Regional Integration and Cooperation

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1. **Definition**
   - The process by which neighboring countries coordinate policies and reduce barriers to trade, movement, and cooperation.
2. **Forms of Integration**
   - **Free trade areas**: reduced tariffs between members.
   - **Customs unions**: common external tariff plus free internal trade.
   - **Common markets**: free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor.
   - **Political/monetary unions**: shared currency or political institutions (e.g., the EU).
3. **Benefits of Regional Integration**
   - Larger combined markets, economies of scale, improved bargaining power globally, and shared infrastructure investment.
4. **Challenges to Integration**
   - Unequal benefits between member states, sovereignty concerns, and differing national priorities can slow or derail integration efforts.
5. **African Examples**
   - The East African Community and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represent major regional integration efforts aiming to boost intra-African trade.