# Review IV: Energy Poverty and Access Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Regionalism

**By:**

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Analyzed from a regionalism perspective, Nalule's book focuses on energy poverty and access challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Nalule highlights the significance of energy for household, commercial and industrialization purposes in the region while pointing out the challenges stemming from the scarcity of it. The book goes on to stress the pivotal role of a regionalism approach as a strategy for resolving the effects of the energy access conundrum in the region.

This book will appeal to a broad audience due to the Nalule's accessible writing style.  Underpinned by scientific rigour, the analysis revolves around the challenges that SSA is currently facing when it comes to energy access. The book anchors the discussion on Goal 7 of the Sustainable Development Goals approved by United Nations - *affordable and clean energy.* Moreover, an interesting demonstration is made on how Goal 7 has a strategic influence for

accomplishing other goals, given its undeniable transversality.

In tackling the energy poverty problem in SSA, the author identifies regionalism as a veritable tool to address the issue. However, the operationalization of the regionalism approach to address this challenge is not linear as it may appear, insofar unlike other regions and/or continents, SSA has several Regional Economic Communities (REC), namely East African Community, Economic Community of West African States and Southern Africa Development Community. In addition to that, the member states of each REC in SSA are immersed in different contexts, which influence, to a great extent, their involvement in the envisaged regionalism approach for the facilitation of energy access.

The book explores the prospects and challenges of operationalizing an energy access strategy within each REC in seven chapters. (chapter i) an *Introduction*, followed by (chapter ii) *Energy Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (chapter iii) *Regionalism in Addressing Energy Access Challenges*, (chapter iv) *Regional Cooperation in Renewable Energy and Fossil Fuel Development*, (chapter v) *Regional Cooperation in the Establishment of Regional Energy Infrastructure*, (chapter vi) *Harmonization of Regional Energy Regulations*, and ending up by (chapter vi) a *Conclusion* coming together with findings and tested recommendations.

The need for creating conditions for energy access is not limited in solving household needs; it would also require a capacity of providing enough energy for industrialization and, in the last resort, ensure energy access for economic development, which is still precarious in SSA. In this way, the interest of the author’s discussion stems from the fact that Africa, in general, and SSA in particular, have vast energy resources. Still, paradoxically, it also has figures pointing out a worrisome level of energy scarcity for both traditional and modern energy.

Energy poverty and access challenge give rise to a complex debate which is, in part, due to different ways it is perceived. For example, entities like the United Nations, International Energy Agency, World Bank, adopted different definitions of energy access and, also, different formulas to address it. Amidst this array of definitions, the author proposes an innovative concept of energy access,

drawing our attention to the need for separating elements such as (i) accessibility, (ii) reliability and (iii) affordability in order to address, in a suitable way, the problems of each SSA country.

The uniqueness of this work is found, among other aspects, in the contemporary and insightful assessment of energy access in SSA observed from the perspective of regional organizations. The book puts forward these important arguments through a legal and comparative analysis of the regional energy cooperative mechanisms which include, among others, (i) regional regulatory authorities, (ii) regional energy infrastructure establishments, and (iii) regional renewable energy initiatives and developments in Sub- Saharan Africa. In fact, there are many factors to be considered in the context of SSA, which influence the current reality, including (i) corruption, (ii) poor governance, (iii) lack of economic diversification, (iv) inequality in resource distribution, and even (v) political instability, which contribute for leading SSA countries to a poverty scenario.

Notwithstanding resorting to a comparative approach, the author wisely notes that developed countries have successfully tackled the issue of accessibility and reliability of modern energy services. As such, they are currently focused on addressing the issue of energy affordability and security. By observing the peculiarities of each strand of the energy access challenge, the author comes up with efficacious proposals based on the boundaries of each scenario.

Recently, SSA has witnessed several initiatives pooling their resources closely with governments and regional bodies such as the African Union, the African Development Bank, and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development to boost the mitigation of energy poverty. Some of these initiatives include Sustainable Energy for All, Japan’s Power Infrastructure Support Programme, the US Power Africa initiative, and the EnDev programme.

Recognizing the impact of the Paris Agreement 2015 on the need to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the book addresses the trilemma between (i) energy access, (ii) climate change, and (iii) renewable energy from a regional

cooperation perspective, specifically looking at RECs.

In examining the trilemma, the author also inquires:

*Could it be that in the distant decades and centuries, many developed countries were relying on fossil fuels and coal for their energy needs and economic development, and thus ignored their negative impacts? Is it fair that now, after these countries have attained economic development and also overcome energy poverty, they deem it fit to react to climate change and also point out the negative effects of fossil fuels and coal? Or could it simply be that in the past there was no scientific proof that human activities influenced climate change?* (page. 108).

From these inquires, the author notes that since most SSA countries are still developing, they do not need energy for cooking and lighting only, but they also need energy for industrialization and urbanization, which determines the need for relying on dirty and clean energy simultaneously. The author also realizes that the Paris Agreement may not give much room or support for the RECs in SSA to tackle climate change since the RECs in SSA are still undergoing economic integration and most of them play the role of coordination and do not make decisions on behalf of their member states like the case envisaged in the Agreement.

After a vigorous discussion, the author comes up with some conclusions referring that the full potential of regionalism cannot be seen in SSA due to various obstacles such as (i) immature stage of the RECs, (ii) financial constraints, (iii) weak legal and institutional frameworks, and (iv) political instability in some SSA countries. At the international level, initiatives from the World Bank, United Nations, USAID, DFID, and the G20 are relevant; however, they are not coordinated commonly, which could lead to their inefficacy.

Apart from raising constraints, the work also goes through the potential solutions and provides for valuable contributions. In this way, the author ends the book recommending, in a nutshell, the following: (i) clear definition and understanding of the concept of *energy access,* (ii) strengthening the regional legal and institutional framework and (iii) strengthening the international legal framework to support regional cooperation.

This work assumes a benchmark position naturally when it comes to insightful discussion on energy access challenges in SSA. The readers will not only enjoy the reading but also aggregate value to their vision on the pivotal role of the regionalism as a tool through which SSA countries may gradually invert the *status quo* of energy access challenges.

By and large, the book is relevant and highly recommended for those who are interested in discussing issues related to energy access in SSA.

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