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Introductory Statement for Workshop on the Cost of Non-Integration in Africa

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Introductory Statement

African integration has mainly been pursued under the political banner of Pan-Africanism, the root of African unity. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Charter, the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), and the proposed Union Government define integration as one element in African unity. Thus, the political dimension has always taken priority over other aspects of integration at the continental level. However, the small size of most African countries and their economies demands economic collaboration in order to enable African nations to contend with larger economies in the global arena. This notion of economic integration is emphasized in important initiatives, such as the Abuja Treaty (1991) establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) and the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), which elaborated the economic, political, and institutional frameworks for an integrated Africa.

In Africa, the integration question is as urgent as the need for peace, security, democracy, rule of law, and good governance. Home to approximately 17% of the world's population and bedeviled by daunting development challenges, Africa is one of the most balkanized regions of the world. The limited scope of African integration remains a major obstacle to the continent's development. Perhaps the problem has been that African integration has been a state-driven project, in particular led by the OUA and now the AU. One of the most durable features of African integration since its beginning has been a strong rhetorical foundation that has only been significant in political terms.

In the five decades since African independence, there have been three high-water marks in African integration. The first was when the OAU was established by independent African states in 1963. The second was the establishment of sub regional integration institutions from the late 1960s onward (the first East African Community in 1967, Economic Community of West African States in 1975, etc.). The third high point, which is ongoing, started with the transformation of the OAU into the AU.

The intervals of these high points have, however, been marked by serious backtracking from the process of integration. The East African Community, for example, was disbanded following the Tanzania-Uganda war of 1978–79; the Maghreb Union remains nonfunctional; and the

OAU was on the verge of total neglect when it was transformed into the AU in 2002. Nonetheless, there has been some progress in the areas of trade, transport, communications, and macroeconomic policy for example. This progress is mixed across sectors and regions. In trade liberalization and facilitation, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine, or UMOA) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa have made some substantial progress. With regard to the free movement of peoples, the Economic Community of West African States has made considerable strides with the issuance of an ECOWAS passport. The East African Community and the Southern Africa Development Community have progressed well in infrastructure development. In the area of peace and security, ECOWAS leads the rest. Other regional economic communities have also attained the status of a customs union, as with the Southern African Customs Union.

Challenges still abound, and upon close examination it would seem that both the low and high points of African integration have been characterized by state-led initiatives, and until recently civil society's participation in African integration efforts have been generally discouraged. In addition, the full implications of the ups and downs of African integration are barely understood in wider society. There is little analysis and hard evidence of the benefits of integration and, more importantly, the cost of non-integration.

At this workshop, participants will discuss the following set of questions, all aimed at establishing a framework for research and concerted advocacy to advance African integration. The rationale behind these questions is that being clear about the costs of non-integration is as important as understanding the benefits that integration offers. In other words, a clearer policy message requires solid cost-benefits analyses. The benefits are well known, but the costs have not yet been clearly evidenced and articulated.

- What are the costs of non-integration in economic, political, security, social, and cultural terms?
- How does non-integration affect the lives of ordinary Africans?
- What precisely does a balkanized Africa lose in relations with major world powers?
- How does non-integration impinge on Africa's role within the global economic and political systems?
- How can we explain the successes and failures of different regional integration efforts?
- What methodological approaches are most suitable for tracking and assessing the costs of non-integration?
- How can researchers more effectively communicate their analyses of non-integration to policy makers and the general public?

Expected outcomes

Sometimes it can seem that there are endless meetings on African integration, so TrustAfrica is committed to ensuring that this convening truly adds value. Hence, we will produce easily digestible post-convening policy briefs that can serve as the basis for dialogue and advocacy and dialogue with policy makers. We also expect that the convening will mark the beginning of a continent-wide network of researchers, activists, and policy makers who can work in concert to remove obstacles to African integration.