

BOOK REVIEW

Trade Policy: A Handbook for African Parliamentarians; Commonwealth Secretariat, London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2001

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Parliaments play a very important constitutional and democratic role in a modern democracy. The monitoring, review and oversight functions by Parliaments form an important part of the checks and balances essential to a robust trade policy process. The trade-policy-making process covers distinct areas of policy formulation, trade negotiations, implementation and management. Parliamentarians are accountable to their constituencies, and provide a window of transparency to the general public on trade policy strategy. In addition, of course, the country's constitution articulates the role of Parliament in the domestic incorporation of international (trade) agreements. As such, the specific role of the legislature is delineated from that of the executive in the policymaking process.

Parliamentarians come from different walks of life. This means that not all will be conversant with the current global and regional trade agenda or the specific instruments that are available to governments in pursuit of the specific objectives of trade policy.

This book, *Trade Policy: a Handbook for African Parliamentarians*, provides a very useful reference guide geared specifically to parliamentarians in Africa. The Handbook starts with the basics of international trade and covers the following questions:

- Why countries trade
- How governments can influence the impact that trade has
- How Parliament can play a role in ensuring that trade negotiations reflect the development priorities of the country, and
- How parliamentarians can monitor the trade policy process, ensure that trade agreements are incorporated into domestic law, and that the benefits of the agreements are realised.

The Handbook also offers a compact course on international trade theory and policy for parliamentarians. An important contribution made by the Handbook is its review of regional trade agreements, the scope and coverage of modern

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regional trade agreements, and developments on Africa's regional integration

agenda. The Handbook is an accessible reference providing an important source of data on the various regional economic communities and the status of their trade and regional integration agendas. It deals very concisely with some of the important current regional integration challenges in Africa, including those concerning overlapping memberships of regional economic communities, the preoccupation with the linear textbook model of regional integration, and challenges associated with the implementation of regional trade agreements. The review of Africa's regional integration agenda presents parliamentarians with quality analyses that can inform their monitoring of developments in regional integration.

Another very useful contribution by the Handbook is its Glossary of Trade Terms. This collection of terms that are commonly used in trade policy debates is continually expanding as the trade agenda extends beyond the traditional scope of 'trade in goods'.

To remain relevant, however, the Handbook will have to be updated regularly. The Commonwealth Secretariat has sought to address the issue of relevance and updates by developing an online version of the Handbook. The latter is available on the Commonwealth Secretariat's website at www.thecommonwealth.org.