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THE POSSIBILITIES FOR ENHANCING OWNERSHIP OF DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF AFRICA

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Abstract / Resumo

Africa has been the neglected continent in world politics. It has also been the subject of aid dependency and policy conditionality, leaving little autonomy of decision-making and ownership of its development policies. The recent economic turn-around and the global rush for resources and commodities have raised the importance of the African continent in the international economic scene. Many African countries are rich in resources and they have seen their development possibilities enhanced by intensified economic relations in particular with the emerging economies but also with their traditional main partners. However, as this is happening at the country level and African countries still have disperse voices in their exchanges with the rest of the world, the possibilities for leveraging this new potential are limited. Through the analysis of the dynamics of regional integration in Africa, this paper explores the hypothesis that increased integration would give a stronger voice, policy space and ultimately ownership of policies to African countries

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The main fields of investigation are the development economics, international economy, sociology of development, African history and the social issues related to the development. From a geographical point of view the sub-Saharan Africa; Latin America; East, South and Southeast Asia as well as the systemic transition process of the Eastern European countries constitute our objects of study.

Several members of the **CeSA** are Professors of the Masters in Development and International Cooperation lectured at ISEG/"Economics". Most of them also have work experience in different fields, in Africa and in Latin America.

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INTRODUCTION

Africa, like other continents is not a homogenous unit. However, most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa share a historical evolution marked by low or very low rates of economic development and growth, as well as a relative marginalization in world politics. Since their independence as modern states, African countries soon became entangled in the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War. Proxy wars raged across the continent, while at the international level Western countries were constructing a global polity.

The Non-Aligned Movement and the G77 were early efforts at autonomisation from those dynamics but remained influenced by the ideological cleavages between capitalism and communism, as the newly independent countries tried to uphold their specific interests and concerns in the international arena. In political terms, a highly fragmented continent, plagued by conflict had difficulty in ascertaining itself and its interests in an international arena where institutions were mushrooming to respond to the interests of the developed countries. In economic terms, the dependency on aid that most Sub-Saharan Africa experienced left it limited not only in terms of the possibility of influencing world politics but, most strikingly, of deciding on its own domestic policies. Structural adjustment and aid conditionality during the 1980s essentially took over the political economy of most African countries.

The contemporary international political scene offers a number of potential windows of opportunity for changes in this status quo (Bayne e Woolcock, 2011). The club of industrialised countries, G8, was paralleled by the G20 that has a broader geographical representation; emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa among others) have increasing weight in the global economy and influence in world politics; and this is particularly felt in their increasing thirst for natural resources to feed high levels of production and growing consumer markets. Although the exact impacts of the global economic crisis and of emerging economies are not yet known, they are bound to have broad implications at the global level and in the balances of influence in world politics. Among such implications is a window that African countries may take to consolidate changes that respond to their specific concerns at the international level and make their preferences noted and decisive in international negotiations. The importance of Africa being more active in influencing world politics is not only linked to the possibility of the continent taking advantages of opportunities to resolutely move towards sustainable development, but also to protect their interests from the negative implications of global transformations, not least in the area of the environment and climate change.

Africa´s natural resources are essential to sustain current growth levels and the continent also represents a potential new regional consumer market. Both of these aspects can have positive impacts but also very negative ones, depending on how they are addressed. Africa is also increasingly "getting its act together" and strengthening regional and sub-regional institutions that are crucial to better manage common interests. The African Union is the primary institution, but other sub-regional institutions, such as SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA among others, are trying to respond to regional needs, specificities, markets, cultures, political and social contexts.

It is against this broad frame of opportunity but also of uncertainty that the present paper proposes to analyse the political opportunities and limitations for Africa to take advantage of this potential and to have more influence in the world politics and economics and more ownership of its policies. Through secondary literature and document analysis, we will review the external relations of Africa, namely existing fora for policy coordination among African countries and the relation between states and regional organizations in such processes. The focus will be on the implications for Sub-Saharan Africa, since North Africa has a distinct and specific historical evolution.

An essential theoretical issue to explore further is what the conditions are for increased leverage in world politics and economics, in a context of change in the traditional structural limitations that Africa faces. Here we explore the issue of agency and how the possibility of increased policy coordination and a higher degree of policy integration may enhance the potential of African countries for speaking in one voice and obtaining more policy-space and ownership of their international and domestic policies. We will start by addressing the limitations and possibilities of these two concepts, policy space and ownership, and how research on regional integration shows the potential for additional influence in the international playing field of participating countries and of joint policy positions. We will then analyse the institutional framework of the African Union and the dynamics of regional economic integration, namely how the external trade ties impact on regional economic integration and vice-versa, and how Africa has shown to be ale to exert leverage at the multilateral level, exploring the examples of the EPA negotiations and the aid effectiveness agenda.

LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES ON AFRICAN POLICY-SPACE AND OWNERSHIP

The development aid agenda has evolved over the years in highly unsatisfactory ways (Mosley, 1991; Easterly, 2006; Glennie, 2008). Although the specific reasons found for the successive policy failures are many, there is a consensus that international aid has not been able to outweigh the negative effects of a system dominated by neo-liberal development models, with serious impacts on developing countries (Mosse e Lewis, 2005; Craig e Porter, 2006; Sumner, 2006). Neo-Liberal model critics and supporters see two different sides of the coin: supporters claim inadequate implementation of the prescribed policies while critics blame the very essence of a model that entails global inequity.

What is most problematic is the disjuncture between the economic growth agenda and the social policy agenda. The economic growth agenda is dominated by the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the trade negotiations. These have imposed reforms limiting the policy space available for countries to decide policies that protect the vulnerable sectors of their economies. The social agenda, in the form of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and increasingly the focus of poverty reduction, is meant to offset the consequences of low economic performance on the increasingly impoverished populations. It is also meant to advance the social agenda in governments that are very often not democratically accountable and suffering serious problems in good governance. Therefore, new modalities of conditionality are being imposed that, rather insist on good governance policies more than in the classical structural adjustment conditions (Rakner e Wang, 2007; Booth e Fritz, 2008; Carmody, 2008).

Policy space and ownership

There is very little reference to policy space in the academic literature on political science. Existing empirical analyses focus on the space generated by the differences between and within parties in the political spectrum (Pennings, 2002). The other references are found in the literature on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations framework since this is a term that was used explicitly to specify the loss of government autonomy generated by the international trade agreements.

The concept of policy space thus arises out of the constraints on freedom of choice derived from international agreements that increasingly regulate trade relations in a globalised world. According to the São Paulo consensus (UNCTAD, 2004): “It is for each Government to evaluate the trade-off between the benefits of accepting international rules and commitments and the constraints posed by the loss of policy space. It is particularly important for developing countries, bearing in mind development goals and objectives, that all countries take into account the need for appropriate balance between national policy space and international disciplines and commitments.”

Policy space ultimately equals the possibility of introducing protectionist policies aimed at nurturing national industries, contrary to existing international arrangements, and to streamline conditionalities of the IFIs. The relevance and legitimacy of these protectionist practices was enhanced with the economic crisis of 2008 (see, G77 and China, 2010). Another concept has been associated with this approach to policy space, that is “development space”, illustrating the link between domestic policies and conditionality, but not necessarily reflecting negotiation space in international agreements in general (Hoekman, 2005).

There is a general concurrence that developing countries’ policy space is shrinking (Wade, 2003), although Page (2007) argues that such space has been lost and gained.

The discussion on policy space in the context of trade negotiations starts in Monterrey's conference on Financing for Development in 2002, where the negative impacts of globalization were acknowledged. From there emerged two parallel but often decoupled concepts on enhancing the capacity of autonomous policy-making of developing countries: the policy space concept in the WTO context, and the ownership concept in the context of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005.

In this paper we take a different view on policy space, not directed at the internal level but at the external or multilateral level. In this context policy space would entail the amount of influence African countries are able to have on international negotiations. This would be best assessed in circumstances where significant contrasting policy positions are at stake, of which this article will explore some examples, but it may also be reflected in instances of more subtle influence in the international policy agenda.

As suggested above, policy space is closely related with the principle of ownership of development policies as defined by the Paris Declaration and the subsequent Accra Agenda for Action of 2008. However, in the latter concept, the relational dimension is more obvious as it states that developing countries should have the leadership over their development policies, implying that other actors such as donors also have a say in those policies. In practice, ownership reflects more directly the negotiative interaction between developed and developing countries than the policy space concept, which refers to the trade-off of domestic gains and limitations from countries' commitments in international trade regulations.

In an alternative definition of ownership that is more in tune with the object of this research and links the two concepts, we would emphasise the capacity of countries to make use of policy space in influencing policy decisions towards policy priorities. This definition of ownership presupposes that there is an *a priori* identification of policy priorities and the legitimacy and credibility to uphold them.

The link between the two concepts is illustrated in the G77 statement to the United Nations General Assembly on the occasion of the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its impact on Development in 2010: "The G77 and China deems important to strengthen the concepts of ownership and policy space. In that respect, it must be borne in mind that client countries are the owners of their development policies and that selectivity in World Bank's strategy and actions must be guided, first and foremost by developing countries' priorities and preferences." (G77 and China, 2010)

Policy space is also related but distinct from voice: voice is possibility of stating a position and is close to participation, but doesn't mean actual influence in the policy outcome as reflected in the following G77 statements: "The G77 and China believes that decision-making rules should be changed in order to strengthen voice and participation of developing countries." And "The G77 and China calls for an expeditious completion, as soon as possible, of a much more ambitious reform process of the World Bank's governance structure and of an accelerated road map for further reforms on voice, participation and enhanced voting power of developing countries based on an approach that truly reflects its development mandate and with the involvement of all shareholders in an equitable, transparent, consultative and inclusive process." (G77 and China, 2010)

In this context one can argue that policy articulation and coordination between countries may in certain circumstances give more policy space and ownership. Much of this also depends on the salience of issue-areas and on the degree of consensus on a policy position. Consensus documents publicised as outcomes of conferences may be powerful tools to express the weight of the position. For instance, the Kigali consensus was an important instrument leading to the elimination of three areas of further intervention in internal affairs in the context not only of the Uruguay Round negotiations but of the WTO itself (Third World Network, 2004).

In the same manner, fragmentation and different negotiating strategies can also lead to failure of coalitions (Narlikar e Odell, 2003). There are instances of coalition failures by defection of some members, depending on the "carrots" offered at the bilateral level. In these cases, developed countries use a strategy of undermining the coalition by offering incentives for defection in bilateral talks. This is one of the reasons pointed out for the interest in maintaining a multilateral negotiating framework rather than a bilateral one for trade negotiations, thus enabling coalitions to form and resist developed countries' pressures (Narlikar e Wilkinson, 2004).

Regional integration favours policy articulation and coordination, thus in theory enhancing the influence of its members and of the group as a whole and shielding the group against external pressures.

Regional integration as promoter of power to its members

Existing models of regional integration reflect different types and degrees of policy convergence. The most developed of these is the EU model, but also the Mercosur, NAFTA and ASEAN constitute some of the many examples in different quarters of the world (Mattli, 1999).

Neo-functionalism and inter-governmentalism provide explanations of how integration evolves but they both focus predominantly on the internal dynamics rather than on the external dimensions of integration. Internal dimensions are important in explaining coordination and avoiding free-riding, a problem that affects loose coordination structures more evidently. Mattli (1999) also examines the logic of integration beyond

Europe arguing that many of the integration schemes in Latin America and Asia are examples of second integrative response to potential trade diversion. Africa, to a lesser extent can also be seen as such, although the process has been too complex and externally influenced to enable such a straightforward argument.

Although the implementation capacity of states participating in regional integration processes has not matched the rhetoric, and existing cases have disappointed expectations of being an intermediate step to global governance (Malamud e Castro, 2007), regionalism can be advantageous for example in reducing transaction costs. Leadership is pointed out as crucial to the success of such forms of political interaction (Mattli, 1999). This leadership may be exerted by delegation to central institutions in more advanced forms of integration or by political leaders of some of the participating states, depending on the nature of the issue. Meunier (2005) explores the detrimental effects of cacophony and disparate positions at the EU level and this argument can be applied to other instances.

Some studies have analysed the degree of EU "actorness" in different contexts and how it enhances its bargaining power (Groenleer e Van Schaik, 2007) but it is still difficult to assess the effects of speaking in one voice (Smith, 2010). Even when the EU does speak in one voice, its negotiation arrangements are often organized in an *ad hoc* way and marked by internal differences (Delreux, 2008).

The idea of policy coordination and group cohesion is not automatically beneficial, as was shown in the case of the Group of Like-Minded states where most defected from the group position due to parallel bilateral incentives from developed countries, and those who remained loyal lost credit. Much depends on the type of negotiation strategies adopted by the group: Narlikar and Odell (2003) distinguish between integrative strategies and distributive strategies, claiming that the former have better chances of keeping the group together (see also Narlikar e Tussie, 2004).

UNCTAD itself advocated for greater regional integration in Africa as way to enhance policy space (UNCTAD, 2007). However, regional agreements on trade may also reduce policy space (Page, 2007), and it may be relevant to say that there is a need to articulate strategically the impacts of regional agreements to the impact of agreements at the multilateral level (Mayer, 2009).

The Challenges of African Regional Integration: from the OAU to AU

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) created in 1963 responded to the aspirations and collective efforts of the African leadership for an institutional body sustaining the continent´s political and economic integration. The OAU was expected to become the forum for African leaders to come together and discuss and solve the continent´s ongoing issues. Its main goals were the rapid decolonization of the continent, its unity and the defence of the territorial integrity of the member states (Akokpari, 2004).

OAU played an important role in helping African states achieve political independence. Yet, economic independence and political stability was far more difficult to obtain. The Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) agreed in 1980 and based on the principle of "collective self-reliance" was an attempt to transform the economic structure of Africa and to help the continent overcome its economic crisis (Adogamhe, 2008). As Paul Adogamhe points out:"the LPA diagnosed that Africa´s economic crisis was caused by the historical injustice suffered by Africa under colonialism and its continued dependence on external forces (p.12)."

The LPA aimed at pushing for Africa´s self-sufficient and self-sustained development through industrialization and continental integration schemes. It was the policy response by African leaders to diminish foreign economic dependency and fortify their collective capacity to bargain with world economic powers. This was followed by the Abuja Treaty in 1991 that provided the institutional framework necessary for the gradual establishment of the African Economic Community (AEC). This framework was conceived to ultimately lead to the free movement of people and goods across the continent. The initial implementation of the Abuja Treaty involvedthe experimentation with a diversity of regional economic communities that were later expected to become the "building blocks" of the AEC (Adogamhe, 2008). However, since their creation, these regional economic communities, by operating independently from each other, have failed to fulfil the expectations as building blocks of AEC.

Africa is now hosting several regional economic communities such as:

1) the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (known by its French acronym, CEMAC) that includes Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo – ROC, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon;

2) the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), with Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo –DROC – Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe;

3) the East African Community (EAC) with Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda;

4) the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d´Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo;

5) the West African Economic and Monetary Union (known by its French acronym, UEMOA) with Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d´Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo;

6) the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo – DROC – Lesotho, Madagascar,

Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe;

While regional economic integration was not delivering the original pursuit of self-reliant development, African countries also experienced several civil wars that not only played a destructive role in the economy but also brought a serious and disruptive political instability to the continent.

This context had a profound impact on the identity of the OAU by revealing its incapacity to prevent and address these conflicts. It raised the point that the organisation´s institutional flaws were making it no longer viable. Almost four decades after its creation, the OAU institutions were unprepared to deal with conflicts among members, impotent in dealing with globalisation and the economic marginalisation of the continent, unable to deepen economic integration as the continent´s economic crisis got worse and weak in fighting widespread violations of basic civil and political rights (Akokpari, 2002, Adogamhe, 2008).

It was against this background that the African leaders decided to dissolve the OAU and formally create a new organization - the African Union (AU) - in 2002. The expectation was that the new institutional framework would be able to address the major issues affecting the continent´s, security stability, political progress and socioeconomic development. Despite the continued emphasis on the respect for territorial integrity of member states, a clear constitutional difference between the OAU and AU has lied in the right of the latter to intervene in a member state in order to "restore peace and stability" to prevent genocides, war crimes and crimes against humanity (Adogamhe, 2008)

In 2003, African leaders decide to integrate NEPAD, the New Partnership for African Development, in the AU. NEPAD was a new economic initiative launched in 2001 and heralded as the blueprint for full-scale socioeconomic development of the continent. As with the Lagos Plan of Action, NEPAD was the policy response by African leaders to deal with globalisation, trade and aid for economic development. It set a new format of engagement with the developed world and with multilateral organisations, based on mutual respect, good governance, responsibility and accountability. Additionally, an African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was also established to guarantee that

African leaders would be accountable to each other for the effective implementation of political and economic reforms (Adogamhe, 2008).

Ten years later, it is still difficult to assess the real impact of AU, NEPAD and APRM in terms of deepening regional integration. NEPAD, for example, has been criticised for embracing the failed economic policies and programs of the World Bank/IMF and falling short of ending the continent´s marginalisation and of structurally transforming the African political economies (Adésínà, 2001, Amuwo, 2002).

In the past decade, Africa has seen marked improvements in human development. African countries have undertaken market-oriented reforms and key economic fundamentals have improved considerably: annual average growth closed to 5 per cent (1998-2008), improved trade revenues, reduced macroeconomic imbalances, stronger demand for domestic services (Ali & Dadush, 2011).

This is more the result of faster integration of Africa with the rest of the world than with itself. Economic growth in the region is above all the result of strong exports of the continent´s commodities, which are needed by fast-growing economies such as India and China. But this has had limited impact on the economy at large and in social policies, with the continent continuing to reveal high levels of poverty and inequalities (Brenton and Isik, 2012). According to official custom statistics, Africa continues to trade little with itself and failing to achieve its potential in regional trade. As an example, the share of intra-regional goods trade in total goods imports is only around five percent in COMESA, 10 percent in ECOWAS and eight percent in UEMOA (Brenton and Isik, 2012).

As Paul Brenton and Gozde Isik (2012) point out:

“Regional trade can bring staple foods from areas of surplus production across borders to growing urban markets and food deficit rural areas. With rising incomes in Africa there are emerging opportunities for cross-border trade in basic manufactures such as metal and plastic products that are costly to import from the global market. The potential for regional production chains to drive global exports of manufacturers, such as those in East Asia, has yet to be exploited, and cross border trade in services offers untapped opportunities for exports and better access to consumers and firms to services that are cheaper and provide a variety than those currently available.” (p.1).

In this sense, regional integration can be regarded as an engine that can accelerate economic growth and sustainable development in Africa. Yet, regional integration in Africa is progressing slowly due to the lack of financial resources and expertise, multiple and overlapping memberships in sub-regional organisations, weak co-ordination, harmonisation and implementation of commonly agreed protocols and decisions in the continent and poor regional infra-structure (African Economic Outlook, 2012).

External Partners and Enhanced African Regional Integration

Africa´s traditional partners, the European Union and the United States, as well as a more recent one, China, can support regional economic integration by keeping with their commitments to assist Africa´s economic development and through the provision of funding to strengthen the workings of regional bodies.

U.S.-Africa

Since 2000, trade ties between the U.S. and Africa have been under Washington´s African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA, www.agoa.gov). This trade initiative has opened U.S. markets to almost all goods produced in AGOA-eligible countries and it has contributed to increase the volume and diversity of trade between U.S. and Sub-Saharan Africa.[1] In 2011, U.S. total exports to Sub-Saharan Africa totalled US$21 billion, an increase of almost 23% in comparison with the previous year. Machinery, mineral fuels, cereals and aircraft drove the growth of U.S. exports to Africa. Sub-Saharan exports to the US reached US$74.2 billion, up 14% from 2010. Mineral fuels, precious metals and stones, vehicles and cocoa products led the African products sold to the US. Under AGOA, African exports to the US totalled US$51.8 billion, 34% more than 2010. Mineral fuels and crude oil represented 94% of the African exports (US$48.4 billion). AGOA´s African exports of non-energy products grew 26% and they were led by vehicles, iron and steel and apparel (woven and knit) (US Department of Commerce, 2012). The annual U.S. Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Forum is one of the main formal gatherings within the AGOA framework. It is informally known as "The AGOA Forum" serves to institutionalise high-level dialogue between U.S. officials and their counterparts in AGOA-eligible countries. This is expected to build closer economic and trade ties between the U.S. and the continent.

EU-Africa

EU is Africa´s main trade partner and it has offered it trade preferences through such schemes as the Everything But Arms and it is now seeking to conclude EPAS - Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The strength of EU-Africa relations go beyond trade and fall under the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership (2007) addressing political, economic and social issues. In 2010 (last available data), E.U total exports to Sub-Saharan Africa reached around US$124 billion, up almost 16% from the previous year. Machinery and transport equipment, manufactured goods and chemicals

[1] AGOA beneficiaries: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia.

representing 68% of the goods exported by Europe to Africa. E.U total imports from Sub-Saharan Africa grew to almost US$132 billion, 22% higher than 2009. Mineral fuels represented almost 60% of the total goods imported from Africa (Eurostat 19/2012)

China-Africa

China has made clear its commitments towards Africa since the 2006 Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC, www.focac.org/eng/). This Forum was set up in 2000 as "a platform established by China and friendly African countries for collective consultation and dialogue and a cooperation mechanism between the developing countries, which falls into the category of South-South cooperation".[2] It is through FOCAC that China implements its trade policy towards Africa. FOCAC makes clear that China's ties with Africa are focused on building a strong economic cooperation through financial support and bilateral trade. As China increases its financing to the Africa and an increasing number of Chinese state-owned and private firms enter the African market, trade between China and the continent has grown from US$4.1 billion in 1992 to around US$160 billion in 2011 (Freemantle & Stevens, 2012). Africa´s rich resources have become increasingly important to help China´s rapid economic growth and development. As a result nearly 80% of China´s imports from Africa comprise mineral fuels and oils. Thus, Africa´s exports to China totalled US$93 billion in 2011 from less than US$1 billion in 1992 (Freemantle & Stevens, 2012). Africa´s imports from China have increased from US$3.02 billion in 1992 to US$73 billion in 2011 (Freemantle & Stevens, 2012). Twelve years after the first FOCAC in Beijing, China has now become one of the leading trade partners of Africa.

External Partners and Threats to Policy Space and Ownership

There are, however, concerns that old and new trade partners, namely the European Union, United States and China can negatively affect steps for stronger regional integration due to bilateral trade deals. As African regional groups seek to adopt customs unions with common external tariffs, trade agreements on the African side will only bring a positive impact if they are concluded on a regional basis rather than bilaterally. This, however, seems not to be happening in the case of negotiations between EU and Africa. For the past decade, trade negotiations between the two economic blocs were supposed to be undertaken within the framework of regional groups to enhance integration. Instead, the negotiations have been dominated by bilateral agreements. This same seems to apply to the case of China. (African Economic Outlook, 2011)

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[2] See http://www.focac.org/eng/, accessed 20/05/2012

With the changing global economics dynamics and a competition for African commodities and resources between the EU, US, China, India and Brazil and other emerging economies, Africa has the opportunity to assert itself to gain more policy space and ownership over the terms of the continent´s sustainable development. Better coordination among African states within the current regional integration framework can strengthen the continent´s bargaining power in the negotiating table. This approach can maximise the potential benefits it can obtain from engagement with these trade partners and positively shape the patterns of foreign direct investment across the continent towards enhancing productive activities, upgrading worker´s skills, technology transfer, better infrastructure and high-valued agricultural development.

EPAs and Busan: Africa Fight for Policy Space and Ownership

EPAs are new trade agreements being negotiated between the EU and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) group of developing countries to replace the former Cotonou Agreement. With the EPAs, the EU wants the ACP countries to open their doors to European goods and services in return for duty-free market to European consumer and commodities market. The negotiations started in 2002 and were expected to conclude in 2007. Instead, throughout 2011 progress continued to be limited and none of the African regional communities has fully implemented an EPA.

African leaders argue that EPAs will destroy their nascent industries and hamper the needed structural transformation of the economy by allowing the entrance of European goods and services. In September 2011, the European Commission announced that it intended to remove trade preferences by January 2014 in case of countries failed to ratify and implement their respective EPAs (Ramdoo & Bilal, 2011). In an EPA Negotiations Coordination Meeting organised by the African Union in Arusha (Tanzania) between the 17th and 18th of May, 2012 to review and assess the current state of the negotiations, the African Union's response was clear. Despite the European Commission´s announced plans, the meeting adopted the following recommendations among others:

"ix. There is need for a rethink of EPA negotiations taking into account current developments and the rise of emerging economies. The new issues (geographical indications, investment, Trade and Environment, etc) that are being introduced in the negotiations should not be negotiated to ensure the interests of African countries are not compromised

x. The African regions negotiating EPAs and the African Union should continue to collectively maintain their positions on the following: Most Favoured Nation (MFN), Export taxes, Safeguards, Rules of Origin, Non-Execution Clause, which are considered to be of critical importance to the development aspirations of regions and the continent as a whole" (African Union, 2012)

Another case in which Africa has also succeeded to gain more policy space and ownership resulted from their common position on development effectiveness and aid reform for the Busan 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness setting that set a future global aid agenda. Following the Tunis Consensus in 2010 (African Development Bank, 2010), the African Union organised a meeting in Addis Ababa on 30th of September 2011 to form the basis of Africa´s negotiating position in Busan. Among the priorities agreed in the common position was that "regional economic communities, investments and cooperation are an essential aspect of ensuring Africa´s development goals" and that the continent needed to reduce the dependence on foreign aid and mobilise and support a more diverse development finance base. The Chief Executive Officer of the Planning and Coordinating Agency of the New Partnership for Africa´s Development (NEPAD), Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, was quoted as saying: "We are taking charge of our own destiny. For the first time, Africa has presented its own vision for aid and the future of development of the continent." (NEPAD, 2011) The Busan Declaration by highlighting the issue of development effectiveness shows that when African comes with one voice can win the argument.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored dimensions of regional integration in Africa and analysed the possible sources of limitations or potential of such developments. Regional integration at continental level is different from the sub-regional level, and the degree of integration is not comparable to that of other instances of regional integration such as the EU or even Mercosul.

Africa is a fragmented political reality and marked by social and cultural diversity. However, its countries share the concerns of a continent lagging behind in development, with highly impoverished populations lacking access to basic services. In social and demographic terms the continent is permeated by ethnic lines and social affinities, including economic relations that overcome classical borders. More convergence and policy articulation would make sense given the irrationality of existing borders that were defined artificially by the colonial powers.

The Pan-African ideology has roots in post-colonial anti-capitalist ideology, which soon after the end of the Cold War gave way to divergences regarding embracing neo-liberalism and negotiating trade agreements or resisting that tendency. These are reflected for example in the divisions and criticisms that view NEPAD as a neo-liberal influence and externally imposed agenda, which was embraced and promoted by a few African leaders.

As this paper has shown there are a number of areas where convergence and coordination of policy positions enhance Africa's influence and capacity to determine policy outcomes. Such is the case of the EPAs on the issue of trade relations between Africa and EU or Busan on aid effectiveness (now development effectiveness). These are strategic areas of interest that go beyond merely ideological assertions more ambitious than the existing capacity to implement them.

The conclusions of this paper also point to the idea of strategic consistency, which depends on the identification of clear areas of common salient interest where preferences can be made to converge on specific issues. This entails creating an agenda that is truly African and that avoids the over-bureaucratic trap of the EU model. This requires political leadership.

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