

# African Union Strategies for Extracontinental Trade Cooperation: Prospects for Symmetric Future Partnerships

Frederick Boamah\*

## ABSTRACT

The African Union (AU) plays an important role in shaping the continent's economic development by managing its intra - and extracontinental trade relationships. This is premised on the need to integrate Africa's economy into global markets and value chains, serving as a catalyst for building sustainable trade relations. To this end, the AU's comprehensive economic development policies, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and Agenda 2063, serve as a blueprint for the AU's vision of Africa's trade cooperation. This paper examines how

the AU implements these blueprints through its strategies to anchor relationships with extracontinental blocs and states. This is crucial because AU member states have concurrent extracontinental trade arrangements and partnerships that could hinder the AU's vision. Using a qualitative framework, this paper analyses AU strategies for extracontinental trade cooperation and symmetric partnerships. Through a critical examination of existing literature and AU member states case studies, the paper argues that the AU must adopt a proactive role in shaping extracontinental trade relationships to ensure that bilateral agreements align with

---

\* PhD. University of Ghana (Ghana). [fboamah@ug.edu.gh]; [<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4646-8595>]

Received: June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025 / Modified: September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025 / Accepted: October 2<sup>th</sup>, 2025

To cite this article:

Boamah, F. (2025). African Union Strategies for Extracontinental Trade Cooperation: Prospects for Symmetric Future Partnerships. *Oasis*, 43, 93-119.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18601/16577558.n43.05>

both the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063. By doing so, the AU can promote symmetrical trade partnerships and enhance Africa's economic development and prosperity. The paper offers valuable insights into AU's role in redefining trade relations across the continent. It recommends that the AU, through the AfCFTA Secretariat, be involved in member states' trade negotiations to provide continental expertise. Additionally, the AU should establish a team of experts to review and revise member states' trade agreements to align them with the objectives of the AU.

**Keywords:** Africa Union; China; European Union; United States; Partnerships; Extracontinental; AfCFTA, AGOA

## **Estrategias de la Unión Africana para la cooperación comercial extracontinental: perspectivas para asociaciones simétricas futuras**

### **RESUMEN**

La Unión Africana (UA) desempeña un papel fundamental en la configuración del desarrollo económico del continente, mediante la gestión de sus relaciones comerciales intra y extracontinentales. Esto se basa en la necesidad de integrar la economía africana en los mercados y cadenas de valor

globales, actuando como catalizador para la construcción de relaciones comerciales sostenibles. En este sentido, las políticas de desarrollo económico integral de la UA, incluida el Área de Libre Comercio Continental Africana (AfCFTA, por sus siglas en inglés) y la Agenda 2063, sirven como hoja de ruta para la visión de la UA sobre la cooperación comercial del continente.

Este artículo examina cómo la UA implementa estas directrices a través de sus estrategias para afianzar relaciones con bloques y Estados extracontinentales. Esto es crucial, dado que los Estados miembros de la UA mantienen acuerdos y asociaciones comerciales extracontinentales simultáneos que podrían obstaculizar la visión de la organización. A partir de un enfoque cualitativo, el artículo analiza las estrategias de la UA para la cooperación comercial extracontinental y las asociaciones simétricas.

Mediante un examen crítico de la literatura existente y de estudios de caso de Estados miembros de la UA, se sostiene que la organización debe adoptar un papel proactivo en la configuración de las relaciones comerciales extracontinentales para garantizar que los acuerdos bilaterales se alineen tanto con la AfCFTA como con la Agenda 2063. Al hacerlo, la UA puede promover asociaciones comerciales simétricas y fortalecer el desarrollo y la prosperidad económica de África. El artículo ofrece valiosos aportes sobre el papel de la UA en la redefinición de las relaciones

comerciales en todo el continente. Se recomienda que la UA, a través de la Secretaría de la AfCFTA, participe en las negociaciones comerciales de los Estados miembros para aportar experiencia a nivel continental. Además, la UA debería establecer un equipo de expertos que revise y actualice los acuerdos comerciales de los Estados miembros para alinearlos con los objetivos de la organización.

**Palabras clave:** Unión Africana; China; Unión Europea; Estados Unidos; asociaciones; extracontinental; AfCFTA; AGOA.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized economy, countries must be able to access global markets and value chains to reap the benefits of international trade and investment (Qiang *et al.*, 2021). For African nations, seizing the opportunities presented by this globalized world economy is crucial for achieving global economy integration. Despite the efforts to integrate into the global economy, Africa is still considered to be positioned at the lower end of achieving symmetric integration (Nigusie & Mohammed, 2020). As of 2019, the continent represented only 2.6 percent of world trade. Projections indicate that Africa's share of global trade will remain below three percent in 2024 (UNCTAD, 2018; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2024).

Due to its marginal position in the global economy, Africa has developed

various policies and strategies to enhance its economic development through improved trade relationships. Towards this end, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) initiated several programs aimed at achieving sustainable economic growth in Africa, including the 1980 Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Final Act of Lagos. Building on this foundation, the OAU launched initiatives like the LPA and the Final Act of Lagos, which ultimately led to the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) (Shumba, 2023). Although the implementation timelines were not fully met, these efforts were not without success, as they laid the groundwork for current blueprints of the African Union (AU) (Shumba, 2023). These programs sought to address the continent's socio-economic challenges by mobilizing its human resources to promote development.

Additionally, when the AU replaced the OAU in 2002, it included in its mandate the acceleration of socioeconomic integration across the continent, the creation of conditions necessary for Africa to assume its rightful role in the global economy, and the fostering of integration among African economies (African Union, 2002; Article 3(c)(i)(j)). To achieve these goals, the AU also launched various programs to promote sustainable economic growth in Africa. One such program was the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which was adopted in 2002. The NEPAD was designed to promote sustainable growth and development

by emphasizing trade and investment, thereby enhancing opportunities for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Badi-ru, 2016). Despite facing challenges, the NEPAD successfully established global partnerships with both industrialized and developing countries, as well as multilateral organizations (AUDA-NEPAD, 2021).

Building on these initiatives, the AU introduced several broad policy frameworks such as the Africa Mining Vision, Agenda 2063, Boosting Intra-Africa Trade (BIAT), the African Commodities Strategy and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (African Union, 2025). From these initiatives, Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA have received the most attention due to their perceived impact. Adopted in 2015, Agenda 2063 outlines a strategic framework for the AU over the next 50 years (African Union, 2025). To achieve Aspiration 1, which envisions “A prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development,” the AU aims to create a transformed African economy characterized by sustainable and inclusive economic growth, economic diversification, and resilience. The AU also aims to advance in Science, Technology, and Innovations (STI) through manufacturing and value addition (African Union, 2015). The AfCFTA, operationalized in 2021, is one of Agenda 2063’s flagship projects. It is designed to accelerate intra-African trade and enhance Africa’s position in the global market by strengthening its collective voice and policy influence in

international trade negotiations (African Union, 2025).

Despite the positive outlook for implementing the AU’s strategic plans to improve Africa’s competitiveness, these plans must contend with the existing bilateral and multilateral trade commitments of its member states. Trade arrangements, such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Interim EPAs with the EU, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) with the United States of America (USA) and the various free trade agreements with China, are designed to provide African countries with preferential market access, aid and investment (European Commission, 2025; Okafor, 2024). However, many of these agreements, which are often promoted for their concessions, tend to produce asymmetric benefits (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). As a result, African countries often encounter significant challenges and imbalances in trade. The varying standards of these trade negotiations with African countries by their external partners undermine the AU’s regional integration and trade cooperation efforts, often yielding asymmetric outcomes (Krapohl & Huut, 2020).

Asymmetrical extracontinental trade arrangements involving AU member states lead to a decrease in intraregional trade. This hinders the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 visions of the AU (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). Given the asymmetric outcomes produced by these existing relations in the past, the AU’s vision may not be realized without

concrete efforts to align these member states' extracontinental relations with the AU's vision for regional integration and economic development. As AU members have committed to the AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, their economic agreements with other nations must align with the AU's overarching goals of economic integration and growth. Many of these existing trade and investment arrangements predate the AU's comprehensive economic development strategies, so the AU must examine their strategies to align them with its vision.

This paper argues that the AU's ability to achieve its trade objectives relies on aligning the existing bilateral and multilateral agreements of its member states with its broader trade framework. However, the AU currently lacks a clear structure for integrating these arrangements, which creates uncertainty about whether they should coexist, be phased out, or be standardized for compliance. This ambiguity raises questions regarding the AU's ability to enforce its trade policies in the context of extracontinental relationships. This paper explores the AU's approach to enforcing its trade policies in the extracontinental trade relationships of member states, examining how it can ensure alignment with its overall trade goals.

The paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to achieve its objectives. It explores existing literature and case studies regarding trade agreements between AU member

states and key foreign partners and trading blocs. First, it discusses the overarching economic goals outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA. Next, it introduces and explains some theories of regional integration and international trade. Then, it examines the extracontinental trade relationships of AU member states, highlighting the associated challenges and negative outcomes. Finally, the paper explores the proactive steps the AU must take to ensure that the extracontinental trade partnerships of its members contribute to the continent's primary economic goals, thereby facilitating the realization of its strategic visions. Ultimately, the paper offers valuable insights into how the AU can adopt a more proactive stance in redefining its members' trade relationships to foster African economic development and prosperity.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

This paper proposes how the AU can align its members' international trade agreements with the AU's regional economic development goals through its objective of fostering economic integration. To this end, this section of the paper provides insight into the theories surrounding regional integration and international trade. Specifically, it seeks to answer the questions of why countries agree to regional integration and why countries engage in international trade.

Theories of integration in international relations seek to explain why countries collaborate to build a more connected and cooperative global community. These theories include federalism, functionalism, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism, among others (Suska, 2025). Federalism involves forming a supranational entity in which member states cede part or all of their sovereignty for collective benefits. This aligns with the original aspirations of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Muammar Gadhafi, who envisioned a United States of Africa (Woldegiorgis, 2025).

According to functionalism, integration occurs through the phenomenon of “spill-over,” whereby cooperation in one area creates a demand for cooperation in others. This approach trusts member states to unite globally through specialized institutions (Suska, 2025). Neofunctionalism extends this idea, emphasizing the role of non-state actors and social interests in pushing for full political integration, driven by non-state actors and social groups rather than just member states (Woldegiorgis, 2025). Intergovernmentalism, on the other hand, argues that national governments are the primary actors in integration and use regional integration to advance their economic and security interests (Towobola & Bamisaye, 2023).

These theories shed light on why states cooperate through regional organizations, highlighting the complex interplay between economic, security,

and ideological factors that drive such collaboration. The AU is an intergovernmental institution that pursues national interests within an integration framework (Woldegiorgis, 2025). National interests appear to be the main driving force behind integration, cloaked in Pan-Africanism (Woldegiorgis, 2025). Therefore, African integration can be attributed to the role of national leaders seeking gains through integration.

International trade theories provide insights into why countries engage in global commerce. These theories can be broadly categorized into traditional, classical, and modern frameworks (Pineda, 2025). Mercantilism is a traditional and nationalistic approach to trade that emphasizes state regulation and centralization of economic activities. This theory advocates for maximizing exports and minimizing imports, viewing trade as a zero-sum game in which one country's gain is another's loss. The ultimate goal is to achieve a trade surplus, where exports exceed imports (Bharat *et al.*, 2023).

In contrast, classical theories, such as Adam Smith's theory of absolute advantage and David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, offer a more nuanced understanding of international trade. Absolute advantage refers to a country's ability to produce goods or services more efficiently and at a lower cost than others using the same resources (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). By specializing in their trade, countries can benefit from increased efficiencies and improved production methods (Pineda,

2025). However, the absolute advantage theory has limitations, as some countries may excel in producing multiple goods. Comparative advantage provides a solution to this. Comparative advantage occurs when a country can produce a product more efficiently than other goods, leading to specialization and trade (Pineda, 2025).

Modern trade theories offer additional perspectives on international trade. The Heckscher-Ohlin theory posits that countries rich in capital, natural resources, or labour will specialize in producing goods that utilize these abundant factors. This could potentially benefit them while harming countries that have scarce resources (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022; Pineda, 2025). The Product Life Cycle Theory explains how new products evolve through stages of development, impacting comparative advantage and trade patterns as products mature and production shifts to lower-cost countries (Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). Other modern theories, such as the gravity model of trade, the theory of national competitive advantage, and the Country Similarity Theory, further enhance the understanding of global trade dynamics (Pineda, 2025; Jerzy & Oleksandr, 2022). Understanding these frameworks enables governments and businesses to develop informed policies and strategies to navigate the complexities of international trade and promote economic growth and development.

Most African countries individually exhibit a comparative advantage in

exporting primary goods (Yuni, 2023). Increased intra-African trade is based on current comparative advantage patterns. However, Yuni (2023) argues that traditional international trade theories predominantly reflect a Western perspective, often overlooking the African context. To optimize the AfCFTA, Yuni (2023) proposes that African countries collaborate to create comparative advantages among themselves. This would involve strategically allocating limited resources to specific products and expanding markets across national borders, ultimately enhancing regional trade performance.

#### THE AU'S AGENDA 2063 AND AFCFTA: TOWARDS ECONOMIC SYMMETRIES

The AU aims to foster economic integration and development and alleviate poverty across the continent. To this end, the AU has implemented Agenda 2063 and established the AfCFTA. These strategic frameworks are designed to stimulate socioeconomic transformation by encouraging intra-African trade, fostering economic cooperation among member states, and improving the continent's competitiveness on a global scale (Selelo, 2024; Githui, 2025). The AU intends to strengthen Africa's position in the global market and accelerate sustainable development by facilitating trade and collaboration among member states.

"Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" inaugurated in 2013 by African heads of state and government, was a response

to the realization that the objectives outlined in the AU's Constitutive Act were still largely unmet (Kapyata, 2021). This Agenda is built around seven aspirations, each with various goals and priorities, and features a 10-year implementation plan (African Union, 2024a). A central vision of Agenda 2063 is for Africa to emerge as a global economic powerhouse characterized by inclusive and sustainable economic and social outcomes (Githui, 2025). To advance economically, the AU envisions "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" (African Union, 2015a). This vision aims to ensure a high standard of living, enhance the quality of life, and promote the well-being of all citizens. The AU seeks to increase productivity, transform African economies, boost their competitiveness, and develop the continent's human and social capital through education and skills training in science and technology (African Union, 2015b). The AU's goal is for its member states to rank among the top countries in terms of quality of life by 2063, with the continent's GDP reflecting its population and natural resources share (African Union, 2015a).

Agenda 2063 highlights that achieving economic development in Africa requires the promotion of industrialization, infrastructure development, human capital development, financing and investment, and greater regional integration (Githui, 2025). Currently, many African nations depend heavily on exporting raw materials and

primary commodities to remain economic viable. In response, the AU aims to transition the continent's economic framework from one dependent on raw material exports to one that prioritizes industrialization, with a focus on manufacturing, technology, and innovation (African Union, 2015a). This shift is intended to position the continent as a competitive player in industrial sectors and drive the growth of its member's economies.

To enhance both internal and external connectivity and trade, Agenda 2063 recognizes that infrastructure is fundamental for economic development (Githui, 2025). Therefore, it proposes improvements and the establishment of transport networks, energy production, and information and communication technologies among countries (African Union, 2015a). These enhancements are designed to facilitate the movement of people, goods, and services, ultimately boosting trade, investment, and productivity.

To ensure the successful implementation of Agenda 2063, the AU has established institutional frameworks and flagship projects. These initiatives focus on key areas such as infrastructure, education, science, technology, and economic integration. Notable projects include the Integrated High-Speed Train Network, the development of an African Commodities Strategy, the implementation of the Grand Inga Dam Project, the Annual African Economic Forum, and the AfCFTA (African Union, 2025). Each AU member state is



expected to adapt and integrate these projects and frameworks into their national policies and development programs to achieve the economic goals outlined in Agenda 2063 (Githui, 2025).

The AfCFTA is a flagship initiative of Agenda 2063. This agreement was established in Rwanda in March 2018 and came into force on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. However, Actual trading under its regulations began on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The AfCFTA is the world's largest free trade area, in terms of both member states and scope (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025). The AfCFTA aims to create a unified continental market for goods, services, business opportunities, and investment to transform African economies and position the continent as an emerging powerhouse in the global trade landscape (World Bank, 2020). If successfully implemented, the AfCFTA is projected to increase Africa's income by USD\$459 billion by 2035, while also adding USD\$76 billion to the income of the global market. Furthermore, the agreement is expected to boost the continent's exports by USD\$560 billion, primarily through increased manufacturing rather than relying solely on raw material exports (World Bank, 2020).

The AfCFTA achieves its goals through a series of protocols that encompass tariff concessions, customs cooperation, mutual administrative assistance, and the elimination of technical barriers to trade (Mustapha, 2020). These protocols to the Agreement Establishing the AfCFTA also include

those concerning the procedures for settling disputes among member states regarding their transactions under the Agreement, as well as protocols concerning investment, intellectual property rights, and competition policy (African Union, 2025). Additionally, the AfCFTA utilizes essential instruments to manage its operations, including cooperation on rules of origin, the monitoring and removal of non-tariff barriers, a digital payments system, and a trade observatory dashboard (Mustapha, 2020). However, for these measures and protocols to be effective member states must adopt unified positions in their trade negotiations with external trade partners, in line with the AfCFTA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025).

The AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA offer a transformative vision for Africa's economic future. By promoting economic integration, encouraging industrialization, and enhancing infrastructure development, the AU aims to position the continent as a competitive player on the global stage. Successfully implementing these initiatives could drive sustainable development, boost trade, and improve the quality of life for African citizens. To achieve these benefits, it is crucial for member states to effectively incorporate the principles of Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA into their national trade policies. This integration should occur both in their interactions with other African countries and in negotiations with foreign trade partners,

to ensure a cohesive and strategic approach to regional and global trade.

#### CASE STUDIES OF EXISTING EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE RELATIONSHIPS OF AU MEMBER STATES

African countries conduct more trade outside the continent than they do among themselves. In 2023, approximately 84 percent of Africa's trade, amounting to US\$1.07 trillion, was with non-African partners (Mauritius Commercial Bank, 2025). Most of Africa's extra-continental trade is with China, the EU, and the US, with a growing amount of trade with India. While African nations do benefit financially from these partnerships, the power dynamics often remain imbalanced, placing African countries at a disadvantage (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

Collectively, the EU serves as the primary trading partner for African nations and represents their largest export market (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). In 2023, the EU accounted for 26% of Africa's imports and 15% of its exports, resulting in a total trade volume of €467.2 billion (European Council, 2025). Furthermore, the EU was the leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, with an investment stock valued at €238.9 billion (European Council, 2025). Beyond traditional trade and investment, the EU has established financial programs across African nations to support education and human development, promote peace,

security, and conflict prevention, advance digitization, and address climate change challenges (European Commission, 2022).

Initially, the EU established unilateral trade preferences with African countries under the Lomé Convention, which was initiated in 1975. However, this agreement was deemed incompatible with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules due to its discriminatory nature against non-African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) developing countries (Fasan, 2018). To address this issue, the Cotonou Agreement replaced the Lomé Convention and introduced Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) aimed at fostering reciprocal trade relations. The EU commenced negotiations on EPAs with various African regional blocs, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Mével *et al.*, 2015). By the end of 2014, negotiations for all regional EPAs were concluded. However, the agreements with the ECOWAS and the EAC are still pending adoption (European Commission, 2020).

In subsequent years, the AU has sought to consolidate individual country agreements into a single continental agreement to promote a unified trade policy and mitigate fragmentation (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). Nevertheless, challenges arise as some countries have not endorsed the EPAs negotiated by their respective blocs. This has led to the signing of Interim Economic

Partnership Agreements (IEPAs) with individual countries, which complicates the AU's efforts. Ghana is a case in point, which entered into an IEPA with the EU in 2016 (EPA Secretariat, 2022). Currently, the European trade framework in Africa delineates a clear division between different African regions, creating policies that segment the continent into separate market access systems for exports to Europe (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This trade model includes EPAs with 15 countries, the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) with Cape Verde, the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) with five countries, and the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, along with Most-Favored Nation (MFN) terms applicable to certain countries within ECOWAS, EAC, and SADC, all aimed at promoting economic integration and cooperation (Luke & MacLeod, 2023; European Commission, 2025; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2018).

Furthermore, trade arrangements between the US and African countries primarily operate under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This program offers a nonreciprocal trade preference that allows for duty-free access to the US market for most exports from eligible sub-Saharan African countries. AGOA has contributed to the growth of South Africa's automotive sales in the US, increased Ghana's non-oil exports, and boosted Mozambique's sugar exports (Luke, 2023). In 2024, exports from African

countries under the program totalled USD\$8 billion (Congressional Research Service, 2025). AGOA has been in effect for over twenty years and is set to expire in September 2025 (Bhonsle, 2025). With the proposed tariffs by the Trump Administration, however, there is a likelihood of a suspension of the program (Bhonsle, 2025).

On the other hand, trade relations between Africa and China have significantly increased since 2000, and China is now Africa's second most important trading partner. China has trading partnerships with countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, and Ghana (The Africa Report, 2025). In 2023, China accounted for 16% of Africa's imports and 15% of its exports (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Most of Africa's exports to China consist of iron ore, refined copper, crude oil, and aluminium ore. Meanwhile, China remains the primary source of manufacturing imports for Africa (Oyintarelado, 2024; Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

China is seeking to unilaterally grant all products from developing nations zero-tariff market access (Okafor, 2024). Consequently, China's trade model with African countries offers duty-free, quota-free (DFQF) market access for the least developed countries to export specific goods to China without incurring customs duties or quantitative restrictions (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). In 2024, at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China committed to investing USD\$51 billion

in Africa while also eliminating tariffs for 33 African countries (Okafor, 2024). Unlike its previous zero-tariff policy, which primarily applied to low-value, unprocessed commodities, the new zero-tariff policy grants zero tariffs on 100% of products for all 33 countries (NTU-Centre for African Studies, 2025). This policy took effect in December 2024.

A significant aspect of Africa's trade relationship with China is China's substantial role in financing infrastructure development and providing affordable energy to promote industrial growth and competitiveness in African countries (Oyintarelado, 2024; Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This is primarily facilitated through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multitrillion-dollar international infrastructure and economic development program designed to promote the flow of goods, investment, and people (Potts, 2023). Since its launch in 2013, the BRI has invested hundreds of billions of dollars in constructing bridges, ports, highways, power plants, and telecommunications projects across Asia, Latin America, parts of Europe, and Africa (Gan & McCarthy, 2023). As of 2023, 53 African nations were participating in the BRI, with African countries receiving USD\$21.7 billion in BRI deals that year, including investments in ports, railways, and renewable energy (de Kluvier, 2024). Notably, the BRI financed the construction of Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway and the

expansion of Zimbabwe's Kariba Hydro-electric Power Station (France-Presse, 2024).

In addition to China, many African countries also maintain trade relations with the United Kingdom (UK). These arrangements largely replicate the pre-existing EU trading agreements following the UK's departure from the EU (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). The UK has finalized its version of the EU's EPA with 29 African countries. Additionally, in 2025, the UK's development finance institution, British International Investment, partnered with Ghana International Bank to boost trade in seven African countries by investing USD\$50 million to lend to local businesses in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia, Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Ekanem, 2025). This investment aims to help these countries import essential commodities and equipment, thereby scaling up their operations and increasing trade (Ekanem, 2025).

The extra-continental trade relationships of African countries with partners such as the EU, UK, China, and the US significantly impact their economies, accounting for a substantial portion of Africa's trade. While these relationships offer financial benefits and growth opportunities, they also pose challenges, including imbalanced power dynamics and dependence on external markets.

#### CHALLENGES ARISING FROM EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE RELATIONS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES

While extracontinental trade with the EU, US, UK, and China offers African countries financial advantages, it also comes with challenges. Many of these trade agreements result in asymmetric benefits that put African nations at a disadvantage (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). These arrangements create issues such as imbalanced power dynamics and increased dependence on external markets.

Despite being Africa's largest trading partner, the EU accounts for merely 2.2% of Africa's trade (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Beyond the significant disparity in trade volume, the EU's trade agreements and policies with Africa also create imbalanced power dynamics (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). The EU's trade arrangements, including the EPAs, the GSP, GSP+, Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements, and MFN terms, fragment the continent into multiple trade programs with different terms for each country. This piecemeal approach prevents African countries from presenting a united front in trade negotiations, as each country is subject to different terms and conditions. For instance, EPAs are offered to 15 countries, GSP to five countries, and GSP+ to just one country (Luke & MacLeod, 2023; European Commission, 2025; UNCTAD, 2018). The EU's tailored approach to trade agreements, designed to serve its own economic interests, poses a

challenge to African countries and the AU in articulating a cohesive economic vision and negotiating effectively.

Prior to the EPAs, African countries had preferential trade arrangements with the EU, which provided them with unilateral, non-reciprocal market access to EU markets (Third World Economics, 2017, p. 10). Under these arrangements, they received duty-free and quota-free market access to the EU. The EPAs, however, introduced a new paradigm based on reciprocal trade liberalization, requiring African countries to open their domestic markets to EU imports in exchange for EU market access (Krapohl & Huut, 2020). The aim of the EPA negotiations was to promote economic liberalization in Africa and increase access for European companies to African markets. This, however, has had devastating consequences for some African economies. Cheap and subsidized EU products have flooded the market, stifling growth in key sectors such as industry and agriculture (Third World Economics, 2017, p. 10). Evidence from Ghana's implementation of an interim EU deal supports this notion, as Ghana's once-vibrant tomato and poultry sectors are struggling due to an influx of inexpensive imports from EU member states. In 2023 alone, the Netherlands exported USD\$65.7 million worth of poultry meat to Ghana, while Italy regularly dumped tinned tomato paste into the country (Langan, 2024). Overall, EPAs seem to benefit European companies more than African nations

by opening African borders to European production rather than enhancing the economies of African nations.

Similar to the EU, the US is also a major contributor to Africa's international trade and has achieved notable successes. US trade relations with African countries bear similarities to Africa's trade agreements with the EU. Both the US and the EU have established trade divisions that differentiate countries north and south of the Sahara. Specifically, African nations located north of the Sahara are ineligible for the AGOA, meaning that only sub-Saharan African countries can participate in this program (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

A major concern with AGOA is its unilateral nature, which allows the US to suspend countries that fail to meet its requirements (Congressional Research Service, 2025). This discretionary power has been criticized for prioritizing US geopolitical interests over economic development in Africa (Omiunu, 2023). For instance, in 2023, the US government suspended the Central African Republic, Gabon, Niger, and Uganda from its list of countries eligible for market access under AGOA, citing gross violations of internationally recognized human rights (Omiunu, 2023). According to Omiunu (2023), this action aimed to pressure Uganda to change its stance on LGBTQ rights in order to maintain its access to the US market, rather than to protect fundamental human rights. The US' unilateral power regarding countries that rely heavily on AGOA can significantly disrupt a

nation's economy. Ethiopia experienced this firsthand when it was suspended in 2022 due to a serious human rights crisis stemming from its civil war in the Tigray region (The Reporter(Ethiopia), 2025). The suspension led to the exit of 18 companies, resulting in the loss of over 11,500 jobs and a combined revenue loss of USD\$45 million (The Reporter(Ethiopia), 2025).

The unilateral nature of AGOA makes its future uncertain, since upon expiration, it can only be saved by the intervention of the US Congress. This uncertainty creates a significant challenge for African countries that rely heavily on AGOA, because they have limited control over the program's continuation. AGOA is set to expire on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, unless the US Congress intervenes (Bhonsle, 2025). Currently, the program's future is uncertain due to President Trump's "America First" agenda and the imposition of new tariffs (Bhonsle, 2025).

Simulations conducted by Britz *et al.* (2025) suggest that AGOA's expiration would significantly harm certain economies, including Madagascar, Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, and Malawi. The sectors most vulnerable to these effects are projected to be wearing apparel, leather products, and other manufacturing industries. Nevertheless, this development could prompt African nations to reassess their trade policies, prioritizing regional trade and strengthening domestic industries (Bhonsle, 2025; Britz *et al.*, 2025). This

shift also presents an opportunity for African countries to align their trade policies with the AU's objectives and leverage the AfCFTA framework to promote regional collaboration and economic integration (Britz *et al.*, 2025).

Unlike other African trade partners, who often use generalized systems and approaches, China prioritizes bilateral arrangements. China assists African nations in meeting Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) regulations facilitating exports to the Chinese market (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). Despite this structure of bilateral trade, African countries primarily export raw materials, such as fuels, ores, and metals to China. Manufactured goods comprise less than 4% of their exports. In contrast, manufactured products account for 16% of Africa's total imports, primarily from China (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). These bilateral structures have significantly benefited China, while African markets are flooded with Chinese machinery, technology, electronics, textiles, and other manufactured goods, including contaminated and counterfeit items, particularly medicines (Ondja'a & Ebissemietie, 2023). China has done very little to address the issue of contaminated and counterfeit goods reaching African markets. Furthermore, Chinese exports to Africa have placed African producers at a disadvantage, particularly in the textile sector, where local manufacturers struggle to compete with cheaper Chinese imports (Ondja'a & Ebissemietie, 2023).

In addition to China's announcement of a zero-tariff policy at the 2024 FOCAC, there was a USD\$51 million investment in Africa (Okafor, 2024). This investment raises questions about China's true intentions. Instead of focusing on broader economic development or infrastructure projects that could benefit African countries, the investment is specifically aimed at securing access to critical minerals (Whitehouse, 2024). This suggests that China's primary goal may be to facilitate its own access to Africa's natural resources rather than to support African development (Whitehouse, 2024).

This is particularly evident in Zimbabwe, where Chinese firms now control all operational lithium mines in the country (Mapuranga, 2025). China's investment under its 2025 pledge does not appear to prioritize the development of better infrastructure to boost economic growth in African nations. It also does not focus on enhancing mining infrastructure or refining capabilities to add value to African minerals. Rather, the main goal appears to be facilitating the extraction and export of these resources by China (Whitehouse, 2024). While China's investment may offer some short-term benefits, African countries must carefully consider whether these benefits align with their long-term development goals and priorities.

Moreover, China's BRI with African countries has brought constraints on African countries and their economies.



One major concern is debt sustainability, with many African countries experiencing a growing debt burden due to loans from China (Calabrese, 2025). For instance, Kenya owes China more than USD\$8 billion for its Standard Gauge Railway, which cost USD\$5 billion under the BRI with China (France-Presse, 2024). Another concern with the BRI projects is their lax environmental standards and negative social impacts, with issues like deforestation, habitat destruction, water pollution, displacement of local communities, and lack of adequate compensation surrounding them (Shieh *et al.*, 2021). China's primary goal in launching the BRI is not to help African nations bolster their infrastructure for economic growth; rather, it seeks to extend its influence and strengthen its global economic and political presence by establishing connections in as many countries as possible (Wong, 2023). This situation raises concerns about potential economic coercion, where foreign governments might feel pressured to align with China's agenda or risk losing their investments, which would ultimately stifle the economic progress of African nations (Wong, 2023).

The UK's trade relationship with African countries largely mirrors the EU's arrangements, with a notable shift towards financial investments rather than direct trading (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This relationship, however, poses challenges for African nations. The Stringent sanitary and phytosanitary

(SPS) restrictions imposed on African agricultural products hinder their competitiveness against UK imports (Royal African Society, 2020). Additionally, the UK's push for African countries to sign Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has led to pressure on these nations to prioritize bilateral deals over regional economic bloc decisions. Countries like Kenya, Ghana, and Cameroon have faced threats of losing preferential access to the UK market if they don't sign Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) with the UK, potentially undermining regional integration efforts (Royal African Society, 2020).

Thus, the extracontinental trade relationships of African countries with major trade partners are marked by significant asymmetries, with African nations often receiving disproportionate benefits in the long term (African nation receive more benefits than expected? I suggest changing the word benefits, since benefits means positive results) while their foreign trade partners progress economically. These trade arrangements, often structured to serve the interests of external partners, have led to imbalanced power dynamics, increased dependence on external markets, and stifled economic growth in key sectors. The experiences of African countries under these trade agreements highlight the need for a more equitable and sustainable approach to international trade, one that prioritizes African economic development and integration.



## PROMOTING AFRICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS AND AU STRATEGIES IN EXTRACONTINENTAL TRADE

Given the asymmetries and challenges plaguing Africa's trade relationships with foreign partners, a unified approach is crucial for African countries to safeguard their interests. The AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA offer a framework for collective action with clearly defined objectives. This section examines proactive measures the AU can take to align extracontinental trade partnerships with the continent's economic goals, ultimately advancing its strategic visions and promoting sustainable development.

A significant issue with the foreign trade deals involving African countries is how these agreements categorize countries on the continent into different divisions, enforcing various trade deals and tariff regimes. This problem is particularly pronounced with the EPAs and the AGOA, which notably exclude Northern African countries. For the AU's economic development objectives under Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA to be successful, African countries need to present a united front during trade negotiations with foreign partners (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2025). The current practice of individual African countries incorporating AfCFTA objectives into their national legislation is not enough, as they remain vulnerable to foreign pressure and coercion. To achieve a unified voice in negotiations, the AU must ensure

that AfCFTA Secretariat representatives participate in discussions when African countries engage in foreign trade arrangements.

AU representation is crucial for protecting African economic interests and achieving the continent's development goals. By having AfCFTA representatives at the negotiation table, the AU can ensure that its economic objectives serve as a benchmark during these discussions. This approach helps protect African countries from asymmetric trade deals that favor external partners at the expense of local economies, much like the EU's approach. The EU manages its member countries' trade policies and negotiates agreements on their behalf (European Union, 2025). It recognizes that presenting a unified voice enhances its influence in international trade negotiations, compared to individual member states acting alone (European Union, 2025). With AfCFTA representation, the AU can advocate for a cohesive African stance in trade negotiations and promote more equitable and beneficial agreements for the continent.

The AU has significant potential as a negotiating power on behalf of its 55 members (Cascais, 2023). However, internal contradictions and limitations hinder its effectiveness. Unlike the EU, the AU lacks binding powers, and its organs do not have absolute authority (Staeger & Fagbayibo, 2024). Consequently, member states thus often prioritize their national interests over collective AU goals, which impedes

AU's ability to negotiate effectively on their behalf. States typically adhere to treaty obligations when they align with their interests, rather than out of a sense of obligation, hindering the effective implementation of AU treaties (Edodi & Ahimbisibwe, 2024). Reconciling national and regional interests is challenging and complicated due to the diverse political ideologies and interests of member states (Zanaku, 2022). Consequently, the AU's role as a spokesperson and negotiator for Africa's dealings with external partners is often compromised (Akokpari & Bimha, 2020). The presence of AU representatives from the AfCFTA generally helps balance national and regional interests in negotiations with foreign partners. However, due to organizational limitations that make it difficult for them to challenge authority, these bureaucrats often yield to member state leaders' preferences (Welz, 2019).

Another limitation on the AU's unified negotiation power is its lack of effective instruments of compulsion to enforce unified positions among member states (Akokpari & Bimha, 2020). The AU's intergovernmental nature prioritizes member state sovereignty over supranational authority, preventing it from imposing binding decisions. Unlike the EU, the AU's framework doesn't grant it the power to enforce compliance, as member states prioritize national sovereignty (Staeger & Fagbayibo, 2024). Maluwa (2024) argues that AU legal instruments require amendment to grant it more supranational

authority, which would allow it to better represent its members in external negotiations.

Speaking with one voice, not only protects African interests but also provides countries with the solidarity needed to resist coercion from foreign partners in trade relations. Knowing they have the backing of the entire continent empowers African nations to stand firm in their policies. This collective strength can then be used to negotiate more favourable trade agreements that prioritize African development goals and promote economic integration.

Another benefit of AfCFTA representation in the negotiation processes is ensuring that any trade agreements reached do not jeopardize AU strategies aimed at promoting intra-African trade. This representation enables African countries to negotiate for duty-free and quota-free market access, along with non-reciprocal access to foreign markets for goods and services, for a specified period (Luke & MacLeod, 2023). This differs from the current reciprocal arrangements practised by certain African trading partners, like the EPAs with the EU. Moreover, such a comprehensive trade deal would apply to all African nations not just a select few, as is with AGOA. This shift would enable African countries to focus less on competing against each other for foreign trade and more on seeking trading opportunities within the continent, in line with the goals

of Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA (Luke & MacLeod, 2023).

Furthermore, AfCFTA representation should extend beyond trade agreements to include investment proposals and negotiations with foreign countries. AU representation can ensure that foreign investment initiatives do not solely prioritize oil and mineral extraction, common in projects like China's BRI, but rather emphasize significant investments in agriculture, industry, and manufacturing. This approach is consistent with the AU's objectives outlined in Agenda 2063, which aim to increase agricultural productivity, prioritize industrialization, and promote technology and innovation (African Union, 2015).

As the AU pursues these objectives, it should consider the work of RECs and ensure that their policies and agreements align with the AU's overall goals. AU member states have existing trade agreements with foreign countries that were signed under the auspices of the RECs to which they belong, and these agreements may clash with AU trade policies. To address this, Dawar & Limpimile (2020) suggest integrating and unifying laws and policy frameworks across overlapping memberships to align with the AU's broad agenda. Gumede (2021) proposes a mutually reinforcing relationship between the AfCFTA and REC structures, with the possibility of absorbing REC structures into the AfCFTA. However, this would require significant time and effort to resolve numerous political issues

(Gumede, 2021). Another potential solution is for RECs to gradually give more space to the AfCFTA in negotiations with extra-continental bodies and superpowers (Gumede, 2021). This would enable the AfCFTA to speak with a unified voice, promoting Africa's collective interests more effectively.

In future extra-continental trade negotiations, the AU must be present with the relevant African countries to enforce its objectives and safeguard the interests of its members. However, many member states have already entered into foreign trade agreements without AU representation, leading to arrangements that have often placed them at a disadvantage. The AfCFTA Secretariat needs to harness a team specializing in reviewing and revising the trade arrangements of its member states, gradually transitioning and renegotiating them to ensure compliance with AU objectives and avert disproportionate benefits that would put its members at a disadvantage.

Aligning state-level economic agreements and foreign relations with the AU's economic integration goals is crucial for maximizing collective benefits and ensuring sustainable development. The AfCFTA has shown promise in boosting economic growth and reducing poverty, with intra-African trade growing by 3.2% to USD\$192.2 billion in 2023 (African Union, 2024b). By removing trade barriers, the AfCFTA is expected to increase GDP by up to USD\$3 trillion by 2030 (Ajewumi *et al.*, 2024). Collective action can help countries

tackle economic challenges, promote peace and stability, and drive economic growth and development that benefits all member states (Ajewumi *et al.*, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Africa's economic development depends on successfully implementing the AU's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA. These initiatives aim to increase intra-African trade and economic integration. Many member states, however, have existing bilateral trade agreements with foreign countries that operate outside these frameworks, resulting in asymmetric partnerships that often prioritize external interests over African needs. Despite the financial benefits brought by partnerships with the EU, China, the US, and the UK, these arrangements frequently lead to unequal benefits that put African countries at a disadvantage. To address this issue, this paper proposes that the AU takes proactive measures to align extracontinental trade partnerships with the continent's economic goals. Specifically, the AU should ensure that AfCFTA Secretariat representatives participate in trade negotiations with foreign partners to protect African economic interests and development goals. This unified approach would enable African nations to negotiate more equitable agreements. Furthermore, AfCFTA representation should extend to investment proposals, prioritizing investments that align with AU objectives in sectors such as agriculture, industry,

and manufacturing. The AfCFTA Secretariat should also review and revise existing trade arrangements to ensure they align with AU objectives. This will prevent disproportionate benefits that disadvantage member states and promote a more sustainable and equitable trade framework for Africa. Adopting this approach would strengthen Africa's position in global trade and accelerate its economic development and integration.

## REFERENCES

- African Union (2015, September). *A shared strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development & a global strategy to optimize the use of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans* (Framework Document). African Union. <https://africanunion2063.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/AGENDA-2063-PDF.pdf>
- African Union (2015, January 31). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. African Union. [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063\\_popular\\_version\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_en.pdf)
- African Union (2024, December 22). *Decade of accelerated implementation: Special edition for the launch of the second ten-year implementation plan 2024-2033*. African Union. [https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/43517-wd-Agenda\\_2063\\_Decade\\_of\\_Accelerated\\_Implementation\\_Draft6.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/43517-wd-Agenda_2063_Decade_of_Accelerated_Implementation_Draft6.pdf)

- African Union (2024, September 19). *Significant progress on AfCFTA implementation highlighted at the Conference of Speakers of Parliament*. PAP Pan-African Parliament. <https://pap.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2024-09-19/significant-progress-afcfta-implementation-highlighted-conference-s#:~:text=According%20to%20Afreximbank%20data%2C%20intra-African%20trade%20grew%20by,of%20the%20agreement%20even%20amid%20global%20economic%20challenges.%E2%80%9D>
- African Union (2025, May). *Flagship projects of Agenda 2063*. African Union. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/flagship-projects>
- African Union (2025, May 26). *The African Continental Free Trade Area*. African Union. <https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area>
- African Union (2025, May 17). *Trade and industrial development*. African Union. <https://au.int/en/trade-and-industrial-development#:~:text=The%20AU%20initiatives%20in%20the%20trade%20sector%20are,economies%20of%20scale%20of%20a%20continental%20wide%20market>
- Ajewumi, O., Afolabi, J., & Joe-Akunne, I. (2024). Regional trade agreements and economic integration in Africa: assessing the impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 23(3), 2783-2801. <https://wjarr.com/content/regional-trade-agreements-and-economic-integration-africa-assessing-impact-african-continental-free-trade-area-afcfta>
- Akokpari, J., & Bimha, P. (2020). The African Union as an interlocutor in European Union-Africa relations? In T. Haastrup, L. Mah, & N. Duggan (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*. Routledge.
- AUDA-NEPAD (2021, November 18). *Assessing NEPAD achievements after 20 years: Perspectives and challenges*. AUDA-NEPAD African Union Development Agency. <https://www.nepad.org/news/assessing-nepad-achievements-after-20-years-perspectives-and-challenges>
- Badiru, I. (2016). NEPAD and foreign direct investment in Africa. *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 15-31. [https://www.academia.edu/36186146/NEPAD\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Direct\\_Investment\\_in\\_Africa#loswp-work-container](https://www.academia.edu/36186146/NEPAD_and_Foreign_Direct_Investment_in_Africa#loswp-work-container)
- Bharat, V., Sharma, S., Sehgal, S., & Jakhar, B. (2023). Literature review on theories of international trade and policies behind modern world trade. *Journal of Indonesian Applied Economics*. 11(2), 75-83. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373602489\\_Literature\\_Review\\_on\\_Theories\\_of\\_International\\_Trade\\_and\\_Policies\\_Behind\\_Modern\\_World\\_Trade](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373602489_Literature_Review_on_Theories_of_International_Trade_and_Policies_Behind_Modern_World_Trade)
- Bhonsle, J. (2025, May 7). *Impact of Trump's tariffs & suspension of AGOA on African countries*. Marine Insight. <https://www.marineinsight.com/maritime->

- law/impact-of-trumps-tariffs-suspension-of-agoa-on-african-countries/
- Britz, W., Olekseyuk, Z., & Vogel, T. (2025). *Killing AGOA softly? The impact of Trump's tariffs for sub-Saharan Africa*. IDOS Policy Brief. [https://www.idos-research.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdfs/publikationen/Policy\\_Brief/2025/PB\\_9.2025.pdf](https://www.idos-research.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/publikationen/Policy_Brief/2025/PB_9.2025.pdf)
- Calabrese, L. (2025, May 27). *The Belt and Road Initiative: What impact on China and the global economy?* Economics Observatory. <https://www.economics-observatory.com/the-belt-and-road-initiative-what-impact-on-china-and-the-global-economy#:~:text=The%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20lies%20at%20the,governance%2C%20debt%20sustainability%2C%20and%20social%20and%20environmental%20of>
- Cascais, A. (2023, May 25) Is the AU failing in its role as a mediator? *DW*. <https://www.dw.com/en/is-the-african-union-at-risk-of-failing-in-its-role-as-a-mediator/a-65730521>
- Congressional Research Service (2025). *African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGO)*. Congress. [https://www.congress.gov/crs\\_external\\_products/IF/PDF/IF10149/IF10149.24.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF10149/IF10149.24.pdf)
- Dawar, K., & Lipimile, G. (2020). Africa: Harmonising competition policy under the AfCFTA. *Concurrences*, 2, 242-250. [https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/journal\\_contribution/Africa\\_harmonising\\_competition\\_policy\\_under\\_the\\_AfCFTA/23475890?file=41215680](https://sussex.figshare.com/articles/journal_contribution/Africa_harmonising_competition_policy_under_the_AfCFTA/23475890?file=41215680)
- de Kluvier, J. (2024, July 24). *Africa has much to gain from a more contained BRI*. Institute for Security Studies. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-has-much-to-gain-from-a-more-contained-bri#:~:text=China%E2%80%99s%20Belt%20and%20Road%20Initiative%20%28BRI%29%20has%20gained,incl%20investments%20in%20ports%2C%20railways%20and%20renewable%20energy>
- Edodi, S., & Ahimbisibwe, F. (2023). Challenges of deepening political commitment and long-term legitimacy in West African integration and the future of ECOWAS. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 1-22. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2024.2420465#abstract>
- Ekanem, S. (2025, March 5). *7 African countries secure \$50 million trade deal from UK finance body*. Business Insider Africa. <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/7-african-countries-secure-dollar50-million-trade-deal-from-uk-finance-body/elyzlj8>
- EPA Secretariat (2022). *Handbook on Ghana-EU EPA: A comprehensive guide to exporters*. CCIFI.ORG. [https://aws-a.medias-ccifi.org/fileadmin/ghana/user\\_upload/COMPETE\\_GHANA\\_HANDBOOK.pdf](https://aws-a.medias-ccifi.org/fileadmin/ghana/user_upload/COMPETE_GHANA_HANDBOOK.pdf)
- European Commission (2022, March 8). *International partnerships*. European Commission. <https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/global-europe-neigh>

- bourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument\_en
- European Commission (2025, May 28). *Access2Markets*. European Union. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/generalised-scheme-preferences-plus-gsp>
- European Commission (2025, May 17). *Economic partnership agreements*. European Commission. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/economic-partnership-agreements-epas>
- European Council (2025, May 14). *EU-African relations*. European Council. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-africa/>
- European Union (2025, May 31). *Trade: Towards open and fair world-wide trade*. European Union. [https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/trade\\_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20is%20responsible%20for%20the%20trade%20policy,international%20trade%20negotiations%20than%20each%20individual%20member%20would.](https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/trade_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20is%20responsible%20for%20the%20trade%20policy,international%20trade%20negotiations%20than%20each%20individual%20member%20would.)
- Fasan, O. (2018, March 19). *EU-Africa trade relations: Why Africa needs the economic partnership agreements*. The London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2018/03/19/eu-africa-trade-relations-why-africa-needs-the-economic-partnership-agreements/>
- France-Presse, A. (2024, September 1). 5 key Chinese 'Belt and Road' projects underway in Africa. *Voice of Africa*. <https://www.voanews.com/a/key-chinese-belt-and-road-projects-underway-in-africa/7767507.html>
- Gan, N., & McCarthy, S. (2023, October 16). China is celebrating a decade of the Belt and Road Initiative. What is it about? *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/16/china/china-bri-explainer-xi-jinping-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Githui, F. (2025, February). *Agenda 2063 and its impact on the economic development of Africa*. ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389279917\\_Agenda\\_2063\\_and\\_its\\_Impact\\_on\\_the\\_Economic\\_Development\\_of\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389279917_Agenda_2063_and_its_Impact_on_the_Economic_Development_of_Africa)
- Gumede, V. (2021). The African Continental Free Trade Agreement and the future of regional economic communities. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 39(1), 1-14. [https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1080%2F02589001.2020.1852198?\\_tp=eyJ-Jb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InBIYmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InBIYmxpY2F0aW9uIn19](https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1080%2F02589001.2020.1852198?_tp=eyJ-Jb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InBIYmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InBIYmxpY2F0aW9uIn19)
- Iyorkhegh, M. (2024, February 14). *UK and Nigeria sign trade and investment partnership deal*. Voice of Nigeria. <https://von.gov.ng/uk-and-nigeria-sign-trade-and-investment-partnership-deal/#:~:text=The%20UK%20government%20has%20signed%20an%20Enhanced%20Trade,unlock%20new%20opportunities%20for%20UK%20and%20Nigerian%20businesses.>



- Jerzy, S. & Oleksandr, O. (2022). International trade theories and decision-making areas in the field of development strategy. *WSEAS Transactions on Business and Economics*, 19, 521-530. [https://wseas.com/journals/author\\_page.php?Author=Stadnicki+Jerzy](https://wseas.com/journals/author_page.php?Author=Stadnicki+Jerzy)
- Kapyata, D. (2021). A critical review of the African Union Agenda 2063 and its implementation strategies. *International Journal of Law, Humanities & Social Science*, 5(2), 1-10. <https://ijlhss.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/1-IJLHSS-05-21-14.pdf>
- Krapohl, S., & Huut, S. (2020). A missed opportunity for regionalism: The disparate behavior of African countries in the EPA negotiations with the EU. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(4), 565-582. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/07036337.2019.1666117?needAccess=true>
- Langan, M. (2024, July 2). *How Euro-African free trade deals hit African economies and stimulate migration*. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/how-euro-african-free-trade-deals-hit-african-economies-and-stimulate-migration-179055>
- Luke, D. (2023, November 16). WEF- How has AGOA benefited African countries? *AGOA.info*. <https://agoa.info/news/article/16430-wef-how-has-agoa-benefited-african-countries.html>
- Luke, D., & MacLeod, J. (2023). *Global and regional order: A new trade deal for Africa, please!* Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/international/20258.pdf>
- Maluwa, T. (2024). Constructing African Union law and rethinking supranationalism in African integration: What lessons from the European Union? *International Organizations Law Review*, 21(2), 335-374.
- Mapuranga, R. (2025). *China tightens grip on Zimbabwe's lithium resources, securing key mineral for global energy transition*. Mining Zimbabwe. <https://miningzimbabwe.com/china-tightens-grip-on-zimbabwes-lithium-resources-securing-key-mineral-for-global-energy-transition/>
- Mauritius Commercial Bank (2025). *Trade report 2025: The true potential of Africa lies in trading with itself*. MCB Group. <https://mcbgroup.com/think/article/trade-report-2025-intra-trade>
- Mevel, S., Valensisi, G., & Karingi, S. (2015, May 12). *The economic partnership agreement and Africa's integration and transformation agenda: The cases of West Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa Regions* (Conference Presentation). 18th Annual Conference on Global Economic Analysis, Melbourne, Australia. [https://www.gtap.agecon.purdue.edu/resources/res\\_display.asp?RecordID=4754](https://www.gtap.agecon.purdue.edu/resources/res_display.asp?RecordID=4754)
- Mustapha, A. (2020). Nigeria and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement Area (AfCFTA): Issues, challenges and prospect. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 7(2), 237-249. <https://journals.scholarpu->



- blishing.org/index.php/ASSRJ/article/view/7698#:~:text=Mustapha%2C%20A.%20H.%20.%2C%20%26%20Adetoye%2C%20D.%20.,,Social%20Sciences%20Research%20Journal%2C%207%20%282%29%2C%20237%E2%80-%93250.%20https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.14738%2Fassrj.72.7698
- Nigusie, A. A., & Mohammed, A. (2020). Africa in the global economy: Between integration and marginalization? *Bandung Journal of the Global South*, 7(1) 24-51. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340251058\\_Africa\\_in\\_the\\_Global\\_Economy\\_Between\\_Integration\\_and\\_Marginalization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340251058_Africa_in_the_Global_Economy_Between_Integration_and_Marginalization)
- NTU-Centre for African Studies (2025, January 28). *China grants full duty-free access to 33 African countries*. Nanyang Technical University. <https://www.ntu.edu.sg/cas/news-events/news/details/china-grants-full-duty-free-access-to-33-african-countries>
- Okafor, C. (2024, December 2). *China has initiated a free-trade policy with 33 African countries*. Business Insider Africa. <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/china-has-initiated-a-free-trade-policy-with-33-african-countries/7xtgww>
- Omiunu, O. (2023, November 6). *US suspends four countries from AGOA: Reassessing the human rights trade nexus*. Afronomics Law. [https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/analysis/us-suspends-four-countries-agoa-reassessing-human-rights-trade-nexus#:~:text=The%20US%20Government%20announced%20on%20October%2030th%20that,under%20the%20African%20Growth%20and%20Opportunity%20Act%20%28AGOA%20](https://www.afronomicslaw.org/category/analysis/us-suspends-four-countries-agoa-reassessing-human-rights-trade-nexus#:~:text=The%20US%20Government%20announced%20on%20October%2030th%20that,under%20the%20African%20Growth%20and%20Opportunity%20Act%20%28AGOA%20de-nexus#:~:text=The%20US%20Government%20announced%20on%20October%2030th%20that,under%20the%20African%20Growth%20and%20Opportunity%20Act%20%28AGOA%20)
- Ondja'a, A., & Ebissemitie, K. (2023). Trade between China and 45 African Countries: Does the gravity model matter? *Journal of Sino-African Studies*, 2(3), 1-23. <https://sino-africanstudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Trade-between-China-and-45-African-countries-does-the-Gravity-Model-matter.pdf#:~:text=Ondja%E2%80%99a%20Abeng-Abe%2C%20C.%20J.%2C%20%26%20Ebissemite%20Kisso%2C%20E.,a%20little%20over%20one-third%20of%20the%20world%27s%20total.>
- Oyintarelado, M. (2024, April 2). *10 charts to explain 22 years of China-Africa trade, overseas development finance and foreign direct investment*. Global Development Policy Center. <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2024/04/02/10-charts-to-explain-22-years-of-china-africa-trade-overseas-development-finance-and-foreign-direct-investment/>
- Potts, C. (2023). What is China's belt and road initiative? *Michigan Journal of Economics*. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mje/2023/10/23/what-is-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>
- Pineda, M. (2025, March 4). *The major theories of international trade*. Profolus. <https://www.profolus.com/topics/>

- the-major-theories-of-international-trade/
- Qiang, C., Liu, Y., & Steenbergen, V. (2021). *An investment perspective on global value chains*. World Bank Publications.
- Royal African Society (2020, November). *UK-Africa trade after Brexit: Challenges and opportunities*. Royal African Society. [https://royalafricansociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RAS\\_UK-Africa-Trade-After-Brexit-V3.1.pdf](https://royalafricansociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RAS_UK-Africa-Trade-After-Brexit-V3.1.pdf)
- Saurugger, S. (2023). Grand theories of integration: Neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism. In S. Faure, & C. Lequesne (Eds.), *The Elgar companion to the European Union* (pp. 13-26). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Selelo, S. (2024). Promoting Intra-African trade through Agenda 2063 to accelerate continental economic growth for sustainable development. *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development*, 185-193. <https://oidaijsd.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/17-12-15-03-FRA-24-SS.pdf>
- Sharma, A., & Cyrill, M. (2024, November 26). India-South Africa bilateral trade and investment. *India Briefing*. <https://www.india-briefing.com/news/india-south-africa-bilateral-trade-and-investment-35221.html/>
- Shieh, S., Chow, L., Zhong, H., & Yue, J. (2021). *Understanding and mitigating social risks to sustainable development in China's BRI: Evidence from Nepal and Zambia*. ODI.
- Shumba, W. (2023). Towards the African economic community: Legal and historical perspectives. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 26(1), 1-32. <https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.17159/1727-3781/2023/v26i0a15609>
- Staeger, U., & Fagbayibo, B. (2024, March 5). The African Union is weak because its members want it that way-experts call for action on its powers. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/the-african-union-is-weak-because-its-members-want-it-that-way-experts-call-for-action-on-its-powers-224191>
- Suska, M. (2025). Integration theories: A review of selected political and economic concepts. *International Journal of Management and Economics*, 61(2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.2478/ijme-2024-0035>
- The Africa Report (2025, February 7). *Infographic: Who are China's top trading partners in Africa?* China Global South Project. <https://chinaglobalsouth.com/analysis/infographic-who-are-chinas-top-trading-partners-in-africa/>
- The Reporter(Ethiopia) (2025, February 15). Ethiopia loses 11,500 jobs, foreign companies following AGOA suspension. *AGOA.info*. <https://agoa.info/news/article/16543-ethiopia-loses-11-500-jobs-18-foreign-companies-following-agoa-suspension.html>
- Third World Economics (2017, July 1-15). *How EPAs can undermine African agriculture*. Third World Network. <https://twn.my/title2/twe/2017/pdf/644.pdf>

- Towobola, O., & Bamisaye, O. (2023). The ECOWAS regional integration agenda: A model-based assessment. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, 7(1), 425-439.
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2018). *Generalized system of preferences: List of beneficiaries*. United Nations. [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/itcdtsbmisc62rev7\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/itcdtsbmisc62rev7_en.pdf)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2025). *Advancing the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area: Proposing transformative strategic actions*. UN Economic Commission for Africa. <https://www.uneca.org/economic-report-on-africa-2025>
- Welz, M. (2019). Reconsidering lock-in effects and benefits from delegation: The African Union's relations with its member states through a principal-agent perspective. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(1), 1-20.
- Whitehouse, D. (2023, September 5). FO-CAC: China's Africa focus shifts from debt, infrastructure to mining. *The African Report*. <https://www.theafricareport.com/360649/focac-chinas-africa-focus-shifts-from-debt-infrastructure-to-mining/>
- Woldegiorgis, M. (2025). Theoretical arguments for regional integration: A perspective on African idiosyncrasies. In A. Freytag, & A. Oduro (Eds.), *Prospects for regional integration in Africa: A comparative perspective* (pp. 103-124).
- Wong, T. (2023, October 17). Belt and Road Initiative: Is China's trillion-dollar gamble worth it? *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-67120726>
- World Bank (2020, July 27). The African Continental Free Trade Area. *World Bank Group*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area>
- Yuni, D. (2023). Theories of international trade: Perspectives from Africa. In E. Ilioh, E. Aniche, & S. Azom (Eds.), *African political economy in the twenty-first century* (pp. 37-53). Lexington Books.
- Zanaku, A. (2022). *What is your perspective of regional political integration in West Africa and the possible challenges?* (In-person interview). ECOWAS.

