

ARIA II: Some Key Facts

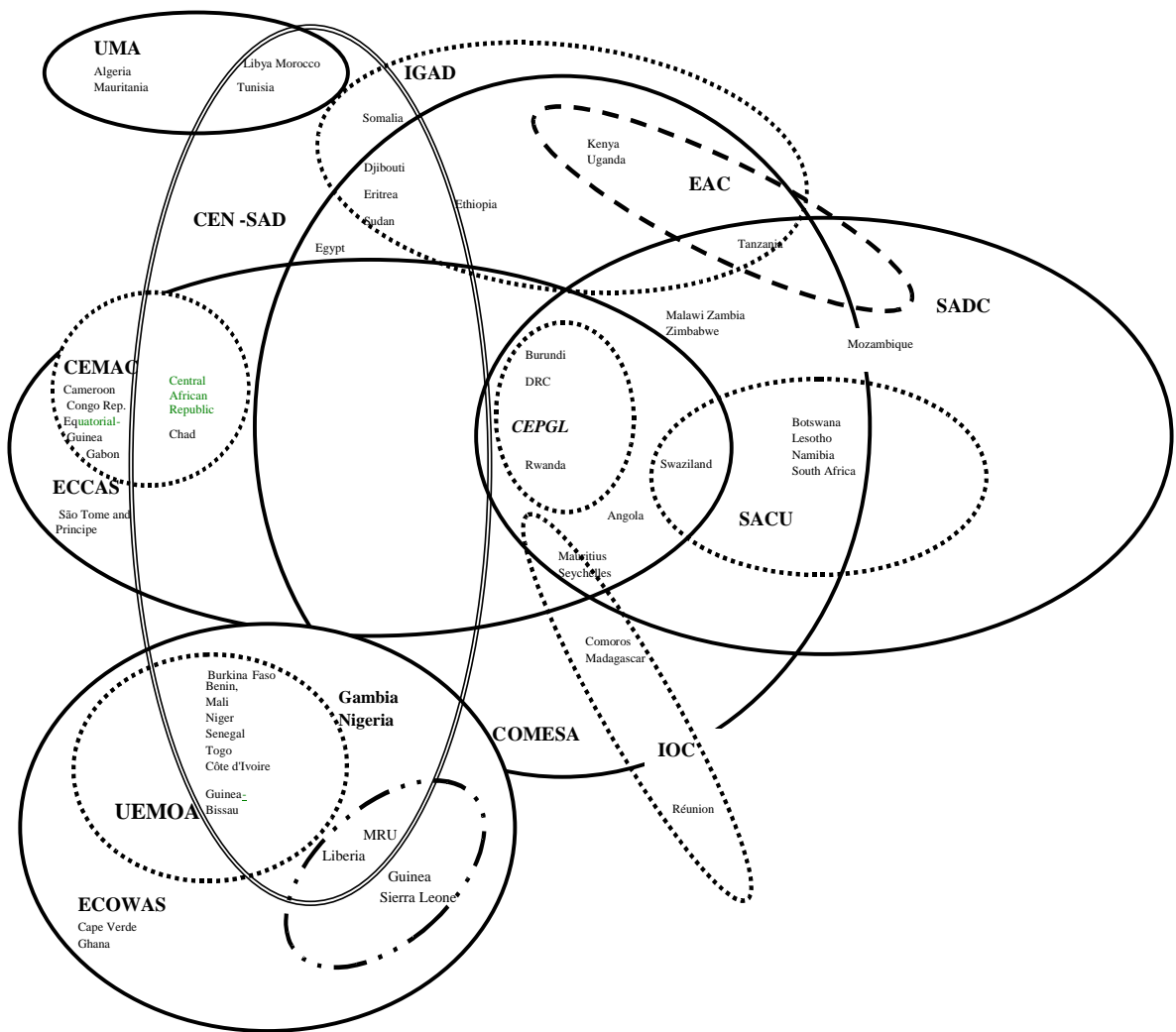
1. What are Regional Economic Communities?

These are intergovernmental organizations set up by groups of countries to foster stronger economic ties and cooperation, eventually leading to the creation of one African Economic Community.

2. Why this focus on RECs?

The African Union has designated the regional economic communities as the building blocks towards achieving an African Economic Community. The process foresees the gradual integration of African economies through establishing free trade areas, customs unions and common markets.

3. What does overlapping memberships look like?



4. How many RECS are there in Africa?

The African Union recognizes eight regional economic communities. These are the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

5. How many other inter-governmental organizations working the integration agenda exist in Africa?

In total, there are fourteen intergovernmental organizations working on the integration agenda. In addition to the eight mentioned above, there is also the Central African Monetary and Economic Community (CEMAC), Economic Community of the Great Lakes States (CEPGL), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Mano River Union (MRU), Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

6. What are the key consequences of overlapping memberships?

Multiple memberships make it difficult for Member States to meet financial obligations to the RECs; makes it difficult to focus on the numerous agenda of each REC; leads to low ratification and implementation of agreed treaties and programmes; incompatibility of some programmes; duplication of effort. Also means little support for, and understanding of RECs in member countries.

7. Why do countries belong to several RECs?

The main reasons cited by countries for joining more than one REC are strategic and political considerations. Economic benefits and geographical contiguity also count.

8. How can RECs be rationalized?

The report presents four scenarios for rationalization. These are rationalization through mergers and absorptions; rationalization around rooted communities; rationalization through division of labour; rationalization through coordination and harmonization.

9. Does the report recommend a particular approach?

No. The report presents each scenario and gives an objective assessment of what its implementation might entail. The final decision on how to proceed lies with African Heads of States. However, the process must be inclusive and involve the RECs and other stakeholders, under the leadership of the African Union commission.

10. Why ARIA?

Regional integration has been a priority of African leaders since the early years of independence, and a rallying call of many Africans for several decades. The discourse took place both in political and economic terms. However, several years since independence, Africa is still largely fragmented into small economies with little cross-border trade. Therefore, the African Union and the United Nations Economic

Commission for Africa decided to study in detail the impediments to integration in order to recommend steps for accelerating the process. The result is the series of publications *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*, or ARIA.

The first in the series, ARIA I, remains the only comprehensive assessment policies, programmes and progress towards regional integration in Africa. It analyses in some detail, the benefits of the various integration efforts on the region as a whole, and looks at sectoral policies and results, including in transport and communications, trade, monetary and fiscal policies. The report finds that progress has not been commensurate with the numerous activities undertaken, and makes strong recommendations on accelerating integration in Africa. One of the main challenges was the rationalization of regional economic communities, which led to the publication of ARIA II. The next in the series, ARIA III, will focus on macroeconomic convergence in Africa.