Introduction to Symposium - Prospects for Deepening Africa - Caribbean Economic Relations

By:

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The African and the Caribbean continents have shared history, 'forged from the scars of the egregious 300-year long Trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism's abuses, and the anti-colonial/independence struggle.' Stemming from these shared struggles, it is unsurprising that cultural similarities and bonds between peoples of both continents run deep. Indeed, listen to any of the popular musical genres in the Caribbean – soca, reggae or calypso – and the underlying African rhythms are distinct. Despite the historical and cultural ties, economic cooperation between both regions remains negligible.

Be that as it may, the potential and opportunities for enhancing trade, investment and economic cooperation between these two regions are evident and encouraging. For example, for some time, Africa and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries have cooperated formally through several vehicles, most

notably, the Organisation of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS and formerly called the ACP Group of Countries), the Commonwealth of Nations, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) of the United Nations and as part of the ACP negotiating group in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Also, the diaspora, which includes the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, has been designated the sixth region of the African Union. However, region-to-region and bilateral political relations between Africa and Caribbean countries have generally remained limited until recent CARICOM and the African Union (AU) attempts to formalise a region-to-region relationship. CARICOM countries' diplomatic footprint on the African continent remains small, although a joint mission is being established in Kenya, and Barbados has recently established an embassy in Ghana. Africa-Caribbean regional cooperation has seen greater expression during the COVID-19 pandemic as the AU has extended to CARICOM access to its Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP). Besides vaccine equity, there are also areas of shared interests, such as reparations for the wrongs of the slave trade/slavery and climate change.

Political will towards deepening Africa-Caribbean trade preceded the COVID-19 pandemic but has been intensified by the need to diversify export partners in order to build more resilient post-COVID-19 economies. While formal trade and investment between the two regions remain negligible, opportunities abound for developing closer Africa-Caribbean economic and commercial ties. To this end, in recent years, concerted efforts have been made by African and Caribbean governments to build on this shared history and to explore opportunities for more significant Africa-Caribbean trade. The boldest step in this regard is the announcement by the AU and CARICOM of an inaugural CARICOM-Africa Summit, which will be held virtually on 7 September 2021. Kenya will host the virtual event under the theme 'Unity Across Continents and Oceans: Opportunities for Deepening Integration'.

Given the promising potential for deeper trade and investment relationships between both regions, there is a dearth of scholarly analysis on the Africa-Caribbean economic relationship, which this AfronomicsLaw Symposium aims to address partially. The five essays in this symposium, all authored by well-respected academics and practitioners, explore various themes of the Africa-Caribbean relationship. The essays all refer to the shared bonds of history and the need for more significant action on both sides to actualise a mutually

beneficial region-to-region relationship. All of the essays offer innovative recommendations for deepening Africa-Caribbean relations.

The contributions to this symposium can be classified into two broad categories: those focused primarily on the political relationship/cooperation and those exploring Africa-Caribbean economic and commercial relations.

The essays by Dr. Nand Bardouille, Brandon Sullivan, Dr. Sandra Ochieng'-Springer and Matthew Wilson focus on the political cooperation and engagement between the AU and CARICOM on a region to region level and within multilateral fora.

Dr. Nand Bardouille's essay points to the enhanced momentum for greater CARICOM-AU partnership, exemplified by their cooperation on vaccine access through the African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP). Noting that CARICOM is the *demandeur* in this foreign policy track, Dr Bardouille's central argument is that this initiative opens cooperation opportunities between the two regions under the auspices of summitry. Calling CARICOM-AU summitry a work in progress, Dr. Bardouille notes the opportunity it presents for both sides to transform their political and diplomatic agendas. Dr. Bardouille's also cautions that summits do not by themselves constitute a holistic foreign trade and foreign policy. With the inaugural CARICOM-Africa Summit, scheduled for 7 September 2021, Dr. Bardouille's arguments on the role of summitry in CARICOM-AU Relations are pertinent.

Brandon Sullivan's explores how the indigenisation of knowledge-led economic competencies mediates maturational economic outcomes for Africa and the Caribbean. Sullivan argues that 'knowledge economies intent on (knowledge) access and creation' can be critical drivers for the economic development of both regions. Building on this observation, Sullivan urges African and Caribbean countries to pay attention to the shifting paradigm in global affairs, where autochthonous techno-economic efforts progressively dictate capital enrichment and economic success. Sullivan argues that there is a window of opportunity for African and Caribbean countries to forge indigenous responses and focus on arresting the digital (and fortune) divide between the Global North and Global South. He contends that 'lateral collaboration, through such like African and Caribbean cooperation, presents a

likely path to prosperity, through the leveraging of respective comparative advantages — Africa, being home to over a billion people, and the Caribbean's proximity to key business, financial and logistics centres in the Americas, illustrate numerous greenfield opportunities through which such a partnership can focus its intentions.'

Dr. Sandra Ochieng'-Springer's paper highlights the potential to enhance integration between the African and Caribbean regions by mainstreaming trade relations using a south-south cooperation framework. After providing a concise overview of formalised Africa-Caribbean cooperation in various fora, Dr. Springer discusses the approaches to regional integration by the AU and CARICOM. Dr. Springer argues that diaspora relations are a driver for deeper cooperation between the AU and CARICOM and calls for the formalisation of mechanisms, including an established regional diaspora grouping into the AU. Dr. Springer argues further that 'the AfCFTA provides a useful mechanism for reframing SSC to enhance engagements within the continent and deepen them with trading partners from the developing world.' More importantly, Dr. Springer posits that the success of the AfCFTA can be a springboard for the AU considering an FTA with CARICOM making it the 6th region of the AfCFTA.

Matthew Wilson argues that while there are shared histories between Africa and the Caribbean, shared history and goodwill are not sufficient for growing the Africa-Caribbean alliance, particularly within negotiating settings like the WTO, where the regions' interests might not always align neatly. Wilson emphasises this latter point, arguing that 'the global trade and investment landscape is not always conducive to bloc thinking.' Stemming from this argument, Wilson welcomes calls for a renewed relationship between both regions which is premised on a realisation that 'Africa and the Caribbean may not always have the same priorities and, in some cases, will be direct competitors for investment and development assistance.'

The papers by Ainsley Brown, Paula Hippolyte-Bauwens, Abigail Namasaka and Reagan Eatale have the trade and broader economic relationship as their axis of focus.

In his paper **Ainsley Brown** sounds a clarion call for an Africa-Caribbean Economic Engagement Network, comprising trade agreements, investment

treaties, mutual recognition agreements, air service agreements, double taxation agreements and customs to customs agreements. In describing what he calls the ‘Economic Engagement Advantage’, Brown argues that in an Economic Engagement Network, parties can leverage the interaction between the various types of agreements for their mutual benefit. Brown argues that while an African-Caribbean Economic Engagement Network will not be easy to achieve, instituting such a series of proposed agreements would optimise a unified African and Caribbean vision for greater global economic participation.

Paula Hippolyte-Bauwens posits that developing more synergistic cooperation, particularly within the context of the OACPS, should be a central element in Africa and Caribbean countries’ global repositioning strategies. Hippolyte-Bauwens historicises the Africa-Caribbean cooperative relationship within the OACP thus far. Hippolyte-Bauwens posits that for trade and non-trade cooperation within the OACPS to be effective, it has to be concerned with more than jointly negotiating with the EU but should focus on a greater understanding of Africa-Caribbean realities. This requires working together on existing and emerging concerns and areas of mutual interest (e.g. the Blue Economy, green sustainable pathways, health crises, climate change and digitisation challenges etc.) for both regions using the OACPS as a common platform.

In their co-authored contribution, **Abigail Namasaka** and **Reagan Etale** evaluate the impact of the negotiations of ACP-EU Economic Partnerships Agreements (EPAs) on the Africa-Caribbean trade. Specifically, the paper discusses the dynamics of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA negotiations, the ECOWAS-EU EPA negotiations, and the EU’s negotiation with the Southern Africa bloc to highlight the fragmentation and dilution effect of the EPAs negotiating process. The central thesis of their paper is that the negotiation tactics adopted by the EU coupled with specific provisions of the EPAs, such as the diagonal cumulation concept, have contributed to the low trade volumes between African and Caribbean countries.

We thank the contributors to this symposium for their excellent contributions. Afronomicslaw.org is committed to continuing this discussion on the Africa-Caribbean relationship and welcome reactions to the posts in this symposium.

Bio of Contributors

Ainsley Brown is the Snr Director Regulations, Policy, Monitoring and Enforcement at Jamaica's Special Economic Zone Authority and an Adjunct Lecturer in Logistics at the Mona School of Business and Management.

Paula Hippolyte-Bauwens is a Consultant on EU / Development cooperation affairs. She is a former Advisor as well as Head of Chancery/First Secretary at the Eastern Caribbean States (ECS) Embassies to the EU and the Kingdom of Belgium. She also worked as Trade Expert and Senior Programme Manager for EU-ACP TradeComII Programme. Some of her work includes Brexit-impact related issues, analysis of EU-ACP relations, EU policies and Small Island Economies' challenges.

Abigail Namasaka is a Kenyan-based lawyer currently pursuing a post-graduate diploma at the Kenya School of Law.

Reagan Etale is an international trade lawyer.

Dr. Sandra Ochieng'-Springer is a Lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.

Matthew Wilson is the Chief of Special Projects at the International Trade Centre (ITC). He is a former trade negotiator for the Government of Barbados and also served as Deputy Aid for Trade Coordinator at the WTO, Senior Adviser to the WTO Director General, and Chief of Staff to the Executive Director at ITC.

Dr. Nand C. Bardouille heads the Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean in the Institute of International Relations (IIR), The University of the West Indies (The UWI) – St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Bardouille's teaching and research focus are on International Relations and Comparative Politics, with a regional focus on the Caribbean. He specialises in and has published on small states' diplomacy, foreign policy, and international economic relations.

Brandon Sullivan is the Group Global Communications Lead at Wikimedians of the Caribbean (WikiCari) – focused on the enrichment of regional digital development and the enablement of regional knowledge communities through the power of Wikipedia and other Wiki projects. He is also a Research Assistant

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