ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council

Student Officer: Yağız Saraçoğlu

Issue: Improving infrastructure and economic cooperation for freer trade across African regions

TIMUN '25

Turkish International Model United Nations

THIMUN Affiliated Conference

Committee: Economic and Social Council

Issue: Improving infrastructure and economic cooperation for freer trade across African regions

Student Officer: Yağız Saraçoğlu – Vice President

I. Introduction

No continent has been more connected by history yet divided by borders than Africa. A great deal of this situation has come about due to the fact that African nations have had difficulty consolidating power locally and regionally; in both politics and economics. A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) refers to a bilateral or multilateral agreement that enhances the trade of the signing parties by reducing or completely eliminating the typical limitations faced during trade procedure. Such limitations include tariffs (taxes on imports), quotas (limits on goods), and other, rather complex, customs procedures. The logic is that by adjusting such barriers, goods can move more freely acros borders, ultimately increasing efficiency, lowering costs, and facilitating economic growth. One of the best examples of a FTA completely changing the economic dynamics of a region would be the European Union's Single Market initiative in 1993. The initiative proved that FTAs are effective in integrating smaller, fragmented markets into larger and more competitive ones– apparent in its effectiveness as the Europe of today.

As of 2025 Africa hosts a similar free trade agreement– the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It was signed in 2018 with 54 member states, making it the largest free trade area in the world by number of participating countries. Its goal is similar to its predecessors: to create a single market for goods, allow freer movement of investments, and ultimately to enhance Africa's historically fragmented trade systems.

However, the current trade patterns highlight the limited impact thus far of the agreement. According to the Economic Development in Africa Report 2019's press release (i.e.,UNCTAD/PRESS/IN/2019/2/Rev.1) in 2017, only 16.6 % of Africa's exports were destined for the African market itself, while the overwhelming majority, 83.4%, flowed into extra-African markets in Europe, Asia, and America. If we compare this with other continents' internal trade data, such as 68.1 % of Europe or 59.4 % of Asia, we can conclude that the African region remains well-under the global median. This shows that the region's persistent structural challenges is a multifaceted problem and cannot be solved with just an adjustment of formal customs regulations.

II. Key Vocabulary

Intra-African Trade: The trade that occurs between African nations instead of their external trading partners. The indicator shows how well African economies connect with each other through their internal value chains and shared markets because high levels indicate strong integration but low levels show ongoing fragmentation.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs): It refers to trade barriers that extend beyond tariffs and include border delays and excessive paperwork and corruption and product standards that do not align. The main obstacle preventing tariff reductions under AfCFTA from leading to easier and less expensive cross-border trade is NTBs.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs): It consists of sub-regional blocs including ECOWAS, SADC and EAC which were established to serve as transitional structures for continental integration. The multiple memberships and conflicting regulations between these entities have produced both positive and negative effects which simultaneously support and hinder the achievement of AfCFTA success.

Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs): The International Monetary Fund and World Bank implemented SAPs as economic reform programs during the 1980s through the 1990s. The SAPs implemented by the IMF and World Bank through privatization and spending reductions and market liberalization policies diminished state power while destroying domestic industries and forcing African nations to maintain their position as raw material exporters instead of building self-sustaining economic systems.

Rules of Origin: It establishes the criteria that determine where a product originated for production purposes. The rules of origin under AfCFTA determine which products can enter the market without tariffs. The disagreements about these rules stem from big economies pushing for fast market opening while smaller nations want to defend their home industries.

Infrastructure Deficit: The lack of dependable transportation systems and power networks and digital connectivity throughout Africa stands as a major challenge. The colonial infrastructure built to connect mines and plantations to European ports instead of uniting African states continues to block regional integration through its ongoing infrastructure deficit.

Dependency Theory: The economic theory shows that developing nations stay under developed nation control through exporting unprocessed materials while importing finished products. The economic relationship between Africa and Europe and China and the United States demonstrates this pattern which hinders the development of independent African trade networks.

III. Involved Countries and Organizations

Nigeria

The most populous and economically developed nation of Africa. The implementation of AfCFTA depends heavily on Nigeria because it holds a founding position in both ECOWAS and the African Union. Nigeria joined AfCFTA in 2018 with, underlining, hesitation because it wanted to defend its domestic industries but later ratified the agreement to acknowledge its future advantages. The government views AfCFTA as a method to build up its manufacturing sector while decreasing its oil export reliance. However, it maintains a reserved approach to fast market liberalization.

South Africa

The continent depends on South Africa to lead its industrial sector and maintain its position as a vital member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The country supports regional value chain development through its diverse economy and manufacturing base which enables it to promote industries including automobiles and energy and mining. Pretoria supports AfCFTA because it wants to boost African industrial growth and access new export markets but maintains strict rules of origin to stop the unfair practice of re-exported goods. The agreement will create fresh economic expansion while promoting industrial development to establish Africa on a long-term development trajectory. South Africa stands as the central force in integration discussions because it maintains both positive and realistic views about the matter.

Egypt

Egypt stands as a leading supporter of AfCFTA because it links Africa to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle Eastern region. The Suez Canal functions as a critical trade route which leads Cairo to see continental integration as a way to establish itself as a logistics and industrial center. The North African nation became one of the initial signatories to AfCFTA while launching major infrastructure development projects including the Cairo–Cape Town highway to connect North African markets with Sub-Saharan territories.

Kenya

Kenya is East Africa's top economic power while actively backing AfCFTA to promote small and medium-sized enterprises and international trade. Kenya benefits from regional integration through its East African Community membership and benefits AfCFTA by extending such advantages. The Standard Gauge

Railway built by Chinese funding under the Belt and Road Initiative serves as Kenya's main infrastructure project which connects Mombasa to Nairobi to support both regional and international trade.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia maintains its status as the African Union headquarters and leads the continent through its political efforts for unity. The country has built a major infrastructure project through the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway which provides access to ocean trade routes despite being without access to the sea. The government of Ethiopia views AfCFTA as a tool for both economic development and political unification and peace promotion. The country faces internal political turmoil and weak governance which hinders its potential to maximize regional trade benefits.

African Union (AU) & AfCFTA Secretariat

The African Union operates as the main organization for continental integration through its flagship program AfCFTA which implements Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. The African Union establishes political cooperation structures while the Accra-based AfCFTA Secretariat handles the technical and legal aspects of trade agreement implementation. The African Union presents AfCFTA as a unifying force that goes beyond economic transformation to achieve African unity.

African Development Bank (AfDB)

The African Development Bank (AfDB) supports the development of infrastructure needed for AfCFTA success through its financing activities. The AfDB supports regional infrastructure development through PIDA funding which includes investments in regional highways and energy grids and cross-border transport corridors.

European Union (EU)

The European Union itself is an example of regional unification–mentioned earlier in the introduction. They are maintaining their position as Africa's principal trading bloc. The EU has maintained its commitment to development support and infrastructure development through its EU–Africa Partnership framework. The EU supports AfCFTA but works to preserve its exclusive market access in Africa which generates an undercurrent of partnership versus competitive dynamics.

China

Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) China has become Africa's leading trading partner and investor. China has used its financial support to construct and upgrade African transportation infrastructure including the Addis Ababa–Djibouti railway and others mentioned throughout the report. China supports the

AfCFTA because it believes the free trade area will enhance its existing infrastructure-based approach to African engagement.

United States of America

The United States focuses its African engagement on trade facilitation instead of building extensive infrastructure networks. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) stands as the main initiative of the United States which provides special market access to eligible African export products. The textile industry benefits from AGOA but the program delivers unequal advantages to different sectors and its benefits need periodic renewal to maintain stability. The United States backs AfCFTA but its participation in the initiative takes place within the context of countering Chinese expanding influence in Africa.

IV. Focused Overview of the Issue

To better grasp the AfCFTA's lack in tackling the issue, one must know the history of the region. Africa's current fragmented economic infrastructure and low intra-trade are not caused by today's malpractice, but due to the outcomes of both geography and the historical landmarks collectively. Natural barriers, such as but not limited to deserts, rainforests, and landlocked state,s already constrained integration; colonial powers redirected the infrastructure outward and toward Europe; newly independent states' borders were determined by the artificial borders drawn by, again, colonial powers; and global economic reforms in the late 20th century further weakened regional integration. These historical legacies are too powerful to disregard whilst debating improving trade in Africa.

Africa before colonization was far from isolated; it hosted trade routes that not only linked North Africa with the rest of the continent but also connected Africa to broader global networks. If you look at pre-colonial trade it tends to fall into two main regions. First, the Sahara Desert, an environment that's pretty sparse when it comes to population, yet it still played host to parts of the trans Saharan trade route. Then the grassland savanna, with its trade dynamics and the eastern coastline, which had its unique role in regional and global trade. The ancient camel caravan networks played a role in trade in commodities like gold, salt, ivory and textiles.

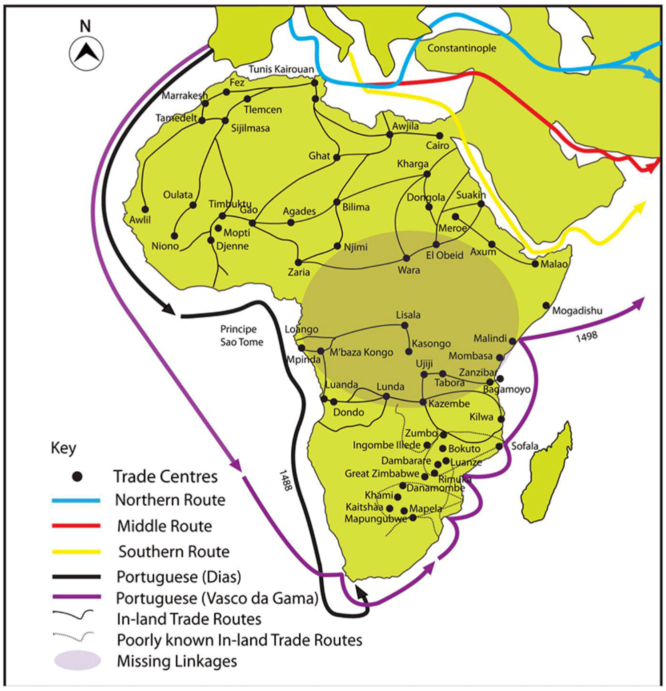

Image 1: Map of Trade Centers and Trade Rputes in Africa

They connected the empires of Mali and Songhai to the thriving markets of North Africa and the Mediterranean. It is also important to mention the city of Timbuktu. The wealth that flowed into Mali through trade in Timbuktu was immense. However, Timbuktu's significance extended beyond its economic influence. During the 14th to 15th centuries it emerged as a center of Islamic learning earning a reputation as one of the most important hubs of its kind. The Sankore University and many madrasas were hubs that drew in scholars over the Arabian Peninsula. These students studied theology, and maths influenced by the minds of Cairo and Mecca. The Sahara trade routes functioned as more than simple transportation routes between locations because they enabled cultural exchange between different regions. The trade routes across the Sahara enabled people to exchange knowledge and religious beliefs and scientific breakthroughs which established West Africa as a central hub of Islamic scholarship worldwide. The Swahili Coast features multiple independent port cities which extend east from the savanna region. The three most powerful city-states of Kilwa and Mombasa and Zanzibar operated as major trading centers. The city-states maintained control over access points to both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The city-states operated as trading centers where they exchanged ivory and gold and slaves for cloth and spices, and porcelain that arrived from Arabia and India and China. Moving far from the coast to the inland, other states like Great Zimbabwe flourished, which ultimately linked the interior of Africa to markets along the coast. The economies of these regions relied heavily on the production of gold and iron, as well as cattle herding. A notable example of this prosperity is the imposing stone architecture of Great Zimbabwe, which shows how reaching trade was on the continent. It wasn't wealth that flowed from this trade but significant political and cultural advancements. Communities that existed before colonization paint a picture of an Africa that was intimately connected to the rest of the world both economically and intellectually, long before the arrival of European colonizers. Africa's struggles haven't stemmed from a lack of trade.. That's still the case today. The real issue has been the nature of its trading systems, which have long been fragmented and poorly integrated.

The arrival of European colonization in the late 19th century drastically reshaped Africa's economic map. At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, European powers divided the continent with little to no regard for its cultural or economic aspects and created artificial borders that persist to this day. Colonial administrations then restructured African economies to serve strictly external markets: railways, ports, and roads and all of the other major infrastructure novelties that came with the industrial revolution were constructed not to connect African communities to each other, but to channel raw materials outward to Europe. For example, the copper-rich regions of Zambia and the Congo were linked by rail directly to coastal ports, bypassing neighboring African markets. Colonies were further reshaped into single export economies, each producing a narrow set of goods for European demand. Ghana specialized in cocoa, Nigeria in palm oil (and later petroleum), Kenya in tea and coffee, and Zambia in copper. This forceful specialization undermined the potential for diversified or regional trade. At the same time, colonial governance created weak institutional foundations by design. Colonials' goal was primarily to extract resources and maintain order, not to promote the development of the region as well. Education systems were only for training a limited number of administrators who could exclusively serve colonial authorities. The educational opportunities were completely blocked for the entire population. The lack of skilled workers became a major challenge for new independent nations because they needed these professionals to establish proper governance and economic development. The Congolese population of fourteen million people had only sixteen university graduates when the country gained independence in 1960. The colonial system actively worked against the development of local industries through its policies. The colonies operated as raw material producers while they imported European-made manufactured goods for consumption. The use of British shovels made from African iron materials served as an example of this practice. The European mass production of goods forced local textile and craft industries to face unfair competition from imported European products. The unfair market competition between local and European products resulted in the decline of traditional manufacturing in the region. At the political level, power was centralized in the hands of colonial governors and appointed officials (cf. history of the Commonwealth), setting authoritarian structures that will persist even after independence. Collectively, these policies produced institutions that were extractive and highly fragile, leaving African states unprepared for the demands of nation-building and regional economic integration. The colonial period, therefore, established a system in which Africa's trade and infrastructure were outward-facing and extractive, rather than internally integrated. By independence, the continent inherited not only artificial borders, but also an economic structure dependent on global demand and ill-equipped for regional integration.

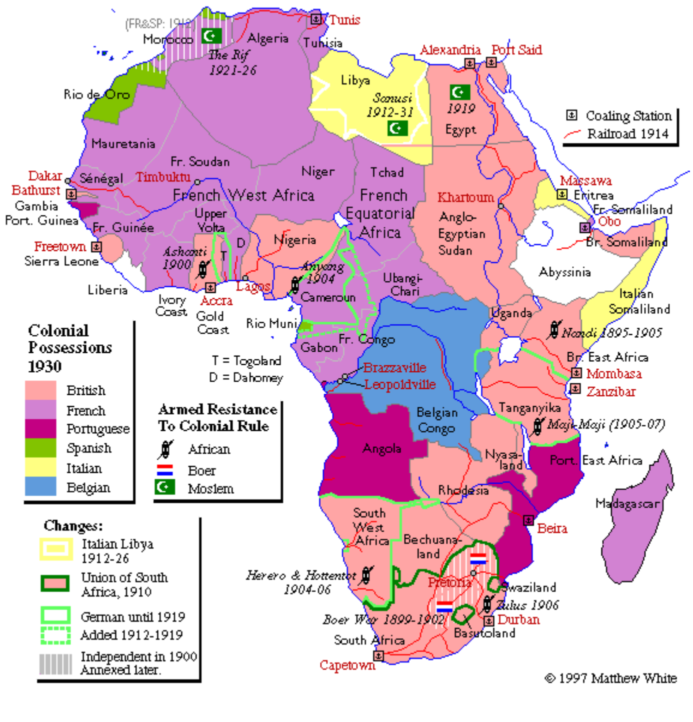

Image 2:Map of Colonial Period of Africa

African regions had started to gain Political sovereignty in the 1960s, but severe structural and economic vulnerabilities remained. The new independent nations operated with underdeveloped industrial sectors and insufficient institutional frameworks and restricted export markets of basic commodities. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) established in 1963 chose to preserve colonial borders to prevent perpetual conflict but this decision resulted in the creation of numerous small economically vulnerable states across the continent. Many leaders responded by looking for large-scale development initiatives run by the state. For instance, Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah started the Akosombo

Dam project in 1965 to facilitate the country's industrial expansion. Ghana's economy faltered, debt grew, and the hope of rapid industrialization vanished as a result of the country's continued heavy reliance on cocoa exports. Alongside with the economic legacy, Africa was also affected from Cold War geopolitics. Ultimately becoming a region of proxy wars. Such dynamic can be demonstrated by the situation in Angola, where rival groups supported by the US and the USSR engaged in a protracted civil war that ravaged the nation's infrastructure and economy after gaining independence in 1975. Superpower competition indirectly strengthened authoritarian rule, militarization, and division rather than promoting integration. Many African states were in economic crisis by the late 1970s as a result of rising oil prices and a global decline in commodity prices. The IMF and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s, which further altered the continent's economic course, were made possible by mounting debt and falling revenues.

The debt situation in Africa reached a critical point during the early 1980s. The combination of aggressive borrowing during previous decades and the 1970s oil price shocks and declining global commodity prices left numerous states unable to repay their debts. The World Bank together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided loans that required African governments to adopt structural adjustment programs (SAPs). The programs forced governments to cut in public spending and damaged state capabilities because they deteriorated essential infrastructure and educational and healthcare systems. The intended stability measures through these reforms actually intensified existing structural problems in Africa. To decrease public spending while privatizing state assets and opening markets to foreign trade and converting agricultural land for the influx of affordable foreign imports led to industrial collapse throughout the region which resulted in raw material exports becoming the primary economic activity of many economies. The agricultural shift toward export-oriented production led to decreased food security throughout the region. The social costs included increasing unemployment together with worsening poverty levels and escalating public disturbances. The SAPs imposed by foreign creditors stripped African governments of their political autonomy because they needed to follow IMF economic guidelines instead of pursuing domestic priorities. The implementation of IMF requirements over African regional cooperation led to the collapse of integration efforts through ECOWAS and COMESA and SADC. The adjustment period established a permanent economic system which maintained African states in separate entities that depended on foreign aid while being unable to achieve domestic growth.

Beyond the weight of history, regional integration is still delayed by Africa's infrastructure and geography. The vast size of the continent spanning more than 30 million square kilometers leads to high expenses for building and maintaining transportation systems. The sixteen landlocked countries including Uganda, Zambia, Chad, and Mali need to use their neighboring ports for trade which increases their transportation expenses. The Great Rift Valley and Ethiopian Highlands and Congo Basin rainforests create obstacles for land-based connections while the Sahara Desert divides North Africa from the rest of Africa.

The majority of African waterways become impassable because of coastal rapids and waterfalls which prevents extensive trade activities unlike European navigable rivers. The existing infrastructure problems stem from colonial-era development patterns. The colonial powers constructed transportation routes which directly linked mines and plantations to European ports for resource export purposes. The construction of east-west and cross-border transportation routes was minimal during colonial times which resulted in poor connectivity between neighboring states. The process of moving goods between African nations through inadequate logistics and prolonged border procedures takes longer and costs more than exporting to foreign markets. The infrastructure gap extends beyond transportation systems. Opportunities for digital trade and integration are limited because more than 600 million Africans still lack access to electricity and because digital networks are still not uniform. In addition to the historical legacies of colonial extraction and post-independence dependency, Africa's infrastructure and geography combine to form structural barriers that maintain trade fragmentation.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) emerged in 2018 as African leaders addressed ongoing structural problems which led to its implementation in 2019. The agreement works to reduce trade obstacles through non-tariff barrier elimination and customs law unification and tariff removal for 90% of traded goods. The agreement aims to create a unified African market through domestic processing of goods instead of international exports. The AfCFTA represents the most significant post-independence integration effort because it builds upon previous regional blocs including ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA. The implementation of AfCFTA has shown limited progress. The main obstacles to progress stem from both tariff barriers and ongoing issues with infrastructure and weak institutions with ineffective customs systems and inconsistent regulatory frameworks. The majority of economies have directed their economic focus toward external markets since colonial times. The AfCFTA stands as Africa's most promising development while also creating its most significant challenge because it seeks to unite the continent against its geographical constraints and European colonial heritage.

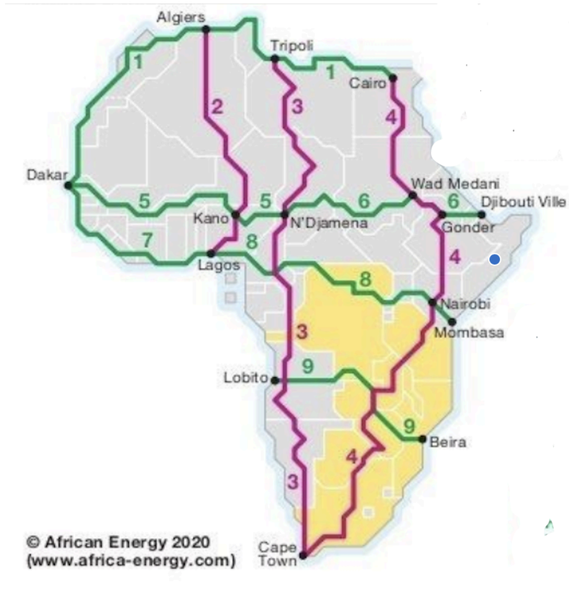

Image 3: Trade Routes Envisioned by AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) became official in 2019 but multiple ongoing obstacles prevent Africa from achieving regional integration. The agreement has created political support and created a unified image for Africa but its actual effects on trade remain minimal. The percentage of intra-African exports in total trade remains at 16-17% which falls significantly short of European and Asian levels. The barriers to progress stem from current challenges which include treaty implementation gaps and non-tariff trade restrictions and economic size disparities and foreign market reliance. The current trade landscape of Africa remains unchanged because of these factors which make up the main economic policy challenge for the continent.

1. Implementation Gap

The AfCFTA agreement received signatures from 54 African states in 2019 but its implementation process continues with significant delays and incomplete progress. Several member states have not completed the process of aligning their tariff systems and customs operations and regulatory frameworks with AfCFTA's established terms. The 2022 "guided trade initiative" tested AfCFTA readiness through a restricted number of participating states and limited product scope. The difference between legal approval and actual implementation of trade rules results in traders facing unaltered border movement expenses and extended processing times. The agreement faces the risk of remaining a political statement instead of a practical framework because member states lack standardized systems and digital customs and uniform origin rules. The agreement needs complete implementation to transform African trade practices from theoretical to actual changes.

2. Non-Tariff Barriers

The reduction of tariffs under AfCFTA does not eliminate non-tariff barriers (NTBs) which continue to block free trade. The combination of border post delays and excessive documentation requirements and customs corruption leads to higher costs and longer delivery times for cross-border trade than international exports. The lack of standardization between African markets through food safety and pharmaceutical and industrial product regulations creates major obstacles for businesses attempting to expand their operations across different countries. The regulatory challenges facing small and medium-sized enterprises become more severe because they do not possess enough funds to handle these obstacles. The AfCFTA Secretariat established online systems to track NTBs but the process has been delayed and monitoring capabilities remain insufficient. The actual trading experiences of African traders will not improve through tariff reductions unless all trade obstacles are removed.

3. Asymmetry Between Large and Small Economies

The success of AfCFTA faces additional challenges because of the significant economic differences between large and small African nations. The expanded continental market benefits Nigeria and South Africa and Egypt most because they have diverse industrial sectors yet smaller developing economies fear their domestic industries will face destructive competition from early liberalization. The disagreement between member states about rules of origin has become a major challenge because these rules determine how benefits from AfCFTA will be distributed among member states. The larger states advocate for rapid market liberalization but smaller states require extended timelines and protection for their domestic industries. The uneven economic power between member states creates obstacles for implementation while threatening to damage the perception of AfCFTA as a fair integration framework. The agreement faces potential decline in support from essential member states unless their concerns receive proper equilibrium.

4. Dependence on External Partners

The creation of AfCFTA has not changed Africa's trade structure because most of its trade activities still focus on external markets. The total trade of Africa consists of 16-17% intra-African exports but most goods move toward European and Asian and American markets. The established economic structure shows that African nations continue to send their raw materials like oil and copper and cocoa to global markets while importing finished products which bypass their regional trading partners. The European Union along with China and the United States maintain this trade imbalance through their agreements and investments and financial support for African development. The essential financial support and market opportunities from these relationships decrease the need for Africa to develop internal value chains. The continent faces a risk of remaining a raw material supplier to global markets unless AfCFTA successfully shifts substantial trade volumes toward domestic markets.

5. Political Instability & Coups

The process of African economic integration faces ongoing disruption because of political instability across the continent. The African continent has faced more than 220 coup attempts since 1950 which makes it the most coup-prone region worldwide. The recent overthrow of governments in Mali and Guinea and Burkina Faso and Niger has led to ECOWAS and African Union sanctions against these countries while halting regional agreements. The political instability creates market unpredictability which drives away foreign investors while forcing governments to redirect their resources from building trade infrastructure and developing national infrastructure to focus on security issues. The numerous coups throughout Africa stem from institutional weaknesses rather than being the primary reason for the fragmented trade structure. The core barriers to AfCFTA implementation stem from structural weaknesses including inadequate infrastructure and weak institutions and excessive external dependence even though coups make existing problems worse and prolong the integration process.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
1884–1885	Berlin Conference

1960	17 African countries gain independence
1963	Establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)
1973 & 1979	Oil price shocks and fuel debt accumulation.
1980s	Introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).
1991	Abuja Treaty
2001	African Union (AU) replaces the OAU, setting Agenda 2063
2008	Global Financial Crisis.
2012	Launch of PIDA by the AfDB and AU.
21 March 2018	African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement
30 May 2019	AfCFTA officially enters into force
1 January 2021	Start of trading under AfCFTA
2022	AfCFTA launches Guided Trade Initiative
2023	A wave of coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger disrupts regional integration efforts, with ECOWAS imposing sanctions
2025	AfCFTA continues gradual rollout

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- Abuja Treaty (1991): The Abuja Treaty created the African Economic Community (AEC) to achieve economic integration through a step-by-step process that included regional blocs such as ECOWAS and SADC and COMESA. The AU member states signed the document which established a path for AfCFTA yet the initiative faced delays because of political disagreements and duplicate membership and insufficient institutional capacity which demonstrated that conceptual plans cannot solve fundamental organizational challenges.
- UNCTAD Trade and Development Board – Agreed Conclusions 458 (1999): The UNCTAD agreement recognized that weak transport systems across Africa create trade barriers and it supported both private sector involvement and technical tools including ASYCUDA. The agreement gained consensus approval yet failed to produce lasting results because of insufficient funding which did not resolve the fundamental problem of infrastructure development.
- UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/293 (2016): The resolution designated 2016–2025 as the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa (IDDA III) while tasking UNIDO and UNECA and AU to help with industrial development and trade capacity enhancement. The resolution gained backing from most UN Member States but its political impact remains restricted because it contains no binding enforcement mechanisms and no financial backing.

- AfCFTA Agreement (2018–2019): The agreement establishes free trade for 90% of goods while standardizing customs procedures yet its execution has proceeded at different speeds across various regions thus revealing the distance between political goals and actual integration progress.
- UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/78/262 (2024): The United Nations adopted this resolution in March 2024 to continue backing improvements in African business environments and investment opportunities and infrastructure development and regional integration. The resolution demonstrates worldwide agreement about AfCFTA's significance yet it lacks binding power because member states need to take action through their own initiatives.

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The Abuja Treaty from 1991 stands as one of the first diplomatic attempts to establish the African Economic Community through step-by-step integration of regional blocs including ECOWAS, SADC and COMESA. The Treaty established theoretical foundations for future initiatives including AfCFTA although its ambitious goals were not achieved because of conflicting memberships and political disagreements and insufficient enforcement systems.

The establishment of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) including ECOWAS, SADC, EAC and COMESA served as a significant initiative to promote economic integration. The different blocs developed free movement and customs union and trade liberalization protocols yet their implementation faced continuous challenges because of conflicting interests and variable progress rates. The free movement policies of ECOWAS faced significant challenges because border restrictions and political instability in the region made them less effective.

The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) which the IMF and World Bank implemented throughout the 1980s and 1990s aimed to stabilize African economies through liberalization measures. The SAPs implemented by the IMF and World Bank resulted in state capacity deterioration through essential spending reductions and global market exposure that destroyed domestic industries while forcing countries to return to raw material exports. The SAPs created more market fragmentation while making African countries dependent on foreign markets instead of fostering integration.

Military interventions throughout history have proven unable to establish stability which is essential for trade integration. The peacekeeping operations of ECOWAS in West Africa and AU peacekeeping missions in conflict zones were intended to establish regional stability for commerce but these efforts frequently became trapped in extended conflicts. The repeated military coups in Mali and Burkina Faso and

Niger demonstrate that using force to solve political issues has not produced enduring peace or integration outcomes.

The numerous failed attempts demonstrate that African programs face two main challenges: multiple overlapping systems with weak implementation power and international organizations focus on short-term stability rather than lasting integration. The current AfCFTA initiative stands as the most extensive attempt at integration but it faces an uncertain future because it lacks solutions to its fundamental structural problems.

VIII. Possible Solutions

1. Regional Infrastructure Corridors

The development of regional transport and energy corridors should replace large-scale continent-wide projects because they offer better funding and maintenance possibilities. The West African Lagos–Abidjan highway and East African LAPSSET corridor improvement projects will decrease trade expenses for millions of people in their respective regions. The African Development Bank (AfDB) together with regional governments and external partners including China and the EU should share the costs of project funding. The method delivers concrete outcomes through focused resource allocation instead of spreading resources across multiple projects.

2. Standardizing Customs and Border Procedures

The AfCFTA Secretariat should expand its Guided Trade Initiative pilot program to additional countries while deploying electronic customs platforms across different regions. The system reduces delays and minimizes corruption risks through its implementation without needing extensive new infrastructure development.

3. Transitional Safeguards

The implementation of transitional safeguards by AfCFTA will protect smaller economies from being overwhelmed by Nigeria and South Africa and Egypt under the free trade agreement. The implementation of transitional safeguards by AfCFTA will protect political backing through its establishment of temporary trade safeguards and its implementation of gradual tariff reductions and targeted funding from the AfDB for member states to adapt. The system maintains free trade stability through its approach which stops smaller nations from abandoning the agreement.

4. Regional Value Chains

The concept of pan-African industrialization remains an unattainable goal. The development of regional value chains represents a more practical strategy because it allows businesses to operate within areas where transportation expenses remain affordable. The West African region should develop a cocoa-to-chocolate-to-packaging industry network while East Africa should concentrate on textile and leather production. The development of regional value chains through specialization proves more achievable than attempting to construct a unified continental production system.

5. Managing Political Instability

The occurrence of coups and instability will continue to happen in the future. The AU and RECs should create emergency protocols to maintain vital trade routes during times of political instability instead of expecting flawless stability. The system should protect vital goods including food and medicine from sanctions and require military governments to respect current transportation agreements. The system enables trade operations to continue during unstable periods while maintaining political influence.

6. Multilateral partnership with external countries

Africa needs to maintain its market ties with external nations because these relationships will continue throughout the upcoming years. The AfCFTA should establish practical agreements with China and the EU and the US which include funding for infrastructure development and training programs. The involvement of external actors through these agreements will enhance African trade operations instead of harming them. The goal should be to direct external influence toward supporting African integration efforts instead of blocking external participation.

IX. Useful Links

Video Resources

How Africa's Geography Traps it in Endless Poverty - RealLifeLore YT

How did North Africa Communicate with the rest of Africa? - Knowledgia YT

How Europe Stole Africa so Quickly, Mapped - Johnny Harris YT

Decolonization: Crash Course European History #43 - Crash Course YT

Wat Happened in Africa During the Cold War? - The Armchair Historian YT

Why is African trade under performing? | LSE Research - London School of Economics YT

The African Continental Free Trade Area #AfCFTA (English version) - African Union YT

Written Resources

What was precolonial West Africa like? - BBC Bitesize

Colonisation of Africa - Britannica Encyclopedia

Decolonisation of Africa - Britannica Encyclopedia

A BBC article About Cold War Africa - BBC News

UN Report on Africa's Economic Status Quo - UNCTAD

https://www.ecowas.int/ - ECOWAS Website

https://au.int/ - African Union Website

X. Works Cited

"Africa's Vulnerability to Global Shocks Highlights Need for Stronger Regional Trade." *UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*, 10 Feb. 2025, unctad.org/news/africas-vulnerability-global-shocks-highlights-need-stronger-regional-trade#:~:text=Energy%20insecurity%20stifles%20industrial%20and,%2C%20or%206.1%25%20of%20GDP. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

BBC Bitesize. "Mali and Mansa Musa - Precolonial Africa - KS3 History - Homework Help for Year 7, 8 and 9. - BBC Bitesize." *BBC Bitesize*, 8 July 2021, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zj4fn9q/articles/zjch6g8#zp7g3j6. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

---. "What Was Precolonial West Africa Like? - Precolonial Africa - KS3 History - Homework Help for Year 7, 8 and 9. - BBC Bitesize." *BBC Bitesize*, 25 Oct. 2023, www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zj4fn9q/articles/zs4ptrd#zwy7jsg. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

"Colonization of Africa | Britannica." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2025, www.britannica.com/explore/Colonization-of-Africa.

EHS Africa Logistics. "Mapping Africa's Infrastructure Transformation: A Journey towards Connectivity and Prosperity - Transportation Solutions by Air and Sea | Express Handling Services." *Transportation Solutions by Air and Sea | Express Handling Services*, 20 Jan. 2025, ehsafricalogistics.com/mapping-africas-infrastructure-transformation-a-journey-towards-connectivity-and-prosperity/. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

"Facts & Figures." *UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD)*, 26 June 2019, unctad.org/press-material/facts-figures-0. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

Ferragamo, James McBride,Mariel. "Congo: A Legacy of Intervention." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 18 Apr. 2023, www.cfr.org/timeline/eastern-congo-legacy-intervention. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

"Map - Colonial Africa in the Twentieth Century." *Erols.com*, 2025, users.erols.com/mwhite28/afri1914.htm. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

Marks, Shula E, and David Birmingham. “Decolonization of Africa | Summary, Factors, Independence, & Facts.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9 June 2025, www.britannica.com/event/Decolonization-of-Africa. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

Marks, Shula E, and John D Fage. “Decolonization of Africa | Summary, Factors, Independence, & Facts.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9 June 2025, www.britannica.com/event/Decolonization-of-Africa. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

Shadreck Chirikure. “Documenting Precolonial Trade in Africa.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, 24 Dec. 2016, oxfordre.com/africanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-68, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.68. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.

“The Story of Africa| BBC World Service.” *Bbc.co.uk*, 2025, www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/12chapter8.shtml. Accessed 2 Sept. 2025.