

The Afro-Atlantic region: Development opportunities and integration challenges

L'espace Afro- Atlantique: Opportunités de développement et défis d'intégration

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Date de soumission : 04/05/2025

Date d'acceptation : 11/06/2026

Pour citer cet article :

BEN FARAJI. B. (2026) «The Afro-Atlantic region: Development opportunities and integration challenges»,
Revue Internationale du chercheur « Volume 7 : Numéro 2 » pp : 1342-1361

Abstract

This article, entitled «The Afro-Atlantic Region: Opportunities for Development and Challenges of Integration», examines the issue of regional integration (which is so eagerly sought) and the call for integrated and sustainable development in the African countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean (23 countries). This involves conducting a study accompanied by an analysis of the broader context that defines the specific local characteristics of these countries, whether in terms of their strategic geopolitical position, the abundance of their natural and socio-political resources. The same for the complementary nature of their capabilities and human resources, while also highlighting their significant macroeconomic value, both at regional and local level and on a continental and global scale as well. Nevertheless, this potential for development faces numerous complex challenges and deep-seated systemic difficulties, particularly those relating to the Atlantic Initiative as a whole and the Nigeria–Morocco gas pipeline project more specifically. These obstacles are linked, on the one hand, to the major geostrategic shifts currently taking place in Atlantic Africa and, on the other hand, to the recurring environmental challenges (internal and external) that these 23 countries will have to face, just like other nations around the world.

Keywords : The Atlantic area, sustainable and integrated development, Atlantic initiative.

Résumé

L'article en présence, intitulé «L'espace Afro-Atlantique: opportunités de développement et défis d'intégration» débattre la question de l'intégration régionale (tant souhaitée) et la revendication pour un développement intégré et durable dans les pays Africains ayant une côte sur la façade Atlantique (23 pays). Cela consiste à mener une étude accompagnée d'une analyse du cadre général qui définit les spécificités locales desdits pays, que ce soit en termes de leur position géopolitique stratégique, de la richesse de leurs ressources naturelles et sociopolitiques, ou encore de la complémentarité caractérisant leurs capacités et leurs ressources humaines, sans oublier leur forte valeur macroéconomique, tant au niveau régional et local qu'à l'échelle continentale et mondiale également. Néanmoins, ce potentiel de développement fait face à de nombreux défis qui sont d'ailleurs complexes et à des difficultés systémiques profondes, de façon particulière celles concernant l'Initiative Atlantique dans son ensemble et le projet du Gazoduc Nigéria- Maroc plus spécifiquement. Ces obstacles sont d'une part liés aux grandes mutations géostratégiques que traverse l'Afrique Atlantique, et d'autre part, aux enjeux environnementaux récurrents (internes et externes) auxquels devront faire face ces 23 pays, tout comme d'autres nations à l'échelle mondiale.

Mots clés : L'espace Atlantique; le développement durable et intégré; l'Initiative Atlantique.

Introduction

Given the diversity of its geopolitical, geo-economic and socio-developmental subdivisions – the North (Western Europe and North America), Latin America (South America) and the South (the African continent) – the Atlantic region encompasses a vast geographical area and represents a particularly significant sphere of organisation.

It is home to numerous communities that have long been settled within its territory for a long time, particularly in the Afro-Atlantic region. This is because, in ancient times, their lands were a hub of social stability and population growth.

It is also the natural homeland of many ancient empires, civilisations, Mamluk dynasties and nations, even dating back to pre-Christian times (the Egyptian civilisation; the Kanem-Borno Empire; the Kingdom of Axum; the Kingdoms of Makuria and Ghana; the Kingdom of Kush; the Kingdom of Punt; the Kingdom of Carthage...).

Today, more than ever, the Afro-Atlantic region has become a unique strategic hub on the world stage, for a variety of reasons. These include the importance of its strategic location (maritime shipping, transport...); the availability of local skills and a relatively young workforce, the availability of cheap labour, the abundance of natural resources and underground mineral wealth, the vast length of the coastline... etc.

Despite all these available resources, this «rich » Afro-Atlantic region has not yet been transformed into a leading global political, economic and organisational power on a par with, for example, the European Union or the United States of America. At least is not yet on the way to becoming one (as is the case with certain Latin American initiatives in this regard).

All the more so as the countries of Afro-Atlantic region clearly have the capacity to achieve integrated and sustainable development goals at regional and even continental level.

Building on this rather complex analytical framework, we shall examine the various aspects of the aforementioned topic, «The Afro-Atlantic Space: Opportunities for Development and Challenges of Integration», by seeking to address the following key elements of the main research question:

- To what extent have the potential and opportunities of the Afro-Atlantic region contributed to the development of the countries in the region and to their regional and continental integration?

Methodologically, this study adopts the descriptive-analytical approach, given its capacity to examine and analyze the subject matter through its various research dimensions and different analytical perspectives.

This study is structured around two main axes. The first axis, entitled “The Specific Characteristics of the Countries of the Afro-Atlantic Region” examines, firstly, the general framework for training and the opportunities available within the Afro-Atlantic space, highlighting the human, institutional, and economic resources that contribute to development. Secondly, it explores the various intersections within the Afro-Atlantic development system, with a focus on the interactions and complementarities that characterize the region's political, economic, social, and strategic dynamics. The second axis, entitled “The Issues and Challenges Facing Afro-Atlantic Development” addresses, on the one hand, the prospects and opportunities for integration and development at regional and continental levels, emphasizing the potential for enhanced cooperation and sustainable growth. On the other hand, it analyzes the difficulties and constraints in the light of contemporary geostrategic changes, including emerging geopolitical challenges, security concerns, and the evolving international environment that shapes the future of Afro-Atlantic development.

1. The specific local characteristics of the countries in the Afro-Atlantic region

The vastness of the Afro-Atlantic region, the richness of its natural environment and the diversity of its population are what define its local characteristics, which, whilst sharing many common features, also differ in several socio-psychological aspects from one country to another. This takes into account the guidelines of the general framework in relation to the opportunities available to each individual country (**Part One**), within the context of the intersections of the Afro-Atlantic development system (**Part Two**).

1.1 The general framework for training and the opportunities available

To discuss the general context and potential of the Afro-Atlantic countries, we will first analyse the characteristics and significance of the region's geopolitical position (**first paragraph**), followed by the macroeconomic value of the Afro-Atlantic region (**second paragraph**).

1.1.1 The importance of the region's geopolitical position

Since Antiquity, African countries, particularly those bordering the Atlantic Ocean (Sea of Darkness; Ocean Sea; Atlantic Ocean), have occupied a strategically important and multifaceted position. This is reflected in their extreme significance due to their distinctive

geopolitical positioning, whether at regional, continental or even global level (Kerrouch, 2024, p. 684–686).

The Atlantic Ocean, the second-largest ocean after the Pacific, is a key strategic location where four major continents meet (Africa, Europe, North America and South America). This basin plays a major role in a wide range of fields, including demography, politics, the economy, nature, ecology and even security.

It is generally a vital hub for people from dozens of African political systems (23 in total)¹ and Europeans (14 countries)² as well as those in North America (2 countries)³ and South America (9 countries)⁴.

The Atlantic region is also home to many other communities, which settled on various islands in the Atlantic at around the same time (for example: the Bahamas; the British Isles; the Caribbean islands; the Turks and Caicos Islands; the Faroe Islands; the Cape Verde Islands...). Thus, the wider Atlantic region, with its three continental hubs (the Americas, Europe and Africa).

It appears more as a vast, imposing “intercontinental” structural vessel, encompassing a large number of governments and economies worldwide. This vessel exhibits local and regional specificities, some similar, some different whilst being composed of disparate elements.

Starting with socio-demographic, moving on to political, and ending with economic. This gives the Afro-Atlantic region, in particular, a prominent geopolitical position that is both attractive and balanced, both internally and externally, all the more so as the 23 African countries on the

¹ The countries of Atlantic Africa are: Morocco; Mauritania; Cape Verde; Senegal; The Gambia; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Sierra Leone; Liberia; Ivory Coast; Ghana; Togo; Benin; Nigeria; Cameroon; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; Congo; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Angola (Cabinda); Angola; Namibia; South Africa.

² The countries of Atlantic Europe are: Iceland; Ireland; Great Britain; Norway; Sweden; Finland; Scandinavia; Denmark; Germany; the Netherlands; Belgium; France; Spain; Portugal.

³ The countries of North Atlantic America are as follows: the United States of America (14 of whose states have a coastline on the Atlantic); Canada.

⁴ The countries of the South Atlantic are as follows: Colombia; Venezuela; Guyana; Suriname; French Guiana; Brazil; Uruguay; Argentina; Chile.

Atlantic coast account for around 46% of Africa's total population, accounting for over 55% of Africa's GDP and 57% of the value of continental free trade. Accounting for over 55% of Africa's GDP and 57% of the value of continental free trade, for example.

This gives it (that is, the Afro-Atlantic region) particular macroeconomic significance.

1.1.2 The macroeconomic value of the Afro-Atlantic region

It is no secret that the economic status of the Atlantic region, particularly at the start of the third millennium, has become increasingly significant. International interest in the Atlantic economy has grown considerably. This is part of the trend within the new generation of globalised economies known as the «ocean/blue economy generation», given their vast and valuable maritime resources, diverse investment opportunities, relatively seamless transport and mobility networks, and shared geographical ties.

According to official estimates by the World Bank, the oceans contribute 1.5 trillion \$ to the global economy each year.

Furthermore, financial experts and entrepreneurs predict that this investment figure will double by 2030, reaching over 3 trillion US dollars.

This growth is expected to stem from upcoming projects in what is now referred to as the “sustainable ocean economy sectors”, an area that could create nearly 50 million jobs for the African workforce.

Nowadays, more than ever, the Atlantic region has become a hub of maritime activity, representing a vital strategic alliance between the world's economies, whether in the north and south or the east and west.

This open space has also become a major commercial hub, both in terms of volume and quality, with the total number of transactions continuing to rise.

This is because it has become the most densely populated, socially safest and politically most stable of the three oceans, compared with the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Furthermore, the Afro-Atlantic region, which already comprises—as mentioned above—23 countries of varying sizes stretching along the Atlantic coast, constitutes a rich demographic reservoir in addition to its geopolitical strength and macroeconomic leadership. This pool accounts for nearly half of the population of the African continent, with about 46% of Africans currently residing in countries bordering the Atlantic coast.

Added to this Afro-Atlantic percentage young people (46%), who make up the vast majority. The abundance of «low cost» labour and the expansion of the consumer base are bolstering investor confidence, the recovery of the labour market and the improvement in the business climate in Atlantic Africa.

To conclude this macroeconomic section, it should be borne in mind that the region under consideration comprises six Atlantic countries that, thanks to their leadership, rank among the ten largest economies on the African continent.

It is also worth noting that these six countries alone account for around 60% of foreign direct investment. Due to the growing international interest in the Afro-Atlantic space economy, as well as the complexity of its development framework and the interplay of its various aspects across numerous vital and multi-faceted investment sectors, the Afro-Atlantic space economy has become a priority for the international community.

1.2 The various intersections within the Afro-Atlantic development system

In order to analyse the boundaries of the intersection between elements relating to the wider Afro-Atlantic development ecosystem, taking into account the conditions and requirements of regional and international markets, this sub-section will present two concise and integrated analyses. Firstly, the aim is to highlight the wealth and complementary nature of the resources and capabilities of this region (**first paragraph**), whilst secondly, we will examine the general context of the development of partnerships and agreements between Atlantic and non-Atlantic countries (**second paragraph**).

1.2.1 The wealth and complementarity of resources and capabilities

The Atlantic Ocean, along its entire continental coastline, has made a significant contribution to the economic development of the countries bordering it.

In addition to its major historical importance in securing maritime movements (people; goods; weapons) and linking countries, it also contains vast quantities of oil, natural gas, and a wide variety of underground minerals found in the sedimentary rocks of its continental shelf (shallow coastal waters).

It also holds inexhaustible reserves of gravel and sand, as well as abundant and renewable fishery resources provided by the Atlantic waters.

The deep waters off the Atlantic coast of Africa form a vast natural reservoir, harbouring significant oil and gas deposits, as well as a diverse wealth of living and non-living biological, mineral and fungal resources.

The surface and subsoil of Atlantic African countries are, for their part, rich in precious minerals, such as gold and silver, which are found in particular in Morocco, Ghana and South Africa, not to mention precious stones such as diamonds, rubies, emeralds and many others (South Africa; Namibia...) (Hebdo P, 2019, p. 8).

Furthermore, some countries in the Afro-Atlantic region are major regional, continental and global producers of minerals used in industry, such as bauxite, iron, copper and manganese (Guinea; Mauritania; Congo...). The same applies to certain new types of strategic minerals, or so-called «clean » or «alternative» minerals. These include cobalt, coltan and lithium (Democratic Republic of the Congo; Morocco...).

It is also worth noting that the World Bank, in cooperation with the African Union, has for years been seeking to support United Nations initiatives aimed at producing a modern map of Africa's mineral resources, including those in the Atlantic region.

It all began with: «The billion-dollar map» of 2014, the public budget allocated at the time to an advanced geological survey of Africa's mineral resources (Jeune Afrique website, visited: 23 April 2026).

The results of these successive studies have revealed the existence of huge global mineral reserves (85% of platinum; 80% of chromium; 75% of phosphate; 75% of diamonds; 60% of cobalt; 60% of manganese; 40% of gold; 30% of titanium; 30% bauxite...) (Al-Hatrit, 2015, p. 19).

This clearly confirms the wealth of Africa's land and waters-both across the continent as a whole and, more specifically, along the Atlantic coast-in terms of valuable known underground resources and rare, as yet undiscovered ones.

These resources possess unique magnetic and electrochemical properties (17 elements) and go by many names: rare-earth elements, minerals of the future, building blocks of new technologies, the core of new technologies, and the gold of the 21st century (BBC website, visited: 23 April 2026).

The Afro-Atlantic region also offers favourable conditions for growing a wide variety of fruit and vegetables (tomatoes; onions; citrus fruits; bananas; pineapples; mangoes; avocados; dates; figs; olives...).

As well as livestock farming, particularly of cows, sheep, goats and camels. The countries in this region are among the world's leading exporters of vegetables, thereby contributing to food security.

This is due to the availability of diverse and complementary resources, characterised by: diverse biological and ecological systems, a large land area, fertile soils, high-quality organic fertilisers, a mild climate, a constant flow of surface water, abundant and readily accessible groundwater resources, and a plentiful labour force.

In light of the above, we can say that Atlantic Africa, in particular, is rich in a wide range of natural and mineral resources (both terrestrial and marine) that hold significant potential for development.

This represents a cornerstone of the excellence sought through economic self-sufficiency across its various sectors (industry; commerce; agriculture; services...), as well as in the fields of medicine, pharmacy, renewable energy, defence, electronics and modern technology.

This has helped to foster the development of partnerships and to secure a greater number of contracts both now and in the future, at regional, national, continental, bilateral and global levels.

1.2.2 Development of partnerships and agreements between countries

Partnerships and intergovernmental agreements play a pivotal role, both organisationally and technically, in giving effect to the official will of contemporary political systems.

They serve to define and formalise their key objectives, facilitating the implementation of their short- or long-term strategies, whether public or private, regional, continental or international, temporary or permanent, bilateral or multilateral.

These are formalised partnerships (documented agreements and protocols) that often aim to: establish or develop exclusively diplomatic or thematic relations; foster cooperation; implement visions; unify external positions; achieve integration; share interests; mitigate risks; address challenges; and pursue other objectives that have been agreed upon, either in general or in relation to a specific field.

Similarly, the 23 countries of Atlantic Africa, like other countries around the world, have recently entered into a wide range of treaties and partnerships.

All aim to strengthen and consolidate regional political cohesion, strengthen economic foundations, create investment opportunities and implement joint projects in various fields and at all levels.

The aim is, on the one hand, to establish modern foundations and devise effective policies to implement the «expected» integrated and sustainable development system in the «prosperous» Afro-Atlantic region, and, on the other hand, to protect it from potential risks and threats (both internal and external).

Over the past two decades, the Afro-Atlantic region has thus been characterised by a constant stream of high-level visits, ministerial meetings, consultations and coordination forums, such as seminars, conferences, round-table discussions, workshops, open days and Communication Days...

Consequently, they have led to the formulation of unified and unifying visions of development to a certain extent, in the form of partnerships and memoranda of understanding covering various topics and areas.

Some of these agreements have already been fully implemented, whilst others are still being implemented, either partially or on a temporary basis. Other aspects of the agreements have encountered difficulties, or even setbacks, between the signatory parties.

In this analytical paper, we shall confine ourselves to citing a single example of these Afro-Atlantic partnerships, which have a very wide regional reach.

This is the most recent partnership agreement (Second Partnership Declaration No. PEAA/2023/1) concluded between the majority of the Afro-Atlantic countries (21 out of 23).

This agreement, which emerged from the third ministerial meeting of the African Atlantic Coast, held in Rabat on Wednesday 12 July 2023, sets out a new roadmap for achieving a leap forward in development and attaining the «desired» Afro-Atlantic integration.

Broadly speaking, this partnership has focused primarily on establishing peace, security and shared prosperity in the region, as well as on fostering a regional vision that is participatory, flexible, progressive and based on solidarity among member states.

It is based on three key strategic pillars. Firstly: effective political and security dialogue; secondly: a productive blue economy; and thirdly and finally: comprehensive and sustainable development.

2. The issues and challenges facing Afro-Atlantic development

Having reviewed the specific characteristics of the African countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean, with a focus on the key aspects of their regional development systems (determining factors and strengths), we shall now, in this second and final section, address the challenges and issues facing the region's development objectives.

Following a discussion of the prospects and possibilities for regional and continental integration and development (**Part One**), the text goes on to explore the various challenges and constraints in the light of contemporary geostrategic shifts (**Part Two**).

2.1 Prospects and opportunities for integration and development at regional and continental levels

The aim here is to focus on providing general and key information regarding the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI) project (**first paragraph**). Within the same analytical framework, the details of the Afro-Atlantic gas pipeline project will also be examined (**second paragraph**).

2.1.1 The Integrated Atlantic Initiative Project

We have already touched briefly upon (under the heading of Afro-Atlantic partnerships and commitments) the new strategic approach that most countries in Atlantic Africa have adopted, particularly in recent years.

This is a managerial, participatory, inclusive, consensus-based, open, supportive and forward-looking approach that aims to develop a balanced, integrated and multifaceted regional initiative which takes account of local societal differences and disparities whilst contributing to more productive, integrated and unified development prospects.

The framework agreement published by the third ministerial meeting of the African countries of the Atlantic region in Rabat, Morocco (Wednesday 12 July 2023) formed the basis for the official announcement of the adoption of the Integrated Atlantic Initiative for the benefit of African countries with an Atlantic coastline (11,000 kilometres).

A development initiative with a regional focus in terms of geographical scope (South-South), but one that is open and geared towards all global markets in terms of its target audience (a new paradigm of open cooperation) (Dzaguiss, 2024, p. 4 and 5).

It aims to achieve four key objectives of strategic priority, namely:

1. An Afro-Atlantic region that provides effective security solutions and promotes lasting stability and peace;
2. An Afro-Atlantic region that is regionally competitive in terms of production and value chains;
3. a sustainable Afro-Atlantic region capable of revitalising its social fabric, protecting its ecosystems, strengthening, preserving and digitising its green economy, and addressing its immediate challenges, foremost among which are food, water and energy security.
4. A dynamic Afro-Atlantic region that aims to ensure its member countries attract significant foreign investment and capitalise on their local products by marketing them both domestically and internationally.

At the same time, this Afro-Atlantic initiative is set to grow and expand to other countries that have expressed an interest in joining. These include countries in the regions neighbouring the south of the Atlantic (Central and coastal Africa) as well as those to the north and west of the Atlantic (Europe; America).

This led to a further technical meeting of the partners in the Atlantic Initiative (EAC) project on the sidelines of the 78th United Nations General Assembly in New York (September 2023).

That is, nearly two months after the Rabat meeting (July 2023). In a short space of time, the number of member states of this newly formed coalition and of the development project (I.E. the Integrated Atlantic Initiative) has risen from 23 at the start of the coordination process to 38 today.

This «provisional» figure is likely to rise, particularly with the admission of 15 new countries from the coasts of the other Atlantic continents mentioned above, including some major political powers in South America, such as Brazil.

Returning to the subject of the major substantive objectives set by the partners in this regional – or rather intercontinental – initiative), it can be said that it envisages a second level of «three-dimensional» development, organisational and institutional targeting, as follows:



- ❖ Promote support and coordinate transatlantic cooperation in order to strengthen the national economies of member countries (with a particular focus on hard power);
- ❖ Optimise and network political relations between project partners within and outside the region;
- ❖ Increase the value of investment partnerships and the volume of free trade;
- ❖ Consolidate an effective and unifying negotiating position for the Atlantic States vis-à-vis various international actors and powers;
- ❖ Ensure adequate funding for structured programs and projects for the benefit of countries in the Atlantic region;
- ❖ To enhance infrastructure development in line with modern international scientific and practical standards, thereby ensuring decent living conditions at the grassroots level and improving the business climate at a higher level.

2.1.2 The Africa-Atlantic Gas Pipeline Project

In the context of this document, it is more appropriate to present a concrete example of how the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI) intersects with tangible projects on the ground.

It is in this regard that we have examined the Afro-Atlantic gas pipeline project, even though it is still in its preparatory phase. This is an energy project that is long-standing in terms of its core concept (2016) but new in terms of the start of its implementation (2023).

It aims to redefine the region's pragmatic geopolitical landscape, with a new, more energy-focused macro-development framework within the Atlantic region, particularly between the South (West Africa) and the North (Western Europe).

This is a massive continental gas pipeline designed to transport Nigerian natural gas to Morocco and, from there, to European markets via the Kingdom of Spain, passing through a group of Atlantic African countries (Benin; Togo; Ghana; Côte d'Ivoire; Liberia; Sierra Leone; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Gambia; Senegal; Mauritania; Togo), and certain African coastal countries (Mali; Burkina Faso).

According to projections by economic and energy experts, this gas pipeline is expected to enhance energy security by supplying electricity to more than 440 million people, mainly across the 15 countries identified above (13+2), which are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The success of the Nigeria-Morocco gas pipeline project – a 5,660-kilometre undersea pipeline costing 25 \$ billion – can be seen as an economic and political catalyst for the development of the West African region, opening up new avenues of cooperation between the South Atlantic states in general, and between them and Morocco in particular (Morocco's regional integration within Africa) (Report on Morocco's Regional Integration in Africa, 2020, p. 20 and 21).

The aim is to achieve integration that will contribute to political stability and sustainable development in a sensitive region, one that is frequently plagued by civil wars and internal conflicts, weakened by the spread of poverty, fragility and marginalization.

From a technical perspective, the feasibility study reports, field assessments relating to environmental and social impact assessments, and the preparation of technical and topographical surveys have been completed, as has the determination of the final optimal route for the gas pipeline.

The signing of protocols, memoranda of understanding and government partnerships between the countries involved in this «long-term» intercontinental project, which is expected to be fully completed within the next 25 years in three successive phases, with a capacity of between 30 and 40 billion cubic metres per year, or an average of 3 billion cubic feet of gas per day.

However, whilst the Nigeria–Morocco/ Africa-Europe gas pipeline project, with its substantial budget, geopolitical complexity and promising development prospects, seeks to achieve the strategic objectives of the integrated Atlantic area project, both within and beyond its inner Afro-Atlantic space; yet this same gas project, still in its «embryonic» stage, continues to face complex organisational challenges.

These problems are financial in nature (a lack of genuine sources of political funding) (Jaïdi and Martín, 2018, p. 159 – 161); political disputes between some of the beneficiary countries) and structural (most of the West African countries through which the gas pipeline passes are at a medium or even low level of development). Others combine environmental and maritime concerns (for example: the potential negative impact on marine life along the Atlantic coast, where the gas pipeline is located).

2.2 Difficulties and constraints in the light of contemporary geostrategic changes

The analytical section of this article will conclude by attempting, first of all, to identify the main obstacles observed that are closely linked to the Nigerian-Moroccan gas pipeline project (**first paragraph**).

Next, the most significant systemic issues currently facing, or likely to face, the regional project known as the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI), particularly in light of current geostrategic changes (**second paragraph**).

2.2.1 Specific obstacles relating to the implementation of the Nigeria–Morocco gas pipeline project

At first glance, one might not assume that the Atlantic Intercontinental gas pipeline project which aims to link the far south, its exporter (Nigeria), to the northernmost point of the Atlantic-African region -Atlantic region, the beneficiary country (Morocco), by adopting this energy project, which is the largest in the Atlantic region.

A project that is “extraordinary” in both quantitative and qualitative terms, with considerable geopolitical significance, major strategic importance, and strong macroeconomic value.

It inspires a high degree of shared hope and legitimate ambition at various levels, both present and future, for the exporting country (Nigeria), the recipient country (Morocco), and other economies directly impacted along Africa’s Atlantic coast, the Sahel region, and even Western Europe.

However, the nature of the opportunities available and the scale of the «enormous» vision for the development of the Africa-Europe gas pipeline, bolstered by financial partnerships (Islamic Development Bank; European Investment Bank; OPEC...).

The numerous technical and environmental studies currently underway (engineering designs; feasibility studies; environmental impact assessments...) do not obscure the major problems faced by the aforementioned project since it was first announced (in 2016).

This is understandable, as the project is costly (25 billion dollars), long-term (25 years) and has a broad regulatory framework (involving more than 15 beneficiary countries).

Overall, this section has enabled us to summarise the key fundamental challenges facing this project, whilst highlighting its core objectives for the present and the future, as well as the main expected deliverables:

- Firstly, from a political perspective: there is a lack of political stability in the region, if only in certain Atlantic countries or in the coastal countries of Africa.

By exacerbating their internal situation, their transitional systems have been severely affected by the consequences of successive coups d’état and by their weak organisational, security and

military capabilities; consequently, there is a potential negative impact on the prospect of overall political stability, which could undermine the investment climate for this project (Samy, 2024, p. 12–27). Secondly, in terms of security: the center, the Sahel and the desert regions of the African continent, along with part of the western coastline (the focus of our study), have been plagued by a wave of threats and prolonged security risks for decades (Azizi, 2024, p. 139).

These include internal factors (military divisions; civil wars; popular uprisings; civil disobedience; crime; the arms and drugs trade...) and external factors such as terrorist organisations, encompassing various terrorist groups and networks (ISIS, Boko Haram....). This will destroy the infrastructure and may well spell the end of the entire project.

Thirdly, from a financial perspective: numerous thematic reports and specialist media outlets covering developments regarding the Niger-Morocco gas pipeline have repeatedly raised the issue of funding, emphasising that the project's development partners have so far made only promises of funding, without having signed any definitive contracts.

Indeed, this project requires the construction of new pipelines and gas transfer stations spanning 5,660 kilometres within the territorial waters of the Member States.

In addition to the financing challenges and technical difficulties associated with providing legal guarantees for the funding, there is also the need to identify the lead entity responsible for managing the project, to secure its contractual terms and to ensure its financial viability and technical sustainability.

- Fourthly, from an environmental perspective: The environmental dimension has recently been the focus of increased attention from the United Nations and the international community, in light of the growing environmental problems (on land, at sea and in the air) associated with the approval of these large-scale energy projects, which are extensive in both geographical scope and duration.

This is even truer when it comes to a project for an undersea liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

This has sparked intense environmental debate amongst environmentalists and numerous human rights organisations, who stress the importance of protecting natural resources and aquatic life in particular, citing the provisions and requirements of several international treaties and conventions.

2.2.2 General systemic issues relating to the success of the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI) project

As mentioned above, the group of 23 African countries situated along the Atlantic coast is working to establish a regional organisation, stretching from the north (the Strait of Gibraltar) to the south (Ras Al Raja Al Saleh), with the ultimate aim of bringing the major project of the Integrated Atlantic Initiative to fruition.

This is an ambitious development project with far-reaching implications in spatial, political, organisational and economic terms, the ultimate aim of which is to bring the major Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI) project to fruition.

For centuries, this particular region has benefited from diverse natural resources, significant geostrategic potential, a young and homogeneous population, an open local economy, a stimulating investment climate, a favourable geopolitical landscape, and a growing collective desire for unity and cooperation.

This is particularly evident following the end of the post-colonial phase of foreign colonial exploitation of the wealth and resources of these «rich/poor» countries.

However, this collective Afro-Atlantic drive for regional integration within the framework of the integrated Africa-Atlantic project – in our view – is not as easily achievable as one might imagine.

In this analytical context, it is worth noting that a number of alliances, conglomerates and unions in Africa have failed before they could even get off the ground, some of which involved countries that were members of the G23 (the Arab Maghreb Union for example).

This is, of course, a historical dialectic as ancient and complex as it is, and not merely a modern, context-dependent geopolitical issue, as one might imagine (the dialectic between proximity and belonging, for example, is not a topical issue in itself).

Apart from the risks and threats we have already mentioned in the first paragraph above regarding the obstacles to the implementation of the Nigeria–Morocco gas pipeline project (political, security, financial and technological obstacles), in this second and final paragraph we will address deeper systemic issues linked to the challenges facing the success of the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI).

Foremost among these deep-seated systemic issues is the existence of a vast macro-developmental divide between the 23 countries of Atlantic Africa, which are driving the Afro-Atlantic integration project in a sustainable manner.

There are a few economically advanced countries (Morocco; Nigeria; South Africa), and others with average economic performance (Angola; Namibia; Senegal; Ghana; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Gabon), whilst the remaining countries rank at the bottom of the continental and even global rankings, and are regarded as underdeveloped countries.

Not to mention the African coastal states as a potential integral extension of the Atlantic Africa project. These landlocked states are, in fact, experiencing extreme social insecurity, acute social fragility and excessive economic isolation (Mali; Burkina Faso; Niger; Chad).

Another issue that is no less important is the growing external debt of most, if not all, of these countries' governments.

It is worth noting that, according to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) latest annual report for 2023, Africa's debt is estimated at 1.14 \$ trillion. Debt levels doubled between 2013 and 2022 and now account for over 60% of average GDP.

Even some African countries have completely stopped repaying their external debt due to their budget deficits and the collapse of their economies. For example, South Africa, one of the countries participating in the Integrated Atlantic Initiative project, tops the list of the continent's most indebted countries, accounting for 15% of Africa's total debt.

Furthermore, even foreign direct investment (FDI) fell by 42% in 2022, due to security and political concerns.

To sum up, the countries of Atlantic Africa are in a better position in terms of economic dynamism and, to a certain extent, external debt compared with their neighbours in the East and Central regions.

This slight distinction does not detract from the fact that these 23 countries are generally characterised by persistent structural problems that continue to take a negative turn in terms of economic deficits, rising external debt, high domestic prices, rising inflation, low per capita income, and high unemployment. They are also affected by foreign interference in internal affairs, civil wars, political coups, international terrorism, organised crime, and drug trafficking.

This leads us to the following questions: How can the partners in the Integrated Atlantic Initiative (IAI) project address such obvious systemic problems? What are the limits of the guarantees that everyone, without exception, will be involved in the success of this regional geo-development project? Will this initiative be able to put the «win-win» principle into practice? How can the historical' political differences between some of these key partner countries (Morocco and South Africa, for example) be overcome?

Finally, can the Integrated Atlantic Initiative project hold its own in the competitive landscape of the major economic hubs in the Atlantic regions (Western Europe; North America; Latin America)?

Conclusion

Based on the above, it is clear that Atlantic Africa is endowed with a wide range and variety of natural resources (both terrestrial and marine) and diverse human and societal capacities. It is also rich in local characteristics that are diverse and conducive to highly effective investment.

It is also rich in diverse local characteristics that are conducive to highly effective investment. These are capable of driving the «desired» self-sustaining growth in the Afro-Atlantic region, and even beyond.

However, the 23 countries that make up this significant geopolitical space –whether at regional, continental or global level – still need, both now and in the future, to make greater joint contractual, organisational and institutional efforts, in theory and in practice.

This is necessary in order to succeed in the challenges of regional unity, cooperation and integration, and to achieve the major strategic objectives of the Integrated Atlantic Initiative as a model, both now and in the future.

Consequently, and in relation to the main question mentioned above, we were able to conclude that all the potential and opportunities available in the Afro-Atlantic region, despite their richness and abundance, have the capacity to drive the development of the region's countries and achieve their regional, continental and international integration. This is possible provided they are harnessed in a manner that is collective, based on solidarity, participatory, effective, productive and sustainable.

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