

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NONRECIPROCAL FRAMEWORKS IN GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AND THE PROSPECTS OF AFRICAN EXPORTS: THE CASE OF THE AFRICAN GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (AGOA)

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ABSTRACT

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has played a crucial role in enhancing market access for sub-Saharan African (SSA) exports to the United States through a nonreciprocal trade framework. However, the shift toward a transactional trade model raises concerns about the future of African exports. This study examines the impact of AGOA's expiration on SSA economies, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), using customs union theory and world-systems theory as analytical lenses. The research adopts an exploratory approach, analyzing trade data and policy trends to assess how reciprocal trade frameworks may shape export prospects. Findings indicate that while AGOA facilitated export diversification and job creation, its expiration exposes African economies to heightened competition, potential trade diversion, and structural vulnerabilities. The dominance of raw material exports over value-added goods remains a key challenge. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure and limited industrial capacity hinder the ability of SSA countries to compete in a reciprocal trade system. To mitigate these risks, the study recommends strengthening regional trade agreements such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), enhancing value addition in exports, and negotiating favorable bilateral trade agreements. Additionally, investments in infrastructure and industrial development are critical to ensuring sustainable export growth. In conclusion, while AGOA's expiration presents challenges, it also offers an opportunity for African nations to redefine their trade strategies. By fostering regional integration and economic diversification, SSA countries can enhance their resilience in the evolving global trade landscape.

Keywords: Exports, import substitution, AGOA, market access, African growth, ECOWAS

INTRODUCTION

The global geopolitical landscape is undergoing significant transformation, with profound implications for international political economy, development studies, and international relations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. As economies grow and expand their influence, nations must develop their export sectors and pursue industrialization to enable businesses to compete globally and capitalize on emerging opportunities. However, this traditional approach is increasingly giving way to the strategic use of tariffs as a means to elevate national economies. While not a novel concept, this strategy has historically contributed to the prosperity of countries like the United

States. The contemporary shift, however, emphasizes reciprocity in cross-border trade. A notable example of this shift occurred under President Donald Trump, whose international trade policy has disrupted the status quo by introducing a transactional approach to trade. This shift redefined trade and international relations through a model in which reciprocity dictates economic engagements. While Moseley (2018) argues that transactionalism is ineffective, Toosi (2019) and Gvosdev (2019) contend that it has evolved from mere rhetoric into a defining principle of contemporary global trade, which is now a reality.

One key policy affected by these changes is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), established in 2002 as a nonreciprocal program that grants duty-free access to U.S. markets for eligible exports from qualifying sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. Since its inception in 2000, AGOA has been central to U.S.-Africa economic relations and remains a cornerstone of America's commercial engagement with the region (Lighthizer, 2020). For instance, in 2024, Nigeria's exports to the U.S. exceeded \$5 billion, largely benefiting from tariff-free access under AGOA. In contrast, Nigeria's imports from the U.S. amounted to over \$4 billion, with tariffs ranging from 5% to 35%. Recently, Donald Trump announced the introduction of a reciprocal trade system, which is expected to impact Nigeria's exports – as well as those of other eligible SSA countries – to the U.S. market due to newly imposed reciprocal tariffs. This policy shift signals the potential expiration of AGOA and raises critical questions about the future of African exports under a reciprocal trade framework.

This paper critically examines the implications of the transition from a nonreciprocal trade framework to a reciprocal one and explores its potential impact on African exports. Specifically, it seeks to address the question: How will a reciprocal trade framework shape the prospects of African exports? To analyze this issue, the study adopts an exploratory approach, using the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a case study applying custom union and the world-systems theory as its theoretical framework. Given the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, this research aims to provide policy recommendations to help position the region advantageously within the emerging transactional model of international relations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **customs union theory** and the **world system theory**. The customs union theory, developed by Jacob Viner (1950), examines the economic impact of trade agreements that eliminate internal tariffs among member states while maintaining a common external tariff against non-members. This framework helps analyze the implications of AGOA's nonreciprocal nature and the potential shift toward a reciprocal trade arrangement. A central tenet of customs union theory is the distinction between trade creation and trade diversion. Trade creation occurs when a trade agreement enables more efficient production within member states, leading to increased economic welfare. In contrast, trade diversion happens when preferential trade policies shift imports from a more efficient global producer to a less efficient member country due to tariff preferences. AGOA, as a nonreciprocal trade preference program allowed African exporters to expand their access to the U.S. market without facing competitive pressures from American products entering their domestic markets tariff-free. As a result, AGOA facilitated trade creation by enabling West African countries to export goods, particularly crude oil, apparel, and

agricultural products, at preferential rates. However, with the shift toward reciprocal trade frameworks, there is a potential risk of trade diversion. If AGOA expires and a new system requires SSA countries to lower tariffs on U.S. goods in exchange for market access, African producers might struggle to compete with highly subsidized American products. This shift could reduce the competitive advantage enjoyed by African exporters under AGOA, thereby affecting the prospects of African exports.

Furthermore, this study also draws on world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 2011), which provides a broader geopolitical perspective on AGOA's implications. World-systems theory classifies the global economy into core, semi-periphery, and periphery nations, with core countries (such as the United States) dominating global trade and finance, while peripheral economies (including most of sub-Saharan Africa) supply raw materials and low-value goods. Under AGOA, African countries operated within a peripheral economic structure, primarily exporting raw materials and low-processed goods to the U.S. while relying on imports of higher-value manufactured goods. The expiration of AGOA and the transition toward transactionalism in trade, where reciprocity dictates market access, raises concerns about whether SSA countries can negotiate favourable terms within a system historically dominated by core economies. Hence, the potential for increased tariffs on African exports could exacerbate existing inequalities and limit SSA's ability to move toward semi-periphery status, where industrialization and economic diversification could thrive.

In integrating customs union theory and world-systems theory, this study provides a framework for understanding AGOA's role in shaping U.S.-Africa trade relations and the potential consequences of its expiration on African exports. The shift toward reciprocity and transactionalism in trade presents both opportunities and challenges for West African economies, requiring strategic policy responses to ensure sustainable export growth and regional economic integration. In addition, customs union theory suggests that regional economic blocs like ECOWAS can serve as a buffer against trade dependency on external partners; this study argues that in strengthening intra-African trade through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), ECOWAS countries could reduce reliance on AGOA-type arrangements and foster economic self-sufficiency. However, the transition to a reciprocal trade system poses a challenge, without AGOA, SSA countries may need to negotiate bilateral trade agreements with the U.S., potentially weakening regional economic unity and undermining export potentials to the U.S. market.

BRIEF OF WEST AFRICAN IMPORT AND EXPORTING PERSPECTIVE

West Africa, an area in western Africa, is renowned for its many cultures, rich history, and important contributions to African heritage. The region is characterized by a variety of landscapes, ranging from lush tropical rainforests to arid savannas (Adegbeye et al 2024; Bönner et al 2021). Throughout history, West Africa has been home to several powerful and influential empires, such as the Ghana Empire, Mali Empire, and Songhai Empire. These empires were centres of trade, learning, and cultural exchange, leaving a lasting impact on the region's identity. The West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, has formulated trade policies aimed at enhancing exports to its member states and the global market. Imports are viewed as complementary to the export strategy, with a

focus on enhancing local value and fuel exports from extractive industries dominate transactions constituting 75% of exports, primarily sourced from Nigeria (73%) (ECOTIS, 2024). Other significant export products include cocoa, precious stones, cotton, edible fruit, rubber, plastics, wood products, and fish, collectively forming the major share of ECOWAS exports. Europe accounts for approximately 28% of ECOWAS exports, with the European Union contributing 23%. The Americas constitute 40%, with the Free Trade Association of North America (NAFTA) making up 34%, including the US, Canada, and Mexico. The development of South-South trade has led to a notable increase in exports to Asian countries and Oceania, capturing 16%. Nigeria and Ivory Coast dominate these exports, representing 87% of transactions, with Nigeria contributing 77% and Côte d'Ivoire 10%. Ghana and Senegal follow, contributing 4% and 2%, respectively, while Mali and five other countries each account for 1% of regional exports.

Over the years, China has become a prominent trade partner for many West African nations. The relationship often involves the export of raw materials, such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products, to meet China's growing industrial and consumer demands (Shinn 2023; Abegunrin & Manyeruke 2020; Hou, Fu, & Mohnen 2022). Also, several West African countries maintain strong trade ties with European Union (EU) nations. The EU is a major destination for West African exports, including agricultural products, minerals, and oil. Individual countries within the EU, such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands, are significant trading partners (Adam, et al. 2020; Krapohl & Van Huut 2020). Similarly, India has been a growing trade partner for West African nations. The relationship involves the export of various commodities, including oil, minerals, and agricultural products. India's increasing demand for raw materials contributes to the economic ties between the regions (Okoro, Ujunwa et al. 2020). However, the United States is also an important export partner for some West African countries. The ECOWAS and the United States have taken steps to develop trade relations frameworks. Among the various frameworks, our case study in this paper is the AGOA. AGOA has facilitated trade between the US and eligible African countries, providing preferential access to the US market for certain goods.

AGOA, which encourages sub-Saharan African eligible exports with tariff-free access to the US markets, has now expired. The EU has similar frameworks, and there are expectations that they continue to support trade between West Africa and European countries. The expiration of AGOA presents challenges for West African economies, highlighting the need for strategic policy responses to ensure sustainable export growth and economic development in the post-AGOA era.

AGOA: US-ECOWAS TRADE RELATION

AGOA is a nonreciprocal preference programs that make available duty-free access to the US markets for eligible exports from qualifying SSA countries. Since its inception in 2000, AGOA has been at the core of US economic policy and commercial engagement with Africa and it is considered the cornerstone of America's economic engagement with sub-Saharan Africa over the decades (Lighthizer 2020). To be eligible for AGOA, countries must also be eligible for the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). All ECOWAS member states are AGOA-eligible countries except Guinea, Mali, and Niger which lost their eligibility or are ineligible. The basic

eligibility criteria include (a) market-based economy where the country must have established or be making progress toward establishing a market-based economy; (b) rule of law where the country must have established or be making progress toward establishing the rule of law; (c) political pluralism where the countries must have established or are making progress toward establishing political pluralism. Others include (d), a due process where the countries must have established or are making progress toward establishing the right to due process; (e) trade barriers where the countries must have eliminated trade barriers and economic policies that reduce poverty; (f) corruption where the countries must have systems to combat corruption; (g) human rights where the countries must not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights or provide support for acts of international terrorism; and (h) cooperation where the countries must cooperate in international efforts to eliminate human rights violations and terrorist activities.

According to the ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS) (2024), under AGOA, SSA exports to the US comprise oil, apparel, and various other products. In 2022, the US witnessed a 3.3% decline in exports to ECOWAS, totalling \$6.7 billion – reflecting a 20% decrease from 2012 and a drop from the figures recorded in 2021. Equally, US imports from ECOWAS in 2022 amounted to \$9.4 billion, marking a notable 38.8% increase from 2021 but a substantial 55% decrease from 2012. ECOWAS import-export data reveals key export products, including cocoa, cocoa food preparations, precious stones, cotton, edible fruit, rubber, plastics, wood and wood products, fish, and shellfish. Notably, Europe constitutes around 28% of ECOWAS exports, with the European Union contributing 23%. With the expiration of AGOA and new reciprocity in tariffs, the export dynamics to the US market might change drastically.

Asmah and Taiwo (2016) argue that the primary drivers of export growth under AGOA are predominantly centred on oil and gas, with minimal contribution from agricultural products. The influence of AGOA on African agriculture is notably constrained, despite agriculture being the sector with the highest potential for poverty reduction and job creation in Africa. One key factor of the constraints for ECOWAS member states is the subsidization of agriculture by the US government for its farmers, which has effectively nullified any competitive edge held by Africa's agricultural sector within AGOA (Asmah & Taiwo 2016). This subsidy system makes American agricultural exports more affordable than locally produced items in AGOA beneficiary countries and undermines the potential growth of smallholder farming in West Africa. Charles, et al (2003), argued that AGOA consistently fosters regional supply chains irrespective of pre-existing quota practices, particularly in products like textiles and apparel. Pigman (2016) Submitted that African exports under AGOA have not reached their quota limits. The implication is that because AGOA failed to eliminate pre-existing quotas as observed by Asmah and Taiwo (2016), it does not pose a significant challenge to West African exports. Thus, there is room for eligible West African exporters to explore opportunities under the agreement. To qualify for AGOA's textile and apparel benefits, beneficiary countries must establish a robust visa system to prevent unlawful transshipments and the use of counterfeit documents, coupled with effective enforcement and verification procedures.

ECOWAS EXPORTS SUCCESSES UNDER AGOA

The AGOA framework has catalyzed ECOWAS export services and diversification in different respects. These include contributing to increasing export diversity in West Africa, enabling job creation and economic growth, and enhancing exponential market access for newcomers and existing exporters to the US market, among others.

AGOA increased export diversity in West Africa: AGOA has played a crucial role in diversifying West African exports. Its impact on West African exports lies predominantly in its success in diversifying a historically commodity-dependent export landscape. From the customs union perspective, AGOA's preferential treatment has incentivized West African nations to diversify their export portfolios beyond traditional commodities which are subject to global price volatility. Traditionally tied to the fortunes of oil and mineral exports, West African states found themselves susceptible to the volatilities of global commodity markets (Jacob et al 2020; Seyoum & Abraham 2022; Aslanidis et al 2020). AGOA emerged as a transformative catalyst, steering these countries toward non-traditional sectors, thereby fostering a more resilient and diversified export portfolio. The reliance on the exportation of commodities, primarily oil and minerals posed significant challenges, as fluctuations in global commodity prices often translated to unpredictable economic outcomes for these nations. AGOA, recognizing the need for economic resilience, strategically incentivized West African countries to explore and expand their export base beyond traditional commodities.

One of the notable shifts facilitated by AGOA is the substantial growth of non-traditional sectors, such as textiles, apparel, and agricultural products. From the world system theory perspective, the growth of sectors like textiles and apparel under AGOA has enabled West African countries to move beyond the simple export of raw materials, fostering economic development and challenging traditional periphery roles. This shift contributes to a more balanced global economic system by enabling periphery nations to engage in more complex economic activities.

Furthermore, the diversification has not only mitigated the risks associated with overreliance on a few key exports but has also unleashed new economic opportunities. West African states, once constrained by the cyclical nature of commodity markets, have now successfully navigated towards industries with more stable demand patterns. The textile and apparel sector, in particular, has experienced significant expansion, driven by preferential trade terms and incentives under AGOA. Countries in the region have been able to capitalize on the access to the US market, fostering the growth of local industries and creating employment opportunities. Additionally, the agricultural sector has witnessed increased attention. West African nations are leveraging AGOA to enhance their export capacities in crops and processed agricultural goods. AGOA's encouragement of diversification aligns with broader sustainable developmental goals, promoting sustainable economic growth and reducing vulnerability to external shocks (Luke 2023). The legacy of AGOA, therefore, extends beyond preferential trade agreements, contributing significantly to reshaping West Africa's economic landscape.

Job creation and economic growth: AGOA's impact on West African economies extends beyond trade preferences, as it stands as a catalyst for substantial job creation (Tadesse, 2024; Luke 2023).

One of the key mechanisms through which AGOA has promoted job creation is by encouraging the establishment and growth of industries, with a notable focus on the garment and textile sectors (Tadesse, 2024). From the perspective of customs union theory, AGOA's preferential trade terms have effectively reduced trade barriers between the U.S. and eligible African countries, fostering trade creation. This environment has enabled West African nations to develop industries that are competitive in the U.S. market, thereby enhancing their job creation. However, the non-reciprocal nature of AGOA means that while African countries benefit from reduced tariffs, they are not required to lower their tariffs for U.S. goods, distinguishing them from traditional customs unions. Nevertheless, this expansion has translated into a surge in employment opportunities, from skilled labour in manufacturing facilities to ancillary roles in supply chains and distribution networks. The garment and textile sectors, in particular, have become vibrant hubs of economic activity, serving as significant contributors to job markets in West Africa. The creation of employment opportunities in these industries not only addresses immediate economic needs but also contributes to skill development and capacity building, thereby fostering a more sustainable and diversified labour force (Tadesse, 2024; Luke 2023).

Furthermore, the sustainable economic development fostered by AGOA-driven job creation goes beyond the immediate gains. The establishment of industries, coupled with the development of a skilled workforce, sets the stage for long-term economic growth and competitiveness (Luke 2023). The infusion of vitality into these sectors not only aligns with the goals of poverty reduction but also positions West African states as dynamic players in the global economic arena. In essence, AGOA's role in enhancing job creation and economic growth in West Africa transcends simple trade concessions (Tadesse, 2024). It serves as a transformative force, breathing life into industries, uplifting communities through employment opportunities, and laying the foundation for sustained economic prosperity.

In other words, AGOA's role in enhancing job creation and economic growth in West Africa exemplifies the practical applications of customs union and world-systems theories. The act's preferential trade provisions have stimulated relevant industrial development and employment, contributing to the economic advancement within the global system.

Enhanced exponential market access for newcomers and existing exporters to the US market: AGOA provides West African countries with preferential access to the US market and promotes an environment conducive to trade and investment leading to a rise in exports, creating mutually beneficial relationships between West African producers and American consumers (Seyoum & Abraham 2022; Aslanidis et al 2020). At the heart of AGOA's impact is the preferential access it affords ECOWAS members to the vast US consumer base. By reducing trade barriers and providing duty-free or reduced-tariff entry for eligible products, AGOA has effectively lowered the cost of exporting goods from West Africa to the United States. This preferential treatment has both made West African products more competitive and also acted as a powerful incentive for producers in the region to explore and exploit the opportunities presented by the US market.

The consequence of the increased market access has been a tangible rise in exports from West Africa to the United States (ECOTIS 2024). Industries such as textiles, apparel, and agricultural

products have experienced an increase in demand, leading to a steady flow of West African goods entering the US market. Kennedy, Larres and Rockwell (2023) argue that AGOA's facilitation of increased market access has cultivated mutually beneficial relationships between West African producers and American consumers. Producers in West Africa gain access to a vast consumer base, providing them with a stable and lucrative market share for their goods. Simultaneously, American consumers benefit from a diversified range of products, often showcasing the unique cultural and artisanal offerings from West Africa.

From a customs union perspective, AGOA's preferential access can be likened to the benefits observed in regional trade agreements, where reduced tariffs among member countries promote trade creation. By lowering trade barriers, AGOA has made West African products more competitive in the U.S. market, encouraging producers to explore and capitalize on these opportunities. Applying world-systems theory, AGOA can be seen as a mechanism that integrates peripheral economies, such as those in West Africa, into the global trade system dominated by core countries like the United States. This integration facilitates the flow of goods from West Africa to the U.S., potentially leading to economic growth and development in the exporting countries. However, it's essential to consider the dynamics of such relationships to ensure they promote equitable and sustainable development. Therefore, AGOA's preferential trade terms have expanded market access for West African exporters, leading to increased exports and strengthened economic ties with the United States. Analyzing this through the lenses of customs union theory and world-systems theory provides a deeper understanding of the economic and systemic implications of such trade agreements.

CHALLENGES FACED BY ECOWAS EXPORTS UNDER AGOA

Despite the positive strides made in export diversification facilitated by AGOA, ECOWAS member-countries continually find themselves grappling with persistent challenges including the risk of dependency on a limited range of products and the challenge of infrastructure and capacity constraints.

The challenge of dependency on a few products: AGOA has reinforced existing dependencies on a narrow range of exports, perpetuating structural inequalities in the global economic system. Its structure has maintained West African countries in a peripheral role, primarily supplying raw materials and low-value-added goods to core economies like the United States. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle where West African economies remain dependent on exporting a limited array of commodities, making them vulnerable to global market fluctuations and inhibiting sustainable development. While AGOA has opened doors to new markets and industries, the lingering reliance on a handful of key exports remains a vulnerability that necessitates strategic interventions for sustainable economic growth (Páez et al. 2010). The challenge arises from the historical economic structures of these nations, which were often built around the extraction and exportation of specific commodities, such as oil, minerals, or agricultural products. While AGOA has successfully encouraged the exploration of non-traditional sectors, the allure of continued revenue streams from these established commodities poses a threat to the broader economic resilience of West African economies. The challenge of dependency on a few products is multifaceted. Economic shocks, such as fluctuations in global commodity prices, can have a disproportionate impact on nations

reliant on specific exports (Qian et al. 2023; Gerval& Hansen 2022). Moreover, overreliance on a limited range of products can hinder the development of a more dynamic and robust economy, limiting the ability to adapt to changing market conditions and to capitalize on emerging opportunities. To address this challenge, concerted efforts are required to further broaden the export base of West African nations to new frontiers. This involves diversifying both the types of products exported through the AGOA framework and also expanding into value-added processes within existing sectors.

The challenge of infrastructure and capacity constraints: These are manifestations of the peripheral status of West African countries within the global economic system, where underdeveloped infrastructure perpetuates dependency and limits upward mobility. Without such infrastructure, the potential benefits of trade agreements like AGOA are substantially diminished. Infrastructure and capacity limitations, including inadequate transportation networks and limited production capabilities, pose challenges to fully harnessing the benefits of AGOA (Simuziya 2023; Alves& Alden 2024). The challenge of infrastructure and capacity constraints emerges as a critical impediment to fully realizing the benefits of AGOA, particularly in West Africa. Despite the preferential trade terms and market access opportunities, inadequate transportation networks and limited production capabilities present substantial hurdles that hinder the region's ability to harness the full potential of this transformative trade agreement. The insufficient state of transportation infrastructure stands out as a major bottleneck. Inefficient and underdeveloped road, rail, and port systems impede the smooth flow of goods, resulting in delays, increased costs, and overall logistic challenges. This not only affects the competitiveness of West African exports but also diminishes the attractiveness of the region as a reliable trade partner. Addressing these infrastructure gaps is imperative to facilitate the continuous movement of goods and enhance the efficiency of the AGOA-enabled supply chain.

PROSPECTS OF ECOWAS EXPORTS WITHOUT AGOA

With AGOA set to expire, concerns arise regarding the future of ECOWAS exports. The termination of the nonreciprocal framework could lead to a decline in exports, particularly in sectors like apparel, agriculture, and automotive industries, thereby impacting employment and economic stability within these nations. This impending scenario necessitates strategic planning and the exploration of alternative trade agreements to sustain and enhance the export momentum of ECOWAS countries in a post-AGOA landscape. However, it could further facilitate economic transformation based on the shift towards transactionalism. AGOA, as a catalyst for economic transformation, has set the stage for a paradigm shift in the region's economic landscape. Its expiration provides an enabling environment for the independence of ECOWAS exports to embrace transactionalism in international trade. The strength of the deal in this transaction is raw materials. According to the world system approach, this is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Its advantage lies in the bargaining power it affords the peripheral countries, and its disadvantage is the lack of purchasing power bedeviling developing countries, which also weakens the bargaining power. However, the foundation laid by AGOA is not merely confined to short-term gains; it serves as a cornerstone for sustained growth, increased competitiveness, and a

comprehensive overhaul of traditional economic structures (Tadesse, 2024; Luke 2023). The exit of AGOA could steer the nations away from reliance on a narrow range of commodities by initiating a broader exploration of industries, including textiles, apparel, agricultural products and new markets. The prospect of this diversification mitigates future economic risks associated with the exit of the framework and paves the way for a more resilient and adaptive economic ecosystem.

Further, economic transformation is inseparable from human capital development. The analysis of AGOA's possible termination reveals that its impact extends to the workforce, emphasizing the importance of skilled labour and capacity building (Luke 2023). By investing in education, training, and skills development, West African countries can create a workforce equipped to drive innovation, productivity, and sustained economic growth to further explore preferential market access with quality products with fewer rejections. The ultimate goal of economic transformation is to position West Africa as a globally competitive player. Trading under a transactional framework offers a unique opportunity for these nations to establish themselves in international markets. Continued efforts to enhance competitiveness through quality standards, efficiency improvements, and adherence to sustainable practices contribute to a positive feedback loop, attracting more trade partners and solidifying West Africa's standing in the global economy.

However, there is a mixed prospect for deepening regional integration. The prospect of deepening regional integration within West Africa emerges as a strategic avenue to amplify the urgency of deepening regional integration and support for the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) with the expiration of AGOA which creates trade diversion. However, AGOA would encourage a more collaborative environment that maximizes the benefits of this transformative approach to sustainable development. Through concerted efforts and shared goals with AGOA, ECOWAS could overcome challenges, pool resources, and create a more attractive investment landscape that propels the region towards sustained economic growth (Washington, 2024). Regional integration facilitates the smooth movement of goods, services, and capital across borders, contributing to enhanced market access. This is currently highly limited in the regions as goods move more freely to the US market under AGOA than as they move from Nigeria in West Africa to Uganda in East Africa. Nonetheless, through aligning trade policies and harmonizing regulations, ECOWAS can create a more efficient and integrated market and benefit maximally from intra-African trade and the permeation of new markets. This will benefit local businesses and make the region more appealing to other international investors looking for simplified and coherent trade environments.

Collaborative efforts in regional integration can prioritize the development of cross-border infrastructure (Simuziya 2023; Alves & Alden 2024). Shared investments in transportation networks, energy grids, and communication systems can significantly improve connectivity within the region. This, in turn, reduces the costs of doing business and enhances the overall competitiveness of ECOWAS on the global stage. Regional integration allows West African countries to pool their resources and expertise for common economic goals to take advantage of the AGOA's preferential market access. Whether it's investing in research and development, promoting innovation, or addressing shared challenges, collaborative efforts amplify the impact of individual initiatives. A united approach enhances the effectiveness of policies, making it easier to

implement reforms and navigate the complexities of global trade. West African nations can offer a unified market that attracts foreign direct investment to the region by aligning legal and institutional frameworks regarding ECOWAS Vision 2050 with a strong competitive framework. Thus, the expiration of the nonreciprocal framework encourages an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation.

In addition, regional integration creates the enabling environment for West African countries to collectively address challenges that transcend national borders. Whether it's tackling infrastructure deficiencies, harmonizing customs procedures, or jointly promoting sustainable practices, collaborative efforts provide a platform for effective problem-solving. This united front enhances the region's resilience in the face of global economic fluctuations and challenges. The prospect of deepening regional integration among West African countries emerges as a strategic imperative to maximize the impact of AGOA.

CONCLUSION

The African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), as part of a broader US initiative, aimed to encourage sub-Saharan African eligible exports with tariff-free access to the US markets. However, it is now expiring. The EU has similar frameworks. We hope they would not be gone likewise following the dramatic global geopolitical changes. This was a form of foreign assistance operated outside the traditional scope of, for example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), etc. and was not explicitly tied to donor-national interests, instead prioritizing the local development needs of recipient countries. AGOA has facilitated trade between the US and eligible African countries, providing preferential access to the US market for certain goods. However, the expiration of the framework signals an era for innovation to compete effectively in the new transnationalism technique and explore new markets for export services of local production and resources.

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