

The real impact of EPAs

Trade deals now being negotiated between the EU and its former colonies will achieve the opposite of their stated aim of promoting regional economic integration and increasing Africa's regional trade.

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The EU is also guilty of applying double standards by demanding African nations achieve integration virtually overnight while the same process in Europe took more than four decades.

Both accusations are made in a damning report released today by three specialist trade NGOs - Traidcraft (UK), SEATINI (Uganda) and EcoNews (Kenya) - which looks behind the European Commission's rhetoric at the real impact of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) on regional integration in Africa.

The report, *Economic Partnership Agreements: Building or Shattering African Regional Integration*, says African countries stand to lose far more than they would gain from EPAs. It's a conclusion supported by research from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa which estimates losses of up to 22% in the growth of regional trade across Africa if a standard EPA is applied.

European Development Ministers meet this week in Brussels to agree the route to conclude EPA negotiations this year.

The EU insists that EPAs will support African regional integration and is placing immense pressure on African countries to sign up to the agreements on this basis, said John Ochola of EcoNews Africa, a trade-focused NGO based in Kenya. But the claims do not stand up to scrutiny.

The onus must be on the EU to demonstrate how exactly EPAs can possibly support our regional integration, when the current evidence overwhelmingly suggests the contrary. Surely our governments cannot be expected to sign up to agreements that look set to have the opposite impact to their stated objectives, Ochola added.

Kenya, for example, already trades extensively within the East African and COMESA region, with regional markets being fundamental to the country's strategy for moving up the value chain and away from commodity dependency. Yet studies quoted in this report predict a 15% fall in Kenya's regional trade as a result of an EPA, as European exporters capture East African markets.

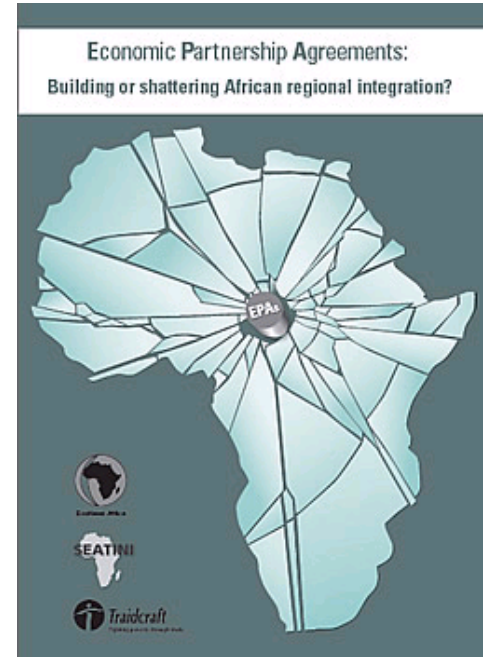
The report also compares the approach the EU took to its own regional integration, with the recipe it is prescribing for Africa under EPAs, and accuses the EU of imposing double standards.

It took the EU nearly four decades to become a common market, yet it is expecting African regions to achieve this within a couple of years, said Sophie Powell of Traidcraft.

The EU allowed itself huge structural funds, enormous flexibility, and lots of time to support its own regional integration, none of which it's proposing to allow in sufficient degree to African countries. The EU wants to impose an unworkable template on Africa purely because it needs to conclude EPAs. With time fast running out, member states need to wake up, allow more time for the negotiations, call for a proper look at alternatives, and above all, guarantee that ACP countries will not lose their preferential access to the EU while these problems are being sorted out, Powell added.

Download the report

- [Economic Partnership Agreements: Building or shattering African regional integration? \(PDF file\) \(1099kb\)](#)



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