

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Green Pan-Africanism: Normative power and the making of a regional sustainability order

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Abstract

This article examines the role of normative power in shaping the global sustainability order. It challenges the prevailing focus on hegemonic leadership and norm diffusion from dominant states, arguing that less powerful states have contributed significantly to the global order by creating regional initiatives tailored to their unique contexts. The article adopts an alternative theoretical framework of norm-governed change, comprising norm-building, institutionalisation, and transformation. Using an illustrative case study of Africa's regional economic institutions, it employs process-tracing and archival analysis of key policy documents. The study demonstrates how African states have proactively embedded environmental norms within their regional initiatives, while contributing to the global sustainability agenda, exemplifying a form of normative power referred to as 'Green Pan-Africanism'. This approach broadens the understanding of global sustainability governance, positioning less economically powerful actors as active participants in world-making. The findings highlight the critical role of normative power in advancing global sustainability governance, particularly in addressing complex global challenges such as climate change.

Keywords: global sustainability governance; Green Pan-Africanism; normative power; norm-governed change; regional orders

Introduction

Conventional narratives of global sustainability governance often focus on the influence of hegemonic leadership, particularly the role of Western powers like the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). These accounts usually highlight how these powers utilise international economic regimes, such as Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) in the trade regime, to promote environmental sustainability, often framing the Global South as passive recipients of Northern norms.¹ This perspective implicitly suggests that international economic regimes from the Global South have historically neglected or minimised the importance of environmental sustainability.²

¹E.g. Ida Bastiaens and Evgeny Postnikov, 'Greening up: The effects of environmental standards in EU and US trade agreements', *Environmental Politics*, 26:5 (2017), pp. 847–69; Daniel Esty, *Greening the GATT: Trade, Environment, and the Future*, illustrated ed. (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 1994); Sikina Jinnah and Jean Frédéric Morin, *Greening through Trade: How American Trade Policy Is Linked to Environmental Protection Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020).

²For exceptions, see James Gathii, *African Regional Trade Agreements as Legal Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lisa Lechner and Gabriele Spilker, 'Taking it seriously: Commitments to the environment in South–South preferential trade agreements', *Environmental Politics*, 31:6 (2022), pp. 1058–80; Adebayo Majekolagbe and Olabisi Akinkugbe, 'International investment law and climate justice: The search for a just green investment order', *Fordham International Law Journal*, 46:2 (2022), pp. 169–212 (p. 169).

This article challenges these assumptions of hegemonic leadership, arguing that less powerful states have played a proactive role in shaping the global sustainability order. Through an illustrative case study of the African region and using archival sources from continental and regional economic institutions, the study demonstrates how African states have embedded environmental norms within regional economic initiatives, while contributing to the global sustainability agenda, thereby exercising normative power. The theoretical framework of ‘norm-governed change’ – comprising the phases of norm-building, institutionalisation, and transformation – reveals that less economically dominant regions have been key contributors to global sustainability governance.

By exploring Africa’s role in creating and diffusing environmental norms at both regional and global levels, the article argues that Africa is not merely a norm-taker but a norm-giver and entrepreneur. Green Pan-Africanism, a regional approach to sustainability governance, highlights Africa’s agency in world-making, offering a more inclusive narrative of global sustainability governance. The findings demonstrate that environmental norms do not necessarily flow exclusively from North to South but also in reverse, expanding the understanding of how less powerful actors can shape global governance.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical explanation of hegemonic leadership and its limitations. This is followed by an outline of the norm-governed change framework, detailing the phases of norm-building, institutionalisation, and transformation. The article then examines how Green Pan-Africanism functions as a form of norm-governed change within Africa’s regional sustainability order and global sustainability governance. Empirical evidence is provided through archival materials and key policy documents, tracing the evolution of environmental norms in Africa’s regional economic initiatives and the global sustainability agenda. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of normative leadership for global sustainability governance.

The limits of hegemonic leadership

Conventional accounts on the making of what can be called the ‘global sustainability order’ have, unsurprisingly, privileged the role of hegemonic leadership in the making of the order. Such narratives show how the major Western economies of the US and the EU have led the global efforts to leverage international economic regimes to advance environmental sustainability norms. Both major economic powers have, for instance, been presented as being at the vanguard of using their Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) to promote social standards.³ The US has been championed as the leader in ‘greening trade’ through their PTAs and the multilateral trading system.⁴

Relatedly, scholars have emphasised the diffusion of environmental norms, through international economic regimes, from the Global North to the South. In these accounts, states in the Global North, which are assumed to uphold higher domestic standards, usually socialise their partners in the South to better appreciate and embrace environmental sustainability.⁵ Using the example of how the US has been innovative in linking its PTAs with environmental sustainability objectives, Morin et al. argue that ‘powerful countries, therefore, may have clear leverage in influencing the uptake of their novel provisions in PTAs that they themselves negotiate with a weaker partner. Moreover, we expect that the legal innovations introduced by powerful countries are more likely

³Bastiaens and Postnikov, ‘Greening up’; Sikina Jinnah and Elisa Morgera, ‘Environmental provisions in American and EU free trade agreements: A preliminary comparison and research agenda’, *Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law*, 22:3 (2013), pp. 324–39; Noémie Laurens, Zachary Dove, Jean-Frédéric Morin, and Sikina Jinnah, ‘NAFTA 2.0: The greenest trade agreement ever?’, *World Trade Review* 18:4 (2019), pp. 659–77; Evgeny Postnikov, *Social Standards in EU and US Trade Agreements* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

⁴Esty, *Greening the GATT*; Jinnah and Morin, *Greening through Trade*.

⁵Sikina Jinnah and Abby Lindsay, ‘Diffusion through issue linkage: Environmental norms in US trade agreements’, *Global Environmental Politics*, 16:3 (2016), pp. 41–61; Jean-Frédéric Morin, Dominique Blümer, Clara Brandi, and Axel Berger, ‘Kick-starting diffusion: Explaining the varying frequency of preferential trade agreements’ environmental provisions by their initial conditions’, *The World Economy*, 42:9 (2019), pp. 2602–28.

to attract attention and can be expected to become global standards. Third countries might want to duplicate these innovations in their own template, especially if they hope to conclude a PTA with these more powerful partners in the future' and that 'the adoption of environmental provisions by environmentally credible countries sends a signal to other countries about the importance and the expected effectiveness of such a policy innovation. Countries that want to improve their own environmental credibility are likely to emulate countries they perceive to be the most credible.'⁶

A key implication of the foregoing narrative of hegemonic leadership is the (implicit) assumption that other states, especially those from the Global South, have usually excluded or minimised the importance of environmental sustainability. But this is not necessarily true, as this article will demonstrate. It is true, however, that liberalism has been the dominant ideology, and major Western economic powers have leveraged their superior relative economic bargaining power to promulgate their *preferred* version of an approach to integrating environmental sustainability in international economic regimes.⁷ As such, these hegemonic economic powers, especially the US and the EU, have been presented as the main architects of the global sustainability order, with limited to little reference to other states that may have contributed in a narrower and more contextual, rather than global, manner.

Relaxing the core assumptions of hegemonic leadership and the one-way diffusion of sustainability norms from the Global North to the South can open theoretical possibilities of studying the different (or similar) ways that less powerful states have contributed to the making of the global sustainability order. It is thus my ambition in this article to shift the attention to other sources of change – that is, to normative change – as a key aspect of the global sustainability order.

While the hegemonic leadership narrative may account for a larger fraction of the global economy, considering the normative dimension might enable the possibility of understanding how a larger share of the global population – albeit with relatively limited economic power – has significantly contributed to advancing global sustainability governance. But doing so will require adopting a different theoretical approach that considers the potential (and implications) of normative power where the preponderance of material power is largely absent. As the empirical section will show, some of the initiatives aimed at integrating environmental sustainability norms into the international economic regime pre-date the more prominent multilateral analogies that are the result of hegemonic leadership. The next section takes up this theoretical task.

Green Pan-Africanism as norm-governed change

In this section I theorise how Green Pan-Africanism is a form of norm-governed change. Green Pan-Africanism can be defined as a form of norm-governed change that integrates environmental sustainability norms within the broader political and economic agenda of African regional integration. Rooted in the Pan-African vision of self-determination and collective action, it emphasises the development of regional policies and institutions that balance economic growth with environmental sustainability. This approach reflects the agency of African states in shaping their regional sustainability order, driven by their unique socio-economic and environmental contexts, rather than merely adopting norms imposed by external, hegemonic powers. It is also based on the political ideology of Pan-Africanism, as will be elaborated in the next section.

Analogous to the concept of 'embedded liberalism', which refers to the post-World War II global economic order that sought to reconcile open markets with social welfare and state intervention.⁸ Green Pan-Africanism similarly seeks to balance economic development with environmental sustainability. In what follows, I first show the significance of Pan-Africanism as a guiding ideology

⁶Morin et al., 'Kick-starting diffusion', p. 2607.

⁷Steven F. Bernstein, *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Esty, *Greening the GATT*.

⁸John Gerard Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change: Embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order', *International Organization*, 36:2 (1982), pp. 379–415.

in Africa's regional economic integration, just as liberalism is for the Western-led global economic order. I then outline the key features and mechanisms of how norm-governed change occurs within the context of a regional order.

Norm-governed change

If material power is not the only explanation for the emergence and evolution of the global sustainability order, what other factors can be included in the analysis? In this section, I present an alternative explanation that emphasises the role of norms in shaping the transformation of international regimes. I draw on and extend the key concepts of embedded orders, normative change, and flexible regimes to develop the theoretical framework.

In his classic book *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi introduced the concept of 'embedded orders' to argue that economic systems are usually embedded in broader social contexts. As such, market mechanisms and forces do not usually operate in isolation but are shaped by their prevailing socio-economic and even political contexts. Polanyi's insight into the embeddedness of markets and other economic systems laid the foundation for his claim that markets and society shape each other. Building on this premise, then, it follows those international economic orders, including regional ones, are also encased within a socio-political context. Through his analysis, Polanyi paved the way for a nuanced analysis of international economic orders.

John Ruggie built on Polanyi's idea of embedded orders to show how norms could govern change in international regimes. Writing in his seminal journal article, part of the groundbreaking special issue 'International Regimes', Ruggie advanced the concept of 'embedded liberalism' to show how that the normative core of the post-war international economic order had remained largely intact, even though the structure of the order had significantly changed. In making this argument, Ruggie challenged the prevailing theories premised on hegemonic power as the key mechanisms for the establishment and transformation of international regimes, since 'power may predict the *form* of international order, but not its *content*'.⁹ Instead, he concluded that 'to say anything sensible about the *content* of international economic orders and about regimes that serve them, it is necessary to look at how power and legitimate social purpose become fused to project political authority into the international system'.¹⁰

To elaborate on his theoretical argument of what he also called the 'generative grammar' of international regimes, Ruggie noted that international change could occur in the absence of hegemonic power. In fact, this was Ruggie's central argument about norm-governed change, an insight worth quoting at length:

It is the last possibility that interests me most. It suggests the need for a more nuanced formulation of regime change than is currently available. If and as the concentration of economic power erodes, and the 'strength' of international regimes is sapped thereby, we may be sure that the instruments of regimes also will have to change. However, as long as purpose is held constant, there is no reason to suppose that the normative framework of regimes must change as well. In other words, referring back to our analytical components of international regimes, rules and procedures (instruments) would change but principles and norms (normative frameworks) would not. Presumably, the new instruments that would emerge would be better adapted to the new power situation in the international economic order. But insofar as they continued to reflect the same sense of purpose, they would represent a case of norm-governed as opposed to norm-transforming change.¹¹

Both concepts of 'embedded orders' and 'norm-governed change' suggest that international regimes could be flexible. It is this flexibility of international regimes that is key to the argument I

⁹Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change', p. 382.

¹⁰Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change', p. 382, emphasis in original.

¹¹Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change', p. 384.

advance in this paper, as I will show that this has allowed African states to change and even transform the regional economic regime, while retaining its normative core that includes addressing economic underdevelopment and pursuing environmental sustainability.

I extend Ruggie's notion of norm-governed change to comprise three phases: norm-building, institutionalisation, and transformation. In the *norm-building phase*, states define the core principles and norms of the regime, such as environmental stewardship, which are typically embedded in treaties. This is followed by *institutionalisation*, where institutions are empowered to implement these norms through policies, strategies, and legal instruments. Finally, the *transformation* phase sees regimes evolve, either by adapting their structures while preserving the normative core or by altering the normative framework itself. In the African context, this process has shaped the development of the region's sustainability order.

Paralleling Ruggie in a book-length study, James Gathii has shown how African trade agreements, and the broader economic regime, are unique due to their flexibility. In challenging the claims based on the American and European experience that African trade agreements are weak as they have not changed the behaviour of their member states, Gathii views such comparisons as 'caricatures that are not based on the actual treaty commitments and experiences of African [Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs)]' and contends that African regimes are indeed flexible to, among others, 'adopt[ing] a broad array of social, economic and political objectives without giving salience to any set of objectives ... [and they] demonstrate a particular preference for functionally specific objectives to undertake discrete projects and to serve as forums for the integrated development of common resources, such as river basins that cut across national boundaries.'¹² In brief, Gathii cautioned against the uncritical comparison of African and European/American international economic regimes, with the latter used as a yardstick for the former, and maintained that flexibility was a feature rather than a bug of Africa's economic regimes.

Pan-Africanism as a guiding ideology

Pan-Africanism has been a guiding political vision for the emancipation and unification of the African continent. But its impact, while widely studied, has yet to gain global appeal and appreciation, including by scholars who have studied the making of the global sustainability order. At the heart of this limited appreciation of the concept is a deeper epistemic challenge: that of the marginalisation of Africa, not only in scholarship, but also in the global public imagination. It is, therefore, necessary to demonstrate the significance of Pan-Africanism as a guiding political ideology in world-making, before relating it to the establishment and evolution of the African regional economic order.

Understanding Africa's image and place in the world has been a long-standing epistemic challenge. In the seminal book *The Invention of Africa*, V. Y. Mudimbe argues that the notion of Africa is an invented one, created by European powers to create an image of an Africa without agency – what Mudimbe terms as *alterity*.¹³ Mudimbe's project was part of the broader efforts to challenge the 'othering' of certain geographies, in tandem with Edward Said's *Orientalism*.¹⁴ Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is arguably the most infamous rendition of 'othering' Africa, to which Chinua Achebe responded by writing the classic book *Things Fall Apart* to not only showcase Africa's agency and long-standing precolonial traditions, but to also challenge the epistemic project that sought to diminish Africa's image in the world. In many ways, this epistemic challenge has persisted, and it has implicitly and explicitly contributed to the marginalisation of the continent in studies and discourses on global governance.

¹²Gathii, *African Regional Trade Agreements as Legal Regimes*, p. 2.

¹³V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

¹⁴Ali A. Mazrui, 'The re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and beyond', *Research in African Literatures*, 36:3 (2005), pp. 68–69; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1978).

Post-colonial African leaders were aware of this epistemic challenge, hence their adoption of Pan-Africanism as a guiding vision. Two phases of Pan-Africanism can be identified. In the first phase, African leaders focused on political decolonisation as the overriding objective, a project that was completed with Namibia's independence in 1990. The second phase of Pan-Africanism focused on regional economic integration as the main building block of continental unity.¹⁵ In this article, I focus on how both the political and economic aspects of building the regional order in Africa have shaped the continent's approach to environmental governance. I seek to show that the current institutional arrangements, where regional economic institutions have incorporated environmental sustainability, have long historical roots and are not merely copied or diffused from elsewhere. In doing so, the article emphasises the pioneering role of African countries in integrating environmental norms in their regional economic initiatives.

Self-determination is a key tenet of Pan-Africanism, and by implication, of the making of Africa's regional sustainability order. In the book *World Making after Empire*, Adom Getachew quotes Kwame Nkrumah's reflections on self-determination for Africa's continental integration, and the New International Economic Order (NIEO), as follows: 'The major advantage which our independence has bestowed upon us is the liberty to arrange our national life according to the interests of our people, and along with it, the freedom, in conjunction with other countries, to interfere with the play of forces in the world commodity markets.' Getachew further notes that 'this vision of development underwrote not only the postcolonial state but also the regional federations ... Large regional markets, coupled with an assertive federal state, created the spatial and scalar context as well as institutional conditions that would better position postcolonial states to modernize their economies.'¹⁶ While Nkrumah's vision of a powerful African federal state was not realised, he articulated a vision where Pan-African ideology would guide regional and continental integration efforts through self-determination. It is this vision that also guided regional economic integration initiatives in Africa, especially from 1970 onwards.¹⁷

Pan-Africanism, therefore, is unique and different from comparative ideologies such as liberalism. Analyses of Africa's regional economic regimes should thus be premised on Pan-Africanism as a conceptual and ideological point of departure, if they are to capture the context and philosophical roots of Africa's regional economic integration.¹⁸ I now turn to showing how environmental protection and sustainability has been an integral aspect of Pan-Africanism and the African regional economic integration project, as well as the normative framework of the emergent regional sustainability order.

Defining a regional (sustainability) order

Before proceeding to articulate how Green Pan-Africanism is a form of norm-governed change, I will first show how and why Africa's regional integration initiative is akin to creating a regional order. As a political ideology, Pan-Africanism has provided a guiding vision for the creation of the order. It is within this context, and with the consideration of the environmental dimension of Pan-Africanism, that we can speak of a regional sustainability order in Africa. But understanding the African context would require a conceptual departure from conventional narratives of world-making that are based on material power and functional institutionalism. Here, Pan-Africanism is considered as the core norm that has driven the creation of a regional order in Africa, as its sustainability derivative.

¹⁵Francis Mangeni and Calestous Juma, *Emergent Africa: Evolution of Regional Economic Integration* (Terra Alta, WV: Headline Books, 2019), pp. 9–10.

¹⁶Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 168.

¹⁷Mangeni and Juma, *Emergent Africa*, chapters 1, 2.

¹⁸Mangeni and Juma, *Emergent Africa*; Francis Mangeni and Andrew Mold, *Borderless Africa: A Sceptic's Guide to the Continental Free Trade Area* (C. Hurst & Co Publishers, 2024); Joseph S. Nye, *Pan-Africanism and East African Integration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

To do so, I build on Amitav Acharya's concept of 'regional worlds in a multiplex world'¹⁹ to show how African countries have harnessed the political ideology of Pan-Africanism to build a regional economic order that also advances environmental governance, albeit in context-specific ways that correspond to the contextual challenges of underdevelopment and limited material capabilities. I show how, by using Pan-Africanism as a guiding vision, African countries have deployed the strategies of self-determination and institutional innovation to create a green regional economic order. I begin by clarifying the definition of regional orders that I adopt, before outlining how self-determination and institutional innovation have been central to the Pan-African project of regional economic integration. In doing so, this section sets the stage for the subsequent articulation of Green Pan-Africanism as a form of norm-governed change.

Orders are an integral element of global governance. An order 'can be conceptualised as a relatively predictable set of behaviours, interactions, and outcomes within a particular social system. A given order in an area of world politics tends to be defined by certain regulations (rules, norms, institutions) and patterns of behaviour (actions, reactions, outcomes) that reflect how actors understand and apply those regulations.' Or put simply, an order 'is an organised group of international institutions that help govern the interactions among the member states.'²⁰

Much of the literature on orders is premised on the notion that they are created and maintained by great powers.²¹ In the post-war world, multilateral cooperation has been based on what has been termed as the liberal international order (LIO). While there are disagreements on the precise definition of the LIO, there is broad consensus that the core of the order is based on liberal values. As the United Nations charter, on which multilateral cooperation is anchored, reveals, the liberal values of individual human rights, open markets, delegation of authority to international organisations, and the legalisation of cooperation through the peaceful settlement of disputes are key elements of the LIO.²²

Hegemony, however, is not the only kind of order. As Amitav Acharya has argued, regional orders are also an integral component of global governance. Challenging the view that hegemonic power is central to the creation of orders, including regional ones, Acharya 'advances an alternative view that has received considerably less attention in the literature on regions and regional orders. Power matters, but local responses to power may matter even more in the construction of regional orders. How regions resist and/or socialize powers is at least as important a part of the story as how powers create and manage regions. Regions are constructed more from within than from without.' Acharya thus 'calls for balancing the top-down and power-centric analytical prism ... with an agency-oriented perspective that acknowledges local resistance to, and socialization of, powerful actors and attests to the endogenous construction of regions.'²³ I follow Acharya's approach to show how African countries have exercised agency in leveraging their regional economic regimes to advance global climate cooperation, as the following empirical sections illustrate. I emphasise that by exercising their agency, African countries are seeking creative ways to overcome capability challenges in the provision of global public goods.²⁴

The making and evolution of Africa's regional sustainability order

Having articulated Green Pan-Africanism as a form of norm-governed change, I empirically illustrate the argument in this section. I seek to show that environmental sustainability has remained

¹⁹ Amitav Acharya, 'The emerging regional architecture of world politics', *World Politics*, 59:4 (2007), pp. 629–52.

²⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, 'Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order', *International Security*, 43:4 (2019), pp. 7–50 (p. 9).

²¹ Mearsheimer, 'Bound to fail', p. 9.

²² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²³ Acharya, 'The emerging regional architecture of world politics', p. 630.

²⁴ Kennedy Mbeva, Reuben Makomere, Joanes Atela, Victoria Chengo, and Charles Tonui, *Africa's Right to Development in a Climate-Constrained World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

an enduring legitimate social purpose in Africa's regional economic integration, despite significant changes in the attendant regime. That is, while the regional economic regime underpinning integration in the continent has significantly changed, the normative framework that includes environmental sustainability has remained integral. I also show how Africa has contributed to the development of global sustainability norms, drawing on insights from its regional economic initiatives. This durability in the normative framework of Green Pan-Africanism has underpinned the making of the regional sustainability order in Africa.

In what follows, and in line with the theoretical framework articulated in the preceding section, I demonstrate how Green Pan-Africanism has evolved through three main phases, namely: norm-building, institutionalisation, and transformation. For each of the phases, I show how the normative framework that includes environmental sustainability has endured despite the transformations in the structure of the regional economic regimes in Africa. I draw on qualitative materials – archival sources from the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Organisation of African Unity (OAU)/African Union (AU) repositories, and analysis of key regional economic treaties and related policy documents – to show the endurance of the Green Pan-Africanism normative framework amidst a rapidly changing global and regional economic regimes. I use process-tracing to analyse the materials.²⁵

Importantly, I present a chronological narrative to demonstrate the endogenous sources of normative change in the formation and evolution of the African regional sustainability order, an approach in line with the theoretical framework of norm-governed change. Put differently, I present a historical account of the emergence and evolution of Green Pan-Africanism. In doing so, I historicise (normative) power²⁶ to illustrate the theoretical framework that underpins this study, since as Robert Cox famously remarked, 'theory is always for someone and some purpose.'²⁷ Given the focus on Africa as an illustrative case, I trade off breadth for depth. As such, this article builds on and probes the broad findings of the empirical analysis of hundreds of PTAs with Global South membership that have concluded that these countries have been proactive, and not just passive recipients of environmental norms via PTAs: 'developing countries that intentionally include stringent environmental standards in their PTAs seem to do so with real intentions since they also have higher environmental protection levels.'²⁸

Norm-building: Global and regional initiatives

African as a region has been integral to the making of the global sustainability order. But the region's contribution is largely absent in the literature. Perhaps this could be due to the unique focus on connecting the agenda of environmental sustainability with that of economic underdevelopment. As this section will show, Africa, through the concept of what I have referred to as 'Green Pan-Africanism', has made significant intellectual and policy contributions at both global and regional levels. Through analysis of key policy and archival material, I trace both contributions to show how African countries leveraged global and regional policy initiatives to articulate the norm of 'Green Pan-Africanism', which considers environmental sustainability as a legitimate social purpose of international economic regimes. This was mainly undertaken through the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), particularly under the leadership of the mercurial

²⁵Derek Beach, 'Process tracing methods in the social sciences', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017); David Collier, 'Understanding process tracing', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 44:4 (2011), pp. 823–30, available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.176>}.

²⁶Mahmood Mamdani, 'Historicizing power and responses to power: Indirect rule and its reform', *Social Research*, 66: 3 (1999), pp. 859–86.

²⁷Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55 (p. 128).

²⁸Lechner and Spilker, 'Taking it seriously', p. 1075.

Professor Adebayo Adedeji, who articulated an alternative vision for Africa's regional economic integration that included environmental sustainability.²⁹

African countries were closely engaged with the preparation and convening of the first global conference on environmental governance – the landmark 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNHE), more commonly known as the Stockholm Conference. To prepare for the conference, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General sought to engage developing countries in the preparation of the conference; this would be undertaken through four regional meetings under the auspices of the UN regional economic commissions.³⁰ Following this invitation, UNECA passed a resolution in 1971 to convene a regional seminar that would address the topic of the Human Environment in Africa, a theme that mirrors that of the Stockholm Conference.³¹ In doing so, Africa would have an opportunity to make intellectual and policy contributions to the Stockholm Conference.

Crucially, the African Regional Seminar on the Human Environment – hereafter the Seminar – received high-level political support, as it included the messages of support from Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie and President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Maurice Strong, the chair of the UNHE, was also present. Conceptually, the seminar sought to examine the connection between development and environment from an African perspective, and its relevance and contribution to the emergent global sustainability agenda.³² Notably, the discussion was based on the influential Founex Report on the Environment and Development, which had been developed by Global South intellectuals to formulate the contribution of their regions to the UNHE.³³

The Founex Report articulated a conceptual distinction between how the Global North and South framed environmental issues, a distinction that would resonate with the African context and would be foundational to the concept of 'Green Pan-Africanism'. While industrialised countries in the Global North framed environmental problems as the result of economic overdevelopment, developing countries emphasised economic underdevelopment as the root cause of environmental problems – at least in their context.³⁴ Despite the conceptual differences, African countries viewed environmental sustainability as a legitimate social purpose of regional economic integration but underscored the need to take into account the region's unique context and conditions:

The countries of the African Region were all encountering, to an increasing degree, the type of environmental problems associated with the process of development. The purpose of this African Regional Seminar was precisely to identify some of the more important of these problems, in the light of the special characteristics of African societies, their cultural values and

²⁹Janneh Abdoulie, 'Saluting a development pioneer-tribute to Adebayo Adedeji at 80' (2 December 2010), available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/47087>; Adebayo Adedeji, 'The economic commission for Africa: Its origin, development, problems, and prospects', Working paper, March 1978, 35, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/14986>; Adebayo Adedeji, 'An alternative for Africa', *Journal of Democracy*, 5:4 (1994), pp. 119–32; Adebayo Adedeji, 'History and prospects for regional integration in Africa: By Professor Adehayo Adedeji, CFR' (6 March 2002), available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/47111>.

³⁰UNECA and UN, 'Report of the First All-Africa Seminar on the Human Environment (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA]; United Nations Secretariat, 11 October 1971), p. 1, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/11153/Bib-52021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³¹UNECA, 'Resolution adopted by the Conference of Ministers' (Tunis, Tunisia: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 1 April 1971), available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/29058/b10713839.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; UNECA and UN, 'Report of the First All-Africa Seminar on the Human Environment', p. 1.

³²UNECA and UN, 'Report of the First All-Africa Seminar on the Human Environment', p. 2.

³³Founex, 'The Founex Report on Environment and Development', FOUNEX (1971); Miguel Ozorio de Almeida, *Environment and Development: The Founex Report on Development and Environment* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1972).

³⁴Ozorio de Almeida, *Environment and Development*; Adil Najam, 'Developing countries and global environmental governance: From contestation to participation to engagement', *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 5:3 (2005), pp. 303–21 (p. 309); Clyde Sanger, 'Environment and development', *International Journal*, 28:1 (1973), pp. 106–8.

their own way of life. In dealing with environmental problems arising out of the process of development, the developing countries of the region could profit from the experience of the industrialized countries. But solutions evolved from a different set of circumstances should be carefully adapted to the special human and natural endowment of each region and each country.³⁵

Upon concluding the debate, which was based on the Founex Report, the seminar ended with a list of policy recommendations for the UNHE. A follow-up report on Africa's participation at the UNHE, wherein 35 African countries took part, concluded that 'most of the environmental concerns of Africa – as elaborated [at the All Africa Seminar] – were included in the final recommendations of the UNHE.'³⁶ UNECA was then tasked with coordinating Africa's engagement with the soon-to-be-established United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and to also ensure the environmental agenda was mainstreamed into regional economic integration policy initiatives.³⁷ Based on its engagement and intellectual contribution to the UNHE, Africa was instrumental in defining the global sustainability agenda, a fact that is largely unacknowledged in the extant literature.

It is against this backdrop of global policy developments, in combination with the continent's unique context, that African countries proactively formulated their regional economic initiatives, which included environmental sustainability as a key element. In the year following the UNHE, at the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), African countries adopted the African Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence in 1973.³⁸ Taking stock of the decade after the founding of the OAU, and looking ahead, the Declaration made by the heads of state and government in Africa included a stand-alone section on the 'Environment', where the leaders committed to take the necessary measures to protect nature and the environment, and that such measures should be developed within the context of the economic and social development of the region, and to always be guided by the principles adopted by the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.³⁹

Six years later, African states would adopt the first of a series of landmark policies that would underpin the establishment of a regional economic order. Building on the African Declaration, the 'Monrovia Declaration of Commitment of the Heads Of State and Government, of the Organization of African Unity on Guidelines and Measures for National and Collective Self-Reliance in Social and Economic Development for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order' [sic] – hereafter the Monrovia Declaration – they called for the establishment of a new international economic order in the continent, an echo to the broader New International Economic Order (NIEO) that was proposed by the Global South collective.⁴⁰ Taking a long-term view to the turn of the millennium (the year 2000), the Declaration included a commitment by the heads of state and government on 'Cooperation in the preservation, protection and improvement of the natural environment'.⁴¹

³⁵ UNECA and UN, 'Report of the First All-Africa Seminar on the Human Environment', p. 7.

³⁶ UNECA, 'The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment', report, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (31 July 1972), p. 2, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/10728/Bib-51531.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³⁷ UNECA, 'The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment', pp. 3, 7.

³⁸ OAU, 'African Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence' (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Organization of African Unity [OAU], 9 May 1973), 1, available at: https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/5947/African%20Declaration%20on%20Cooperation%20Development%20and%20Economic%20Independence_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

³⁹ OAU, 'African Declaration on Cooperation, Development and Economic Independence', p. 11.

⁴⁰ OAU, 'Monrovia Declaration of Commitment of the Heads of State and Government, of the Organization of African Unity on Guidelines and Measures For National and Collective Self-Reliance in Social and Economic Development for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order' (Monrovia, Liberia: Organization of African Unity [OAU], 20 July 1979), p. 1, available at: https://archives.au.int/bitstream/handle/123456789/835/AHG%20St%203%20%28XVI%29%20_E.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁴¹ OAU, 'Monrovia Declaration of Commitment of the Heads of State and Government', pp. 1, 3.

In following up the commitment on advancing environmental sustainability in the Monrovia Declaration, African leaders elaborated on this commitment in the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa (1980–2000) – hereafter the Lagos Plan. A chapter on ‘Environment and Development’ was included in the Lagos Plan, which called for regional and sub-regional cooperation on strengthening the link between eradicating poverty and underdevelopment, and pursuing environmental sustainability, with the UNECA taking the lead.⁴² The privileging of environmental sustainability in a key regional economic policy document – as the Lagos Plan is considered a foundational policy for the continent’s regional economic integration – is an important fact, as it precedes the practice of including such environmental commitments in international trade agreements, a practice usually attributed to major Western economies, especially the US and the EU. What is instructive here is that Africa’s framing of the link between economic development and environmental sustainability was proactive and based on its prevailing context. The Lagos Plan included a Final Act of Lagos and a resolution by heads of state and government, thus giving it legal and political significance.⁴³

As African countries were advancing their regional economic integration agenda, they were also actively engaging with the multilateral environmental governance initiatives that were gaining momentum. Africa’s contribution was not only through policy recommendations but also included intellectual contributions by arguing for the need for context-relevant conceptions of the relationship between development and the environment. In preparation for the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which would introduce the concept of ‘sustainable development’ and lay the groundwork for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, African countries convened in Kampala, Uganda, in 1989 to debate and formulate their contribution. Presented through the ‘Kampala Agenda for Action towards Sustainable Development in Africa’, which was convened at the ministerial level by the UNECA and UNEP, the main objective of the conference was to ‘consider how the recommendations of the World Commission on Environment and Development, which called for a reappraisal of current approaches to development and stressed the importance of the social and economic dimensions of environmental degradation both at national and international levels, could be translated into action in Africa.’⁴⁴ The Conference concluded that ‘whether in a developed or in a developing country, man should recognize that the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability involving all sectors of development.’⁴⁵

Consolidating the preceding regional economic initiatives, heads of state and government adopted the all-important ‘Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community’ of 1991, also known as the Abuja Treaty. This treaty would serve as the blueprint for the creation of a continental common market in Africa. For comparison, the Abuja Treaty is akin to the foundational European Economic Community treaty or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, commonly abbreviated as ASEAN. Following precedent, the Abuja Treaty included a chapter on the environment, which included several innovative articles and clauses. Article 58 of the treaty called on African states to ‘adopt national, regional and continental policies, strategies and programmes and establish appropriate institutions for the protection and enhancement of the environment ... For the purposes of this paragraph 1 of this Article, Member States shall take the necessary measures to accelerate the reform and innovation process leading to ecologically rational, economically sound

⁴²OAU, ‘Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa (1980–2000)’ (Lagos, Nigeria: Organization of African Unity [OAU], 29 April 1980), chapter IX, available at: <https://www.resakss.org/sites/default/files/OAU%201980%20Lagos%20Plan%20of%20Action%20for%20the%20Economic%20Development%20of%20Africa.pdf>.

⁴³OAU, ‘Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa’, appendices I–III.

⁴⁴UNECA and UNEP, ‘Report of the First African Regional Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development’ (Kampala, Uganda: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA]; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 16 June 1989), p. 4, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/13794/Bib-55174.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, see paragraphs 18–21.

⁴⁵UNECA and UNEP, ‘Report of the First African Regional Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development’, p. 4.

and socially acceptable development policies and programmes.⁴⁶ The treaty also called for member states to adopt a Protocol on the Environment at regional levels.⁴⁷

In a fitting culmination, African states participated in and contributed to the famous UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Rio Conference, in 1992. As before, African states advanced the policy and conceptual understanding of the need to link efforts to eradicate poverty with the pursuit of environmental sustainability. In formulating their common position, African states 'benefitted from the environmental guidelines drawn from the following documents: the Monrovia Declaration (1979), the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), Cairo (1985) and the critical experiences that led to the adoption of Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD)', as well as the Kampala Agenda of 1989.⁴⁸ Having outlined the need to adopt a more holistic approach to conceptualising the relationship between environment and development, African states concluded that 'it is our desire that the programmes of this Common Position be included in UNCED Agenda 21 as the framework for the priority activities for the Africa region. We are convinced that the positive and effective contribution of the African community in the global development of the environment cannot take place without addressing the cross-sectoral issues involved.'⁴⁹ This framing was incorporated into the eventual outcome documents – in particular the UN Declaration on the Environment and Development, and the UNCED Agenda 21, after which 'the ECA Conference of Ministers of Economic Planning and Development adopted African Strategies for translating Agenda 21 into concrete actions in the region, *based on the philosophy of the African Common Position*.'⁵⁰

From the foregoing discussion, African states have long considered and prioritised integrating environmental sustainability in their regional economic initiatives. But these efforts were not limited to the regional level, as African states also actively participated in global fora and advanced a unique perspective based on 'Green Pan-Africanism'. African states can thus be considered as norm entrepreneurs, and not just as passive norm-takers. As the next two sections will show, African states have institutionalised this norm of 'Green Pan-Africanism', especially in regional economic initiatives.

Institutionalisation: Greening regional economic institutions

Based on Articles 58, 60, and 88 of the Abuja Treaty, African states have institutionalised the norm of 'Green Pan-Africanism' in their regional economic institutions, also known as regional economic communities (RECs). There are eight RECs in Africa, and they include the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

⁴⁶OAU, 'Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community' (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Organization of African Unity [OAU], 3 June 1991), p. 40, available at: {https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37636-treaty-0016_-_treaty_establishing_the_african_economic_community_e.pdf}, see Article 58.

⁴⁷OAU, 'Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community', p. 41, see Article 60.

⁴⁸UNECA, 'African Common Position on the African Environment and Development Agenda' (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 12 February 1992), p. 1, <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/15396/Bib-61911.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, paragraph 8.

⁴⁹UNECA, 'African Common Position on the African Environment and Development Agenda', p. 7, para 44.

⁵⁰UNECA, 'Operationalizing the African Strategies for the Implementation of UNCED Agenda 21', E/ECA/PSD.8/3 (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 25 February 1994), p. 1, <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/5767/Bib-45500.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, paragraph 1, emphasis own.

Four of the RECs (SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA, and the EAC) have stand-alone chapters on the environment in their treaty text. In fact, ECOWAS is the third Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), after the European Economic Community of 1986 and the Abuja Treaty of 1991, to include a stand-alone chapter on the environment. But, as has been noted in the preceding section, several African regional economic policy documents already included stand-alone environmental chapters, a fact that points to Africa's pioneering leadership in integrating environmental sustainability into international economic regimes.

While they do not include stand-alone chapters on the environment in their treaty texts, the other four RECs (except for the UMA), have adopted regional environmental policies and initiatives. IGAD, for instance, has adopted an Environment and Natural Resources Strategy which 'provides a comprehensive and coherent framework aimed at guiding IGAD programmes in the area of environment and natural resources' and has 'tapped from regional and international development processes, conventions and agreements.'⁵¹ IGAD also has a climate change strategy (2023–30).⁵²

It is thus through the institutionalisation of the norm of 'Green Pan-Africanism' that African states have ensured the integration of environmental sustainability in their RECs, which also significantly differ in their design. Moreover, the institutionalisation is based on the key regional economic integration policies, thus underscoring the evolutionary nature of the process. As such, Green Pan-Africanism has been an enduring normative framework. In the next section, I show how despite a radical transformation of the regional economic regimes in Africa, Green Pan-Africanism has endured as the core normative framework that underpins how African states integrate economic and environmental policies.

Transformation: A paradigm shift in designing international economic regimes

As the third phase of the norm-governed change framework, transformation is the ultimate test of the framework. Here, and following Ruggie, the test is whether the normative framework can withstand significant changes in the *form* of the regime.⁵³ That is, the rules and procedures (form) of the regime significantly change, but the principles and norms (content) of the normative framework would remain largely the same.

In the African context, the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018 marked a major transformation of the regional economic order, as it is also a flagship project of the African Union Agenda 2063, the continent's 50-year development blueprint.⁵⁴ In underscoring its significance, Juma and Mangeni concluded that the 'post-colonial history of Africa is largely about the most complex and elaborate regional integration project undertaken in human history. It covers 55 countries with a population of more than a billion people'⁵⁵ and that AfCFTA 'promises to do for the continent's economic freedom what the formation of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in May 1963 did for Africa's decolonization and political freedom.'⁵⁶

⁵¹IGAD, 'IGAD Environment and Natural Resources Strategy' (Djibouti City, Djibouti: InterGovernmental Authority on Development [IGAD], April 2007), p. 5, available at: https://igad.igadportal.org/attachments/159_IGAD_ENR_Strategy.pdf.

⁵²IGAD, 'IGAD Regional Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2030)' (Djibouti City, Djibouti: Intergovernmental Authority on Development [IGAD], 2020), available at: <https://www.icpac.net/publications/igad-regional-climate-change-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2030/>.

⁵³Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change', p. 382.

⁵⁴AU, 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (Popular Version)' (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union Commission, 2015), available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf; Mangeni and Juma, *Emergent Africa*, p. 20.

⁵⁵Mangeni and Juma, *Emergent Africa*, p. 9.

⁵⁶Calestous Juma and Francis Mangeni, 'African regional economic integration: The emergence, evolution, and impact of institutional innovation', discussion paper, Cambridge, MA: Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs (January 2018), p. 2, available at: https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/African%20Regional%20Economic%20Integration%20-%20Final_0.pdf.

When the AfCFTA treaty was concluded, its text did not include a stand-alone chapter on the environment. This was a stark departure from precedent, and it inspired critiques from scholars and practitioners.⁵⁷ It could thus be assumed that African states had deprioritised environmental issues in the AfCFTA, but this would be inaccurate, since AfCFTA embodied a radically different design. Rather than outline environmental obligations for the diverse group of member states in a chapter in the treaty text, the designers of AfCFTA adopted a bottom-up approach where member states would integrate environmental commitments into their national plans for the implementation of the AfCFTA – also known as the National Implementation Strategies (NIS).⁵⁸ Following this approach, UNECA developed guidelines to assist the member states in doing so, including the integration of environmental and climate change issues into the NIS.⁵⁹ In many ways, this would be a novel governance approach, since it would provide African countries with the necessary flexibility to link economic and environmental issues in ways that were relevant to their national contexts.

Some African states have pioneered the inclusion of environmental commitments, including climate change, in their AfCFTA NIS. In its strategic objective to ‘reinvigorate industrial policy and its Growth at Home execution strategy for industrialization’, Namibia linked climate action to its industrial policy in its NIS: ‘Namibian industrial policy was developed in 2012. Important developments have occurred at national, regional and global levels, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. It is important to revise the 2012 industrial policy to take into account new developments.’⁶⁰ Kenya’s NIS includes the strategic objective to ‘contribute to sustainable development through mutually supportive trade and environment initiatives.’⁶¹

More explicitly, Côte d’Ivoire has linked the implementation of its NIS with that of the Paris Agreement by noting that ‘the authorities have adhered to international protocols and action plans, such as the ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994, the submission of its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the signing of the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015.’⁶² That the NIS and the NDCs are to be prepared and updated in five-year cycles provides an opportunity to innovatively link trade and climate policies, including in an adaptive and durable manner.⁶³

⁵⁷ Gerhard Erasmus, ‘Should the AfCFTA have a protocol on climate change?’ Tralac Trade Law Centre (10 January 2024), available at: <https://www.tralac.org/publications/article/16265-should-the-afcfta-have-a-protocol-on-climate-change.html>; Colette van der Ven and Landry Signé, ‘Greening the AfCFTA: It is not too late’, Policy Brief, Africa Growth Initiative, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution (September 2021), available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/21.09.15-Greening-the-AfCFTA.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Lionel Fontagné, Stephen Karingi, Simon Mevel, Cristina Mitaritonna, and Yu Zheng, ‘Greening the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement’, EPII Working Paper (Paris, France: Centre d’études prospectives et d’informations internationales, February 2024), available at: http://www.cepii.fr/PDF_PUB/wp/2024/wp2024-04.pdf.

⁵⁹ UNECA, ‘Guidelines for Developing African Continental Free Trade Area National Strategies’ (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], African Union [AU], Africa Trade Policy Centre [ATPC], April 2021), p. 6, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/43060>.

⁶⁰ GoN, ‘National Strategy for Implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (2022–2027)’ (Windhoek, Namibia: Government of Namibia, 2022), p. 47, available at: <https://www.uneca.org/afcfta-implementation-strategies>.

⁶¹ GoK, ‘Policy brief: Kenya’s national AfCFTA implementation strategy 2022–2027’ (Nairobi, Kenya: Government of Kenya, 2022), p. 3, available at: <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/48179/b12016822.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

⁶² GCI, ‘Stratégie nationale de mise en œuvre de l’Accord sur la Zone de Libreéchange Continentale Africaine [ZLECAF] Côte d’Ivoire’ (Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire: Government of Côte d’Ivoire, 2023), p. 32, available at: http://www.cnzlecaf.gouv.ci/uploads/doc/Strate%C3%ACgie_Nationale_de_mise_en_oeuvre_de_la_ZLECAF.pdf.

⁶³ Fontagné et al., ‘Greening the implementation of the African continental free trade area agreement’; Thomas Hale, ‘Catalytic cooperation’, *Global Environmental Politics*, 20:4 (2020), pp. 73–98; Thomas Hale, *Long Problems: Climate Change and the Challenge of Governing across Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024); Kennedy Mbeva, ‘Towards a green trade and investment strategy’, Policy Memo, Oxford, UK: Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford (25 April 2023), available at: https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/2023-04-25_BSG_Policy_Memo_Towards_Green_Trade_Strategy.pdf.

AfCFTA's bottom-up approach marked a paradigm shift in continental economic integration in Africa.⁶⁴ While this was a significant transformation of the regional economic regime, the normative framework of integrating environmental sustainability has endured. It can thus be concluded that 'Green Pan-Africanism' is a form of norm-governed change.

Conclusion

In this article I have demonstrated how the narrative of the making of global sustainability is incomplete, as it is mainly based on hegemonic leadership and the one-way diffusion of sustainability norms from the Global North to the South. I have shown how an alternative theoretical explanation based on 'norm-governed change' can enable us to better understand how states from the Global South have leveraged their agency and normative power to shape the global sustainability order, and also to create regional alternatives. In conclusion, and using Africa as an illustrative case study, this article underscores the need for a more expansive and inclusive narrative on the making and shaping of the global sustainability order.

Several implications follow from this conclusion. The first is epistemic: there is a need to transcend the simplistic caricature of presenting the Global South as a passive recipient, if not a saboteur, of environmental sustainability norms. While it is true that there is long-standing cooperation, where the Global North has supported the South, especially in the form of technology transfer, finance, and capacity building, it should be more appreciated that the South has advanced ideas and policies that may be useful at the global level, as well as for the Global North.

Theoretically, the focus on hegemonic power and leadership as the main driver of global sustainability governance could limit our ability to understand how less (economically) powerful leverage other forms of power – such as normative power – to pursue grand ambitions of world-making. Attempts to theorise the role of such 'weak actors' could also transcend the focus on their limited agency to the possibility that such actors can undertake grand projects of world-making. Here, the Global IR research programme is instructive.⁶⁵ Empirically, this study has suggested that there is a wealth of material, especially archival sources, that are yet to be consulted. Studies that analyse such material could broaden our understanding of the making of the global sustainability order, focusing on novel initiatives from the Global South, such as the Bridgetown Initiative for the Reform of the Global Financial Architecture.

Finally, this study has suggested that innovative sources of governance can emerge from unlikely sources.⁶⁶ As states strive to align the global economic system with environmental and climate policy goals, as well as to address the disastrous impacts of the climate catastrophe, promising examples can be found at the regional level. Engaging with and learning from such initiatives can expand the governance toolkit needed to advance global sustainability governance. It would also ensure that economic transformation and environmental sustainability, especially climate change, go together, since this is not usually guaranteed, as Okereke has poignantly reflected:

As an African scholar whose primary interest is international climate justice, I am concerned with whether the moral imperative for international climate justice for poor countries around the world (and especially in Africa) is better served by a global economic paradigm of degrowth or green growth ... environmental sustainability and social justice are not always coterminous. It is possible to imagine a world that is environmentally sustainable without social justice and a world that is socially just without being environmentally sustainable.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Mangeni and Juma, *Emergent Africa*; Mangeni and Mold, *Borderless Africa*.

⁶⁵Amitav Acharya, 'Global International Relations (IR) and regional worlds: A new agenda for international studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58: 4 (2014), pp. 647–59.

⁶⁶E.g. see Lechner and Spilker, 'Taking it seriously'; Majekolagbe and Akinkugbe, 'International investment law and climate justice'.

⁶⁷Chukwumerije Okereke, 'Degrowth, green growth, and climate justice for Africa', *Review of International Studies*, 50: 5 (2024), pp. 910–20 (p. 911).

‘Green Pan-Africanism’, and other analogous initiatives based on norm-governed change, could serve as inspirational governance models, especially in the emerging multiplex world order.⁶⁸

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000913>.

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⁶⁸ Amitav Acharya, Antoni Esteveordal, and Louis W. Goodman, ‘Reshaping global order in the 21st century: G-plus leadership in a multiplex world’, *China & World Economy*, 27:5 (2019), pp. 63–78.