

Foreword

As Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa, I am delighted to support this important edited collection. It provides us with a number of timely reflections on the direction of travel of UK–Africa relations since the election of the Coalition Government in 2010. In doing so, it builds on some of the key findings of a seminar series on ‘British Africa policy after Labour’, which concluded with a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in June 2016. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa supported this series and the book provides a rich and complex account of the dilemmas and tensions shaping recent British engagement with Africa. The analysis covers both a range of different actors including political parties and non-governmental organisations and policy areas including aid, trade and peacekeeping. As such, it represents an original and important contribution that will be of interest to both scholars and policymakers alike.

The individual chapters engage with a coherent set of important questions, framed by the editorial team, which focus on the drivers and power dynamics underpinning contemporary UK engagement with Africa. Given the recent work done by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa in our 2017 report on the future of Africa–UK trade and development cooperation, it is pleasing to see how this book addresses these issues from a number of perspectives.

The domestic context within which UK policymakers are currently operating is unpredictable given the result of the Brexit referendum. This has provided an opportunity to ask important questions about what kind of trade relationship with the UK might best serve African development in the future. Two of the chapters in this collection offer some important insights in this respect. First, a consideration of the developmental impacts of a continuation of the existing EU scheme of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African sub-regions leads to the conclusion that they will perpetuate colonial patterns of trade. By contrast, there is also analysis of the ongoing work of UK civil society organisations which support a more progressive alternative to the reciprocal free trade that is central to EPAs.

Although the book focuses in the main on UK policy towards Africa, it also acknowledges that across a number of different policy spheres African actors are

able to exert varying degrees of agency in the relationship. For example, in the realm of trade it is clear that African countries are far from passive recipients of policy and they will be able to draw important lessons from their experience of negotiating EPAs with the EU.

UK–Africa relations also need to take account of the changing global context where we see a range of players, including India and China, taking a much greater interest in what is a diverse continent. As this book effectively demonstrates, UK engagement with Africa has taken on a more pragmatic tone in recent years. With Africa’s population predicted by the UN to increase to 2.5 billion by 2050, this book makes a convincing case for the UK to rethink where Africa features within the hierarchy of its foreign policy agenda.

Lastly, the book provides some thoughtful reflections on the perceptions of Africa that shape the public imagination. One can only hope that this collection stimulates wider self-reflection among a range of UK actors upon the need for new ways of thinking about and engaging with Africa.

Chi Onwurah, MP
Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Africa