

# Addressing Strategies for Accelerating Sustainable Development and Trade Integration after COVID-19: Agenda 2063



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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily put the world on hold while also proactively changing global politics. Africa was less affected by COVID-19; however, its effects were felt more severely. Resultantly, COVID-19 posed a challenge to African leaders in terms of how to get Africa back on track, even though African economic growth had been sluggish for some years. Before COVID-19, progress in sustainable development and trade integration had been slow. Against this backdrop, the paper sought to present strategies for accelerating sustainable development and trade integration in Africa in the post-COVID-19 era. The study comprised objectives that assess COVID-19's impact on sustainable development and trade integration, and the insights acquired are carefully gathered to better understand Africa's post-COVID-19 recovery strategy. The research adopted a qualitative methodology, combining desk-based research with interviews, and offered recommendations to align Africa's recovery efforts with the long-term objectives of Agenda 2063. The study's findings suggest that politicians should be truthful in addressing concerns of trade integration and sustainable development and that honesty and integrity should be regarded as essential characteristics in any African economy. The study recommends policymakers form public-private partnerships to encourage entrepreneurship and provide targeted support to small firms. The study contributes to existing knowledge and policy frameworks in post-COVID-19 initiatives for accelerating Africa's sustainable development and trade integration, in line with Agenda 2063, through policy changes, digital transformation, and equitable economic recovery.

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## INTRODUCTION

African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 was penned and enacted five years before the outbreak of COVID-19 across Africa and around the world. SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that produces COVID-19, has caused significant global socioeconomic damage.<sup>1</sup> On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) proclaimed a pandemic public health menace.<sup>2</sup> By that point, the pandemic had spread to more

<sup>1</sup> Bastián González-Bustamante, "Evolution and Early Government Responses to COVID-19 in South America," *World Development* 137 (2021): 105180.

<sup>2</sup> Nadia Jebri, "World Health Organization Declared a Pandemic Public Health Menace: A Systematic Review of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 'COVID-19,'" 2020.

than a hundred countries, with over a hundred thousand cases globally. COVID-19 has impacted numerous countries worldwide, with Africa being the most recently affected continent.

The guiding framework of the AU Agenda 2063 echoes the Pan-African demand for unity to realise Africa's Renaissance. AU Agenda 2063, based on Pan Africanism and the African Renaissance, offers a strong framework for resolving historical injustices and transforming the 21st century into the African Century.<sup>3</sup> Following independence, African leaders aimed to achieve progress through integration.

Moreover, Aspiration 1 of the Agenda 2063 framework calls for a prosperous Africa through inclusive growth and sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the dream of realising Aspiration 1 has not ended; time is still on the continent's side, though the unexpected crisis brought on by COVID-19 may have slowed its manifestation.

For the past fifty years, Africa has faced a disease burden that has gradually increased in magnitude and complexity. Despite this, Boujnah claims that health development on the continent has continued to rely on donor packages since decolonisation.<sup>5</sup> The load of interdependence has made it hard for Africa to develop without external assistance. COVID-19 weakened the process of sustainable development and trade integration.

Therefore, it is vital that Africa adopt creative policy tools to offer urgent sustainable development and trade integration support following the COVID-19 crisis, as well as sustained progress towards the realisation of the AU Agenda 2063 as a driving force for this recovery. A post-pandemic plan should eliminate existing policy inefficiencies and fix perverse incentives that impede sustainable development.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 has exacerbated Africa's existing crises, particularly in the health sector. Much of the research on post-COVID-19 recovery focusses on healthcare rather than sustainable development and trade. Studies by Kodali; and Ogbeta, Faruk & Omotosho recommends that countries must invest and innovate to ensure progress towards health coverage after the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, recent publications have provided little clarity on sustainable development and trade integration. COVID-19 undermined the planned trade integration and sustainable development that were intended to better and liberate Africa economically and socially.

Therefore, the research objectives include to review COVID-19's impact on sustainable development and trade integration; to examine the African Union Agenda 2063 and its contribution to achieving sustainable development and trade integration and assess the insights gathered on the recommended actions for Africa's post-COVID-19 recovery approach

The study provides vital insights into the challenges and prospects for promoting sustainable growth and trade integration in Africa following COVID-19. It presents a comprehensive framework for improving future pandemic readiness and practical recommendations that are consistent with Agenda 2063's objectives, making a significant contribution to policy discussions on regional integration and sustainable recovery in Africa.

This article has expanded much of the data to better explain the nature of COVID-19 and how it reversed the little progress gained by African governments in the previous ten years. The articles identify all the COVID-19 gaps and difficulties, while also making room for the AU Agenda 2063 to slot in as a crisis solution. Therefore, the article focusses on ideas for accelerating sustainable development and trade integration in the aftermath of COVID-19, drawing on the AU Agenda 2063.

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<sup>3</sup> Haddy Njie, "Do the Objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063 Aspirations Harmonize with a Pan-African and African Renaissance Vision?—A Critical Review." 2019.

<sup>4</sup> African Union, "Agenda2063 Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want in 2063," 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hiba Boujnah, "Health Diplomacy in Africa-Opportunities Post-COVID-19," *Pan African Medical Journal* 43, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>6</sup> Edward B Barbier and Joanne C Burgess, "Sustainability and Development after COVID-19," *World Development* 135 (2020): 105082.

<sup>7</sup> Prakash Babu Kodali, "Achieving Universal Health Coverage in Low-and Middle-Income Countries: Challenges for Policy Post-Pandemic and Beyond," *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, 2023, 607–21; Kingsley Oghenekevwe Ogbeta, Abubakar Faruk, and Felix Oyejide Omotosho, "Covid-19 Shocks And Post Pandemic Recovery In The Gambia," *Covenant Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 2023, 15.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Sustainable Development*

Scholars like Shi et al., conceptualise that sustainable development has become a critical approach for guiding the world's social and economic transformation.<sup>8</sup> Currently, the majority of definitions and conceptions of sustainable development are not based on full conceptions of sustainability. Instead, they are affected by the fundamental concepts of certain sustainable development organisations.<sup>9</sup> For example, the concept of development does not discriminate between aims and means but views sustainable development as a basic process of change that can persist forever.

The term sustainable development was originally used in the 1987 World Commission on Environmental and Development report "Our Common Future," also known as the Brundtland Report.<sup>10</sup> However, the term was first used in the 18th century, when economists like Adam Smith highlighted development-related issues.<sup>11</sup> Later, neoclassical economic theory emphasised the significance of clean air, water, and renewable resources as well as the necessity of government intervention in cases of externalities and public goods. Karl Marx and classical economists Malthus, Ricardo, and Mill also debated about certain aspects of sustainable development in the 19th century.<sup>12</sup>

Sustainable development was defined as development that satisfies present needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to satiate their own needs.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, development entails considering economic, social, and environmental factors. The notion of sustainable development was developed through collaboration among various organisations and institutions. The most notable is the United Nations, which was established in 1945 and has its headquarters in New York. Since its inception, the UN has promoted sustainable development through conferences, activities, and publications to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>14</sup>

### **Trade Integration**

International trade is seen as the "engine of growth" for both emerging and developed countries. Carbaugh characterised it as the process of decreasing international trade barriers, increasing factor mobility, and intensifying economic activity among members.<sup>15</sup> It is a policy that seeks to eliminate economic boundaries and trade restrictions that impede the free movement of goods and services among members. According to Gammadigbe, trade integration can help to spread knowledge and technology while also facilitating the invention of new products.<sup>16</sup> Improved trade integration should have a favourable influence on country growth and create economic convergence.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### **Global Development Theory**

The study is centred on the Global Development Theory. The Global Development Theory provides guidance for addressing future difficulties and identifying effective solutions. According to Horner and Hulme, the global Development Theory emphasises the value of exchanging best practices and promoting

<sup>8</sup> Longyu Shi et al., "The Evolution of Sustainable Development Theory: Types, Goals, and Research Prospects," *Sustainability* 11, no. 24 (2019): 7158.

<sup>9</sup> Shi et al., "The Evolution of Sustainable Development Theory: Types, Goals, and Research Prospects."

<sup>10</sup> Special Working Session WCED, "World Commission on Environment and Development," *Our Common Future* 17, no. 1 (1987): 1–91.

<sup>11</sup> Klarin Tomislav, "The Concept of Sustainable Development: From Its Beginning to the Contemporary Issues," *Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business* 21, no. 1 (2018): 67–94.

<sup>12</sup> Tomislav, "The Concept of Sustainable Development: From Its Beginning to the Contemporary Issues."

<sup>13</sup> Marcin Zemigala, "Tendencies in Research on Sustainable Development in Management Sciences," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 218 (2019): 796–809.

<sup>14</sup> Sanjiv Kumar, Neeta Kumar, and Saxena Vivekadish, "Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS): Addressing Unfinished Agenda and Strengthening Sustainable Development and Partnership," *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* 41, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0970-0218.170955>.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Carbaugh, *Contemporary Economics: An Applications Approach* (Routledge, 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Vigninou Gammadigbe, "Is Regional Trade Integration a Growth and Convergence Engine in Africa?," 2021.

shared routes in international relations.<sup>17</sup> This theory aims to replace the North-South paradigm of development, which defined international development as acts and research focused on poor nations.<sup>18</sup>

The global development theory aims to address differentiated difficulties experienced by all parts of the world, rather than a binary approach.<sup>19</sup> Global development challenges, such as climate change and public health cannot be achieved individually but require collaborative response from multiple global players. COVID-19 is an excellent example of how global challenges cannot be solved individually but require a collaborative global player.

The global development theory is transforming not only where development takes place and what defines a challenge, but also who engages in development cooperation and how they interact.<sup>20</sup> The global issues, processes, actors, and resources driving the global development theory necessitate more inclusive cooperation for development.

This article explores how Global Development Theory might provide a framework for understanding the existing system. This theory offers a framework for considering sustainable development in the African setting after COVID-19. According to Petrone, Global Development Theory recognises that the reasons of development are not limited to certain regions or countries.<sup>21</sup> The future of trade integration and sustainable development relies on encouraging mutual learning and collaborative action across Africa.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research methodology. The major feature of qualitative research was to explore how scholars, political leaders, and think tanks make sense of their own tangible, real-life experiences and knowledge regarding the issue of sustainable development and trade integration following COVID-19 and comprehension of the AU Agenda 2063. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from all participants. Participants were selected based on their critical thinking abilities and knowledge of trade integration and sustainable development. Participants come from universities, civil society organisations, and government officials (particularly those involved in international relations and economics). The study was conducted in South Africa, selecting participants who reside or work in the country but originate from various African nations, primarily from Southern Africa.

The researcher followed all ethical consideration procedures, outlined the confidentiality provisions, and emphasised that participants can voice their ideas while knowing their identities are safe. Semi-structured interviews were done with a variety of participants to collect data. A semi-structured interview was done in person, allowing the researcher to pursue unique insights, pose questions, and evaluate phenomena from numerous angles.

Moreover, data for this work was acquired from relevant academic publications, books, and news stories in the subject of international relations and related fields. The writers analysed the study's data thematically through document review. Articles less than a decade old were recommended. Older sources with convincing evidence were also included. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the dataset. The concepts highlighted in the desk-based literature review were implemented.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The study recognised ethical leadership and transparency as an instrument for change among the several options that may be implemented to address the continent's deficiency in trade integration and sustainable development. There has been surprisingly few empirical research on the function of transparency and ethical leadership, given the importance and complexity of the subject. To illustrate how African governments are addressing corruption, poor administration, and unethical leadership, a substantial amount of data was examined in this study. Many participants said that politicians should be transparent

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<sup>17</sup> Rory Horner and David Hulme, "Converging Divergence? Unpacking the New Geography of 21st Century Global Development," 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Rory Horner, "Towards a New Paradigm of Global Development? Beyond the Limits of International Development," *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 3 (2020): 415–36.

<sup>19</sup> Rachael Calleja et al., "Global Development Paradigm for a World in Crisis" (Center for Global Development, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Calleja et al., "Global Development Paradigm for a World in Crisis."

<sup>21</sup> Francesco Petrone, "Why We Need a Multilateralism That Works and What Is the Role of the BRICS: Lessons from the Recent Covid-19 Pandemic," *BRICS Journal of Economics* 4, no. 1 (2023): 35–51.

to achieve good trade integration and sustainable development, and that honesty and integrity should be viewed as important factors in any African economy.

Infrastructure development and investment are critical components of economic growth in Africa, and they must be addressed quickly. The study findings in this context demonstrate that a strong health system and success in intra-trade necessitate solid infrastructure. COVID-19 showed many Africans' incapacities due to a lack of sufficient infrastructure. So it is time for African leaders to prioritise infrastructure, allowing countries to be more proactive rather than reactive during the crisis. Many participants considered that AfCFTA may be a solution to foster sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 era, implying that infrastructure development must occur before a cross-border trade can be implemented.

Since the AfCFTA is the largest market in the world, significant NTBs to intra-African trade need to be eliminated. Moreover, the results indicate that non-tariff trade barriers should be given more prominence in the African intra-trade discourse and that any excessively bureaucratic non-tariff trade barriers have to be eliminated. Technical aid and capacity-building initiatives in Africa ought to bolster this.

The study finds that political stability is essential for Africa to make the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy. Political stability and trade integration are closely related. Political instability may limit investment and impede economic growth, which is bad for the implementation of the AfCFTA. A small number of moderately underperforming African states also have remarkably stable political systems, despite the fact that some African governments with high development rates are stable.

## DISCUSSION

### Ethical Leadership and Transparency

Unethical leadership is a complicated phenomenon with various origins that cannot be solved with a single solution. However, the continent requires a step that can significantly contribute to the process of eliminating these challenges in Africa by incorporating the value of ethical leadership and transparency into any systemic process. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the concept of ethical leadership globally. Africa had tremendous challenges in maintaining ethical healthcare systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic posed ethical challenges for health officials in regions with fragile economies, limited resources, conflicts, political uncertainty, fragmented healthcare systems, and corruption.<sup>22</sup> Participant three (3) made this assertion;

*Africa continues to lack ethical leaders. Long before COVID-19, Africa suffered hospital incapacity. Therefore, if our continent's leaders had been ethical and proactive, they could have used existing funds to address hospital issues. Thus, we need leaders who are proactive rather than reactive.*

Lim defines ethical leadership as the process by which a leader guides others utilising ethical principles and values such as trust, honesty, empathy, fairness, and charisma.<sup>23</sup> Ethics includes a person's moral character and objectives. Therefore, with pervasive corruption, incompetence, dishonest leadership, and maladministration documented in many parts of the continent, Africa would struggle to achieve smooth sustainability and trade integration until such practices change.

Corruption associated with COVID-19 has been documented across Africa, primarily in procurement.<sup>24</sup> In Cameroon, a 2021 audit showed the misappropriation of around US\$333 million intended for the pandemic response in 2020. South Africa's health minister at the time was placed on leave as questionable contracts totalling \$10 million were probed. There was also popular outrage in the country about the alleged inflation of government contracts for the purchase of medical goods worth US\$900 million. Malawi's government admitted that some of its officials conspired with the private sector to misappropriate US\$1.3 million in COVID-19 money through procurement and allowance

<sup>22</sup> Martha Munezhi and Nazik Hammad, "Ethical Health Leadership: Lessons from Low-and Middle-Income Countries during COVID-19," in *Healthcare Management Forum*, vol. 34 (SAGE Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA, 2021), 62–67.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Theriono Lim, "Ethical Leadership in the Eyes of Gen Z: A Literature Review," *FIRM Journal of Management Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 83–96.

<sup>24</sup> E R Aikins, "Corruption in Africa Deepens the Wounds of COVID-19," *Institute for Security Studies* 19 (2022).

irregularities. The Kenya Medical Supplies Authority is accused of embezzling over \$400 million intended for medical equipment purchases.<sup>25</sup>

In these cases, the participant perspectives above clearly demonstrate the problem of unsighted leaders, which must be mitigated by ethical leadership and transparency. For improved sustainable development and trade integration, African leaders must prioritise long-term strategy and the issue of political will, which comes with ethical leadership ideals and transparency. A part of the AU Agenda 2063 advocate to promote visionary leadership, democratic rule, and developmental structures through transparent planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation systems at all levels.<sup>26</sup>

### Infrastructure Investment

Adequate infrastructure in every given economy drives economic growth.<sup>27</sup> Addressing the infrastructure gap is critical to improving people's quality of life, which includes advances in trade integration and programs related to sustainable development. According to Edobor Arimoro, inadequate infrastructure (such as roads, power, and drinkable water) in Africa has a direct influence on the people's quality of life.<sup>28</sup> A well-maintained road network helps convey intra-African trade. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Africa region faced significant infrastructure deficits, particularly in crucial industries. COVID-19 has made it more challenging for public bodies in Africa to balance infrastructure demand and supply.<sup>29</sup>

Participant 4 further stated that;

*Investments in physical and digital infrastructure are critical for improving connectivity, lowering trade costs, and facilitating integration into regional and global value chains. This comprises transport infrastructure such as roads, ports, and trains, as well as digital infrastructure that supports e-trade and digital services.*

*A positive beginning in the correct way is investing in healthcare and, in general, reliance. Other positive steps include enhancing the health infrastructure, preparing for potential crises, and providing health practitioners with training (Participant 5).*

COVID-19 has triggered a slew of warnings about health infrastructure. According to Okoth and Odaga, Africa's basic services infrastructure gap is exacerbated by weak healthcare systems when compared to other parts of the world. Africa has a substantially lower ratio of hospital beds, intensive care units, and health professionals per population.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, Long-term infrastructure planning is still lacking in many African countries, despite its importance in reducing perceived high-risk premiums for investments in the region. Once more, according to Ebobiss, Africa urgently requires regional infrastructure to hasten the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) because a large number of the continent's development difficulties call for cross-border solutions.<sup>31</sup>

According to Ghosh, true development involves more than just reducing deprivation.<sup>32</sup> It involves transforming a country's structures, institutions, and norms to increase wealth-creation, ensure gains are shared, and expand opportunities for future generations.

<sup>25</sup> Aikins, "Corruption in Africa Deepens the Wounds of COVID-19."

<sup>26</sup> Union, "Agenda2063 Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want in 2063."

<sup>27</sup> Alolote Amadi, "A Cross-Sectional Snapshot of the Insider View of Highway Infrastructure Delivery in the Developing World," *International Journal of Construction Management* 19, no. 6 (2019): 472–91.

<sup>28</sup> Augustine Edobor Arimoro, "Private Sector Investment in Infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa Post-COVID-19: The Role of Law," *Public Works Management & Policy* 27, no. 2 (2022): 108–26.

<sup>29</sup> Edobor Arimoro, "Private Sector Investment in Infrastructure in Sub-Saharan Africa Post-COVID-19: The Role of Law."

<sup>30</sup> Eva Maria Anyango Okoth and Mark Odhiambo Odaga, "Leveraging Existing Approaches and Tools to Secure Climate Justice in Africa," *Carbon & Climate Law Review* 15, no. 2 (2021): 129–38, <https://doi.org/10.21552/cclr/2021/2/4>.

<sup>31</sup> Alain Ebobiss, "Improving Infrastructure in Africa: Creating Long-Term Resilience through Investment," 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Jayati Ghosh, "Beyond the Millenium Development Goals: A Southern Perspective on a Global New Deal," *Journal of International Development* 27, no. 3 (2015): 320–29.

## Free Trade and Trade Commodities

The AfCFTA is a potential solution to address the economic consequences of the COVID-19 conflict. Implementing the AfCFTA quickly and ambitiously can enhance continental resilience and volatility management by diversifying exports and increasing intra-African trade.<sup>33</sup> Upon completion, the free trade zone will serve over one billion people and generate over US\$2.6 trillion in GDP for Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Further, Participant Two (2) indicated that;

*Under these conditions, the trade dividend should flow down to small and medium-sized businesses that engage in cross-border trade, which are dominated by women, children, and, to some extent, persons with disabilities.*

Even though the AfCFTA was started prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the AU Agenda 2063 called for expediting the creation of the Continental Free Trade Area by 2017, doubling intra-African trade by 2022, bolstering Africa's collective voice and policy space in international trade negotiations, and establishing financial institutions within predetermined timelines.<sup>35</sup>

According to Zidouemba and Jallab, the AfCFTA promotes economic development in Africa by increasing incomes, employment, and exports of industrial and intermediate commodities.<sup>36</sup> African economies should hasten the implementation of the AfCFTA and trade liberalisation reforms.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of trade, Participant 3 asked very important questions, claiming;

*We must determine what the trade challenges are. Why have Africans not traded as much as Europeans and Asians do? What type of trading system are we intending to implement? More crucially, we need to understand what we are going to trade with each other. Have we determined what resources Zimbabwe has but South Africa does not, or what Nigeria has but Angola does not?*

The participant's argument makes authenticity, but it should have been emphasised that countries should specialise in manufacturing. Since commodities can be produced from manufactured goods and natural resources like coal and diamonds. Many countries, including those in the central and eastern regions, can trade similar natural resource-derived goods like diamonds. So, traded commodities are sometimes divided into four categories: metals, energy, livestock and meat, and agriculture. Commodities allow investors to diversify their portfolios beyond traditional assets.

According to Motadi, Africa's economy is heavily reliant on natural resources, and economic progress has often exacerbated the imbalance between wealth and poverty, resulting in rising poverty rates.<sup>38</sup> In response, Africa has the ability to process its natural resources and trade them as manufactured goods. Processing this natural resource creates prospects for industrialisation, which will lead to additional jobs for Africans.

## Addressing Non-Tariff Barriers

Africa continues to highlight the demand for increased trade facilitation, demonstrating that trade liberalisation has long been a priority for African policymakers. Eliminating non-tariff barriers (NTBs) is required to achieve the AfCFTA's stated goal of "creating one African market." NTBs are rigorous regulations and processes that, in addition to tariffs, make importing or exporting products more complex and expensive.<sup>39</sup>

Participant Four (4) asserted;

<sup>33</sup> Nassim Oulmane, Mustapha Sadni Jallab, and Patrice Zidouemba, "The African Continental Free Trade Area in a Covid-19 Time: Macroeconomic and Sectoral Impacts," 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Oulmane, Sadni Jallab, and Zidouemba, "The African Continental Free Trade Area in a Covid-19 Time: Macroeconomic and Sectoral Impacts."

<sup>35</sup> Union, "Agenda2063 Report of the Commission on the African Union Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want in 2063."

<sup>36</sup> Patrice Rélouendé Zidouemba and Mustapha Sadni Jallab, "The African Continental Free Trade Area and the Trade Facilitation Agreement: Some Regional Macroeconomic Impacts," *International Journal of Trade and Global Markets* 14, no. 3 (2021): 325–37.

<sup>37</sup> E., A. Keck, R. Koopman, and C. Nee. Bekkers, "'Methodology for the WTO Trade Forecast of April 8 2020.'" (World Trade Organization, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Masa Sylvester Motadi, "Effects of Green Policies on Sustainability of Local Economies in Africa," *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy* (2687-2293) 6, no. 2 (2024): 179–93.

<sup>39</sup> Teniola Tayo and Michael Odijie, "The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods," in *The Quest for Unity* (Routledge, n.d.), 337–54.

*Tariff barriers must be lowered, but non-tariff barriers such as bureaucratic red tape, corruption, and inadequate logistics continue to pose significant trade challenges in many African countries. There is a need to streamline customs operations, increase transparency, and improve logistics services.*

Vhumbunu and Rudigi state unequivocally that NTBs are a substantial hindrance to intra-African trade and international commercial transactions in general.<sup>40</sup> According to empirical research, NTBs limit the import and export of products and services more than customs fees and other levies.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, trade facilitation could help eliminate NTBs by simplifying, standardising, harmonising, and modernising trade and customs procedures.

### **Economic Transformation**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every African country, and recent economic advances are under jeopardy everywhere. COVID-19 responses hunted and continue to hunt a lot of African economies economically. Empirical evidence highlights the crucial importance of economic growth in achieving sustainable development. The following viewpoints by the participants shed more light on the measures that African economies should implement to achieve economic transformation in the post-COVID-19 era. AU Agenda 2063 seeks to utilise African resources to finance and accelerate its transformation.<sup>42</sup>

Participant Nine (9) urged;

*In terms of economic growth, there should be the formation of more robust economies, particularly in trade, as well as the construction of more diverse industrial zones that manufacture products that do not compete with one another.*

Moreover, Participant Seven (7) made this suggestion;

*Small, Medium, And Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) must provide capital to small-scale firms while also participating in the AFCFTA process.*

Indeed, SMMEs play a critical role in sustainable development. SMMEs provide revenue through employment, helping to eliminate poverty and income inequality while also boosting economic growth.<sup>43</sup> However, the performance of SMMEs has been harmed by COVID-19, a communicable respiratory disease produced by a novel type of coronavirus that infects humans. However, the ineffectiveness of SMMEs as a result of COVID-19 cannot detract from the promise of opportunities to re-establishing and define the essence of robust sustainable development in Africa.

To restore the effectiveness of SMMEs, African governments must give financial help, particularly through SMME support agencies, which is critical to the sector's existence. Additionally, the government's temporary exemption from paying some taxes will provide a financial buffer for SMMEs.<sup>44</sup> For instance, the case study of Egypt is anticipated to return to pre-pandemic growth levels by 2022, or roughly 5.5%, thanks to a resurgence of corporate confidence and rising investment, particularly as global tourism rebounds.<sup>45</sup>

### **Political Stability**

Max Weber's political theories suggest that a government's legitimate use of physical force is essential for political stability. If the government fails to provide basic services like security, food, and housing, it loses its authority to enforce laws, leading to political instability.<sup>46</sup> According to Uddin, Ali, and Masih,

<sup>40</sup> Clayton Hazvinei Vhumbunu and Joseph Rukema Rudigi, "Eliminating Non-Tariff Barriers in the African Continental Free Trade Area: Lessons and Experiences from African Regional Economic Communities.," *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>41</sup> "The Role of Trade Facilitation in Addressing Non-Tariff Barriers in the African Continental Free Trade Area," 2021.

<sup>42</sup> African Union, "Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024 (STISA-2024)," *Science & Technology African Union Commission, Ed*, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Olawale Olufunso Fatoki, "Covid-19 and South Africa's Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises: Challenges and Recommendations," 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. Economic impact of covid-19 on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Africa and policy options for mitigation (2020).

<sup>45</sup> LYAL WHITE et al., "The Economic Impact of COVID-19 and Prospects for a Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery in Africa," 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Swedberg, *Max Weber and the Idea of Economic Sociology* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

stabilising political systems that transition to a new political order may experience increased growth.<sup>47</sup> So, African governments in the post-COVID-19 period must be sturdy in order to give a greater foundation for political stability with the goal of promoting sustainable development and trade integration.

*African nations should address political difficulties, as political instability is the root cause of economic issues (Participant 1).*

There is a fine line between political instability and trade intervention. Political instability has been a significant threat to Africa's economic and human growth since independence from colonialism.<sup>48</sup> Political instability in nations such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Sudan has hindered trade and other economic operations. Civil wars and political upheaval can limit a country's ability to engage in various economic activities, including trade.<sup>49</sup>

Cooray, Dutta, and Mallick conducted a new study that examined the impact of civil liberties, democracy, political rights, and political institutions on trade openness and labour force participation rates in Africa.<sup>50</sup> According to their findings, a nation's economic progress is generally boosted by higher labour force participation rates (LFPR), which are a direct effect of better political institutions. Therefore, political stability can impact growth through multiple avenues. For instance, it can foster a business-friendly atmosphere, draw in both foreign and domestic investment, generate job opportunities, and encourage migration to urban areas, all of which contribute to higher aggregate demand and economic growth. Hoy and Sumner argue that domestic disparities, political economy, and distribution have higher ability to alleviate poverty at lower poverty lines, aligning with Global Development Theory.<sup>51</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Leaders should prioritize transparent governance to rebuild trust and attract investment.
- Infrastructure investment, particularly in digital infrastructure and healthcare, is essential to support trade and sustainable development.
- Governments must accelerate the implementation of the AfCFTA to increase intra-African trade and reduce external dependencies.
- Non-tariff barriers should be systematically eliminated through streamlined customs procedures and enhanced logistics.
- Policymakers should engage in public-private partnerships to promote entrepreneurship and provide targeted support for small businesses.
- In accordance with the AfCFTA, Africa should prioritise more economic diversification and structural change, utilising its extensive network of small and medium-sized businesses and formal microenterprises to quickly recover from the effects of COVID-19.<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, notwithstanding the wrongs perpetrated by COVID-19, Africa can still achieve sustainable development and trade integration. African governments should prioritise developing programs and initiatives with strong ties to achieve sustainable development and trade integration, rather than focusing solely on policy formulation without implementation. Having capable and ethical leaders who uphold the ideals of the continent at heart will speed up sustainable development and trade interactions. A prosperous Africa is envisioned by the AU Agenda 2063, but much work still needs to be done,

<sup>47</sup> Md Akther Uddin, Md Hakim Ali, and Mansur Masih, "Political Stability and Growth: An Application of Dynamic GMM and Quantile Regression," *Economic Modelling* 64 (2017): 610–25.

<sup>48</sup> Simplice A Asongu, Thales P Yapatake Kossele, and Joseph Nnanna, "Not All That Glitters Is Gold: Political Stability and Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 75, no. 5 (2021): 469–85.

<sup>49</sup> Asongu, Kossele, and Nnanna, "Not All That Glitters Is Gold: Political Stability and Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa."

<sup>50</sup> Arusha Cooray, Nabamita Dutta, and Sushanta Mallick, "Trade Openness and Labor Force Participation in Africa: The Role of Political Institutions," *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* 56, no. 2 (2017): 319–50.

<sup>51</sup> Chris Hoy and Andy Sumner, "Global Poverty and Inequality: Is There New Capacity for Redistribution in Developing Countries?," *Journal of Globalization and Development* 7, no. 1 (2016): 117–57.

<sup>52</sup> Omphemetse S Sibanda, "Transforming Challenges into Opportunities: A Reflection on the Effects of Covid-19 on African Trade," *Africa Insight* 52, no. 4 (2023): 85–95.

particularly in the areas of regional solidarity, shared accountability, multilateral assistance, international cooperation, and local multi-actor engagement, which are essential for both short- and long-term sustainable restoration. To promote economic recovery in the post-pandemic era, African countries' public and foreign policies should prioritise strengthening intra-trade links within their borders.

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