

Editorial

Letter from the Editors: Heterogeneity and Promise in Africa

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In this last issue of our three-part series examining international business in Africa, we showcase a collection of articles touching on some of the many aspects that make the continent such a fascinating context for researchers, educators, and managers. The articles focus on geopolitics, various aspects of heterogeneity within the African continent, impacts of digitization, and academic challenges related to research and teaching about Africa.

In this final installment of our three-issue series pertaining to international business in Africa, we are delighted to showcase a collection of articles touching on some of the many aspects that make the continent such an exciting context for researchers, educators, and managers interested in international business.

Africa has unique heterogeneity, on multiple dimensions that include ethnicity, language, and culture. The continent is extremely biodiverse, in terms of both flora and fauna, and many of its 54 nations (plus four dependencies) are rich in natural resources. In juxtaposition with its long, complex, and varied history – including strong influence on international trade, especially pre-industrialization – today's Africa is characterized by youth in demographic, political, and economic terms. Its population is young, most of its nation-states are in their first century, and it is home to entrepreneurial activity ranging from traditional to high-tech products and services. With projections that approximately 25% of the world's population, and 33% of the working population, will reside on the continent in 25 years, we need to understand much more about Africa and its business environment.

Complementing our two prior issues focused on Trade and Foreign Direct Investment in Africa (Newbury, Dikova, & Rose, 2026) and Sustainability in Africa (Dikova, Newbury, & Rose, 2026), the ten articles in this issue contribute to our understanding of various aspects related to the promise of Africa. The articles focus on geopolitics, various aspects of heterogeneity within the African continent, impacts of digitization, and challenges related to research and teaching about Africa.

GEOPOLITICS PLAYING OUT ON THE CONTINENT

For centuries, geopolitical machinations have seldom worked for the benefit of the continent, with Africans hav-

ing little choice to exercise. In the current strategic rivalry between China and the U.S., though, most African countries are taking the decision to align their foreign policies with those of China. In the first article in this issue, "Caught between a Rock and a Hard Place? Africa's Position in the US-China Strategic Rivalry", **Gilbert Kofi Adarkwah** (HEC Montréal, Canada), **Christopher Albert Sabel** (Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands), and **Filadina Zilja** (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark) discuss how this choice has developed, and what it means for both managers and researchers.

INSIGHTS INTO AFRICA'S HETEROGENEITY

Three of the articles in this issue consider different aspects of the heterogeneity that characterizes the continent. In "Understanding the Five Business Regions in Africa: A Guide for Enterprises", **Anna Ilina** and **Romie Frederick Littrell** (both at National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia) point out that potential investors would do well to consider the structure of the variation in Africa's business environments. Specifically, Ilina and Littrell identify five distinct regions on the continent, each with specific attributes: North Africa (manufacturing advantages), Southern Africa (financial sophistication), East Africa (digital innovation), West Africa (consumer market potential), and Central Africa (resource endowment).

Caroline Shisubili Maingi (Strathmore University, Kenya) takes a deep dive into African heterogeneity, from a sociological perspective. With a focus on East Africa, her article entitled "Bridging Cultures, Building Markets: The Socio-Cultural Key to International Business in the East African Community" considers the importance of socio-cultural factors for effective regional integration aimed at economic growth. Using the East African Community (EAC) as a context, she discusses the concept of Eastafricanness

and its implications for international business in the region.

In “Lessons to Learn from Informal and Home-Based Business in Africa”, **Karen Paul** (Florida International University, USA) addresses the importance of localization for understanding and providing advice to informal and micro-businesses (e.g., smallholder farmers and women working from home) across the continent. Noting that successful entrepreneurial practices often require substantial adaptation between locales, she argues for the importance of considering the influence of local community leaders and “wise elders”.

SUCCESS STORIES: VARIOUS IMPLEMENTATIONS OF DIGITALIZATION

Four of this issue’s articles offer insights into examples of digitalization-driven success on the continent. In “Entrepreneurial Creativity for Agricultural Transformation in Africa: Lessons for Policymakers from the Hello Tractor Case”, **Benjamin Byarugaba** (Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda) and **Ilaria Galavotti** (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Italy) introduce us to a creative, digital platform-based solution to providing smallholder farmers with access to equipment needed for mechanizing their operations, to facilitate enhanced productivity and inclusive growth.

Satyendra Singh (University of Winnipeg, Canada) addresses an alternative funding source for African entrepreneurs: crowdfunding. In “How Crowdfunding Strategies Create Ventures in Africa”, he discusses how crowdfunding has the potential to bridge the wide gap between the need to facilitate the creation and sustainable growth of entrepreneurial ventures to fuel the economic development of the continent and the lack of widespread access to credit through the formal banking system.

In “African Innovation, Global Impact: Sub-Saharan Africa’s Digital Service MNCs”, **Peter Mhando** (Pennsylvania State University, USA) uses the phenomenon of the continent’s “digital natives”, which leverage digital technologies and networks to facilitate rapid international expansion. These firms offer the opportunity for us to think differently about how international business is changing in the digital age. Mhando also discusses the importance of developing a broader ecosystem that can help these successful African start-ups to thrive on the international stage.

Marcio Amaral-Baptista (University Mohammed VI Polytechnic, Morocco) and **Daniel Rottig** (Florida Gulf Coast University, USA) discuss the case of Intelcia, a Moroccan global business process outsourcing provider with an established history of internationalization, in “Managing Institutional Complexity through Strategic Agility: The

Internationalization Journey of a Moroccan MNC”. Considering key drivers of strategic agility – strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity – the authors note that strategic agility developed at home provides a competitive advantage by enabling the multinational to manage institutional complexity and market uncertainties.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES: TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Our final two articles in this issue address challenges associated with doing research in the African context and exposing international business students to Africa-oriented content. **Max Dike** (De Montfort University, UK) discusses the gap between the copious business activity on the continent and the often-limited availability of data for international business researchers in “Data Deficit and Africa-focused IB Research and Publications”. Addressing the potential causes of this gap and its implications, he introduces some strategies to facilitate the focus on Africa as a context for international business research.

In “Addressing the Limited Use of Africa-Related Content in International Business Courses”, **Paul Beamish** (Ivey Business School, Canada) analyzes the still-limited number of Africa-focused teaching cases available for use in international business classrooms. In light of the continent’s relevance for students studying international business, Beamish argues that this situation must change, and offers suggestions drawn from published Africa-oriented research, including articles from *AIB Insights*.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We hope that you have enjoyed reading the three Africa-oriented special issues. Prior to our May 2024 focused paper development workshop in Nairobi, we had hoped to have enough material for one special issue (i.e., at least four articles). Between the papers from the Nairobi event and the ensuing open call, we are proud to have been able to publish 28 articles focusing on various aspects of international business in Africa. These articles represent the collective work of more than 50 authors, representing 16 countries, with many of the authors based outside of the continent being members of the African diaspora. We are confident that this collection of articles offers a wide variety of opportunities for international business researchers, students, and managers to learn more about the dynamic – and understudied in the IB literature – business environment of the African continent, which is poised to play an increasing role in the global economy in coming years.

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