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Africa’s and SADC’s Regional Integration Agenda: An Introduction

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1 INTRODUCTION

Regional integration may be defined as an occurrence where a group of states, through agreement, collectively pursue common interests, for example, in the areas of trade, investment, good governance, peace and security, among others.¹ Such nations believe that interdependence will yield mutually beneficial outcomes for its members, economically, socially, politically and otherwise. The integration of economies requires reciprocal commitments to lower barriers between them and to collaborate and cooperate in multiple fields. The benefits of this have been extolled by economists and politicians, including Africa’s own liberation leaders, whose pro-independence vision included a continent that pursued political liberation from the West through the unification of African economies. Regional integration can take place at the continental level, for example, in Africa, where it is spearheaded by the African Union (AU) through the African Continental

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1 Mapuva and Muyengwa-Mapuva “The SADC Regional Bloc: What Challenges and Prospects for Regional Integration?” 2014 *LDD* 23.

Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).² The creation of this area is supported by a founding agreement and protocols covering diverse areas of cooperation, including the protection of intellectual property rights, control of competition, and promotion of investment. Regional integration can also take place at a sub-regional level through the establishment of regional blocks.³ The formation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on 17 August 1992 to promote collaboration in areas of economic integration and technical cooperation throughout Southern Africa is testimony to the preceding statement.⁴

Other African regional integration formations include the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU), the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD).⁵ The AU regards regional economic communities (RECs) “as the building blocks for Africa’s economic integration.”⁶

The African regional integration process has increased good relations among African states, facilitating the progressive advancement of cooperation in many areas. However, there are, nonetheless, areas of concern. For example, regional contestations continue unabated, leading to eruptions of trade barriers between nations, such as the ban, on South African horticultural products imposed by Botswana and Namibia.⁷ The aforesaid import bans were nonetheless lifted in 2025.⁸ Further, not all countries can equally benefit from the arrangement, and measures to compensate losses remain weak or non-existent, causing disillusionment with the arrangement. In addition, lack of peace and political stability, such as the ongoing civil war in nations such as Mozambique⁹ and the Democratic Republic of Congo¹⁰ threaten the achievement of the aims of regional integration.¹¹ It has also been reported that regional integration has been “progressing slowly in Africa,” especially in areas of facilitating transport and logistics (for example, through the building of road and rail transport to support corridor development) and energy infrastructure.¹² Infrastructure financing is also a significant challenge hampering regional

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- 2 Apuuli “The African Union and Regional Integration in Africa” in Levine *et al.* (eds) (2016) *Region Building in Africa* 144–145.
 - 3 Saurombe “The Role of South Africa in SADC Regional Integration: The Making or Braking of the Organization” 2010 *JICLT* 125.
 - 4 *Ibid.*
 - 5 Uzodike “The Role of Regional Economic Communities in Africa’s Economic Integration” 2009 *Africa Insight* 31.
 - 6 *Ibid.*
 - 7 Spandiel “Namibia’s Vegetable Ban on South Africa a Struggle for Local Farmers” <https://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/africa/namibias-vegetable-ban-on-south-africa-a-struggle-for-local-farmers/#:~:text=From%20around%202021%2C%20Botswana%20and,on%20business%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20Sihlobo> (accessed 04-04-2026).
 - 8 Manoko “Regional Agricultural Trade Rebounds as Import Bans Ends” <https://www.foodformzansi.co.za/regional-agricultural-trade-rebounds-as-import-bans-end/> (accessed 04-04-2025).
 - 9 Bonate *et al.* “God, Grievance and Greed: War in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique” 2024 *Kronos* 1.
 - 10 Kapend *et al.* “The Democratic Republic of the Congo Armed Conflict” 1998-2004: Assessing Excess Mortality Based on Factual and Counter-Factual Projection Scenarios” 2020 *Revue Quetelet Journal* 10.
 - 11 Mamba *et al.* “Regional (Economic) Integration, Political Stability Uncertainty and (Intra-African) Exports” 2020 *Economic Systems* 1–2.
 - 12 United Nations Economic Commission for Africa “Assessment of Progress on Regional Integration in Africa” (accessed 01-04-2026).

integration in Southern Africa.¹³

In this special issue, the contributors tackle a variety of issues that are related to the advancement of the SADC regional integration agenda. It considers how human rights, intra-regional trade, the free movement of persons, and good governance all contribute to regional integration. The overall objective is to discuss the regional integration project in the SADC region through assessing the symbiotic relationship between sub-regional and continental processes. The focus of this issue is to consider several key questions, including the following:

- Is SADC fulfilling its role as a building block towards continental integration?
- Are SADC and continental instruments and strategies purposefully aligned for the attainment of continental integration?
- Are there any experiences in SADC that can help to inform continental integration?
- What role are RECs expected to play in the promotion of continental integration?
- How can SADC Member States be capacitated to comply with regional and continental commitments?
- How do multiple memberships to RECs impact the attainment of integration in Africa?
- Beyond the recognition of RECs as the building blocks for continental integration, what further measures can be implemented to foster integration?
- How can citizen participation, including the role of civil society, be promoted to achieve convergence between national, regional, and continental policies and strategies?

This special issue contains ten articles. The first article is an introduction to regional integration at the continental and SADC levels. The second article calls for the adoption of a legal framework to address issues of cross-border trade and investment within the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The third article examines the free movement regime in Africa, its interconnectedness with the AfCFTA, and its socio-economic impact and challenges, concluding with insights on the role of institutions in addressing these challenges. The article underscores the necessity of placing people at the heart of Africa's regional integration efforts, ultimately paving the way for a more prosperous and united continent. The fourth article interrogates the role of non-state actors and the ramifications of their lack of standing before the SADC and AfCFTA dispute settlement regimes with the aim of identifying appropriate practical reforms. The fifth article examines the extent to which violence against women in South Africa constitutes "events seriously disturbing public" order in terms of the OAU Refugee Convention. The sixth article assesses Africa's development blueprint – Agenda 2063 – in light of the international climate law framework, and in doing so, demonstrates its implications for the SADC capacity on climate risk management. The seventh article analyses the Botswana High Court's decision in *News Company Botswana v Water Utilities Corporation*¹⁴ through the lens of theories of monism and dualism. It further argues that the court missed an opportunity to utilise ratified but undomesticated treaty law as an interpretative aid of municipal law to give effect to freedom of expression, which includes the right to access information. The eighth article examines the domestication and implementation of Article 5 of the African Union Convention on Prevention and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC). It further analyses contributing factors to formally

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ MAHGB-000361-17.

comply with Article 5 of the AUCPCC, and concludes that effective implementation of obligations set out in Article 5 requires more than the formal incorporation of the treaty into the domestic legal system of Botswana and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The ninth article seeks to establish whether the principle of free, prior and informed consent can assist in fostering development through participatory democracy. The last article examines the legal architecture governing the admission and enrolment of foreign legal practitioners in selected Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states with a focus on Botswana, Namibia, Eswatini, and South Africa.