

## Foreword

---

The Commonwealth countries of Sub-Saharan Africa constitute the largest geographical grouping within our membership. They include middle income developing countries, landlocked and island small states, and least-developed countries, bringing a remarkably diverse array of perspectives, experience and approaches to our collective endeavours.

Notwithstanding continuing development challenges, Africa is widely regarded as a ‘rising continent’, rich in people, resources and opportunities. To unlock even more of the vast economic potential of this great continent, governments in Africa are working together to implement ambitious plans for continental integration, industrialisation and infrastructure development. The adoption of the African Union’s *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want* marks a major step towards realising the vision of a united, peaceful and prosperous continent.

The 18 African countries which have chosen to be members of the Commonwealth already make an immense contribution through their links with one another, and through the multiplicity of links they enjoy with Commonwealth countries spread across every continent and ocean. This includes building on Commonwealth advantage to facilitate trade and boost investment. Commitment to our Commonwealth Charter values of transparency in administration and high standards of probity upheld by the common law — on which international law is based — together with similarity of institutions of governance and administration, greatly ease co-operation and commerce among our member countries. Our inclusive approach leads the Commonwealth to be a strong advocate for deepening regional economic integration, particularly as a pathway towards delivering inclusive social progress, economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The Commonwealth Secretariat provides policy support and technical assistance to member countries and Regional Economic Communities (RECs), strengthening capacity to formulate, negotiate and implement regional trade policies and agreements, and enabling greater benefits to be drawn from expanded and new market opportunities.

The Hub and Spokes Project, jointly delivered by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the European Union, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Secretariat, also provides long-term capacity-building support to Sub-Saharan African countries and the RECs to promote deeper and more effective regional integration.

Strengthening African integration is indispensable for achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals. This publication is therefore both timely and topical, and provides a ready reference guide to the dynamics, opportunities, challenges and policy options associated with Africa's regional integration agenda. Our hope is that this handbook will be of practical assistance to policymakers, parliamentarians, the private sector, academia and civil society, as well as to the wider public, as we work together to advance and achieve the objectives of *Agenda 2063*.

**The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC  
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth**