

**Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article**

# Overcoming Barriers to Intra-African Trade: The Role of AfCFTA in Dismantling Colonial Crop Legitimacy, Shipping Constraints, and Transportation Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is designed to enhance trade between African nations by eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers. Despite its potential benefits, intra-African trade remains low, with a substantial portion of Africa's imports originating from outside the continent. This review investigates the obstacles to intra-African trade, such as colonial-era cash crop legacies, shipping constraints, and transportation challenges, and proposes strategies to overcome them. These strategies include streamlining border procedures, simplifying customs processes, and harmonizing regulations, which can decrease trade costs and enhance the ease of doing business within the continent. The literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of existing research on African trade barriers, identifying key issues and proposing potential solutions. A historical overview of African trade reveals a multifaceted narrative influenced by geographical elements, cultural exchanges, and external influences. Regional trade agreements, such as South Africa Development Community SADC, the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, and East Africa Community EAC, aim to promote economic integration and cooperation, but their effectiveness varies. The consequences of trade barriers on African economies and intra-African trade have been widely studied, revealing the complex impact they have on economic growth. The numerous trade agreements in Africa have created a complex web of overlapping regulations and trade arrangements, making trade facilitation more challenging and creating uncertainty for businesses operating within the region. Simplifying customs processes, harmonizing regulations, and streamlining border procedures can significantly reduce trade costs and improve the ease of doing business within the continent.

## 1. Introduction

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a promising initiative designed to bolster intra-African trade by eradicating tariff and non-tariff barriers. This framework

has been lauded for its potential to boost economic growth and development on the continent (Ansong, 2018; Bakouan & Ouedraogo, 2022; Okechukwu & Chikata, 2018; AfDB, 2012). However, it is crucial to critically examine the ongoing challenges to

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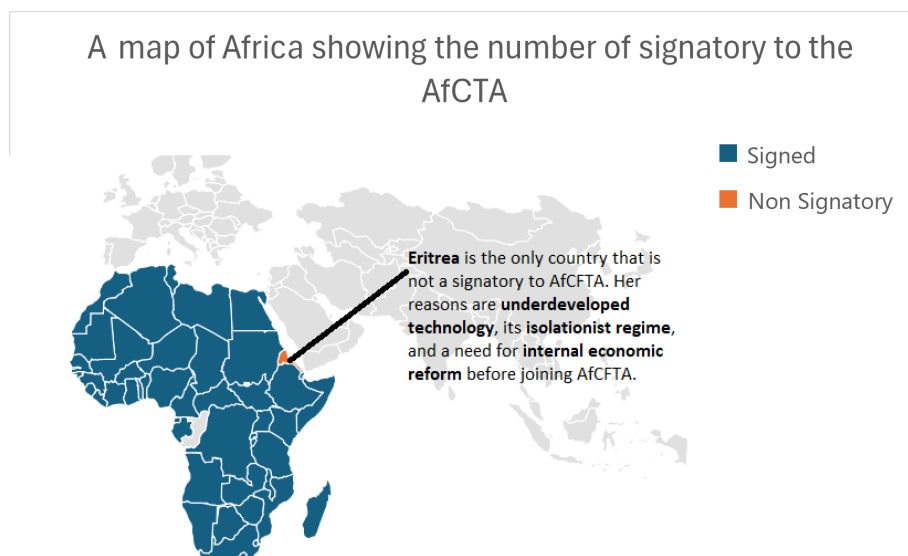
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realize the AfCFTA's envisioned benefits and assess its impact on the continent's economic landscape.

Despite the AfCFTA's objective to promote intra-African trade, African countries continue to rely heavily on imports from outside the continent, particularly Europe and Asia (World Economic Forum WEF, 2021). This highlights persistent structural imbalances and dependencies that must be

addressed. Moreover, the AfCFTA faces persistent bureaucratic obstacles and regulatory inconsistencies that impede seamless trade integration (Turkson et al., 2023; Simola et al., 2022). These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that shape Africa's trade landscape, and going beyond tariff reduction alone is crucial.

**Figure 1:** Map of African Countries that have Ratified African Continental Free Trade Agreement AfCTFA



**Source:** Authors compilation (2024)

Furthermore, despite the potential of AfCFTA to promote industrialization and enhance the manufacturing sector in African countries, it is confronted with the harsh reality of limited production capacities and heavy reliance on external suppliers (Simola et al., 2022). The continent's manufacturing GDP remains disproportionately low, which underscores the necessity for comprehensive strategies to improve local production capabilities and decrease import dependency.

Moreover, the AfCFTA's objective of reducing non-tariff barriers necessitates concerted efforts to streamline border procedures and harmonize regulations; however, these efforts are hindered by institutional inefficiencies and regulatory complexities (Turkson et al., 2023; Simola et al., 2022). Additionally, historical legacies, such as the colonial-era

cash crop systems, perpetuate inequalities in agricultural output and market participation, which pose significant challenges to intra-African trade (Mwanika et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2016).

In light of these challenges, this literature review critically examines the existing research on African trade barriers, aiming to identify key issues and propose potential solutions to foster greater trade integration on the continent. By delving into the complexities of colonial legacies, shipping constraints, and transportation obstacles, this review seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the impediments to intra-African trade and pave the way for informed policy interventions and strategic initiatives to unlock Africa's trade potential.

## 2. Methodology

The narrative literature review methodology for the research article on AfCFTA involves a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature to explore the challenges and potential solutions related to intra-African trade barriers. The following steps outline the methodology:

I. Identifying Relevant Literature: The study conducts a systematic search across academic databases, scholarly journals, and relevant institutional reports to gather literature on intra-African trade barriers, AfCFTA, regional trade agreements, and related topics.

II. Literature Selection: The study then carefully selects literature that addresses the objectives of the study, focusing on articles, books, and reports that discuss obstacles to intra-African trade, historical context, regional trade agreements, and the impact of trade barriers on African economies.

III. Data Extraction: The study process involves extracting key information from selected literature, including data on trade barriers, historical narratives, regional trade agreements, economic impacts, and proposed solutions. The information is subsequently organized into thematic categories for analysis.

IV. Thematic Analysis: The study conducts a thematic analysis of the extracted data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and trends related to intra-African trade barriers, AfCFTA, regional trade agreements, and their implications for economic integration and cooperation in Africa.

V. Synthesis of Findings: The study proceeds to synthesizing the findings from the thematic analysis to develop a comprehensive narrative that presents an overview of the challenges, historical context, existing research, and proposed solutions related to intra-African trade barriers and the AfCFTA.

VI. Critical Evaluation: The study critically evaluates the strengths and limitations of the existing literature, including gaps in knowledge, methodological approaches, and potential biases. Thus, assessing the findings'

reliability and validity to ensure the review's credibility.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations: The study draws conclusions based on the synthesized findings, highlighting key insights, implications for policy and practice, and areas for future research. Based on the itemized steps, the study provides recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers to address intra-African trade barriers and enhance economic integration within the continent.

VIII. Writing the Review: This narrative literature review, follows a logical structure that presents the background, objectives, methods, findings, discussion, and conclusions coherently and concisely.

By following this methodology, this review provides a comprehensive analysis of existing research on African trade barriers, offers insights into the challenges and potential solutions related to intra-African trade, and contributes to the broader understanding of economic integration and cooperation in Africa.

## 3. Historical Overview of African Trade

Africa's trade history is deeply rooted in ancient trade routes, such as the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trade networks. These routes enabled exchanging goods like gold, salt, ivory, and others, integrating African economies into global trade networks and fostering economic and cultural exchanges (Mathew, 2013). Women have been actively involved in trans-border trade along routes like the Mamfe-Ekok-Ikom corridor, challenging misconceptions and contributing to economic activities (Ndip & Akara, 2020). Archaeological research has shed light on the East African caravan trade, providing valuable insights into the historical significance of caravan routes in regions like northern and southern Tanzania (Biginagwa & Katto, 2020). In addition, studies focusing on ancient North Africa highlight the cultural interactions and trade networks that existed in the pre-Islamic period, emphasizing the importance of trans-Saharan trade routes in facilitating exchanges among diverse ethnic groups (Dowler & Galvin, 2011). Caravans played a crucial role in connecting different peoples and facilitating trade across Africa,

with their decline coinciding with the rise of maritime trade routes (Wane & Akrong, 2020).

During the colonial era, traditional trade systems were significantly disrupted. European powers reoriented African economies to serve their interests, focusing on the extraction of raw materials and the establishment of cash crop economies (International Trade Council, 2023). This led to the development of export-oriented infrastructure but also entrenched economic dependencies and underdevelopment (World Trade Organization, 2024).

After gaining independence, African countries sought to diversify their economies and decrease their reliance on former colonial powers. The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other policies promoting regional integration have been vital in encouraging intra-African trade and reducing trade barriers. These initiatives aim to foster economic growth, improve competitiveness, and attract foreign investment (Cicioğlu & Ibrahim, 2023).

Globalization has also integrated Africa into the global economy, resulting in a significant increase in the continent's trade volume. However, this remains a small portion of the world's overall trade. To maintain economic growth and development, it is crucial to enhance global trade relations, improve infrastructure, and strengthen governance (Collier, 1998).

The historical account of African trade reveals a multifaceted narrative that is shaped by geographical elements, cultural exchanges, and external influences. Early trade routes exemplify intricate networks that cover vast distances, such as the 19th-century Sahara caravan trade, which necessitated specialized infrastructure and navigation abilities. On the other hand, the growth of South African trade unions after 1994, as examined by Bhorat et al. (2014), highlights the intersection of labor market regulations and institutional advancements, with nuanced outcomes on wage levels and economic growth, reflecting broader political and economic contexts. Understanding the historical context is crucial for understanding modern trade obstacles and devising strategies for sustainable economic expansion in Africa.

### **3.1. Regional Trade Agreements in Africa**

Regional trade agreements are established in five regions of Africa, comprising the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the East African Community (EAC). These agreements aim to promote economic integration and cooperation, but their efficacy and impact vary. Although they are intended to stimulate economic growth and reduce non-tariff barriers, research conducted by Gammadigbe (2021), Akinkugbe (2021), and Maliszewska et al. (2020) reveals mixed results regarding their effects on income inequality, industrial production, and employment and wage equality. Additionally, these agreements aim to improve food security and agricultural development, but they face difficulties in policy harmonization, market establishment, and infrastructure improvement, as revealed by Okafor et al. (2021). It is essential to conduct a thorough examination of these agreements to assess their effectiveness and address the underlying socioeconomic disparities in the region.

### **3.2. Regional Trade Agreements in Africa**

The scholarly discourse surrounding the implications of trade barriers and the intricate web of trade agreements on African economies and intra-African trade warrants in-depth examination. Numerous studies have highlighted the detrimental consequences of trade barriers, including both tariffs and non-tariff barriers, which impede intra-African trade and stifle economic growth (Sanjuán López et al 2021; Oloyede et al., 2021). Moreover, these barriers are compounded by excessive transportation costs and border delays, further undermining the competitiveness of African exports (Charles, 2021).

The plethora of trade agreements in Africa has resulted in a tangled network of overlapping regulations and trade arrangements. While some agreements are designed to facilitate intra-African trade, the existence of conflicting provisions and regulatory disparities presents significant challenges

(Stack et al., 2023). This complex network of agreements not only hinders trade facilitation initiatives but also fosters uncertainty for businesses operating within the region (Engstrom, 2013). Scholars advocate for the harmonization of trade rules and the reduction of duplicity to streamline trade processes and promote market integration (Kulu & Bentum-Ennin, 2023).

African nations face substantial difficulties in facilitating trade within the continent, primarily due to the lack of adequate infrastructure that impedes the movement of goods between countries. AfCFTA aims to address these challenges by fostering the growth of trade between African nations. However, some experts, such as Uzomah & Abdullahi. (2023) and Stender & Vogel (2023), contend that regional trade agreements (RTAs) in Africa may not be sufficient in overcoming the obstacles to intra-African trade, which could undermine their intended impact. The presence of trade barriers, including inadequate infrastructure and high transportation costs, presents significant

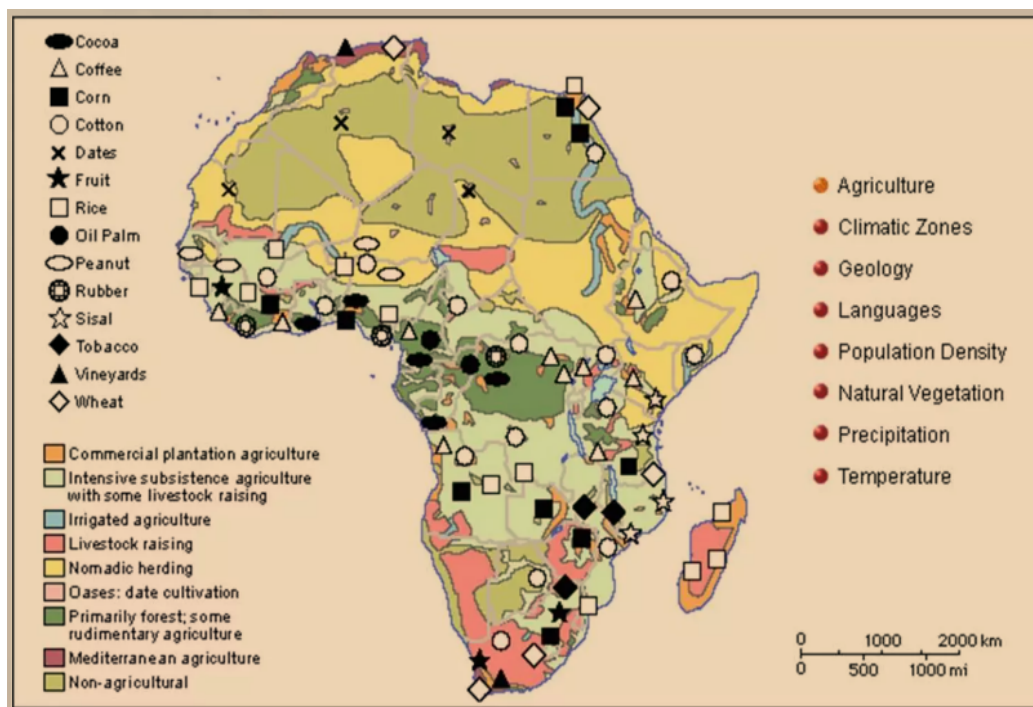
obstacles to economic growth and intra-regional trade within African economies.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The Legacy of Colonial Crops and Its Impact on Trade

The impact of colonial crop cultivation on Africa is ongoing and significantly influences the continent's trade patterns, institutional strengths and weaknesses, and economic structure (Settles, 1996). The colonial powers' implementation of cash crop and monoculture farming systems has led to a reliance on a limited range of agricultural products with minimal value addition, which has intensified trade disparities within Africa (Roessler et al., 2020). Despite being major producers of cocoa beans, African countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria have not secured a substantial share of the global chocolate market revenue, reflecting the exploitative nature of colonial-era policies (Prazeres et al., 2021).

**Figure 2:** Map of Africa Showing the Distribution of Colonial Crops by Country



**Source:** Palmer, (2023).

The overemphasis on colonial crops has obstructed the development of diversified and value-added agricultural production in Africa, thereby limiting opportunities for trade in other agricultural goods and processed

products within the continent. Despite persistent food security challenges, many African countries continue to prioritize the production of colonial crops over essential staples, which they often have to import to

fulfill domestic food demands (Jarzebsk et al., 2020). Moreover, institutional and entrepreneurial constraints hinder intra-African trade in colonial crops, reducing trade volumes and perpetuating dependency on external markets.

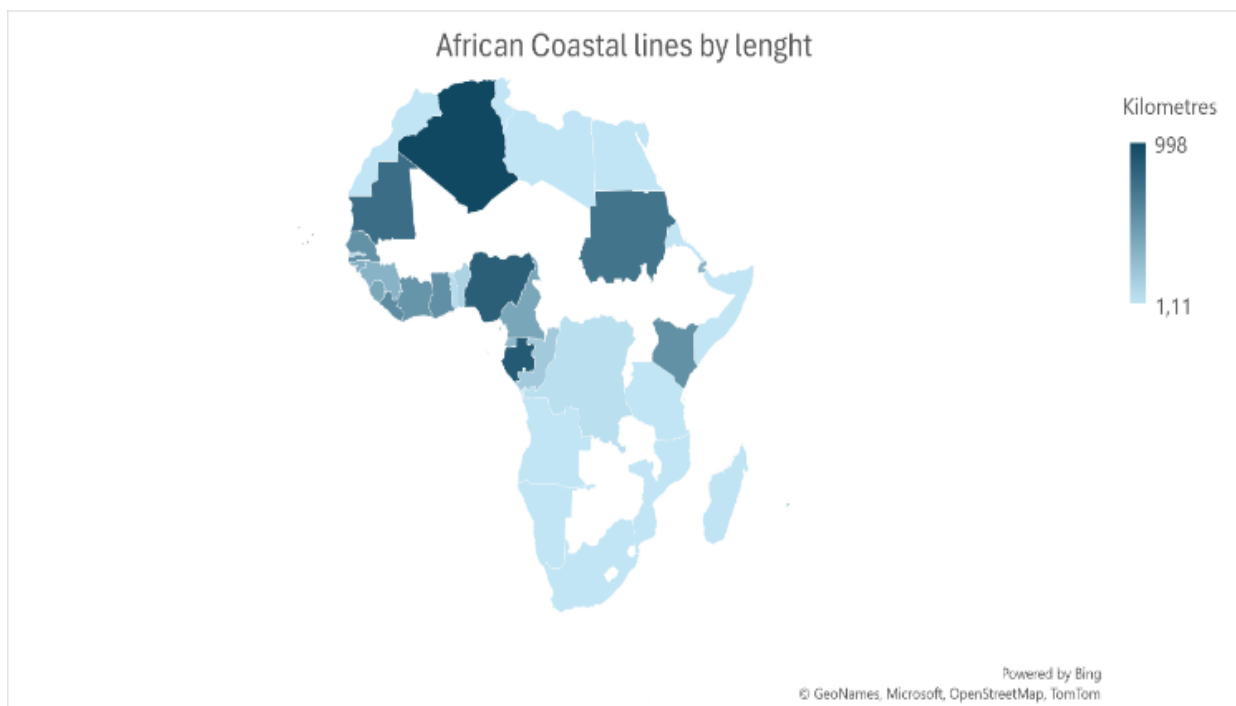
To address the enduring influence of colonial crop legacies on intra-African trade, African countries must focus on diversifying their agricultural production and investing in value-added processing. By expanding the range of traded products and promoting intra-African trade in processed goods, countries can mitigate their reliance on a few primary commodities and foster economic resilience within the continent. Additionally, concerted efforts to establish trade agreements and partnerships, coupled with harmonized trade policies and reduced trade barriers, are crucial for creating an enabling environment for intra-African trade in diversified agricultural products. These measures are essential for advancing the

economic development and integration of Africa as a whole (Roessler et al., 2020; Prazeres et al., 2021; Jarzebsk et al., 2020).

#### 4.2. Shipping Constraints Along the African Coastline

The considerable difficulties that shipping constraints present along the African coastline have a considerable impact on intra-African trade, hindering its growth and development. These challenges, such as inefficient port facilities, intricate customs procedures, insufficient maritime infrastructure, and the geographical configuration of the African continent, contribute to delays, increased costs, and operational inefficiencies in trade transactions (Sowell, 2005; Mafukata, 2015). Additionally, the narrowness of African coastlines, in contrast to the size of the continent, exacerbates this barrier to trade, limiting the potential for increased intra-African trade (Sowell, 2005).

**Figure 3:** Map of Africa Showing the Length of the African Coastlines



**Source:** Author's compilation (2024)

Furthermore, the existence of landlocked countries compounds this issue, as they are reliant on neighboring countries for access to

maritime trade routes, thereby adding additional logistical complexities.

**Figure 4:** Map of Africa Showing the Main Rivers and Their Channels

**Source:** Exploring Africa (2024)

The considerable barriers to intra-African trade posed by African transportation are well-documented, Omotayo (2018) argued that improving intra-country transport infrastructure can mitigate logistical challenges and boost economic integration within regions, they recommended approaches that align with broader initiatives promoting intermodal and integrated transportation systems pivotal for African economic development. However, if inland waterways are one of the options for linking African countries, they prove a far less plausible transportation option. These waterways are often unnavigable due to rapids, shallowness, and seasonal changes, which render them unsuitable for large vessels (Smith, 1979; Heldring & Robinson, 2012; Austin, 2010). Moreover, inadequate port facilities and complex customs procedures further exacerbate these difficulties, leading to delays and unpredictability in trade transactions

(Johnson et al., 2018). These constraints hinder cross-border trade and impede the realization of intra-African trade's potential.

To surmount these obstacles, it is crucial for African nations to prioritize investments in port infrastructure, streamline customs procedures, and enhance maritime transportation systems (Johnson et al., 2018). By improving the efficiency of port facilities and customs procedures, trade costs can be significantly reduced, delays minimized, and seamless intra-African trade facilitated. Additionally, regional cooperation in standardizing trade processes and implementing trade facilitation measures is vital to creating an enabling environment for intra-African trade.

Addressing the constraints on shipping along the African coastline is essential to promoting intra-African trade and unlocking the continent's economic potential. By investing in port infrastructure, streamlining customs

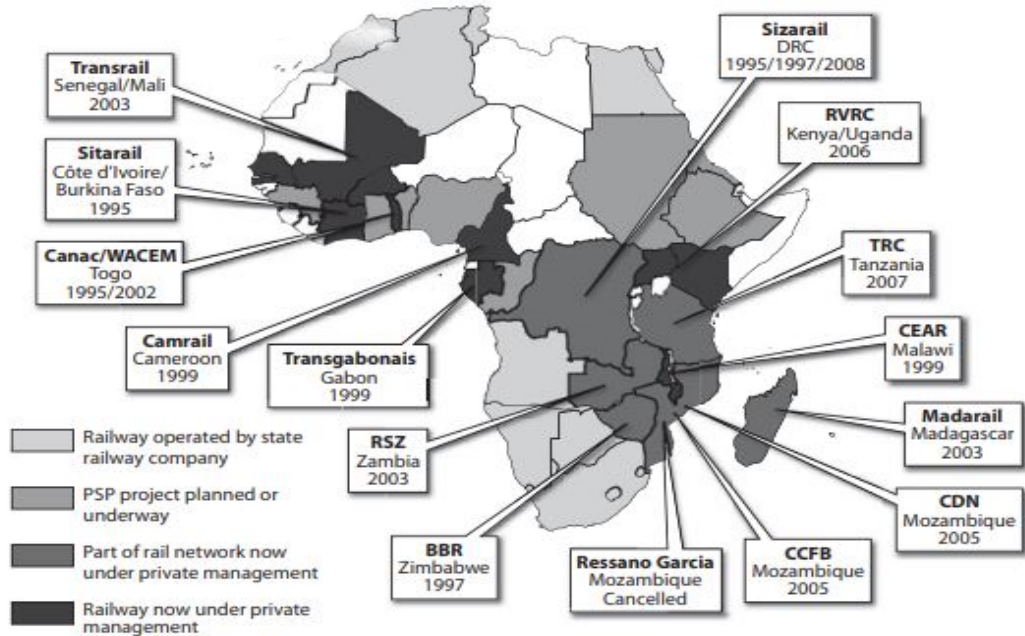
procedures, and enhancing maritime transportation systems, African countries can facilitate increased trade and economic integration within the continent, fostering sustainable development and prosperity.

### 4.3.Challenges of Intra-African Transportation Infrastructure

The challenges posed by the inadequate transportation infrastructure within Africa significantly impede the development of intra-African trade, including issues such as insufficient road and rail networks, high

transportation costs, and prolonged border delays (Olney, 2022; Akpan, 2014). The inadequate state of road and rail infrastructure in many African countries not only hinders the smooth flow of goods but also increases transportation expenses and disrupts trade operations (Akpan, 2014). Moreover, the limited number of railways connecting neighboring countries underscores the lack of connectivity within the continent and raises questions about the feasibility of regional trade initiatives, such as AfCFTA (Zajontz, 2024; Tebagana, 2014).

**Figure 5:** Map of Rail Line Connectivity in Africa since 1990



**Note:** BBR = Belt Bridge Railway; CDN = Corredor de Desenvolvimento do Norte; RSZ = Railway Systems of Zambia; RVRC = Rift Valley Railways Consortium; WACEM = West African Cement Company. Three different dates are given for Sitarail because the concession was relet on three occasions.

**Source:** Bullock, (2009)

African countries confront significant obstacles in their transportation infrastructure, especially in the realm of rail connectivity both within and across borders. Although numerous African nations share frontiers with other countries, few railway lines extend into and out of their territories, and road conditions are often inadequate (Akpan, 2014; Zajontz, 2024; Tebagana, 2014). This gives rise to questions about the feasibility of linking African countries through rail, which could yield substantial commercial

advantages and shared prosperity, or if AfCFTA is merely an empty promise. The construction of rail lines connecting Senegal and Somalia, Algeria and South Africa, and every country in between, would significantly facilitate intra-African trade.

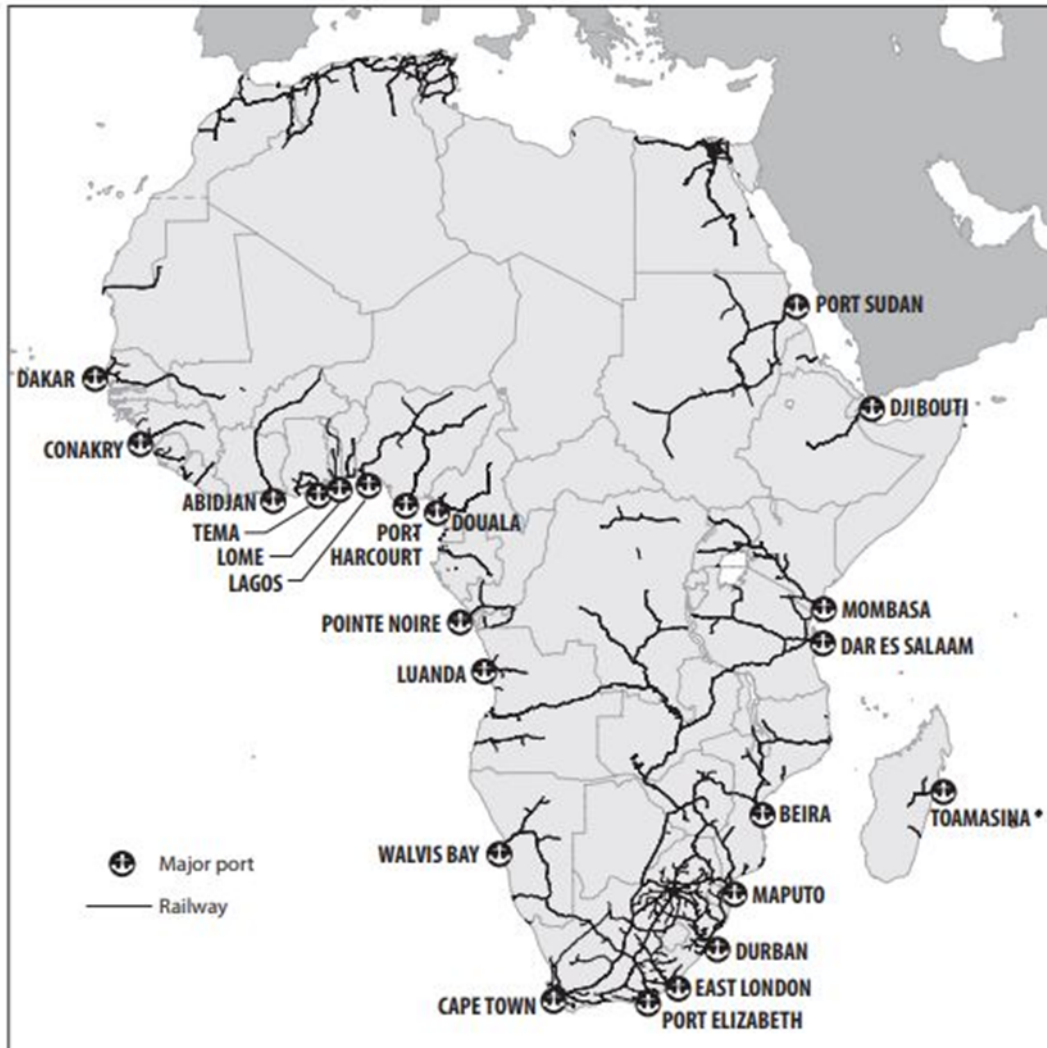
However, despite the AfCFTA's establishment, progress in transportation infrastructure development has been uneven among African nations, with disparities persisting (Bouraima et al., 2023). It is essential for African countries to prioritize the improvement and



maintenance of road and rail networks to enhance trade flows within the continent. Additionally, it is crucial to streamline trade operations and reduce transportation costs by implementing standardized customs

procedures and trade facilitation agreements to mitigate border delays.

**Figure 6:** Map Showing the Rail Line Links in Africa since 2009



**Source:** Bullock, (2009).

In addition, the negotiation of trade agreements centered on transportation infrastructure enhancement presents a promising avenue for strengthening intra-African trade. Joint efforts to standardize transport regulations and align infrastructure standards can establish a smoother and more efficient transportation system across African borders, thereby promoting economic integration and facilitating the inward flow of goods within the continent.

Addressing the obstacles faced by intra-African transportation infrastructure is of paramount importance for cultivating a conducive environment for increased trade,

economic growth, and development throughout Africa. It is crucial for African countries to prioritize investments in transportation infrastructure and to promote regional collaboration to harness the full potential of intra-African trade and contribute to the overall prosperity and integration of the continent.

#### **4.4. Migration Red-Tapes as Obstacles to African Commerce**

In place of focusing on shipping constraints and transportation infrastructure as major obstacles, it is essential to recognize the critical challenges posed by bureaucratic red

tape in African commerce and intra-African trade. These difficulties are compounded by restrictive labor migration policies that limit the free movement of skilled labor and professionals across borders, thus restricting cross-border trade, rapid diffusion of innovation, and economic exchange. In a recent interview, the richest Black man in the world, and African foremost entrepreneur Alhaji Aliko Dangote expressed his dismay at the migration red tapes that exist between African countries and how such bottlenecks have restricted his movement across borders. He remarked that “As an investor, as someone who wants to make Africa great, I have to apply for 35 different visas on my passport,” Dangote told the recent Africa CEO Forum in Kigali. “I really don't have the time to go and drop off my passport in embassies to get a visa,” he said to laughter from the audience (CNN, 2024).

According to Tshishonga (2022) and Onoshakpor & Ogundan (2024), intra-African migration red tape, such as visa requirements, import duties, and border disputes, significantly hinder continental trade and economic integration. Stender and Vogel (2023) argued that while initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) aim to enhance intra-African trade, anti-immigration policies continue to impede progress (Enaifoghe & Maduku, 2019; Sanjuán López et al., 2021).

Furthermore, labor migration restrictions have resulted in barriers for businesses to access the necessary talent and expertise across African countries (Mafukata, 2015). This has not only impeded the growth of industries but has also limited the transfer of knowledge and skills essential for the development of various economic sectors. The cumbersome processes and bureaucratic hurdles for work permits and visas have added unnecessary complexities and costs, discouraging individuals from seeking employment opportunities in various African nations.

Moreover, it is vital to explore the interconnections between migration red tape and broader socio-economic challenges, such as inequality and poverty, which shape the experiences of migrants within African countries and impact intra-African trade dynamics (Ratha et al., 2016). Migration regimes are intertwined with political

rationalities that create boundaries and borders, impacting social formations and inequalities (Sage, 2022).

Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality offers a critical framework for comprehending the interplay of various dimensions of inequality and their impact on individuals, as highlighted by Amelina and Horvath (2020). Recognizing the intersectional perspective is crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by different sub-groups of immigrants and refugees and promoting social justice, as emphasized by Critelli and Yalim (2023).

Moreover, acknowledging the connections between poverty, inequality, and migration underscores the necessity of addressing these issues at national, regional, and global levels, placing them at the forefront of development agendas. Therefore, tackling migration red tape calls for a holistic approach that considers the intricate interplay of various factors shaping migration policies and their implications for economic development.

Furthermore, power dynamics also influence policy formulation in Africa, where weaker countries struggle to influence policies due to perceived structural differences, as pointed out by Hussein and Grandi (2017). These power dynamics and asymmetries between African nations hinder the implementation of migration policies that could benefit the continent and thus affect the AfCFTA, as noted by Nyamnjuh (2005). Eritrea is the only country in Africa that has not ratified the AfCFTA, primarily due to its concerns regarding potential implications for its national sovereignty and economic development strategies. Addressing these underlying challenges and power differentials is essential for facilitating labor mobility and streamlining migration policies, as these efforts may encounter resistance and fail to achieve their intended objectives without addressing these issues.

Migration red tape as a barrier to intra-African trade highlights the need for comprehensive solutions that address underlying political and socio-economic challenges. By fostering inclusive governance structures, promoting equitable economic growth, and addressing power imbalances, African countries can unlock the full potential of intra-African trade and contribute to sustainable development across the continent.

#### **4.5. NON-Trade Barriers and African double Trade cost**

The examination of trade barriers in Africa necessitates a nuanced understanding of the obstacles to efficient trade, extending beyond conventional tariffs to acknowledge the prevalence and impact of non-tariff barriers and trade costs (Sanjuán López et al., 2020; Balistreri et al., 2017). Cumbersome customs procedures and technical regulations significantly hinder cross-regional trade, amplifying transaction costs and delays (Olubandwa & Zamani, 2022; Stender & Vogel, 2023). Turkson et al. (2023) emphasize the detrimental effects of these barriers on intra-African trade, highlighting their substantial influence on integration among African countries.

While initiatives such as AfCFTA aim to combat these barriers, gaps exist in addressing non-tariff and tariff barriers comprehensively (Apiko et al., 2020). High tariffs on specific products restrict market access and hinder export potential (Oyelami & Zongo, 2022), necessitating a holistic approach to reduce trade barriers and promote economic growth (Ngepah & Udeaga, 2018). Furthermore, the proliferation of non-tariff barriers, including sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical standards, and licensing requirements, further complicates intra-African trade (Osiero, 2015).

The success of trade agreements like AfCFTA and the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) hinges on addressing gaps in their legal frameworks and enhancing monitoring mechanisms to effectively curb non-tariff barriers (Apiko et al., 2020). Ensuring transparency and accountability in monitoring non-tariff barriers is crucial for optimizing growth and integration within the continent. While AfCFTA holds promise in reducing non-tariff barriers and fostering intra-African trade, its effectiveness relies on comprehensive coverage, harmonization of conflicting measures, and robust monitoring mechanisms to navigate regulatory challenges effectively.

### **5. Discussion**

#### **5.1. Current Trade Dynamics**

In recent years, the trade landscape in Africa has been significantly altered by the growing

influence of emerging economies like China and Turkey, alongside other regional powers. China's involvement in Africa stands out, with substantial investments made in sectors such as infrastructure, mining, and energy (Toogood, 2022; Titiloye-Ademola et al., 2009). This has led to a shift towards more diversified trade partnerships and has contributed to rapid economic growth in many African countries (Jenkins, 2022). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) implemented by China has further solidified its position, promoting connectivity and economic integration across the continent (Abegunrin & Manyeruke, 2020).

Turkey, on the other hand, has strategically expanded its trade relations with Africa, focusing on sectors such as construction, textiles, and manufacturing (Cicioglu & Ibrahim, 2023). Evidence of this is the significant increase in bilateral trade volume, which has been bolstered by Turkey's proactive diplomatic efforts and the establishment of trade offices across the continent (Cicioglu & Ibrahim, 2023).

The influence of former colonial powers, such as France, is waning in many African regions. Historically dominant in trade and political ties, France's engagement is increasingly being challenged by dynamic and diversified engagements offered by new partners (Raphala, 2017). This shift reflects a broader decolonization trend where African nations are seeking to redefine their economic alliances and reduce dependency on former colonial powers (Cohen, 2022). This transition is driven by the desire for more equitable and mutually beneficial trade relationships, which are often more readily found with non-traditional partners such as China and Turkey (Tekir, 2022).

The increasing influence of countries like China and Turkey, coupled with the diminishing presence of traditional colonial powers, underscores a significant evolution in African trade dynamics. This realignment offers African nations new opportunities for growth and development, fostering a more multipolar global trade environment.

#### **5.2. The Future of Intra-African Trade Volumes**

The analysis of the future of intra-African trade requires extensive scrutiny, as it extends beyond addressing immediate

challenges and encompasses tackling deeper structural barriers to economic integration and development. Investing in port infrastructure and simplifying customs procedures holds promise, but it is crucial to delve into the institution and governance issues and vested interests that shape trade policies and practices (Mekonnen et al., 2019; Acemoglu & Robinson 2012). Without addressing these fundamental problems, initiatives aimed at reducing trade costs and enhancing trade efficiency might not achieve their intended objectives.

Furthermore, while the construction of road and rail networks is vital for improving transportation infrastructure, it is crucial to take into account the socio-economic and environmental consequences of such projects (Tánczos & Török, 2011). Large-scale infrastructure projects often exacerbate inequalities, displace communities, and harm natural habitats, emphasizing the importance of sustainable and inclusive development approaches (Wang et al., 2017). Additionally, efforts to harmonize transport regulations must navigate geopolitical tensions and divergent national interests, which could hinder progress toward seamless cross-border trade (De Melo et al., 2020).

Enhancing labor mobility and stimulating innovation through streamlining and harmonizing migration policies are widely endorsed. However, it is vital to acknowledge the inherent power dynamics and inequalities present in global labor markets (Bach, 2021). Migration policies frequently perpetuate and reflect existing hierarchies, favoring particular types of skilled labor and professionals while disadvantaging others (Faist, 2018). Therefore, efforts to facilitate labor mobility must be complemented by measures aimed at addressing structural inequalities and promoting social inclusion (Grossman-Thompson, 2019).

Optimism and aspirations for growth in intra-African trade volumes characterize discussions about the future. Nonetheless, it is essential to scrutinize these conversations critically. By examining the power dynamics, vested interests, and structural inequalities that shape trade and migration policies, African countries can cultivate more inclusive and sustainable forms of economic integration and development. Only by tackling these deeper challenges can the full

potential of intra-African trade be unlocked, contributing to the broader objective of fostering economic prosperity and integration across the continent.

### **5.3. Strategies for Overcoming Colonial Agricultural Legacies**

The lasting effect of colonial agricultural practices continues to hinder the growth of African economies and complicates efforts to enhance intra-African trade. Despite the passage of time since colonial rule, many African countries still rely on outdated farming methods and monoculture cropping systems, which stifle agricultural diversity and restrict the potential for intra-African trade in agricultural products (Ajayi et al., 2020; Akanmu et al., 2023).

To overcome these challenges, African countries need to implement significant investments in modern farming technologies and promote diverse crop cultivation. The establishment of agro-industrial zones tailored to local contexts is also necessary (Jayne et al., 2019; Magrini et al., 2019). By embracing sustainable and diversified agricultural practices, African countries can unlock their potential for increased agricultural productivity and intra-African trade.

In addition, fostering knowledge exchange and technical support mechanisms among African nations is crucial for promoting the widespread adoption of optimal agricultural practices and the development of value-added agricultural products (Reardon et al., 2019). Collaborative initiatives that focus on sharing agricultural expertise, research findings, and technological advancements will play a vital role in nurturing the growth of intra-African trade in agricultural commodities.

African nations can significantly enhance their agricultural sectors, stimulate intra-African trade, and boost overall economic progress by tackling the lingering effects of colonial agricultural practices and adopting sustainable and varied farming methods. Nevertheless, achieving these objectives necessitates joint action, strong leadership, and continuous dedication to long-lasting transformation at both the national and regional levels.

#### **5.4. Expanding Africa's Shipping Capabilities for Better Trade**

Current inadequacies in maritime infrastructure, port management, and shipping logistics severely hamper trade efficiency and capacity (Twrdy & Zanne, 2020). To improve trade efficiency and capacity, it is necessary to make investments in modernizing port facilities that go beyond mere expansion to encompass comprehensive upgrades in equipment and technology. This includes the adoption of advanced cargo handling systems and tracking technologies to mitigate congestion and streamline operations (Twrdy & Zanne, 2020).

Moreover, the enhancement of maritime transportation systems, such as coastal shipping and inland waterways, is essential to offer cost-effective and reliable transportation alternatives, particularly for landlocked countries (UNCTAD, 2022). Developing and maintaining navigable water routes, along with ensuring transport mode interoperability, are pivotal for improving transportation connectivity and accessibility across the continent.

However, achieving these goals necessitates concerted efforts to harmonize maritime regulations, standards, and customs procedures across African ports (UNCTAD, 2022). Common standards for documentation and clearance processes are imperative to reduce administrative barriers and foster a cohesive and efficient shipping network throughout Africa.

Expanding Africa's shipping capabilities holds the potential to boost the continent's competitiveness in the global market and attract foreign investment. Robust maritime infrastructure not only supports intra-African trade but also contributes to overall economic growth and prosperity (UNCTAD, 2022). However, realizing these benefits requires sustained commitment, collaborative action, and strategic investments in Africa's maritime sector.

#### **5.5. Improving Transportation for Enhanced Intra-African Trade**

Recognizing the significance of enhancing Africa's shipping capabilities, it is crucial to acknowledge that upgrading transportation infrastructure, particularly roads and rail networks, constitutes only a partial solution

for promoting increased intra-African trade. While investing in road network expansions and modernizations is necessary, it is equally important to implement comprehensive measures addressing governance, regulatory, and institutional challenges that hinder efficient trade. Addressing corruption, streamlining customs procedures, and enhancing border infrastructure are critical components of this approach. Additionally, multimodal transportation systems, such as railways, waterways, and air transport, should be considered, as they could offer more sustainable and efficient trade routes. Although efforts to reduce border delays through harmonized customs procedures and trade facilitation agreements are commendable, their success depends on the political will and institutional capacity to implement and enforce these measures consistently.

Moreover, harmonizing transport regulations and standards among African countries requires overcoming divergent interests and competing priorities, necessitating greater regional cooperation and collaboration. Investments in transportation infrastructure are essential, but a more critical and holistic approach is needed to address the multifaceted challenges hindering intra-African trade. This approach should encompass governance reforms, regulatory harmonization, and institutional capacity-building to create an enabling environment for seamless trade operations (World Bank, 2020). Only through concerted efforts to tackle these underlying issues can African countries realize the full potential of intra-African trade and foster sustainable economic growth and integration across the continent.

### **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **6.1. Conclusion**

This literature review examines the challenges and potential solutions related to intra-African trade barriers and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Despite the AfCFTA's objective to promote intra-African trade, African countries heavily rely on imports from outside the continent due to persistent structural imbalances, bureaucratic obstacles, and regulatory inconsistencies. The review explores the complexities of colonial legacies, shipping constraints, and transportation obstacles

that hinder trade integration. It also discusses the effectiveness of regional trade agreements and the impact of trade barriers on African economies. The methodology involves a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature, thematic analysis, critical evaluation, and recommendations for policymakers and researchers to address trade barriers and enhance economic integration within the continent.

## 6.2. Recommendations

Promoting intra-African trade and economic integration requires African countries to implement policy recommendations that address key barriers and facilitate trade. These recommendations aim to foster a favorable environment for trade and cooperation across continents.

To achieve this, African countries should focus on harmonizing trade policies, regulations, and standards. This includes aligning customs procedures, product standards, and documentation requirements in order to create a uniform and predictable trading environment. By doing so, cross-border trade can be streamlined, and administrative barriers can be reduced.

Governments and regional organizations should continue to allocate resources to trade facilitation measures and modern infrastructure, such as ports, roads, and rail networks. By enhancing transportation connectivity and efficiency, African nations can improve the movement of goods and reduce trade costs, thereby stimulating intra-African trade.

Additionally, promoting the development of regional value chains through strategic investments and incentives can boost goods production and processing. This approach fosters collaboration and specialization across African countries, promoting intra-African trade and contributing to economic diversification.

Furthermore, improving access to financial services and credit facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises will strengthen their participation in intra-African trade. Governments can support the establishment of favorable financial frameworks and mechanisms to facilitate trade financing and investment in key sectors.

Emphasizing capacity-building programs, knowledge exchanges, and technical assistance initiatives will enhance the adoption of best practices and innovations in various sectors. By facilitating skill development and knowledge transfer, African countries can bolster their competitive edge and contribute to intra-African trade.

In addition, promoting the use of digital trade platforms and e-commerce solutions can modernize trade processes and facilitate cross-border transactions. African nations can leverage digital technologies to expand market access, improve information sharing, and enhance the efficiency of trade operations within the continent.

Finally, African countries should prioritize the implementation and strengthening of regional integration agreements, such as the AfCFTA. By fostering deeper economic integration and cooperation, these agreements created a conducive environment for enhanced intra-African trade and investment.

By embracing these policy recommendations and aligning their efforts to foster a more robust and interconnected trade ecosystem, African countries can pave the way for sustainable economic growth, increased competitiveness, and prosperity within the continent.

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