



The Multilevel Governance of States and Regional Integration in Africa

Hosted by: The Centre for Federalism and Governance Studies (CFGs), Addis Ababa University

Dates: 20 – 21 October 2026

Part of the: CIDRA Project

Conference Theme

Since the end of the Cold War, Africa has undergone a profound transformation in its governance architecture. A decisive shift away from highly centralised, post-colonial states has led to the widespread adoption of multi-level government systems. This constitutional evolution has taken diverse forms. Countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Somalia have explicitly embraced federalism. Others, including South Africa and Kenya, have constructed systems that embody all the substantive characteristics of a federal polity, even while eschewing the formal label. A third group of nations, exemplified by the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Zimbabwe, have introduced significant elements of multi-level governance while formally retaining a unitary state structure.

At its core, this transition to multi-level governance represents a deliberate constitutional choice to create and safeguard an autonomous space for sub-national units. These entities—whether states, regions, or provinces—are empowered to exercise political authority over specific functional domains with minimal interference from the central government. The motives driving this continent-wide restructuring are multifaceted and deeply rooted in the quest for more legitimate and effective statehood:

- To limit the concentration of power and prevent its potential abuse by the central government.
- To create new, accessible arenas for democratic participation, deliberation, and accountability closer to the citizenry.
- To enhance the efficacy and responsiveness of public service delivery by bringing decision-making closer to the point of impact.
- To manage ethno-cultural diversity, protect minority rights, and accommodate distinct identities within a unified state, thereby fostering national cohesion and mitigating conflict.
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In pursuing these goals, African states have devolved significant political authority and financial resources to sub-national governments, fundamentally reshaping the relationship between the state and its citizens.

However, this internal restructuring is occurring in parallel with a powerful external dynamic: the deepening of regional and continental integration. African states are simultaneously ceding or pooling elements of their sovereignty as members of supra-national bodies. A nation is now not only a federation or a devolved unitary state but also a member of a complex web of regional economic communities and continental organisations. For instance:

- Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia are members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU).
- Ethiopia and Kenya are also members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)
- Kenya and Somalia are also members of the East African Community (EAC).



- South Africa is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).
- Nigeria is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

These regional organisations are not mere forums for dialogue; they are increasingly active policy-makers. Their decisions can have a direct and significant impact on domestic affairs, potentially cutting across or conflicting with the carefully calibrated constitutional division of powers within member states. This confluence of internal devolution and external integration gives rise to a series of critical, under-explored questions that form the core of this conference:

1. How do state governance systems—such as federalism, devolution, and decentralisation—shape the institutional effectiveness of sub-regional organisations in Africa?
2. How do regional economic communities and the African Union harmonise their decision-making processes and policy outputs with the diverse multi-level government systems of their member states? What mechanisms, formal or informal, exist to manage vertical and horizontal policy incoherence?
3. In the decision-making processes of regional and continental bodies, what role, if any, is played by sub-national governments? Do states, regions, or provinces have a direct or indirect say in shaping the regional norms and laws that subsequently affect their constitutionally protected powers? Are there existing platforms for sub-national diplomacy or "paradiplomacy"?
4. How do shifting landscapes of geopolitics and geoeconomics shape governance of regional and subregional organisations in Africa?
5. To what extent do regional and subregional organisations influence democratization processes in member states in Africa?
6. Role of Civil societies and media in promoting effective governance of regional and subregional organisations in Africa?
7. What comparative lessons can be drawn, particularly from the experience of the European Union (EU)? The EU's intricate system of multi-level governance, which involves regional and local actors (e.g., through the Committee of the Regions), offers a rich, though distinct, case study. How have EU member states and sub-national entities navigated the tension between integration and subsidiarity? What lessons are transferable, and what are the limits of this comparison for the African context?

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Conference Sub Themes

- Governance and regional integration
- Rule of Law, constitutionalism and (sub)regional integration
- Role of courts and the judiciary in advancing regional integration
- Regional organisations and governance of maritime access for landlocked states
- Governance of Transboundary natural resources (e.g. water)
- Shifting Global and Regional Geopolitics and Their Implications for African Regional Integration
- Energy: access and distribution
- Participation of Sub-National Governments in Regional Policy Processes
- Digital Governance and the Future of Regional and Sub-Regional Cooperation

Call for Contributions



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The Centre for Federalism and Governance Studies (CFGs) at Addis Ababa University invites members of the CIDRA project and other scholars to submit abstracts that address the conference theme outlined above. We particularly welcome papers that offer in-depth analysis of these dynamics within specific national and regional jurisdictions, as well as comparative studies that cut across different African regional economic communities or draw parallels with other parts of the world.

Key Dates & Submission Guidelines

- **Abstract Submission Deadline:** 15 May 2026
- **Full Paper Submission Deadline:** 1 October 2026

Abstracts of no more than 300 words should be submitted to Dr Zemelak Ayele and Dr Ketema Debele at zemelak.ayitenew@aau.edu.et and ketema.wakjira@aau.edu.et