and German support was discussed in another consultation in May 2024 (ECOWAS 2024j). Another high-level visit followed this in December, that of German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Reporting on the event categorised areas of partnerships in apparent order of importance as: "(i) building peaceful and inclusive communities, (ii) climate and energy, a just transition, (iii) sustainable economic development, training and employment, and (iv) health, social protection and demographic policy" (ECOWAS 2024k).

During the Munich Security Conference in February 2025, ECOWAS security problems were linked to water and energy, sustaining the theme of peace and security as the priority area for ECOWAS-Germany relations (ECOWAS 2025c). The Munich Security Conference is one of the leading global convenings on international security. The discussion on ECOWAS issues provided a good platform for ECOWAS to amplify the security challenges in the subregion to the global security policy community. Peace, security, and governance were again the core of a cooperation entered into in November 2025, with Germany providing €49 million (ECOWAS 2025e). This latest partnership framework is based on finding and implementing commonalities between ECOWAS Vision 2050 and Germany's Africa Strategy.

Agency analysis

It is quite a contrast that France and Germany are neighbours in central-

western Europe, yet perceptions about them in the ECOWAS subregion are drastically different. Whereas France's agency has disintegrated to a very low base since its days as a colonial power, Germany's agency is perhaps the most prominent of all EU member states. This is not to say that Germany has not experienced a loss of agency. Where the EU falters in terms of agency in the ECOWAS subregion, Germany also suffers a collateral agential loss. From an ECOWAS viewpoint, we see mutual agency because the many engagements must have occurred because of positive reciprocal responses to Germany's interest and engagement.

The fundamental source of Germany's agency towards ECOWAS starts from the fact that it is a major funder of ECOWAS's institutional operations. As we have argued in the cases of other powers, foreign institutional support is a loss of agency for ECOWAS because institutional matters should be a basic mandate, an internal matter that shouldn't be funded by external actors.

This role goes even deeper, as the core ECOWAS development strategies have a German imprint. The current ECOWAS 2050 Vision was developed through funding from GIZ. This is a gain for the German agency because the development of the Vision, which is essentially a set of short, medium, and long-term goals, objectives, priorities, and implementation timelines, gives it an understanding of the direction that ECOWAS is taking. This, in turn, provides information on how Germany can gain from the relations. It is also even feasible, though speculative, that Germany may have included its own strategies in the Vision.

Germany's gain in agency can be interpreted as a loss of agency for ECOWAS. That ECOWAS relied on Germany for the development of its development strategies and long-term planning is an extreme case of dependency. At the level of self-esteem alone, agency would demand that ECOWAS be self-reliant not only in the generation of ideas and thoughts about its future planning, but that it also fund activities such as convenings that lead to the production of its master plan.

Germany's agency, as measured by the number of engagements, has reached a level of foreign aid provision to ECOWAS, superseding all the other European powers and approaching or approximately equivalent to

that of the US and China. It has long been agreed that foreign aid is a major avenue for the influence of global powers in developing countries. Influence is indeed a key characteristic of agency. Even though Germany is generally one among other global powers that have scaled back development aid to ECOWAS, it has not completely disappeared, as is the case with powers such as the US.

One area in which ECOWAS and Germany have been engaged in continuous consultation is migration. In the 2018 negotiations described above, the agency was on the German side because it was the one that initiated consultations. In that negotiation, we see mutual agency because Germany and ECOWAS agreed that migration was a big problem for both. German agency is seen in the fact that it wanted to stem the migration flows from the ECOWAS region. Germany has a big motivation in trying to stop migration because the arrival of migrants in Germany is a major political issue at home. ECOWAS has little agency in migration issues because it is doubtful it is serious about stemming the migration flows. On the other hand, ECOWAS seems helpless on migration issues because it is unable to address the root causes, nor does it seem able to help citizens from member countries who make the perilous gamble of crossing the Sahara to reach Europe.

Mutual agency is evident in the peace and security sector, going by the instances in which ECOWAS appeals for assistance, and Germany positively responds to the calls. However, the event in 2020, where a German official called on Africans to take responsibility for funding conflict resolution problems, is an example of a loss of agency for ECOWAS. This was an example of Germany shifting responsibility from itself to ECOWAS. It called into question ECOWAS's agency. ECOWAS's convening of a donor conference to help may be seen as ECOWAS's exercising of agency to mobilise resources in the face of mounting instability problems. On the other hand, however, the whole idea of a donor conference can be read as transferring agency from ECOWAS to foreign actors. In any case, such a conference could have been convened only for ECOWAS member states rather than bringing in actors from outside the continent.

As we saw above, ECOWAS hosted the Germany chancellor and the President in 2023 and 2024. That is, two apex-level visits from Germany, year-on-year. These high-level visits were a form of German agency towards ECOWAS. It is also mutual agency because the visit couldn't have happened without good relations. Many heads of state of global powers have visited Abuja without stopping over at the ECOWAS headquarters. For instance, when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Abuja in 2024, he didn't visit the ECOWAS headquarters. Leaders from global powers such as the US and France have not visited Nigeria in recent times and therefore have not engaged with ECOWAS at its headquarters for a long time. The German leaders' visits are therefore agential compared to those of other global powers.

As we saw above, during the German President's visit to the ECOWAS headquarters, the listing of the issues by an apparent order of importance went thus: i) peace and security, ii) climate and energy, iii) economic development, and iv) health. Because this priority categorisation was made during a German presidential visit, these are also the areas in which Germany was directing its agency. These issues are of mutual agency because ECOWAS officials would agree that peace and security are the top problems for the region. The ranking order of the other issues can be up for debate.

ECOWAS and Russia

ECOWAS-Russia relations are not as extensive as those with China, the US, the EU, France, and Germany. A record of the engagements shows ECOWAS officials attending the First Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi, but with no specific ECOWAS-Russia discussions (ECOWAS 2019f). When ECOWAS officials attended the first Ministerial Conference of the Russia – Africa Partnership Forum in Russia in November 2024, their talking points included terrorist expansion in the subregion (ECOWAS 2024l). The reporting stated that "ECOWAS and the Alliance of the Sahelian States are bound by geography, history and culture and are therefore destined to collaborate in the fight against terrorism in West Africa" and

that "an attack in any of the Sahelian states is considered an attack on other states in West Africa" (ECOWAS 2024l). Omar Alieu Tourey, the ECOWAS Commission President, argued that pursuing the objectives of subregional integration and increased trade "would significantly help to address issues of terrorism in the region," which had become "the epicentre of terrorism in the world" (ECOWAS 2024l). In November 2025, the ECOWAS Commission President, Omar Alieu Touray, met the Russian Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Andrey Podelyshev. No information was provided about the issues discussed beyond the mention of "mutual interest" (ECOWAS 2025f). During the second Russia-Africa Partnership Forum in Egypt, the ECOWAS President's meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was reported in an equally glib manner. The leaders expressed the need for cooperation around subregional integration and peace and security issues without details on how this would be done (ECOWAS 2025g).

The strain in the ECOWAS-Russia relations is quite evident. In 2023, as the ECOWAS ultimatum for Nigerien military leaders to release the detained former president Mohamed Bazoum loomed, the military leaders reached out to the Wagner Group, the Russian mercenary group, to fend off a then-imminent attack (Associated Press 2023). A fallout ensured, with an ECOWAS official stating that Russia would be held responsible in the event of the private military contractor, Wagner, violating human rights in Niger (Ogunseyin 2023). Ultimately, ECOWAS, initially thought to be supported by France and the US, failed to intervene militarily in Niger (Akinkuotu 2023).

From the content analysis on ECOWAS-Russia relations, it appears the relations are less pronounced compared to those of ECOWAS and China, the EU, the US, France, and Germany. The other global powers that have relations with ECOWAS but with limited publicly available information are the Gulf States, Japan, India, and Brazil. These powers should not be dismissed in studies of African agency in the ECOWAS. What is needed is more dedicated primary research to surface the areas of engagement as a starting point to determining their agency or, conversely, the ECOWAS agency towards them.

Agency analysis

The basic fact that ECOWAS-Russia relations are minimal compared to those of China, the US, the EU, France, and China means that an analysis of agency is equally low, weak, and limited from the perspective of gain, loss, and mutuality. This does not, however, mean that agency is completely off the map. Russia's invitations to ECOWAS officials to attend Russia-Africa conclaves are an indication of its interest in engaging, even if ECOWAS is part of a bigger African delegation during such events. In such events, agency is on the Russian side by the mere fact that it invited ECOWAS. It is, however, a weak form of agency because no tangible areas of partnership or projects seem to have been discussed. It is mutual agency because ECOWAS accepted the invitation. It is an agency loss because ECOWAS could have declined the invitation, citing Russia's enablement of the separatist AES member states. ECOWAS officials opted for diplomacy and decency in honouring the invitations, even as Russia acted in a malign way in sending mercenaries to prop up regimes that ECOWAS had sanctioned.

As we saw above, one of the points of discussion between ECOWAS officials and their Russian counterparts is responding to terrorism in the subregion. In such debates, Russia has some valid points to make because the reason it supports the Sahelian states is the promise to help them counter jihadist seriously threatening to overrun their countries. For sympathisers, Russia has some agency in responding to terrorism where the agency of the ECOWAS and Western powers has either been extremely weak or utterly failed. Russia loses agency on the points of approach and method. The use of mercenaries contravenes international, African, and ECOWAS laws. Supporting breakaway states reduces ECOWAS's core agency agenda of subregional integration. Russia's trade and economic motivations – particularly being paid for services through minerals – are seen as mercantilist rather than altruistic. The use of misinformation and disinformation as a tool against competitors such as France and the US is seen as an information war. The list goes on. Collectively, these factors make it impossible for Russia to gain agency in the wider ECOWAS region. But then, it appears that Russia has no ambitions of spreading its influence

beyond a couple of vulnerable states in the subregion. Thus, understands and is comfortable with the fact that its agency will remain limited.

Nonetheless, the mere fact that ECOWAS and Russian officials could converse around the issue of terrorism is a form of mutual agency, circumscribed as it may be. However, ECOWAS seemed timid in not raising the issue of the role of Russia in propping up the separatist AES member states, with counterterrorism as one of Russia's stated motivations in doing so. ECOWAS could have gained some agency leverage had it brought up the issue of Russia's malign methods. Indeed, ECOWAS might have raised the issue, but the reporting on ECOWAS's own website and other sources does not suggest this was the case, at least in the meetings in 2019 and 2024.

Lack of agency on either side can be seen in the fact that no information was forthcoming. When a meeting is held and no readout of some form is available, you know that the issues may have been so difficult and that no agreement may have been reached. Weakness in ECOWAS's agency can be read in ECOWAS officials being circuitous about the issue of Russia's negative role, suggesting that Russia's support for subregional economic integration could help staunch the spread of terrorism. A stronger pushback on Russia could have demonstrated ECOWAS's courage in confronting Russia's devious methods in the Sahel. Feeble agency, as it seems that the parties are only tolerating each other.

ECOWAS officials must bristle at Russia's brazen intrusion into their territory. The one occasion when this antipathy towards Russia surfaced was when Russia stood in to support the military junta in Niger. This is when ECOWAS mustered the agency to threaten military action in Niger, with the ostensible support of the US and France. In that development, however, Russia emerged with a gain in agency because the ECOWAS threat of intervention remained just that, a threat.

Conclusion

Overall, where ECOWAS has a loss of agency, it should attempt to investigate the factors that contribute to the weaknesses of agency towards the global powers. Where ECOWAS has an upper hand in agency

terms, it should seek to maintain such agency. Where ECOWAS enjoys mutuality in agency with global powers, it should seek to maintain such a balance of agency but also calculate how to convert mutual agency into larger agency vis-à-vis global powers. To do this, ECOWAS policy officials can undertake a dispassionate review of relations with global powers and determine areas in which they can boost their agency. Such an exercise could include think tanks, scholars, and civil society.

ECOWAS is overly dependent on global powers for just about every need. ECOWAS leaders should bite the bullet and draw a line on the areas where they absolutely must depend on internal resources and capacities. These include relying on China to build the ECOWAS headquarters, which is reputationally demeaning. Claims of Chinese espionage are not necessarily the major problem. The big dependency problem is that an external actor comes to, in a manner of speaking, your home to build a house for you.

Because China is a relatively new global power player in the ECOWAS region, ECOWAS can set new terms of engagement, drawing on lessons learned from its long-running relations with former colonial powers such as France. ECOWAS has much more negotiating leverage with China because China itself frames the relations as mutual. Infrastructure development is clearly an area in which ECOWAS can mutually negotiate with China. A detailed study of the Belt and Road Initiative to see where the ECOWAS agency can be applied in support of cross-country road, railway, and seaport infrastructure holds some potential.

The need for ECOWAS to build its own buildings applies more broadly to the need for the organisation to also pay for its own core operations. One would understand if an argument were made for the need for ECOWAS to lower its agency and request support for some of its secretariat operations, degrading as it may be. It is, however, indefensible for ECOWAS to rely on a donor such as GIZ for the development of its long-term plan. It is essentially like a family saying it has a secret for success, but that it is an open or public secret that can be realised by partnering with other families. Essentially, it is no longer a secret.

In engaging with nearly all, if not all, external partners, the ECOWAS

officials often invoke the need for subregional economic integration. This is clearly the core of the ECOWAS mandate and vision. Yet, when global powers arrive with their own agendas, ECOWAS officials seem to dial down on the integration agenda and align with the external powers' own interests. In the case of Germany-ECOWAS relations, one sees migration being elevated above ECOWAS subregional integration. ECOWAS should always insist on centering subregional integration if it is to raise its agency in relations with global powers. With a partner such as the EU, the correct question to ask is: how did the EU manage to integrate, how has it managed challenges (such as Brexit), and how is it maintaining the integration? The question shouldn't be how the EU can help ECOWAS integrate. It should be a question about ECOWAS advancing its own integration.

Global powers are shifting in their approaches to ECOWAS. Although further studies are necessary, it is fair to say ECOWAS is either responding to the shifts painfully slowly or not at all. This explains why ECOWAS is on the back foot in terms of agency with just about any global power. A case in point is the shifts in the EU, being implemented today under the Global Gateway strategy. The US's America First policy is another example. To increase its agency, ECOWAS should not merely respond to or align with these mega geopolitical dynamics. ECOWAS should instead invest in envisioning its role globally. This is an area in which ECOWAS could borrow from the Association of South East Asian States, which has done relatively well in mustering agency on a global stage dominated by hegemonic powers. It is quite feasible for ECOWAS to emerge as a global power in the decades ahead, ditching the current practice of swooning towards the current powers.

The biggest problem for ECOWAS is peace and security, manifesting in the so-called Sahelexit. This is an issue for which ECOWAS can't avoid global powers. While it engages with global powers, ECOWAS would do well to also engage with military regimes in the AES. Back channels and track two diplomacy can be rolled in these respects. Bringing back Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali into the ECOWAS fold should be the main driver of ECOWAS's engagement with Russia, France, the US, the EU, and China.

References

Aina, F. 2023. French mistakes helped create Africa's coup belt. Al Jazeera [Online]. Available from: *https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/8/17/french-mistakes-helped-create-africas-coup-belt* (Accessed 12 July 2026).

Acheampong, E. 2015. China in West Africa's regional development and security plans. *Africa Development* 40 (4): 1-19.

Adeuyi, S. 2025. ECOWAS rejects claims of religious genocide in West Africa. *Daily Trust*. [Online]. Available from: *https://dailytrust.com/ecowas-rejects-claims-of-religious-genocide-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

African Perceptions. 2024. *US commits to deepening security cooperation with ECOWAS*. [Online]. Available from: *https://africanperceptions.org/en/2024/08/us-commits-to-deepening-security-cooperation-with-ecowas/* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Africom. 2009. *Policy Statement: The U.S. Welcomes ECOWAS Suspension of Guinea*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.africom.mil/article/6416/policy-statement-us-welcomes-ecowas-suspension-of-* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Al Jazeera. 2022. *Russia, China block UN support for ECOWAS sanctions on Mali*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/12/russia-and-china-block-un-support-for-ecowas-sanctions-on-mali* (Accessed 07 July 2026).

Akinkuotu, E. 2023. Has ECOWAS lost the plot on Niger? *The Africa Report*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.theafricareport.com/325352/has-ecowas-lost-the-plot-on-niger/* (Accessed 15 July 2026).

Anyanwu, S. 2016. ECOWAS, U.S renew partnership for security, development in West Africa. *Federal Republic of Nigeria*. [Online]. Available from: *https://fmino.gov.ng/ecowas-u-s-renew-partnership-security-development-west-africa/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

Associated Press. 2023. *Niger's military rulers ask for help from the Russian group Wagner*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.aljazeera.com/*

news/2023/8/5/nigers-military-rulers-ask-for-help-from-russian-group-wagner (Accessed 15 July 2026).

Bavier, J. 2014. *West African leaders fail to agree on EU trade deal*. Reuters [Online]. Available from: *https://www.reuters.com/article/world/west-african-leaders-fail-to-agree-on-eu-trade-deal-idUSKBN0CK019/* (Accessed 9 July 2026).

Bose, N. et al. 2025. *Trump sells shift from 'aid to trade' in White House meeting with African leaders*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.reuters.com/world/china/trump-hosts-five-african-leaders-tariffs-aid-cuts-bite-2025-07-09/* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Bourdieu, P. 1990. The logic of practice. Polity Press.

Calcagno, S. 2025. Military Coups in the Sahel: A Step Forward for Decolonization and a Step Backwards for Human Rights. *Human Rights Research Centre*. [Online] Available from: *https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/history* (Accessed 12 July 2026).

Chinese Embassy in South Africa. 2012. ECOWAS, China sign agreement for cooperation in infrastructure development, trade and investment. [Online]. Available from: *https://za.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/jbwzlm/zfgxss/zyjw/201210/t20121030_7683888.htm* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

Chipaike, R., and Knowledge. H.M. 2018. The question of African agency in international relations, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2018), 4: 1487257.

Coffie, A. and Tiky, L. 2021. Exploring Africa's agency in international politics. Africa Spectrum, 56(3): 243–253.

Development Reimagined. N.d. *ECOWAS Roundtable Discussion: Reimagining Financing in West Africa – Common Trends And Issues In China's International Financing*. [Online]. Available from: *https://developmentreimagined.com/ecowas-roundtable-discussion-reimagining-financing-in-west-africa-common-trends-and-issues-in-chinas-international-financing-2/* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Dewast, L. 2019. West Africa's eco: What difference would a single currency make? *BBC Africa* [Online]. Available from: *https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/09/30/why-has-west-africas-plan-for-a-*

common-currency-yet-to-become-a-reality/ (Accessed 12 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2018a. *ECOWAS signs an MoU with China for the construction of the new ECOWAS Commission Headquarters.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-signs-mou-with-china-for-the-construction-of-the-new-ecowas-commission-headquarters/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2018b. *ECOWAS calls for the continued support of the United States of America towards regional integration.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-calls-for-the-continued-support-of-the-united-states-of-america-towards-regional-integration/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2018c. *ECOWAS and Germany reiterate commitment to curb illegal migration in West Africa.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-germany-reiterate-commitment-to-curb-illegal-migration-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019a. *ECOWAS and China sign an Implementation Agreement for the Commission's New Headquarters Building.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-china-sign-implementation-agreement-for-the-commissions-new-headquarter-building/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019b. *ECOWAS Commission, USAID begin crisis scenario planning exercise.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-usaid-begins-crisis-scenario-planning-exercise/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019c. *ECOWAS and USAID collaborate on social inclusion to enhance Peace and Security in West Africa.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-usaid-collaborate-on-social-inclusion-to-enhance-peace-and-security-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019d. *ECOWAS and Germany hold Consultations on Development Cooperation.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-germany-hold-consultations-on-development-cooperation/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019e. *ECOWAS and Germany Reach Agreement on*

Development Cooperation. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-germany-reach-agreement-on-development-cooperation/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2019f. *First Russia-Africa Summit: President Jean Claude Kassi Brou Represents the ECOWAS Commission in Sochi.* [Online]. Available: *https://www.ecowas.int/first-russia-africa-summit-president-jean-claude-kassi-brou-represents-the-ecowas-commission-in-sochi/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2020a. *ECOWAS and USAID Train Officials on Joint analysis and Response Planning in Conflict prevention.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-usaid-train-officials-on-joint-analysis-and-response-planning-in-conflict-prevention/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2020b. *ECOWAS Commission Partners with Germany to Improve Security In the Region.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-partners-with-germany-to-improve-security-in-the-region/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2020c. *ECOWAS, Germany Deliberate on Measures to Promote Peace, Curb Terrorism in The Region.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-germany-deliberate-on-measures-to-promote-peace-curb-terrorism-in-the-region/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2021. *ECOWAS, EU, Expertise France hand over cybercrime material to the digital investigation laboratory and launch an awareness campaign on cybersecurity in Burkina Faso*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/hand-over-cybercrime-material-to-the-digital-investigation-laboratory-and-launch-an-awareness-campaign-on-cybersecurity-in-burkina-faso/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2025a. *ECOWAS hosts two-day meeting on Africa Europe education reforms in Abuja.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-hosts-two-day-meeting-on-africa-europe-education-reforms-in-abuja/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2022Aa. *ECOWAS Leaders Lay Foundation for a New Headquarters Building in Abuja.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-leaders-lay-foundation-for-a-new-headquarters-*

building-in-abuja/ (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2022b. *ECOWAS and the European Union provide a digital laboratory to combat cybercrime in The Gambia*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-the-european-union-provide-a-digital-laboratory-to-combat-cybercrime-in-the-gambia/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2022c. *ECOWAS, in Partnership with the European Union, unveils a Scholarship Programme on Sustainable Energy for Post-Graduate Students in West Africa*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-in-partnership-with-the-european-union-unveils-a-scholarship-programme-on-sustainable-energy-for-post-graduate-students-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2022c. *ECOWAS Commission and USAID Review ECOWAS' Interventions in Elections and Mediation Processes in the Region*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-and-usaid-review-ecowas-interventions-in-elections-and-mediation-processes-in-the-region/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023a. *Meeting at the Experts Level of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee on the Construction of the New ECOWAS Community Institutions Headquarters Held In Abuja*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/meeting-at-the-experts-level-of-the-ad-hoc-ministerial-committee-on-the-construction-of-the-new-ecowas-community-institutions-headquarters-held-in-abuja/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023b. *The Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee Considers Progress Report on Construction Works at the New Headquarters for ECOWAS Community Institutions in Abuja*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/the-ad-hoc-ministerial-committee-considers-progress-report-on-construction-works-at-the-new-headquarters-for-ecowas-community-institutions-in-abuja/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023c. *Workshop on Implementation Status of "European Union Pillar Assessment" For The ECOWAS Commission*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/workshop-on-implementation-status-of-european-union-pillar-assessment-for-the-ecowas-commission/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023d. *ECOWAS organized a workshop to plan, coordinate, and monitor the European Union Support Programme to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA IV)*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-organized-a-workshop-to-plan-coordinate-and-monitor-the-european-union-support-programme-to-the-african-peace-and-security-architecture-apsa-iv/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023e. *The ECOWAS Commission presents a Quality Award Certificate of Recognition to the European Union.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/the-ecowas-commission-presents-quality-award-certificate-of-recognition-to-the-european-union/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023f. *ECOWAS Commission, European Union, and Germany unite for the 5th Steering Committee meeting of the "Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking (OCWAR-T) project.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-european-union-and-germany-unite-for-the-5th-steering-committee-meeting-of-the-organized-crime-west-african-response-to-trafficking-ocwar-t-project/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023g. *ECOWAS – France cooperation: Dr. Omar Alieu Touray receives Madame Catherine Colonna, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-france-cooperation-dr-omar-alieu-touray-receives-madame-catherine-colonna-minister-of-europe-and-foreign-affairs-of-the-french-republic/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2023h. *The Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, H.E. Olaf Scholz, visits the ECOWAS Commission.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/nwp_media/the-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-h-e-olaf-scholz-visits-the-ecowas-commission/* (Accessed 12 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024a. *ECOWAS Ad-Hoc Ministerial Committee on the Construction of Headquarters of Community Institutions meets on the Margins of the Council of Ministers Meeting in Abuja.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-ad-hoc-ministerial-committee-on-the-construction-of-head-quarters-of-community-*

institutions-meets-on-the-margins-of-the-council-of-ministers-meeting-in-abuja/ (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024b. *Ambassador of the People's Republic of China bids farewell to ECOWAS*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ambassador-of-peoples-republic-of-china-bids-farewell-to-ecowas/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024c. *The President of the ECOWAS Commission, H.E. Dr Omar Alieu Touray Leads the ECOWAS Commission's Delegation to the 2024 Summit of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/the-president-of-the-ecowas-commission-h-e-dr-omar-alieu-touray-leads-the-ecowas-commissions-delegation-to-the-2024-summit-of-the-forum-of-china-africa-cooperation-focac/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024d. *ECOWAS Commission and the European Union Commission Reinforce Relationship through a Structured Dialogue on Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-and-the-european-union-commission-re-inforce-relationship-through-a-structured-dialogue-on-conflict-prevention-and-peace-mediation/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024e. *ECOWAS and USAID hold talks with a view to signing a new partnership agreement soon.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-usaid-hold-talks-with-a-view-to-signing-a-new-partnership-agreement-soon/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024f. *The ECOWAS Centre for Gender Development (ECGD) is Organising with the Support of USAID West Africa, the 2nd Meeting of the Regional Coordination Committees of its Programmes.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/the-ecowas-centre-for-gender-development-ecgd-is-organising-with-the-support-of-usaid-west-africa-the-2nd-meeting-of-the-regional-coordination-committees-of-its-programmes/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2024g. *Towards a More Dynamic Cooperation Relationship Between ECOWAS and The United States of America*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/towards-a-more-dynamic-cooperation-relationship-between-ecowas-and-the-united-states-of-*

america/ (Accessed 7 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2024h. *Cooperation Between ECOWAS and USAID to Strengthen Natural Resource Management in West Africa*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/cooperation-between-ecowas-and-usaid-to-strengthen-natural-resource-management-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2024i. *Damtien Larbli Tchintchibidja and Mallory Stewart Discuss Cooperation Between ECOWAS and the United States of America*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/damtien-larbli-tchintchibidja-and-mallory-stewart-discuss-cooperation-between-ecowas-and-the-united-states-of-america/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2024J. *Consultations Between ECOWAS and Germany to Strengthen and Boost Their Areas of Cooperation*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/consultations-between-ecowas-and-germany-to-strengthen-and-boost-their-areas-of-cooperation/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2024k. *ECOWAS Receives the President of The Federal Republic of Germany, H.E. Frank-Walter Steinmeier*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-receives-the-president-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-h-e-frank-walter-steinmeier/* (Accessed 12 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2024l. *H.E. Dr Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission Attends the First Ministerial Conference of the Russia – Africa Partnership Forum, at Sirius Federal Territory, Sochi – Russian Federation*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/h-e-dr-omar-alieu-touray-president-of-ecowas-commission-attends-the-first-ministerial-conference-of-the-russia-africa-partnership-forum-at-sirius-federal-territory-sochi-russia/* (Accessed 13 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2025a. *New ECOWAS Headquarters nears completion as vice president of the ECOWAS commission urges the contractor to expedite works*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/new-ecowas-headquarters-nears-completion-as-vice-president-of-the-ecowas-commission-urges-contractor-to-expedite-works/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).
ECOWAS. 2025b. *ECOWAS Celebrates International Francophone and*

French Language Day. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-celebrates-international-francophone-and-french-language-day/* (Accessed 12 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2025c. *ECOWAS Commission Engages Partners in Germany With a View of Further Harnessing the Water-Energy-Food Nexus as a Tool for Conflict Prevention.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-engages-partners-in-germany-with-a-view-of-further-harnessing-the-water-energy-food-nexus-as-a-tool-for-conflict-prevention/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2025e. *Germany commits 49 million euros (82 billion naira) to support ECOWAS in strengthening peace, economic development, health, and security in West Africa*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/germany-commits-49-million-euros-82-billion-naira-to-support-ecowas-in-strengthening-peace-economic-development-health-and-security-in-west-africa/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2025f. *ECOWAS Commission President receives delegation from Task Force on ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme and Russian ambassador accredited to Nigeria and ECOWAS*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-commission-president-receives-delegation-from-task-force-on-ecowas-trade-liberalization-scheme-and-russian-ambassador-accredited-to-nigeria-and-ecowas/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2025g. *ECOWAS and Russia strengthen partnership during second ministerial conference of the Russia – Africa partnership forum*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-and-russia-strengthen-partnership-during-second-ministerial-conference-of-the-russia-africa-partnership-forum/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

ECOWAS. 2026. *Handover of the New ECOWAS Commission Headquarters Marks Milestone in Regional Integration*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ecowas.int/handover-of-the-new-ecowas-commission-headquarters-marks-milestone-in-regional-integration/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. 1998. What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), 962–1023.

European Council. 2014. *Sahel: EU appoints João Cravinho as new Special Representative for the Sahel region.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/11/18/sahel-eu-appoints-joao-cravinho-as-new-special-representative-for-the-sahel-region/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

EU 2023. *23rd EU-ECOWAS Ministerial Dialogue.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/23rd-eu-ecowas-ministerial-dialogue_en* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

EU. 2018a. *Valletta priorities: The EU and Africa partnership helps migrants and refugees.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/53748_en* (Accessed 9 July 2026).

EU. 2018b. *22nd ECOWAS-EU Political Dialogue Meeting.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/54800_en* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

EU. 2017. *21st ECOWAS-EU Political Dialogue Ministerial Meeting.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/24200_en* (Accessed 9 July 2026).

European Investment Bank. 2025. *Global Gateway: Partnership between EBID and EIB to promote climate action and environmental sustainability projects in the ECOWAS region.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2025-112-global-gateway-partnership-between-ebid-and-eib-to-promote-climate-action-and-environmental-sustainability-projects-in-the-ecowas-region* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

Fisher, J. 2018. African Agency in International Politics. *Oxford Research Encyclopaedias.* [Online]. Available from: *https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-709* (Accessed 24 March 2024).

French Ministry of Europe and External Affairs. N.d. *Monetary cooperation between Africa and France: the CFA franc.* [Online]. Available from: *https://ambafrance.org/Monetary-cooperation-between-Africa-and-France-the-CFA-franc* (Accessed 12 July 2026).

Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Mabasa, J. N. 2025. China's Belt and Road shifts focus to Africa with

record-breaking investments. *Mail and Guardian*. [Online]. Available from: *https://mg.co.za/news/south-africa/2025-07-29-china-s-belt-and-road-shifts-focus-to-africa-with-record-breaking-investments/* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

Marsh, J. 2018. Free gift? China extends influence in Africa with $32M grant for regional HQ. *CNN*. [Online]. Available from: *https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/27/asia/ecowas-china-headquarters-intl* (Accessed 5 July 2026).

Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the postcolony*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Musa, A. 2025. ECOWAS as a Regional Institution: Guardian of West African Interests or External Proxy? *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict* Studies, 8 (4): 189-204.

News Ghana. 2022. *GIZ Hands Over ECOWAS Vision 2050 Document to the Management of the Commission*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.newsghana.com.gh/giz-hands-over-ecowas-vision-2050-document-to-management-of-the-commission/* (Accessed 15 July 2026).

Niang, A. 2025. Why has West Africa's plan for a common currency yet to become a reality? *London School of Economics and Political Science.* [Online]. Available from: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/09/30/why-has-west-africas-plan-for-a-common-currency-yet-to-become-a-reality/ (Accessed 12 July 2026).

Nunoo, I. and Adu-Boateng, E. 2022. Assessing agency in colonial Africa: Pan-Africanism as African agency. *The African Review*, 49(4): 399–427.

Olander, E. 2026. China Hands Over $57 Million ECOWAS Headquarters, Deepening Its Influence in West Africa. *China Global South*. [Online]. Available from: *https://chinaglobalsouth.com/2026/04/30/china-ecowas-headquarters-infrastructure-diplomacy/* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Ogunseyin, O. 2023. ECOWAS to hold Russia responsible if Wagner Group violates human rights in Niger. *The Guardian*. [Online]. Available from: *https://guardian.ng/news/ecowas-to-hold-russia-*

responsible-if-wagner-group-violates-human-rights-in-niger/ (Accessed 15 July 2026).

Quijano, A. 2007. Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3): 168–178.

Saleh, M. 2025. *Why Maintaining the EU-ECOWAS Partnership is Important in Uncertain Times*. ANCIP Policy Brief. No.2, February 2025.

Sam, H. 2025. West Africa at a Crossroads of Partnerships. *Policy Centre for the New South*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/west-africa-crossroads-partnerships* (Accessed 13 July 2026).

Shepherd, B and Ntung, A. 2022. African agency: A paradox at the heart of governance. *Chatham House*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/10/african-agency-paradox-heart-governance* (Accessed 24 March 2024).

Soule, F. 2021. Mapping the Future of Africa–China Relations: Insights from West Africa. Occasional Paper 330 September 2021, Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2000. *European Union/ECOWAS 1st Ministerial Meeting Final Communiqué*. [Online]. Available from: *https://reliefweb.int/report/liberia/european-unionecowas-1st-ministerial-meeting-final-communiqu%C3%A9* (Accessed 9 July 2026).

US Department of State. 2022a. *ECOWAS Action on Mali*. [Online]. Available from: *https://2021-2025.state.gov/ecowas-action-on-mali/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

US Department of State. 2022b. *The United States Support of ECOWAS and African Union Actions on Burkina Faso*. [Online]. Available from: *https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-united-states-support-of-ecowas-and-african-union-actions-on-burkina-faso/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

US Department of State. 2022b. *ECOWAS Call for Restoration of Constitutional Order in the Republic of Niger.* [Online]. Available from: *https://2021-2025.state.gov/ecowas-call-for-restoration-of-constitutional-order-in-the-republic-of-niger/* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

United States Trade Representative. 2014. *The United States and the Economic Community of West African States Sign Trade and Investment Framework Agreement*. [Online]. Available from: *https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2014/August/US-ECOWAS-Sign-Trade-and-Investment-Framework-Agreement* (Accessed 10 July 2026).

United States Trade Representative. 2013. *The United States Explores New Opportunity to Boost Trade and Investment with West Africa*. [Online]. Available from: *https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2013/march/US-explores-opportunity-west-Africa* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

UK Essays. 2015. *Analyses EU-ECOWAS historical relation*. [Online]. Available from: *https://www.ukessays.com/essays/european-studies/analyses-eu-ecowas-historical-relation.php* (Accessed 8 July 2026).

Welz, M. 2022. Setting up the G5 Sahel: why an option that seemed unlikely came into being. *The Conversation*. [Online]. Available from: *https://theconversation.com/setting-up-the-g5-sahel-why-an-option-that-seemed-unlikely-came-into-being-180422* (Accessed 14 July 2026).

Yu Dunhai. 2026. China-ECOWAS Relations: Deepening cooperation to jointly promote West Africa's Devt. *Vanguard.* [Online]. Available from: *https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/04/china-ecowas-relations-deepening-cooperation-to-jointly-promote-west-africas-devt/* (Accessed 7 July 2026).

CONCLUSION

Reflections on the Future of Africa's RECs in a Shifting Global Order

Bob Wekesa
African Centre for the Study of the United States , University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Introduction

At the start of the commissioning, research and writing of the foregoing chapters in early 2024, the world was in a rapid geopolitical flux. Multipolarity was on the rise as traditional powers in the Global North/the West—the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) plus the United Kingdom (UK)—ceded economic and political ground to emerging middle powers, emblematically, China, India, the Middle East, Turkey, the BRICS plus the UK and several East and Southern Asian nations such as Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and others. This was largely on account of an accelerating trend following the end of the US-led unipolar world, circa early 2000–2008 (see Lake 2026; Sachs 2023). The notion of a rising Global South, nebulous but observable, was gaining traction. As a collective, the Global South, representing the yearnings of developing nations, was banding together in contestation with the ostensibly declining Global North across imbalanced political and economic relations (Haug et al. 2021). Some countries—such as the US, the UK, Brazil (under Jair Bolsonaro), and Hungary (under Viktor Orbán)—were embracing what came to be labelled populism, neo-nationalism and isolationism (see Cannon 2025). These countries were convinced that globalisation and interdependence in the post-Cold War international system were hurting their sovereign interests. Africa

as a whole and African nations were, as in the Cold War period, caught between the accelerating shifts, emerging alliances and nervous concerns about collective global governance (see Brosig 2021; Lala 2020; Moyo 2021).

At the tail end of the production of this volume, the shifting world order took a decidedly disorderly, chaotic and rapid turn. This was largely in reaction to the second Donald Trump's America First doctrine, unleashed with gusto from 20 January 2025, upending relations between nations and regions (Stephan and Max-Otto 2024). These developments warranted reflection on Africa's place in a world rapturing and seemingly abandoning the normative values that had been codified into the global body politic since the end of the Cold War in 1945 (Jasmin and Hosen 2025). A key pillar of these values was a multilateral global governance ethic steeped in the valorisation of international institutions under the aegis of the United Nations (UN). While analyses focussed on the implications for African nations on one end and the continent on the other, a gap was observed as far as ramifications for Africa's sub-regions were concerned. It was thought that a focus on Africa in the fast-paced flux of global affairs was needed. Evidence from the desk reviews and fieldwork undertaken by the contributors suggests the need for a redesign, reconfiguration and a future-focussed re-engineering of African RECs. Is the decision by the African Union (AU) to use them as building blocks for the continent still relevant today, in the face of a fractious international environment?

This concluding chapter draws discussion points from the substantive chapters in this volume to eclectically envision African RECs in a rapidly shifting world order. As seen in the specific sub-regional analyses in this chapter, African RECs have not been immune to the tectonic re-arrangements in a world order bursting at the seams. As will be seen in the subsequent sections of this chapter, the RECs face significant headwinds in their external engagements. At the same time, all the RECs are international organisations in their own right. They have secretariats at their headquarters which, though limping along, maintain modicums of functionality. They have constitutive structures, organisational structures, organs such as sub-regional parliaments and courts of justice, protocols on trade and security, strategy plans and frequently hold meetings from

heads of state levels to ministerial and sectoral levels. Symbolically, each has its own flag, national anthem and emblem, and other artefacts of sub-regional identity. More significantly for this book, the RECs send and receive diplomatic representations and engage in formal relations with external powers. Thus, the serious credibility deficits that African RECs face should not be treated as testament to their infeasibility. Instead, they should be considered as opportunities for re-engineering to enable them to play more robust roles in a shifting global order. This is the essence of African agency, the idea that African RECs do act as drivers and agenda setters in their relations with global powers (see Links 2021a, 2021b in the case of the South African Development Community [SADC]). Where the African agency is limited, corrective action can be undertaken to boost the capacity of the RECs to act rather than being acted on.

National, sub-regional and continental perspectives

In the chapters, one reads about the inextricable link between individual African nations and their engagements with global powers through the RECs in which they belong. This is the bottom-up perspective in the RECs' ecology, with nations as the lower units of analysis in the formation, operations and future of sub-regionalism. One also sees the upward or top-down linkages, linking sub-regionalism to the macro level of continental unity, the domain of the AU-led governance (see Pearson 2019). The RECs often get short shrift in the shifting global order. Often, global powers see them as less efficient than negotiating any number of deals bilaterally. Global powers are loath to the more arduous approach of negotiating multilaterally with several nations under a sub-regional organisation (see Mulat 1998). It is also patent that African nations get the short end of the stick when they negotiate with global powers by dint of their inherent weaknesses. If a country such as the US or China, or a regional organisation such as the EU enters negotiations with a country such as Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR) or Eswatini, it brings along an asymmetrical diplomatic capability, economic heft and ideological persuasion (see Bachmann and Sidaway 2010 in the case of the East African Community [EAC]). Massively challenged, African

nations are left in a lurch, often signing on the dotted line without fully comprehending the exploitative implications of the agreements. It is, thus, far better for African nations to negotiate as blocs. This is not because the nations do not possess the sovereignty to negotiate on their own; it is because ceding national sovereignty consolidates greater negotiation power by pooling diplomatic, political, economic and even ideological resources, vis-à-vis the asymmetrical power for which powerful countries have come to be categorised as global powers.

It is even more complex for global powers and African countries to engage substantively with global powers at the 54-nation AU level, the upward linkages dimension (Pearson 2019). Structuring relations at the AU level over specific deals can be incongruous, because there would be too many parties at the negotiating table, pursuing divergent interests (Korantema et al. 2025). For instance, the so-called Africa+1 frameworks, such as the AU-EU, Italy-Africa, the Forum on China-Africa, India-Africa, South Korea-Africa, Indonesia-Africa, Brazil-Africa and Russia-Africa, have not resulted in beneficial deals for the continent as a whole. Critics have long noted the ignominy of the 54 African nations supplicating and prostrating before one global power during the summits that sit at the core of these relations (Soulé 2021; Wekesa 2024). These country + continent frameworks are more of global power, soft power socialisation mechanisms that lay the ground for one-on-one negotiations between individual African countries and global powers. Yet, it is for these reasons that African nations are likely to end up with deals that do not favour them at the national and continental levels that negotiating at the RECs level makes strategic mid-level sense (Fofack 2026).

The RECs were established to serve as the building blocks in the continental brick and mortar construction, leading to a strong African Economic Community (AEC). This pragmatic step was premised on the imponderable impossibilities of the AU handling the nuances of such a large continent in specific localities (Shumba 2023). It would also address the question of the desperation and disparity for a continent with varied social, political and economic features. A paradox that emerges every time Africa's policy positions are discussed, is whether such policies should be developed at the continental, sub-regional or national levels. The position

this author has taken in previous intellectual contributions specific to Africa-US and Africa-China is that there should be no contradiction on this question (Wekesa 2020, 2021a, 2021b). African policies towards external actors are perfectly justifiable at the continental, sub-regional and national levels without one precluding the other (for instance, Mkandawire 2011). In this case, the rationale falls on the sub-regional level of African policy towards global powers.

As perusal of the literature, be it academic, policy or journalistic, shows that relations between Africa and global powers are, for the most part, discussed, debated and analysed at the national or continental level. Just as the relations between global powers and African RECs are at a low ebb, so too is an observable phenomenon indicative of RECs as an understudied area of Africa-global power relations. The upshot is that a gap exists in policy and academic considerations at the midway level of Africa's global engagements. The top-down analytical category of continent-global power relations is useful as it is in comprehending overarching issues, risks and generalising developments in specific regional and national circumstances. On the other hand, studying global power relations at the national level may facilitate comprehension of dynamics in the specific 54 countries. This narrow focus, however, neglects the realities of global powers' involvement in multiple countries at the sub-regional level.

As the chapters in this volume amply demonstrate, there are shared affinities in each of the African sub-regions—whether cooperative or conflictual—that justify focus on them as midway units of analysis in the broader scheme of the AEC and the world. This is the thesis this author leveraged to the study of China in East Africa, findings of which demonstrated optimistic, pessimistic and pragmatic perspectives and perceptions (Wekesa 2023). The continental view of Africa's relations with the global powers is too expansive, such that many sub-regional and national particularities fall through the resultant lacunas. The view from the nation-states is too minuscule, thus, missing the bigger picture. The sub-regional level of analysis helps address the paradox of broadness and narrowness. If the nation-state level of analysis is equivalent to being too close to the mirror, making objects (a global power) too big, the continental view is too far from the mirror to make objectives too small. Analogously,

the sub-regional level, an equidistance viewing level, delivers something akin to life-sized images of an object. The sub-regional level of analysis is helpful for African policy strategists interested in the advancement of Africa, one regional block at a time, in a self-help international system. It is also pragmatically and methodologically neater for researchers who aim to theorise the relations between Africa in/and the world, not as a lumbering 2000-language landmass, nor as a patchwork of small colonial enclaves, but as solid geographic entities that embody close socio-economic proximity. Disaggregating Africa into its sub-regions portends value in managing relations with global powers, as it does with managing research projects that aim to appreciate dynamics holistically.

Asymmetries between RECs and global powers

Even when RECs forge ties to boost their negotiating capacity with global powers, the hard reality is that the imbalances between them are immense. Across comparative statistics in every imaginable area of engagement, the RECs are diminutive against the mammoth juggernauts that the global powers are. Various Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data approximations of the sub-regions are revealing. On the African end: EAC (about US$ 300 billion), SADC (US$ 780 billion), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (US$ 735 billion), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) (US$ 540 billion), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) (US$ 280.05 billion). Compare this with the GDPs of global powers: China (US$ 20 trillion), the US (US$ 30 trillion), Germany (US$ 5.33 trillion), India (US$ 4.18 trillion) and Japan (US$ 4.3 trillion). These are indeed the sobering realities of the asymmetries and imbalances that shape relations between Africa and the global powers that have endured from colonisation, through globalisation, to the present (Dickson 2021).

Sub-regional hegemonies in Africa and the notion of gateway countries or anchor states (Devermont 2025; Hanson 2009), is another cleavage that upsets RECs. Should South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Egypt temper down the proclivity to brand themselves as the most internationally connected states in their respective regions? This is because, naturally,

the other countries in the sub-regions bristle at the self-serving influence that the sub-regional powers wield. One such quiet grievance is that the sub-regional powers position themselves as entry points for global powers in the respective regions and sometimes, continentally. For instance, Lagos, Nairobi and Pretoria/Johannesburg serve as the headquarters of multinationals for the global powers in the respective sub-regions. Some of the global powers use the political and commercial capitals of the sub-regional powers as representative diplomatic hubs for the sub-regions. South Africa, for instance, has a strategic partnership with the EU, a designation that the other SADC member states do not enjoy. Analogously, the major diplomatic hubs for the global powers in the sub-regions are concentrated in Kenya, Lagos, Cairo and Pretoria. These and other factors hoist the sub-regional hegemons to beneficial relations with the global powers as compared to the countries with lesser economic status in the same sub-regions. Yet, at the same time, when collective regional economic and political plans do not work, the sub-regional hegemons are tempted to go solo. The sub-regional hegemons can, however, play the role of connectors between the sub-regions and the global powers, mimicking their global hegemon counterparts (McNamee 2016). South Africa, for instance, can project itself as the gateway to Southern Africa, while at the same time providing sub-regional public goods. This is what the US has done on a global scale: presenting itself as the world's leading economy, while also providing foreign aid, facilitating trade and leading on governance matters. This is what China has also increasingly done, positioning itself as an equal partner to the developing world and latching on to this value to structure infrastructure, trade and financial deals in much of East Asia. This is the role that Germany, the largest economy in Europe, is playing in the Eurozone, standing in the gap when broader European interests are under siege. The problem with African sub-regional hegemons, save for South Africa in some respects, is that they want to be recognised as the sub-regional powers without being seen to have earned the titles in terms of connecting countries in their neighbourhood to the rest of the world. The so-called anchor states or gateway countries in the respective sub-regions should be seen by themselves and their neighbours as instrumental drivers in their respective regions. These countries could

play the role of linchpins for the continuation of economic engagement between the global powers and Africa.

It is more strategic for African nations to engage with global powers and sub-regional blocs than as nation-states, because the imbalances are even more stark when you compare any African country's GDP with that of the global powers. For instance, South Africa's GDP, estimated by various sources at between US$ 426.38 billion and US$ 443 billion, is the lowest within BRICS, of which it is a member. South Africa is, therefore, far better off bringing the other SADC member states into its trade and economic engagements within BRICS. On the demographic front, India and China have populations of over 1.4 billion each. Nigeria, the most populous country on the continent, has a population of under 245 million. Nigerians can accentuate their massive population dividend as a major factor in their dominance of ECOWAS. Nigeria would, however, be better strategically negotiating with India or China under the aegis of ECOWAS' population, estimated at between 424 and 435 million. From a landmass perspective, Kenya, the economic and diplomatic power in the EAC, has a geographic size of 582 642 square kilometres, while Russia, the world's largest country by size, is 17 098 442 square kilometres. If Kenya wants to tap the advantages of geography in its relations with Russia, it would be strategic to do so in partnership with the 5.4 million square kilometres.

In a changing global order, the global powers may complain that their economies are under siege. For instance, according to the World Bank, the European economy as a whole, and in specific countries—most of them categorised as global powers—have been on a consistent decline across measurement metrics since 2000 (Cusolito et al. 2026). Global powers will look toward Africa, particularly its natural resources, as a means of boosting their flagging economies. African strategists should, however, not lose sight of the fact that the relative economic decline in nearly all global powers does not mean their sudden economic collapse. This should inform the RECs' engagement with the global powers. African countries are still dealing with comparatively gigantic counterparts, even though their economies are on a downward spiral. Sub-regional strategies can, though imperfectly, help negotiate beneficial agreements.

Competition within and between RECs

Even as this chapter argues for the strengthening, consolidation and operationalisation of the RECs as pragmatic avenues for a semblance of equitable engagements with global powers, one must be wary of the unintended consequences. Highly integrated RECs may end up competing against each other (see Franke 2007; Tambajang 2024) and, therefore, opening themselves up to exploitation by the global powers. Several developments over the years illustrate this challenge. During the election processes for the AU Commission leadership, sub-regions have often voted for candidates more on the strength of the sub-regions from which the candidates come, than on the competencies of the candidates. Over the years, the elections of the AU Commission Chairperson and the commissioners have been split between mostly Anglophone West Africa (ECOWAS) and predominantly Anglophone Eastern and Southern Africa (EAC and SADC) (see Anami 2024; Institute for Security Studies 2015). This is an example of the continued influence of colonial powers roughly forged along sub-regional contours.

Some countries that belong to more than one REC often favour one sub-regional organisation over another, depending on which REC serves their interests at any one time. The hand of external powers can often be seen in the cases where countries pop in and out of RECs at will. Recent developments in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are illustrative. The DRC was admitted into the EAC in 2022, ostensibly to manage the civil war in the eastern flanks of the country, where the M23 rebels, backed by Rwanda, had taken control (see Fabricius 2022). This development was analysed as a loss for the SADC, where the DRC had been a member since 1998 (Buchanan-Clarke 2022). Hardly had the ink dried on the DRC's EAC ascension than the DRC scaled down its engagement in the EAC from 2023 onwards over its perception that the EAC was aligned with its nemesis, Rwanda, in the Rwanda-DRC conflict. Instead, the DRC re-elevated engagements in the SADC, while not exactly leaving the EAC. When the SADC support in quelling the conflict failed to yield the DRC's desired results in the Eastern DRC, the country found itself in an intricate situation. It had stopped pursuing the conflict

resolution agenda in the EAC, and the SADC approach was faltering. This served as an opportunity for a joint EAC-SADC initiative in 2025 to resolve the DRC's frictions with Rwanda. This short-lived effort also failed to resolve the differences, particularly as the M23 rebels overran large swathes of Eastern DRC. Ultimately, the DRC decided to engage the global powers of Qatar and the US, bypassing both the EAC and the SADC. To some extent, the competition between the SADC and the EAC in the DRC-Rwanda conflagration is to blame for the loss of relevance by both sub-regional organisations (see Ilunga and Gahigi 2025). During the peace agreement signed by the DRC and Rwanda in Washington DC (US Department of State 2025), Presidents William Ruto of Kenya and João Lourenço of Angola, representing the EAC and the SADC, respectively, were in attendance, as observers rather than parties to the agreement. It can be concluded that the SADC-Angola-led Luanda peace process and the EAC-Kenya-led Nairobi peace process are dead. Evidence has since emerged as to the US and Qatar's interests in the DRC's critical minerals as the economic motivation for their involvement (see Mostert and Field 2025; Savoy 2025; Toto 2026). On the whole, incipient crass competition between the RECs will serve to weaken the notion of the RECs as the building blocks for the African Economic Region. It will also open cracks that global powers can exploit to the detriment of Africa. This saga is a clear example of the need for RECs to forge ties within and between themselves in such a solid manner that they rise to the occasion and fend off the intrusion of global powers into sub-regional affairs. Because the conflict is ongoing, efforts to bring together the three RECs to chart an African-led conflict resolution process are still feasible. This is indeed a case in which the AU can intervene to structure a strategy that brings all the RECs together to address a problem in which multiple RECs have a stake.

The case of the DRC's circulation between RECs is but an example. There are other examples, such as Sudan and Eritrea, which have left and rejoined the Inter-Governmental Authority of Development (IGAD) in recent times. There should be clauses in the REC protocols to allow countries some sovereignty, for instance, regarding the political systems of choice, and some protocols that are firm on the consequences if countries

persistently ignore the common good and act alone. This would indeed give the regional courts the teeth to bite and rein in leaders who habitually disregard collective commitments when negotiating with global powers.

In a brutally self-help international system, Africa's RECs, to borrow Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's phraseology, are dwarfs competing about who is the taller dwarf (Mwenda 2021), attempting feebly to structure relations with the goliaths that the global powers are. It, however, would be overly pessimistic to dismiss the RECs as utter failures in their engagements with external powers. Such negativity would gloss over some bright spots. Any analyst inclined to see the RECs as worthless sub-regional mechanisms must cut them some slack. Some examples suffice. The SADC was instrumental in the long-drawn global campaign that led to the fall of apartheid in South Africa and the liberation of Namibia from South African colonialism (Temu and Tembe 2019). This was in opposition to the administrations of Ronald Reagan in US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, the major supporters of the apartheid regime (Little 2020). Under the aegis of the EAC, negotiations were successfully struck between Tanzania and Kenya for the construction of the cross-border Arusha-Holili-Taveta-Voi road with Chinese investors (East African Community [EAC] 2022). In the ECOWAS sub-region, the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 helped to quell conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leon in the years that followed, with support from the US and the UN. Today, both Liberia and Sierra Leone are far more stable nations, even though post-conflict problems persist.

On balance, however, assessments in all the chapters in this volume suggest that African RECs have underperformed in their relations with global powers. From the foregoing chapters, however, it is evident that the promise with which the RECs were established has not translated into the results anticipated at the time of their establishment. From the viewpoint of the RECs-external powers engagements, there are many gaps, limitations and dereliction of duty. The agency of African RECs is fragmented and therefore, not effective when it comes to their engagements with global powers due to factors such as overlapping membership in the RECs by multiple countries, internal differences between member states and

diverging allegiances.

The intra-RECs schisms may suggest that the sale-by-date for these sub-regional organisations has passed. National patriotism that often overrides the collective good is, in several instances, to blame. For instance, nationalism in Morocco and Algeria is largely to blame as the core cause of the collapse of the AMU (Allouche 2019). This nationalism spills over into differences over the fate of Western Sahara, an issue that has several international dimensions. Are we, therefore, witnessing the atrophy of African RECs? Not quite. Throughout the chapters, we see efforts to resuscitate the RECs when they stumble, even in the case of perhaps the least functional REC, the AMU (Daoudi 2025). One of the reasons adduced by the authors, directly and indirectly, is that the geographical, historical and cultural proclivities that have entangled communities in the sub-regions are too strong to be put asunder in the foreseeable future. This assumption should give assurance to those who appreciate the economies of scale attainable when the RECs negotiate with the global powers collectively.

All the chapters in this volume provide evidence on how global powers have supported African RECs. The withdrawal of donor funding to African countries has also been felt on the wider scale of RECs. What is being discussed, is the impact of reduced or severed aid, not on regions generally, but on the RECs and formal institutions. When the searchlight is focussed on the RECs, a disturbing trend, tied to the downturns in member countries' economic circumstances, emerges. For instance, both ECOWAS and EAC face severe funding crises as several members default on contributions for basic operational costs and staff salaries, let alone funding sub-regional developmental and humanitarian projects. The silver lining in these circumstances is that sub-regions such as ECOWAS are beginning to take self-reliance rather than donor dependency seriously (Habib 2025).

The chapters in this volume show that friction between member states largely arises when individual nation-states and leaders determine that unilateral engagements with global powers are much more beneficial than collective negotiations. This is when leaders, hitherto invoking regional integration, suddenly justify sovereignty as a higher imperative. This,

as seen particularly in the chapters on ECOWAS, ECCAS and AMU, plays into the hands of global powers' self-interested calculations. It is as if the global powers determine that there is no reason to keep pursuing engagements with the RECs that are falling apart, riven by disagreements, or simply dysfunctional. Pose the question whether China or the EU would invest resources in resolving the sub-regional organisations' administrative and management functions at their secretariats, as a prerequisite to negotiating investment partnerships; and the answer would be negative. These global powers may have been interested in integrated RECs as strategic solutions to the diplomatic toll that negotiating with each African country impose. However, factors such as dwindling budgets, thanks to economic downturns globally, as well as the opportunities of dividing the continent to strike lucrative deals, may have persuaded global powers to deal at the national level.

For instance, in the EAC, Kenya is largely seen as an ideologically Western-inclined nation, while Uganda and Tanzania, though relating with the Western world, are perceived to lean towards China and Russia. These differences led to the collapse of the original EAC organisation in 1977 (Arwa and Sabala 2025). In the same region, Somalia, which joined the EAC in 2023, has closer affinities with the Middle East countries by dint of its Islamic culture and religion. Its membership in the EAC competes with its simultaneous belonging to the Arab League, home of the global powers, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Wekesa 2023). In the SADC sub-region, South Africa has had trying relations with the US, while enjoying warm relations with the BRICS countries. In the ECCAS region, the DRC under President Felix Tshisekedi has embraced the US, igniting potential competition with China, which has a large portfolio of critical mineral assets in the country (see Van Zyl 2025). In the same region, the CAR remains in the Russian orbit. In the ECOWAS sub-region, Cote d'Ivoire maintains close relations with France, while the so-called coup belt nations of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have left ECOWAS to form the Alliance of Sahel States, a newly minted REC, emboldened by support from Russia. The Anglophone-Francophone tensions in the ECOWAS sub-region, a by-product of colonisation, also serve as a sword of Damocles over the region

(Franke 2007). In the AMU, Algeria and Morocco have been in conflict for decades over the question of the full independence of the Sahrawi Arab Republic (Daoudi 2025).

Take the case of the exploitation of critical minerals. In Southern Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Namibia and Mozambique have the same critical minerals profiles. Minerals such as copper, lithium, cobalt, graphite, manganese, nickel and rare earth elements (REEs), transgress national borders in the region. The SADC has several sub-regional plans, strategies and policies for partnership in the minerals sector. These include the 1997 "Protocol on Mining", and "Harmonisation of Mining Policies, Standards, Legislative and Regulatory Framework in Southern Africa", approved in 2006, with an implementation plan launched in 2009 (see United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2024). SADC member states, however, often prefer negotiating with global powers on their own when they see their national interests as more beneficial than the common sub-regional good. The global powers are driving bargains with countries as critical minerals become key inputs in industrial production to support new economic activities in the digital tech and green transition domains (Moores and Bazilian 2023).

For instance, the US and EU-led Lobito corridor project, which commenced in 2023, has been done through negotiations between these global powers with Angola, the DRC, and Zambia (Mulilo 2026). At the core of the initiative is the exploitation of critical minerals in these countries, seen as pitting the West against China (Karkare and Byiers 2025). It would have been more beneficial for the initiative for the deal to be negotiated sub-region-wide through the SADC. This introduces geopolitical risks and tensions better managed at the entire sub-regional level. For instance, the extraction and transportation of the minerals from the DRC, Zambia and Angola will have a price impact across the region, given that the critical mineral deposits in these countries are also in neighbouring countries. China has also entered into bilateral partnerships with individual countries in the sub-region and beyond, a development that has greatly boosted the East Asian powers' prowess as the leading critical minerals manufacturer and global supplier of a diverse range of

digital technology goods. Indeed, the very reasons global powers are encircling the SADC region for critical minerals are the same reasons that should encourage member states to resist their entreaties. The SADC region can become an industrial powerhouse in the production of finished products from critical minerals rather than the export of raw minerals.

In the EAC, for instance, Kenya, which has a 37 per cent share of the sub-regional GDP, negotiated with the EU for a free trade agreement initially structured as an EAC framework in 2023, leaving out the rest of the member states (Pichon 2023). The deal has since been taken to the East African Court of Justice for flouting the EAC's treaty's customs and common market protocols (East African Court of Justice 2025). In another example, Kenya negotiated with the US for a free trade area with the US during the first administration of Donald Trump administration (Blanchard and Wong 2020). In 2023, the East African Court of Justice ruled against the free trade area, since it violated the EAC treaty. In 2025, the Kenyan government defiantly indicated that it was entering new negotiations for another free trade area with the US. Legal arguments aside, Kenya could have insisted on bringing in all the EAC member states, drawing on its common market protocol, which envisages collective trade and economic decisions. It would have served as a sub-regional power that ensures the interests of its neighbours as a responsible and benign sub-regional hegemon.

Nigeria is even more unique in its ECOWAS sphere of dominance compared to South Africa and Kenya in the EAC and the SADC sub-regions. Abuja, the Nigerian political capital, which hosts the ECOWAS secretariat, known as the Commission, its parliament, and the court of justice. This is unlike the EAC and SADC sub-regions, where the headquarters are located in Arusha, Tanzania, and Gaborone, Botswana, respectively. Nigeria in ECOWAS is different from Morocco in the AMU. This, Nizar Messari explains in his chapter in this volume, is because the AMU has been marked by paralysis and even collapse since its establishment in 1989. Both Tanzania and Botswana are important economies in their respective sub-regions. They are not, however, the largest economies in those sub-regions. By dint of Abuja's status as the ECOWAS sub-regional headquarters, draws significant benefits in

the global powers' engagement with the sub-region through its Abuja headquarters. A conspicuous example of the benefits accruing to Nigeria is China's donation of a UD$ 32 billion building to host the ECOWAS headquarters (see Nyabiage 2025), a development that benefited the Nigerian economy in terms of the economies around the building itself and the hosting of staff from the sub-region.

Essentially, a REC is a sub-regional government comprising member states. As a sub-regional government, it exercises executive functions in international relations and diplomacy. Typically, an ambassador of a global power to the country hosting a REC is also the ambassador to that REC. For instance, the EU ambassador to Nigeria also doubles up as the ambassador to ECOWAS. Moreover, the EU has an elaborate diplomatic engagement mechanism with all the African RECs, through its Directorate-General for International Partnerships, which includes units for engagements with individual RECs. A mismatch is evident in that ECOWAS does not have an ambassador to the EU.

Looking at how the RECs have performed on the diplomatic front; one finds examples that can be enhanced. For instance, African RECs are not formal members of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), although representatives attend its triennial summits. This could be enhanced through more deliberate, structured, predictable agreements between China and other global powers and the RECs. At the same time, RECs have not fully exploited their capacity. The practice has been that the ambassador from a country holding the chairmanship of a REC is the representative of the said REC in a region outside Africa. These functions could do with better coordination; for instance, African nations that do not have diplomatic representation in other regions could use the facilities of African countries that have such representation. Similarly, the ambassadors from the countries holding the rotational chairmanship of a REC should serve the diplomatic role of the REC in the political capital of the global powers. Thus, Equatorial Guinea, holding the chairpersonship for ECCAS in 2025, should coordinate the diplomatic roles of ECCAS in Brussels, Beijing, Washington, London, Moscow and other global power capitals. This would cut down on cost and further help in the economies of scale that integrated REC diplomacy portends.

Conclusion

The divergencies between RECs raise the fundamental question of whether the RECs are themselves integrated, before one considers their configuration as building blocks for the entire continent. The answer is neither fully negative nor positive. Studies by the UN Commission for Africa, the AU, and the African Development Bank on the integration of African RECs have typically only used internal metrics, such as trade and economics, macro-economic convergence, free movement of persons and infrastructure. The internal and continental integration of Africa should be measured using the lenses of global powers. This would drill down to the global powers that help with Africa's integration versus those that fuel sub-regional disintegration.

In recent times, African RECs have faced huge budgetary deficits. An internal problem is that the RECs members are not meeting their membership subscription fee obligations. The other issue is that external funders have cut down on their donations amid dwindling foreign aid, ignited in 2025 by the US's American First foreign policy. This is a case of dependency at the African sub-regional level, mirroring dependency at the continental and country levels. The same proposition of weaning African countries and the AU from aid dependency should be applied at the African sub-regional levels. When looking at the areas where the global powers have funded African RECs, one can begin to see where their interests lie. If the core functions of the RECs are funded by external actors, then the agenda is being set from the outside rather than being based on the core interests of the member states. Correspondingly, African RECs can analyse the project areas where global powers have cut aid and consider how the global powers are re-strategising in those areas. Where aid is being replaced by the new approach of transactional deals, the RECs can make counter offers along the same transactional methods. Additionally, the squeezed aid landscape suggests that it is time for the RECs to put in place their own developmental mechanisms. In the SADC region, for example, initiatives such as the Regional Development Fund should be revived as mechanisms for funding cross-border initiatives, somewhat plugging the gaps.

The changing global order is upending global relations, and the RECs are no exception. Dependency on global powers is no longer tenable. Rather, transactional negotiations are the new normal. Clearly, African countries negotiating at the bilateral level are disadvantaged because of the imbalance in economic and political power. African countries should insist on negotiating deals at the REC level to ensure that they have sufficient power to cut advantageous deals.

In the shifting global order, the same Global North powers that funded the budgets of the RECs are now focusing on their own internal budgetary needs while at the same time increasingly forging pragmatic alliances with China. It is the reason why African RECs should focus inwardly and only pragmatically engage with the global powers. An analysis of the new geopolitical landscape should be undertaken for the RECs to identify programmes for which funding will no longer be available from each of the global powers as a starting point towards raising internal funds to continue the projects—those that still hold relevance. Realignments in the global order also mean that African RECs must change strategies. If the EU, France, Canada, Germany and the UK are now reaching rapprochement with China, then RECs have to reckon with the fact that relations that were based on the competition between the Global North and China and India will taper off or take a more pragmatic detour.

As the contributors to this volume have pointed out, a major problem revolves around membership in more than one REC. Either countries should be limited to one REC membership, or a mechanism should be established where countries that fall in more than one REC choose their primary, secondary and tertiary RECs in terms of membership. Regardless, a situation where countries move between RECs based on the issues they confront should be regulated. The DRC, for instance, effectively suspended membership in the EAC in 2025 when it perceived its interests as being trampled in the organisation. Indications are that it has started re-engaging the bloc, as of early 2026. The departure of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS was even more consequential, because they not only left collectively, but also formed their own REC, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

Sovereignty versus collectivism sits at the heart of the failure of sub-

regional integration. How can this difficult problem be addressed? Certain issues internal to a nation are a no-go zone for collective action. For instance, decisions on the political system that a country takes—whether authoritarianism or democracy—are likely to cause rifts for member states. However, countries should agree on areas and issues in which collective RECs' decisions and actions are beneficial. Trade is one area in which countries can agree that no unilateral action should be entertained, and a country should face stiff penalties if it goes ahead to impede trade within the sub-region. Another is infrastructure, where countries should agree that cross-border projects should be seen to benefit the entire region, rather than being framed in competitive terms. For instance, while railway infrastructure from Kenya and Tanzania to Uganda has been framed on competitive terms, it is also feasible that the lines between Mombasa and Kampala, and Dar es Salaam and Kampala, be connected. Infrastructure projects hold the promise for the RECs' engagements with global powers. [Look at the joint RECs strategies on infrastructure]. Ideally, the Lobito Corridor should have been negotiated through the SADC, as would have been the Mombasa–Kampala and Dar es Salaam–Uganda railways through the EAC. The oil pipeline from Uganda to Tanzania caused unease when oil pipelines could have been strategised at the EAC level.

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) can serve as an avenue for economic connections within and between regions. The case of Africa's critical minerals is illustrative. No country can process all the minerals. Agreements within and between African countries would be the recommended approach. A mineral mined in one country can be processed in another country. For instance, Botswana could become a major diamond processing country on the continent, given that it has some capacity in this area. The SADC countries could firmly agree that all diamond processing should be done in Botswana, rather than being shipped raw and cut in any of the global power countries. The SADC could also enter negotiations with the other sub-regions of the continent for diamonds processing to be done in Botswana. Such an agreement could include clauses for Botswana to help diamond-producing countries in the other regions of the continent to increase their diamond processing capacity. This would be based on the avoidance of duplication of efforts

and the sharing of the mineral's bounty. This can be done through AfCFTA, promoting intra-African trade, using the RECs as building blocks. This is essential for the development of supply chains.

An important point to make is that Africa is inherently a sub-regional rather than bilateral economy. The proposal that African policymakers and strategists should lay on the table is that bilateral trade relations make sense for economies that are cross-continental in terms of value chains and opportunities. India and China, for instance, are large countries for which bilateral negotiations with the other global powers is feasible. Global powers should be encouraged to see the broader sub-regional pictures, rather than narrow views that lose the sub-regional opportunities.

Between the RECs, the institutional framework of the AU is based on the RECs. The leadership itself, both at the executive AU Commission level and at the political heads of state level, is rotational. For instance, it has been alleged that France has always been stealthily involved in supporting Francophone African states, particularly within the ECOWAS region, when elective positions open in the AU. The same is often discussed as the case with the Arab Maghreb nations' support for Arabic-African candidates in the AU.

References

Allouche, Y. 2019. *Regional power rivalry and the failure of the Arab Maghreb Union*. Istanbul: TRT World Research Centre.

Anami, L. 2024. Africa's Anglophone, Francophone divide could be make or break for Raila. *Daily Nation*. [Online]. Available at: *https://nation.africa/africa/news/africa-s-anglophone-francophone-divide-could-be-make-or-break-for-raila-4741142#story* (Accessed 10 August 2025).

Arwa, B. and Sabala, K. 2025. Unilateralism, national interests and regional integration in the East African community. *African Security Review*, 1–17.

Bachmann, V. and Sidaway, J.D. 2010. African regional integration and European involvement: External agents in the East African community. *South African Geographical Journal*, 92(1): 1–6.

Blanchard, L.P. and Wong, L. 2020. *U.S.-Kenya trade negotiations*. US

Congress. [Online]. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11526 (Accessed 12 August 2025).

Brosig, M. 2021. *Africa in a changing global order: Marginal but meaningful?* Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Buchanan-Clarke, S. 2022. Opinion: Pros and cons of DRC joining the East Africa bloc. *Mail & Guardian*. 22 April 2022. [Online]. Available at: *https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2022-04-22-pros-and-cons-of-drc-joining-the-east-africa-bloc/* (Accessed 15 August 2025).

Cannon, M.E. 2025. Populism, nationalism, and civilizationism: Implications and complications for religious freedom. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 23(4): 19–32.

Cusolito, A.P., Izvorski, I.V., Kasyanenko, S., Lokshin, M.M. and Torre, I. 2026. Europe and Central Asia Economic Update, Fall 2025: Jobs and Prosperity. *World Bank Group, Washington DC*. [Online]. Accessible at: *https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/e4463608-4160-4318-a0b1-d028fd887d89* (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Daoudi, A. 2025. Former Tunisian President Marzouki calls for revival of Maghreb Union in Rabat. *Morocco World News*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/11/269978/former-tunisian-president-marzouki-calls-for-revival-of-maghreb-union-in-rabat/* (Accessed 18 March 2026).

Devermont, J. 2025. On anchor states. *Post Strategy*. [Online]. Available at: *https://poststrategy.substack.com/p/on-anchor-states?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email&triedRedirect=true* (Accessed 18 March 2026).

Dickson, M.E. 2021. Globalization and development challenges in Africa: Prognosis for the 21st century. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa,* 23.(3): 63–78.

East African Community. 2022. EAC Heads of State launch EAC Arusha bypass. *Softpower News*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.eac.int/press-releases/150-infrastructure/2536-eac-heads-of-state-launch-eac-arusha-bypass (Accessed 15 August 2025).

East African Court of Justice. 2025. East African Court of Justice Halts Implementation of Kenya-EU Economic Partnership Agreement. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.eacj.org/?news=east-african-court-*

of-justice-halts-implementation-of-kenya-eu-economic-partnership-agreement (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Fabricius, P. 2022. Now the East African Community tackles the eastern DRC's rebels. *Institute for Security Studies*. [Online]. Available at: *https://issafrica.org/iss-today/now-the-east-african-community-tackles-the-eastern-drcs-rebels* (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Fofack, H. 2026. Integration is Africa's only way forward. *Project Syndicate*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/african-union-must-pursue-integration-starting-with-monetary-changes-by-hippolyte-fofack-2026-02* (Accessed 2 July 2026)

Franke, B. F. 2007. Competing regionalisms in Africa and the continent's emerging security architecture. *African Studies Quarterly*, 9(3).

Habib, G. 2025. ECOWAS urged to cut reliance on foreign aid. *Punch*. [Online]. Available at: *https://punchng.com/ecowas-urged-to-cut-reliance-on-foreign-aid/* (Accessed 12 March 2026)

Hanson, S. 2009. *Leading Africa.* Council on Foreign Relations. Available from: *https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/leading-africa* (Accessed 12 August 2026).

Haug, S., Braveboy-Wagner, J. and Maihold, G. 2021. The 'Global South' in the study of world politics: examining a meta category. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(9): 1923–1944.

Ilunga, P. and Gahigi, M.K. 2025. Unwilling partners: Congo in EAC, Rwanda in ECCAS. *The East African*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/unwilling-partners-congo-in-eac-rwanda-in-eccas-5076840* (Accessed 14 March 2026).

Institute for Security Studies. 2015. *It's Shakespeare vs Molière in the African Union.* [Online]. Available at: *https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/its-shakespeare-vs-moliere-in-the-african-union* (Accessed 12 March 2026).

Jasmin, I. A. and Hosen, I. 2025. Trump 2.0: Redefining America's role in the global order. *Discover Global Society,* 3(140).

Karkare, P. and Byiers, B. 2025. *The Lobito Corridor: Between European geopolitics and African agency.* ECDPM. [Online]. Available at: *https://ecdpm.org/application/files/6217/6235/7263/The-Lobito-Corridor-Between-European-geopolitics-African-agency-ECDPM-Discussion-*

Paper-386-2025.pdf. (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Stephan, K. and Max-Otto, B. 2024. *Trump 2.0 in times of political upheaval? Implications of a possible second presidency for international politics and Europe, IDEAS.* [Online]. Available at: *https://ideas.repec.org/p/zbw/idospb/300630.html* (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Korantema, S., Tuffuor, K. A. and Awuah, F. 2025. International negotiations: Challenges and strategies for African countries. *University of Cape Coast Law Journal,*. 4(2): 283-305.

Lake, D. A. 2026. The end of the liberal international order? Globalization, deep contestation, and the future**.** *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 19(1): 10–24.

Lala, F. 2020. Africa in the changing global order: Does African agency matter in global politics? In: *The Changing Global Order: Challenges and Prospects*, edited by M. O. Hosli and J. Selleslaghs. Springer: Cham. pp. 127–143.

Links, S. 2021a. Ascertaining agency: Africa and the belt and road initiative. In: *Global perspectives on China's belt and road initiative: Asserting agency through regional connectivity,* edited by F. Schneider. Amsterdam University Press. Amsterdam. pp. 113–140.

— — —. 2021b. Parameters and pathways: Agency in the case of the Southern African development community. In: *Global Perspectives on China's belt and road initiative: Asserting agency through regional connectivity*, edited by F. Schneider. Amsterdam University Press. Amsterdam. pp. 141–170.

Little, B. 2020. Why Nelson Mandela was viewed as a 'terrorist' by the U.S. Until 2008. *Biography*. 19 May 2020. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.biography.com/activists/nelson-mandela-terrorist-reagan-thatcher*. (Accessed 14 August 2025).

McNamee, T. 2016. *Harnessing the power of Africa's swing states: The catalytic role of Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa.* Discussion Paper 1/2016. Johannesburg: Brenthurst Foundation.

Mkandawire, T. 2011. Rethinking pan-Africanism: National and the new regionalism. In *Reclaiming the Nation: The return of the national question in Africa, Asia and Latin America,* edited by S. Moyo and P. Yeros. Pluto Press: London. pp. 31–53.

Moores, S. and Bazilian, M. 2023. What are critical minerals - And why are they key to a greener future? *World Economic Forum.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/05/critical-minerals-technology-geopolitical-greener-future/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22228224717&gbraid=0AAAAAoVy5F40ReOkhJ0zUhgcc5ahGMgBW&gclid=Cj0KCQiA7-rMBhCFARIsAKnLKtA9DcO857Jj4F2lnwnJRJSlM68-u3v1EaCEVosAGeYgdPXZnIUqWYYaAi89EALw_wcB* (Accessed 14 August 2026).

Mostert, H. and Field, T. 2025. Africa's minerals are being bartered for security: why it's a bad idea. *The Conversation.* [Online]. Available at: *https://theconversation.com/africas-minerals-are-being-bartered-for-security-why-its-a-bad-idea-260594* (Accessed 14 March 2025).

Moyo, G. 2021. Navigating African agency in a multipolar world system. In: *African agency, finance and developmental states*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. pp. 45–74

Mulat, T. 1998. Multilateralism and Africa's regional economic communities. *Journal of World Trade*, 32: 115.

Mulilo, D. 2026. Lobito corridor: A new line for trade and investment. *Mail & Guardian*. [Online]. Available at: *https://mg.co.za/africa/2026-02-20-lobito-corridor-a-new-line-for-trade-and-investment/* (Accessed 2 July 2026).

Mwenda, A. 2021. What is Africa's problem? *The Independent*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.independent.co.ug/what-is-africas-problem/2/* (Accessed 18 August 2025).

Nyabiage, J. 2025. How China-built Ecowas headquarters is latest 'concrete symbol' of Africa ties. *South China Morning Post*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3335984/china-built-headquarters-15-member-economic-bloc-strengthens-ties-west-africa* (Accessed 14 March 2025)

Pearson, M. 2019. *Need for a paradigm shift of regional integration in Africa*. ECPDM, Discussion Paper No. 257. [Online]. Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ecdpm.org/application/files/6916/5546/8680/DP-257-Need-for-a-paradigm-shift-of-regional-integration-in-Africa.pdf (Accessed 14 August 2025).

Pichon, E. 2023. Economic partnership agreement with Kenya (East African community). *European Parliament*. [Online]. Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751390/EPRS_BRI(2023)751390_EN.pdf (Accessed 14 August 2025).

Sachs, J. D. 2023. The new geopolitics. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 22 (WINTER 2023): 10–21

Savoy, C. M. 2025. DFC, Critical minerals, and peace in DRC? *Centre for Global Development*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.cgdev.org/blog/dfc-critical-minerals-and-peace-drc* (Accessed 14 March 2026)

Shumba. W. 2023. Towards the African economic community: Legal and historical perspectives. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 26(1).

Soulé, F. 2021. How popular are Africa+1 summits among the continent's leaders? *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.* [Online]. Available at: *https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/12/how-popular-are-africa1-summits-among-the-continents-leaders?lang=en* (Accessed 14 August 2026)

Tambajang, I. 2024. The competition authorities of the regional economic communities (RECs) strengthen their collaboration. *ERCA*. [Online]. Available at: *https://erca-arcc.org/overview/* (Accessed 24 March 2026).

Temu, A. J. and Tembe, J. N. 2019. *Southern African liberation struggles: Contemporaneous Documents 1960–1994*. Mkuki na Nyota Publishers: Dar es Salaam.

Toto, E. 2026. Scrutiny grows over DRC-US minerals deal, even as other African nations sign up. *Mongabay*. [Online]. Available at: *https://news.mongabay.com/2026/02/scrutiny-grows-over-drc-us-minerals-deal-even-as-other-african-nations-sign-up/* (Accessed 24 March 2026)

US Department of State. 2025. *Joint declaration by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Rwanda on the occasion of establishing the Washington accords for peace and prosperity.* [Online]. Available at: *https://www.state.gov/joint-declaration-by-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-the-republic-of-rwanda-on-the-occasion-of-establishing-the-washington-accords-for-peace-and-prosperity/* (Accessed 24 March 2024).

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. 2024. *7th SADC industrialization week: Mineral value chains and transformation in the SADC region: Opportunities from critical energy transition minerals July 29 – August 2, 2024, Harare, Zimbabwe*. [Online]. Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/ https://www.uneca.org/eca-events/sites/default/files/resources/documents/sro-sa/7th-sadc-industrialization-week/mvct_concept_note_cetms.pdf (Accessed 18 August 2025).

— — —. No Date. Regional economic communities. [Online]. Available from: *https://archive.uneca.org/oria/pages/regional-economic-communitie*. (Accessed 18 August 2025).

Van Zyl, I. 2025. Congo's mineral curse fuels US-China rivalry. *The Interpreter*. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/congo-s-mineral-curse-fuels-us-china-rivalry*. (Accessed 14 March 2026)

Wekesa, B. 2020. "African Public Diplomacy: Between Deficiencies and Potential". In Snow, N., and Cull, N., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, 2nd Edition, New York: Routledge.

Wekesa, B. 2021a. A call for an African policy framework during the Biden Era. In: *Africa's Policy Towards the U.S.: The Biden Era*, edited by B. Wekesa. Johannesburg: Good Governance Africa.

— — —. 2021b. A call for an African policy framework towards China. In: *Africa-China cooperation: Towards an African policy on China?* edited by P. Mthembu and F. Mabera. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. pp 11–29. [

— — —. 2023. *China's footprint in East Africa: Pessimism versus optimism*. Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan.

— — —. 2024. *Africa's opportunity in the summits by global power*. Africa-US Forum. Johannesburg: African Centre for the Study of the US.

Wekesa, S. 2023. Risks and opportunities of admitting Somalia into the EAC. *The Elephant*. 8 December 2023. [Online]. Available at: *https://www.theelephant.info/analysis/2023/12/08/fear-and-loathing-in-the-eac-risks-and-opportunities-of-admitting-somalia/(accessed* 19 August 2025).

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Acaye, Gabriel

East Africa Law Society, Tanzania

Gabriel Acaye is an Advocate of the High Court of Uganda and leads professional development and membership at the East Africa Law Society. He is a human rights lawyer whose work focuses on transparency and good governance in natural resource management, the rule of law and regional integration in East Africa.

Kabwe, Kabaso

African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Dr Kabaso Kabwe is Programme Manager at the Southern Africa Resource Watch (SARW) and a Research Associate at the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), University of the Witwatersrand. Her research examines how institutions, public policy and geopolitical dynamics shape Africa's development pathways, with interests in global health, governance and Africa's relations with global powers.

Lotshwao, Kebapetse

University of Botswana, Botswana

Kebapetse Lotshwao is a Senior Lecturer in politics at the University of Botswana. He holds a PhD in Politics from the University of Newcastle, Australia. His research interests span political economy, African politics, political parties and democratisation, and security studies.

Messari, Nizar

Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI), Morocco

Nizar Messari is Professor of International Relations at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane and holds a PhD in International Studies from the University of Miami. His research and teaching focus on International

Relations theory, including perspectives beyond the West, critical security studies and Moroccan foreign policy.

Musemwa, Mucha

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Mucha Musemwa is Professor of History and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. He holds a PhD from the University of Minnesota. His research lies in environmental history and the environmental humanities, with a particular focus on the history and politics of water in Southern Africa.

Nguijol, Gabriel Cyrille

National Research Institute of Cartography, Cameroon

Gabriel Cyrille Nguijol is a researcher at the National Institute of Cartography in Cameroon and lectures in security studies at the Cameroonian Institute of Diplomatic and Strategic Studies. His research interests include international relations, regional cooperation, security studies, intelligence, terrorism and socio-spatial dynamics in Africa.

Romward, Achilleus

East Africa Law Society, Tanzania

Achilleus Romward is an advocate in Tanzania and Programme Manager at the East Africa Law Society. His work focuses on human rights, the rule of law and public interest litigation before national and regional courts in East Africa.

Wefwafwa, Job Allan

African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Job Allan Wefwafwa is a Lecturer in Media Studies at the Technical University of Kenya and a Research Associate at the African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand. His research interests lie at the intersection of digital media, African electoral politics, and Afrocentric thought.

Wekesa, Bob

African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Bob Wekesa is the Director of the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of the Witwatersrand. He holds master's and doctoral degrees from the Communication University of China. His research sits at the intersection of media and communications and geopolitics, including public and digital diplomacy and Africa's relations with established and emerging powers.

INDEX

A

Abuja 9, 82, 221–222, 226, 230, 242, 244, 248, 257, 260, 269–272, 293–294
Afreximbank 142, 145, 149, 153–154, 159–160, 162, 164–165, 209
African Continental Free Trade Area 1, 92, 204
(AfCFTA) 1, 92, 96–97, 100, 108, 168, 204, 297–298
African Development Bank 7, 18, 92–93, 98, 102, 121, 133, 143, 154–156, 160, 168–169, 195, 209, 233, 295
African Union 9, 18–19, 21, 61, 75, 82, 96–97, 111, 121–122, 125, 129, 134, 183, 195, 209, 213, 219, 224, 235, 245, 277, 280, 300
(AU) 1–3, 5, 7, 9–12, 17–18, 53, 61, 64, 70, 74–75, 82, 86, 92, 94, 96–97, 101, 107, 110, 118, 120–123, 133, 137, 141–143, 149, 154, 163, 200, 202, 209, 216, 219, 234, 280–282, 287–288, 295, 298
AFRICOM 13, 145, 176, 178–180, 182, 214, 245, 248, 266
agency iv–viii, x, 1–4, 6–11, 13–14, 16–19, 30, 45, 57, 59–60, 71, 74–76, 83, 86, 89–90, 96, 100, 110–111, 113, 121, 125, 129–130, 134, 169, 188–189, 194, 204–205, 209, 212, 217–221, 225–230, 232–233, 236–241, 243–244, 247–250, 252–255, 257–265, 267, 274–277, 281, 289, 300–302
Agenda 10, 15, 21, 39, 60–62, 65–67, 74–75, 85, 90, 92, 94, 96–97, 110, 115, 117, 119–122, 135, 137–138, 142, 146, 179, 209–210, 250, 253, 262, 265, 281, 288, 295
AGOA 13, 89, 91, 99, 105, 121, 123, 145, 165–166, 168, 214, 242, 247
(African Growth and Opportunity Act) 13, 89, 91–92, 99, 121, 123, 126, 145, 242
agreements ix, 10, 14, 17, 20, 27, 38, 41, 81, 83, 85, 90, 92, 97, 106–109, 118, 142, 146–147, 149, 152, 157–158, 162, 165–166, 168, 177–178, 187, 189, 198, 200, 202–203, 206–207, 216, 219–220, 234, 239, 241, 282, 286, 294, 297
agriculture 38, 41, 64, 84, 87, 90, 117, 136, 143, 146, 151, 156, 163–165, 167–168, 170–171, 243
aid v, ix, 59, 66, 68, 76–78, 81, 95, 103, 105–106, 109, 114, 125, 145, 149, 152, 155, 165, 169–171, 173, 176, 178–180, 183, 185–186, 189, 198–199, 201, 203–204, 210, 214, 222–224, 227, 231–233, 238, 245–246, 249, 258–259, 267, 285, 290, 295, 300
Algeria 15, 20, 26–29, 31–46,

48–50, 53–54, 56, 290, 292
Alliance of Sahel States 291, 296
(AES) 240, 250–253, 255, 262–263, 265, 296
alliances 142, 149, 165, 202, 205, 208, 280, 296
Angola 58, 60–63, 69, 122, 132–133, 138–139, 147, 156, 158, 160, 163–166, 173, 178, 190, 192, 216, 288, 292
Arab Maghreb Union viii, 1, 25, 51, 131, 284, 298
(AMU) viii, 1, 9, 15, 20, 25–29, 31, 38, 42, 48–50, 131, 284, 290–293
autonomy 10, 14, 39–40, 48, 105, 111, 119–120, 135, 147, 169, 180, 203, 208

B

balancing 29–31, 52, 54, 118, 120, 148, 163, 208
bargaining power 6, 13, 17, 83, 97–98, 113, 130, 202, 207
Belt and Road Initiative 13, 19, 21, 42, 73, 93, 123, 145, 224, 229, 238, 264, 301
(BRI) 13, 93–94, 98–100, 103, 111, 145, 148, 162, 165–166, 171, 206, 229
bilateral investment treaties 108, 126, 165
(BITs) 108–110, 165
bilateral relations 71, 151
Botswana 57–58, 61–63, 69, 71, 73, 79, 293, 297
Brazil 57, 63, 116–117, 146–147, 170, 174–175, 205, 261, 279, 282
BRICS 57, 63, 75, 116–117, 123, 125, 141, 279, 286, 291
Burkina Faso 13, 218, 230, 235, 240, 245, 248–251, 253, 265, 269, 277, 291, 296
Burundi 88, 91, 95, 101, 104, 116, 131, 133, 147, 156, 158, 160, 190, 192, 198, 216, 281

C

Cameroon 129, 131, 145–147, 151, 155–158, 163–166, 169, 175–176, 178, 180–182, 184–186, 190, 192, 194–196, 199, 210, 214, 216
Central Africa 130–133, 136, 138, 140–141, 143, 147, 151–154, 159–160, 169, 171, 175–177, 181, 183–184, 186–188, 192, 196–197, 206, 209–215
Central African Republic 131, 133, 139, 177–178, 211, 215–216, 281
(CAR) 44, 139, 142, 145–148, 152, 155–156, 158–160, 165, 175, 177–186, 190, 192, 195–196, 199, 215, 281, 291
Chad 130–131, 133, 139–140, 145–147, 151–152, 155–158, 164–165, 169, 176, 178–186, 192, 195–196, 199, 214, 216, 233, 235, 240

China viii, 13, 18–19, 21, 25, 31–32, 42–43, 49, 51–53, 57–58, 63, 67, 73, 76, 83, 92–94, 98–99, 103, 107, 109–111, 116–117, 122–127, 130, 139, 142–143, 145, 147–152, 155, 157–166, 168–170, 173–175, 180, 183, 188–189, 192–195, 198, 200–201, 205–206, 208–209, 211, 213, 215, 220–229, 238, 249, 259–262, 264–268, 272, 275–279, 281–286, 291–292, 294, 296, 298, 301–302, 304
China–Africa 99
Chinese 13, 43–44, 73, 76–77, 93–95, 100, 109, 111, 140, 163, 166, 171, 183, 188, 192–193, 200, 209, 221–229, 241, 254, 264, 267, 289, 301
civil society viii–ix, 66, 87, 134, 142, 145, 197, 200–201, 205, 207, 210, 213, 264
climate change 7, 57, 73, 109, 142, 169, 184–185, 196, 202, 206, 236, 243, 246
Cold War 4–5, 32, 36, 43, 60, 218, 279–280
colonialism 32, 58, 98, 105, 115, 289
COMESA 2, 9, 11–12, 112, 123, 131, 133
(Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) 1, 112, 131
conflict 10, 19–21, 35, 42, 47, 54, 60, 70, 76, 114, 120, 124, 139, 149, 157, 159, 179, 181, 184–185, 187–188, 202, 231, 234–235, 240, 244, 248, 259, 269, 272, 274, 276, 287–289, 292
Congo 10, 21, 62, 89, 122, 127, 131–132, 139–141, 145–147, 152, 155–156, 158–160, 169, 175, 191–192, 199, 212, 216, 287, 300, 303–304
counterterrorism 111, 127, 145, 148, 170, 176, 178, 180, 182–183, 243, 263
coups 13, 194, 218, 229, 234–235, 244–245, 248–251, 253, 267
COVID-19 16, 18–19, 88, 97, 100, 119, 138, 154
customs union 63, 77, 82, 87, 92, 98, 133, 138, 153

D

debt 111, 142, 145, 147, 163, 166, 168, 171, 173, 201–202, 209, 224, 228
democracy 37, 59, 63, 65, 72, 76–77, 86, 89, 193, 196, 199, 243, 252, 297
Democratic Republic of the Congo 89, 131, 139, 303
(DRC) 10–11, 19, 62–63, 69, 89–91, 101–102, 104, 107, 122, 131–133, 138–141, 145–147, 155–160, 163–166, 169, 173, 178, 182, 184–186, 190, 192, 194–196, 199, 287–288, 291–292, 296, 299–300, 303
dependency 83, 102, 119–120,

130, 147, 163, 166, 168, 180, 182, 202–205, 208, 224, 226, 247, 255, 258, 264, 290, 295–296
development v, viii–x, 1–2, 6–7, 9–10, 18–20, 22, 44, 52, 57, 59–72, 74–75, 77–79, 81–87, 89–112, 115–122, 124–125, 127, 129–149, 151, 154–157, 160, 162, 165–166, 168–173, 175, 177–178, 187–189, 193–195, 198–201, 203–204, 206–209, 211–216, 222–225, 227, 230–233, 235–237, 239–241, 243–244, 247, 252, 254–260, 263–264, 266–269, 272, 274, 281, 287–288, 292, 294–295, 298–299, 301, 303
diaspora 184, 187, 189–191, 215
digital ii, 119–120, 124, 170, 174–175, 195, 197, 203–207, 232, 235, 241, 269–270, 292–293
diplomacy 2, 5, 7, 15–16, 20, 22, 32, 46, 102, 109, 113, 125–126, 131, 142, 145–146, 148, 150, 191–193, 195, 197, 206, 208–209, 224, 226, 244, 255, 262, 265, 276, 294, 302, 304
donors 5, 16, 22, 59, 78, 125, 199

E

East Africa 82, 86, 90–92, 99–100, 103–104, 110, 122, 127, 198, 283, 299, 304
East African Community v, viii, 2, 20, 22, 63, 76, 81–82, 84, 91, 93, 101, 122–126, 131, 281, 289, 298–300, 303
(EAC) viii, 2, 9–11, 14–15, 20, 75–76, 82–96, 98–107, 111–112, 116, 119, 122–125, 131, 133, 281, 284, 286–291, 293, 296–297, 299–300, 304
ECCAS viii–ix, 2, 9, 63, 75–76, 101, 129–178, 180–184, 187–210, 212, 214, 216, 246, 284, 291, 294, 300
(Economic Community of Central African States) vi, viii, 2, 63, 76, 101, 122, 129, 210–211, 213, 246, 284
Economic Partnership Agreements 157, 219, 233, 239
(EPAs) 68, 165–166, 168, 216, 219, 234, 239–240
ECOWAS vi, viii, 2, 9, 13, 15, 29, 131, 138, 153, 157, 161, 217–278, 284, 286–287, 289–291, 293–294, 296, 298, 300, 302
(Economic Community of West African States) viii, 2, 29, 131, 161, 217, 233, 245, 278, 284, 289
education 71, 87, 90, 99, 115, 136, 142, 146, 170, 192–193, 199, 236, 269
elections 10, 12, 14, 20–21, 35–36, 63, 65, 70, 89, 234, 245, 253, 270, 287
energy 32, 40, 62, 69, 94–95, 100, 108, 113–114, 132, 137, 139, 143, 146, 163, 168–171, 173–175, 206–207, 212, 216, 222–223, 232,

236, 243, 257, 260, 270, 274, 304
environment 65, 71, 90, 102–103, 106, 114, 129, 135–137, 143, 147, 153, 179, 200, 216, 224, 280
Equatorial Guinea ix, 121, 131–132, 139, 145–147, 152, 155–156, 158, 163–164, 183, 192, 216, 294
Europe 19, 36–37, 40, 52–54, 83, 94, 106, 112–113, 190, 193, 196, 232, 236, 241, 251–253, 256, 258–259, 269, 271, 275, 285, 299, 301
European Development Fund 102, 145, 230–231, 237 (EDF) 145, 150, 170, 173, 231–232
European Union viii, 3, 25, 51–52, 57, 78, 102, 124, 130, 168, 177–179, 181, 195, 211, 230, 233, 236, 270–272, 277, 279 (EU) 3, 9, 11, 13–14, 16, 20, 25, 27, 29–31, 35–38, 40, 44, 49, 51–52, 57, 68–72, 74, 78, 102, 112, 122, 124–125, 132, 139–140, 142–145, 147–152, 155, 157, 160–161, 163–166, 169–171, 173–175, 177–179, 181–182, 185, 187, 189, 193, 196, 200–201, 206, 208, 210–211, 214, 216, 219, 230–241, 247, 253, 255–256, 258, 260–262, 265, 267, 269, 275, 277–279, 281–282, 285, 291–294, 296, 299–300, 303
external powers v, viii, 10–11, 14, 16, 18, 25–26, 29, 31, 38, 49–50, 57–58, 98, 111, 129–130, 134–135, 139, 143, 147, 150–151, 157, 159, 175, 184, 197, 218, 265, 281, 287, 289
extraction 113, 139–140, 145–148, 151, 162, 171–173, 200, 204, 292

F

FEMNET 198–201, 211
FOCAC 57, 73, 109, 193, 195, 211, 220, 223–224, 229, 272, 294 (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation) 99
food security 62, 84, 86–87, 97, 136, 171, 252
foreign direct investment 89, 108, 138, 170 (FDI) 108, 110, 138–139, 172–175
foreign policy 15, 29–30, 45, 51, 54, 67, 74–75, 78, 101, 103, 123, 134–135, 137–138, 141–143, 150, 190, 206, 228, 255, 295
fragmentation 3, 6–8, 11–12, 17–18, 130–131, 208
France 25–27, 31–32, 36–41, 48–49, 59–60, 89, 111, 139, 141–143, 147–150, 152, 159, 161, 163, 165, 168–169, 172, 175–176, 178–179, 181–183, 185, 187–195, 200–201, 208, 210–212, 235–236, 250–258, 260–265, 269, 271, 275, 291, 296, 298
Francophone 220, 251–252,

254–255, 273–274, 291, 298
free trade 1, 34, 44, 46, 54, 82, 92, 112, 115, 153, 157, 204, 213, 293, 297

G

Gabon ix, 131–132, 134–135, 139, 145, 147, 152, 155–156, 158, 163–166, 172, 176, 178, 183, 192, 194–195, 199, 216
gas 32, 40, 151, 157–158, 160, 162–164, 169, 171, 174–175
gender 64, 70, 87, 97, 136, 198, 200, 205, 244, 272
geopolitics 208, 300, 303
Germany 57, 68, 71–72, 83, 86–88, 143, 233–235, 255–261, 265, 268–269, 271, 273–274, 284–285, 296
GIZ 71, 76, 86–88, 99–100, 124–126, 232–233, 238, 255, 258, 264, 276
global order vi, 1, 4, 18, 74, 76, 81, 126, 279, 281, 286, 296, 299–301
governance ix, 4, 19–20, 59, 62–63, 65, 67, 69, 72, 76, 79, 84, 90–91, 104, 115, 120, 134, 136–137, 139, 143, 145, 147, 152–153, 158, 169–171, 173, 177–179, 182, 190, 193–194, 198–201, 204, 206, 208, 216, 234, 244–246, 257, 277, 280–281, 285, 304
Guinea ix, 121, 131–132, 139, 145–147, 152–153, 155–158, 163–164, 175, 183, 192, 216, 221, 227, 234, 240, 244–246, 251, 266, 294
Guinea-Bissau 221, 227, 234, 240, 246, 251
Gulf of Guinea 153, 157, 175, 234, 246
Gulf states 13, 26, 140–141, 261

H

health 17–19, 39, 47, 73, 87–88, 90–91, 96, 99–100, 136, 155, 168–170, 173, 193, 199, 215, 243, 257, 260, 274
human rights 34, 40, 59, 62–63, 65, 70, 77, 81, 91, 117, 173, 179, 182–183, 190, 193, 196, 198–201, 205–207, 212, 252, 261, 267, 276
humanitarian assistance 244

I

IGAD 2, 9, 11, 131, 288
(Intergovernmental Authority on Development) 2, 131
India viii, 17, 25–26, 31, 45, 49, 54, 57, 63, 116–117, 142, 146–147, 158–159, 161, 170, 173–175, 205, 261, 279, 282, 284, 286, 296, 298
industrialisation 69, 72–73, 87, 94–95, 97, 112, 151
infrastructure 9–10, 13, 64, 67–69, 85, 93–100, 111, 119, 124, 129–130, 137–142, 145–149, 151, 158–159, 161–163, 165–171,

173–175, 177–178, 182, 188, 191, 197–198, 201, 203–204, 206–207, 216, 222–227, 229, 264, 267, 276, 285, 295, 297, 299
insecurity 21, 36, 52, 85, 90, 102, 107, 184–185, 246–247
International Monetary Fund 61, 163, 212–213
(IMF) 173, 212–213
investment 22, 43, 53, 64, 73, 83, 87, 89, 91–92, 94–95, 99, 102, 107–109, 111–112, 116, 118, 122, 124, 126–127, 130, 138, 140, 149–150, 153, 165, 168–171, 173, 187–189, 203–204, 208, 223, 232–233, 236, 238–239, 242–243, 246–247, 267, 275, 278, 291, 302
Israel 25, 31, 33, 35, 45–46, 49, 54, 56, 175

J

Japan 25–26, 31, 44–45, 49, 53, 83, 86, 95–96, 125, 143, 261, 279, 284
justice 19, 38, 67, 82, 84, 136, 138, 198–200, 216, 222, 227, 280, 293, 299–300

K

Kampala 114–115, 121, 125–126, 297
Kenya 2, 14–15, 20, 84–85, 88, 90–92, 95–96, 98, 100, 125, 127, 211, 255, 284–286, 288–289, 291, 293, 297–301, 303

L

Lake Chad 133, 179, 184, 186, 214
Libya 26–29, 37, 42–43, 47, 131, 256

M

Maghreb v, viii, 1, 25–33, 36–39, 41–54, 131, 284, 298–299
Mali 13, 183, 218, 225, 229, 235, 240, 245, 248–251, 253, 265–266, 277, 291, 296
manufacturing 69, 95, 151, 165, 167–168, 172, 174–175, 209
maritime security 153, 175, 234, 246
MENA 26, 29–34, 44–45, 49, 55
(Middle East and North Africa) 29, 53–54
migration 15, 36–40, 55, 184–190, 211–213, 219, 236, 241, 256, 259, 265, 268
military 32, 36–37, 42, 60, 111, 114, 120, 146, 149–150, 152, 165, 170, 175–183, 201–202, 212, 214, 229, 234–235, 244–246, 248–249, 251, 253, 261, 263, 265–267
minerals 10, 58, 131–132, 154, 159–160, 163–165, 168, 171, 204, 262, 288, 292–293, 297, 302–304
mining 62, 108, 140–141, 146, 156–157, 163–164, 169–171, 173–174, 292
monetary union 87, 154, 251
Morocco 15, 20, 25–56, 143, 290,

292–293, 299
Mozambique 14, 21, 60–61, 63, 69–71, 76, 79, 132, 292
Multilateralism 125, 302

N

natural resources 58, 64, 90, 106, 110, 112, 117, 151–152, 169, 173, 201, 204, 208, 286
Niger 13, 194, 218, 230, 235, 240, 245, 248–251, 253, 261, 263, 265–266, 276–277, 291, 296
Nigeria 15, 22, 221–222, 224, 226, 230, 233, 236, 242–243, 246, 250–251, 257, 260–261, 266, 274, 284, 286, 293–294, 301
non-tariff barriers 44, 82, 159, 161, 163, 166–167, 201, 208
North Africa 26, 29–30, 32, 51–54, 95, 132

O

oil 32, 58, 62, 132, 140, 152, 154–158, 162–164, 168–169, 171, 173–175, 204, 297
overlapping memberships 3, 6, 8, 17

P

partnerships v, viii, 13, 15, 17, 31, 47–48, 57, 68, 81, 86, 90, 92, 97, 101, 103, 110–111, 113–114, 118, 120, 130, 137–138, 141–142, 149, 151–153, 157, 167–168, 175–176, 178, 187, 189, 193, 195, 199–200, 202–205, 207–208, 257, 277, 291–292, 294
peace and security ix, 6, 8–9, 21, 62, 68, 70, 78, 86–89, 95, 101–102, 106, 124–125, 136–137, 139, 142–143, 148, 150, 170, 175, 195–196, 208, 211–212, 214, 216, 225, 229, 232–234, 240, 242–243, 245–248, 256–257, 259–261, 265, 268, 271
peacekeeping 71, 139, 149, 175–183, 185, 195, 234
poverty 63, 68, 85, 90–91, 94, 100, 105, 115, 136, 159, 188, 199
private sector 87, 159, 206–207, 209

R

refugees 155, 184–186, 275
regional integration 1, 3, 5–7, 19–20, 22, 27, 51, 62–68, 77, 79, 86–87, 92, 96, 98, 102, 111–112, 121, 126–127, 129–130, 135, 137, 140, 142, 147–148, 153, 158, 161, 163, 168, 206, 209, 211, 213, 224, 236, 268, 274, 290, 297–298, 302
regionalism 1–9, 17–22, 125, 131, 281, 301
rivalry 6, 28–29, 31, 33–34, 42, 49–50, 103, 115, 127, 298, 304
Russia viii, 13, 15, 22, 25, 32, 40–42, 48–49, 54, 57, 63, 83, 113–114, 116–117, 122–123, 130, 132, 141–143, 146–152, 157, 165, 170, 174–175, 177–179, 181–182,

188–189, 194, 196, 200–201, 205, 208, 218, 225, 240, 245, 249, 260–263, 265–266, 269, 273–274, 276, 282, 286, 291
Russia-Africa 57, 122, 141, 146, 260–262, 269, 273–274, 282
Rwanda 10, 19, 21, 88, 92, 95, 101, 104, 131, 133, 139–140, 147, 154, 156, 160, 216, 287–288, 300, 303

S

SADC viii, 2, 6, 9–14, 21–22, 57–58, 60–79, 101, 111–112, 127, 131, 133, 138–139, 281, 284–289, 291–293, 295, 297, 304
(Southern African Development Community) v, viii, 2, 57, 69, 72, 77–79, 101, 122, 301
Sahel vi, 2, 25, 34, 53, 95, 119, 131, 176, 181, 183, 217–218, 229, 235, 240, 248, 250, 253, 263, 267, 275, 278, 291, 296
sanctions 13, 22, 28, 40, 48, 59, 179, 225, 229, 235, 245, 248, 251, 253, 266
security ix, 2, 4, 6, 8–10, 14–16, 19–21, 36–37, 40, 46, 53–55, 57, 61–68, 70–73, 76, 78, 84, 86–89, 95, 97, 101–102, 104, 106–108, 111, 113–115, 119–121, 124–125, 129–131, 134–137, 139, 141–143, 145–150, 152–153, 157, 165, 168–171, 173, 175–183, 187, 189, 195–196, 200–202, 206–208, 211–212, 214–216, 225, 229, 231–234, 236, 240–249, 252, 256–257, 259–261, 265–266, 268–269, 271, 274, 280, 287, 298, 300, 302
São Tomé and Príncipe 147–148, 151–152, 154, 156, 158, 190
soft power x, 16, 59, 190–191, 197, 224, 226–227, 282
South Africa ii, 1, 9–10, 12, 16, 57, 61–63, 66, 69, 71, 79, 102, 116–117, 125, 141, 213, 217, 223, 267, 279, 284–286, 289, 291–293, 301
South Korea 25–26, 31, 44–45, 49, 54, 114–115, 279, 282
Southern Africa 1, 5, 20–22, 63, 77–78, 112, 131, 138, 160, 285, 287, 292
sovereignty 7, 9, 11, 14–16, 35, 39, 110, 126, 146, 179, 282, 288, 290, 296
Soviet Union 32, 41, 43, 60, 109
Spain 25, 30–31, 36, 38, 40, 49, 53, 60, 143, 158
sub-Saharan Africa 59, 79, 85, 99, 192
sustainability 94, 97–98, 100, 111, 123, 132, 140, 143, 147, 163, 166, 168–169, 180, 183, 200, 205, 224, 236, 275

T

Tanzania 61, 63, 71, 81, 84–85, 88, 95, 98, 108, 110, 121–122,

126, 289, 291–293, 297
technology 84, 87, 97, 100, 112, 119–120, 136, 146, 167–168, 170, 204, 207, 224, 293, 302
terrorism 33, 37–39, 70, 102, 114, 149, 179–180, 209, 233, 241, 250, 256–257, 260–263, 269
trade ix, 1, 5–6, 8–9, 11, 13–16, 19–20, 25, 27–28, 34, 36–38, 40, 42–44, 46, 51–52, 54, 61, 64, 68–69, 72–74, 79, 82, 87, 91–95, 97–100, 103–109, 112, 115–116, 118–119, 122–123, 125–126, 131–132, 140–142, 145–147, 149–153, 157–166, 168, 171, 187–189, 201–204, 206–209, 213–214, 216, 219, 221, 223, 225–226, 231, 240–243, 246–248, 255–256, 261–262, 267, 274, 278, 280, 285–286, 293, 295, 297–298, 302
Trump, Donald 34–35, 46, 127, 243, 246–247, 249–250, 267, 280, 293, 300–301
Tunisia 26–27, 29, 31, 33–41, 43, 46–47, 54
Turkey 25, 42, 46–49, 57, 143, 146–148, 157, 170, 175, 205, 279

U

Uganda 61, 84–85, 88, 95, 98, 100, 104, 115–116, 125–126, 291, 297
UNCTAD 110, 127, 132, 138–139, 160, 162–166, 173–174, 203, 214
United Arab Emirates 25, 140, 158, 291
(UAE) 25, 31, 42, 46–49, 140–141, 158–159, 161, 170, 291
United Kingdom 83, 100, 107–108, 120, 122, 126, 279
(UK) 54, 76, 107–109, 121, 123, 126, 183, 198–199, 230, 251, 267, 276, 278–279, 289, 296
United Nations 7, 22, 28, 41, 51, 59, 67, 76, 81–82, 107, 127, 130, 133, 139, 143, 178, 184, 195, 214–215, 220, 225, 229–231, 277, 280, 292, 304
(UN) 22, 28, 33, 35, 41–42, 48, 53–54, 60–61, 70, 74, 86, 89, 115, 117, 132, 139, 141–143, 149, 151, 175, 183, 185, 196, 220, 225, 229, 266, 280, 289, 295
United States viii, 1, 10, 25, 54, 57, 59, 72, 89–90, 99, 105–106, 121, 126–127, 130, 134, 168, 217, 227, 242–245, 268, 272–273, 277–279
(US) 10, 13, 25, 27–28, 31–35, 41, 43–44, 46, 48–49, 52, 54, 57–58, 60, 66, 68–69, 72–73, 78–79, 93–94, 99, 115–116, 124, 126, 138–143, 145, 147–152, 155, 158–166, 169–180, 182, 185–187, 189–190, 192–194, 196, 200–201, 208, 214–215, 227, 242–250, 253–254, 256, 259–263, 265–266, 277–279, 281, 283–286, 288–289,

291–293, 295, 298, 303–304
USAID 73, 89–91, 127, 145, 149, 155, 173, 185, 187, 189, 192, 194, 215, 227, 243–244, 246–248, 255, 268–270, 272–273

W

Wagner Group 42, 146, 152, 177–178, 181–183, 195, 245, 261, 276
Washington 52, 79, 114, 150, 190, 192, 213–215, 242, 246–248, 288, 294, 299, 303
West Africa 22, 132, 160, 221, 226, 231–232, 243–244, 248, 250, 256, 260–261, 266–268, 270, 272–274, 276–278, 287
West, the viii, 2–3, 22–23, 29–30, 34, 39, 42, 48, 50–51, 103, 116, 124, 131–132, 138, 160–161, 184, 211, 214, 217–219, 221, 225–226, 231–235, 243–245, 248–251, 254, 256, 260–261, 266–268, 270–274, 276–279, 284, 287, 289, 292, 302
Western Sahara 15, 27, 33, 35, 38–41, 43–44, 46, 50, 54, 290
World Bank 57, 59, 61, 79, 127, 140, 143, 152, 162–165, 170, 173, 190, 204, 206, 215, 286, 299

Z

Zambia 61–63, 69–70, 158, 292
Zimbabwe 13, 22, 61–63, 65, 69, 292, 304

AFRICAN AGENCY TOWARDS GLOBAL POWERS:

A VIEW FROM REGIONAL ECONOMIC BLOCS

African Agency Towards Global Powers: A View Regional Economic Blocs is part of the University of the Witwatersrand's African Agency Towards Global Powers project, supported by the Open Society Foundations. It turns the spotlight on Africa's regional economic communities (RECs), which often fall through the cracks in analyses that focus on global power engagement at the continental and national levels. The book examines how the continent's various RECs engage with the United States, the European Union, China, India, Russia, the Middle East and other global powers. Drawing on the RECs' strategic plans, summit documents and interviews conducted at REC headquarters, the scholars show that while global powers have clear strategies for each sub-region, the RECs have yet to develop counter-strategies of their own. If African agency is to be strengthened at every level, the sub-regions cannot be overlooked. Written by scholars from across the African continent, the seven chapters are both academic and policy-oriented, offering practical recommendations for REC officials, civil society, the media, business and researchers seeking more equitable partnerships with global powers.

NON-FICTION

ISBN 978-1-0671823-2-8

ESI