



Impact of the Intra-African Trade Mechanisms and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) On Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how AfCFTA can reshape Nigeria's trade landscape, fostering economic growth, reducing dependency on non-African markets, and enhancing regional value chains. The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and related intra-African trade mechanisms presents significant opportunities and challenges for the Nigerian market. This study examines the potential impacts of these trade agreements on Nigeria's economy, focusing on key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. By reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, AfCFTA is expected to enhance Nigeria's access to larger regional markets, thereby stimulating economic growth and diversification of exports. This research highlights the benefits of increased competitiveness for Nigerian businesses and the potential for job creation in sectors aligned with regional demand. However, it also addresses the risks associated with trade liberalization, particularly for industries vulnerable to foreign competition. The findings underscore the necessity for robust infrastructure investment and strategic policy frameworks to mitigate adverse effects, ensuring that the gains from AfCFTA are equitably distributed among various segments of the population. Conclusively, the impact of intra-African trade mechanisms and AfCFTA on the Nigerian market is multifaceted, encompassing opportunities for growth and challenges that require strategic responses. As Nigeria navigates this new trade landscape, the effective implementation of policies aimed at bolstering local industries and enhancing regional cooperation will be vital to harnessing the full potential of AfCFTA. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between intra-African trade initiatives and national economic development and holistically contributes to the broader discourse on African economic integration, providing insights that are crucial for policymakers, businesses, and stakeholders aiming to harness the full potential of AfCFTA in Nigeria in shaping a resilient Nigerian economy within the context of continental trade.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: May, 2025

Received in revised form: June, 2025

Accepted: August, 2025

Published online: September, 2025

KEYWORDS

Intra-Africa, Trade, Mechanisms, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Sustainable Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a transformative trade initiative aimed at integrating Africa's economies into a single market. With over 1.3 billion consumers and a combined GDP exceeding \$3 trillion, it is the largest free trade area globally (Warikandwa,

2023). The agreement seeks to eliminate tariffs on 90% of goods, reduce non-tariff barriers, liberalize services, and create a single continental market that will enhance intra-African trade and strengthen regional value chains.

Nigeria, as Africa's largest economy by population and GDP, occupies a central position

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in this framework. Understanding the mechanisms of intra-African trade under AfCFTA is crucial to leveraging its benefits while addressing potential challenges. Projections suggest that the AfCFTA has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty and boost the incomes of 68 million others living on less than \$5.50 a day (Brookings, 2022a). Its successful implementation could therefore drive significant economic transformation across the continent.

Despite numerous regional integration initiatives, intra-African trade remains low, accounting for only 17% of Africa's total trade, compared to Europe's 69% (Brookings, 2022a). AfCFTA aims to address this gap, and it is projected to increase intra-African trade by up to 25% by 2040, with substantial gains in agriculture, manufacturing, and services. For Nigeria, this represents both opportunities and risks: while the country stands to benefit from broader market access and competitiveness, it also faces challenges such as infrastructure deficits, informal trade practices, and exposure to competition from more efficient producers across Africa (World Bank, 2021; African Development Bank, 2020; Economic Commission for Africa, 2020).

This study seeks to explore the mechanisms of intra-African trade under AfCFTA and their implications for Nigeria. By focusing on key sectors of the Nigerian economy, it highlights both the opportunities for growth and the structural challenges that must be addressed to ensure that the benefits of AfCFTA are maximized. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a landmark agreement aimed at enhancing intra-African trade through tariff reductions and trade facilitation measures represents a significant opportunity for African countries to enhance intra-African trade and economic integration. Nigeria, as one of Africa's largest economies, stands to gain or lose significantly from these developments.

This literature review examines scholarly discussions regarding the mechanisms of intra-African trade and the anticipated impacts of AfCFTA specifically on the Nigerian market. Intra-African trade mechanisms aim to reduce trade barriers and enhance economic cooperation

among African countries. According to Adeyemi (2020), these mechanisms are critical in promoting regional trade and economic development, particularly in Nigeria, where trade restrictions have often stifled economic growth.

Trade agreements within the region, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocols, have laid the groundwork for increased trade flows (Ogunleye & Ajayi, 2021). These agreements facilitate tariff reductions and harmonization of trade policies, which can significantly benefit Nigerian exporters by providing easier access to neighboring markets (Ojo, 2022). The AfCFTA, launched in 2021, aims to create a single continental market for goods and services, thereby enhancing trade across Africa. Economic analysts, such as Ndubisi (2021), argue that Nigeria's participation in AfCFTA could lead to a GDP increase of up to \$29 billion by 2025, primarily through the liberalization of trade and reduced tariffs.

However, challenges persist. Adebayo et al. (2022) caution that the impacts of AfCFTA on the Nigerian market will depend on the country's ability to address structural issues, such as poor infrastructure and bureaucratic inefficiencies. If these issues are not addressed, the potential benefits of AfCFTA may not fully materialize for Nigeria. Research indicates that AfCFTA has the potential to boost Nigeria's manufacturing sector by providing access to a larger market (Uche, 2023). The demand for Nigerian goods in other African countries could stimulate production and create jobs, addressing unemployment issues in the country (Nwogugu, 2022).

Conversely, some scholars warn of potential threats posed by increased competition from other African nations. According to Olaoye (2023), Nigerian businesses, particularly in the agricultural sector, may struggle to compete with more efficient producers from countries where agricultural practices are more advanced. This could lead to a significant reduction in market shares for local producers if protective measures are not implemented (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2021). Historically, intra-African trade has faced challenges such as high tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and limited infrastructural connectivity (Egbuna &



Ukah, 2023). The inception of AfCFTA marks a significant shift towards trade liberalization in Africa, aiming to boost regional economic integration (Mbekeani, 2023). Numerous studies indicate that AfCFTA could substantially enhance Nigeria's GDP by expanding its access to a larger market (Obi & Ifelunini, 2024). Economists suggest that increased trade with other African nations provides Nigerian businesses with opportunities to scale and diversify their exports (Ojo, 2024).

According to Adeyemi (2024), the agricultural sector in Nigeria is expected to benefit significantly from reduced trade barriers under AfCFTA. As Nigeria has a competitive advantage in agriculture, the agreement could facilitate greater export opportunities (Akinwumi, 2023). Conversely, the manufacturing sector may face challenges due to increased competition from other African producers (Chidozie, 2024).

The successful implementation of AfCFTA is contingent upon improved infrastructure and trade facilitation measures (Adebiyi, 2024). Recent literature underlines that Nigeria must invest in transport and logistics networks to maximize the benefits of the AfCFTA (Ola & Nwogbo, 2024). Political factors also play a crucial role in the effectiveness of intra-African trade mechanisms. As highlighted by Nwankwo (2023), Nigeria's negotiation strategies within the AfCFTA must consider domestic political dynamics to foster greater public support for trade liberalization policies.

While AfCFTA holds great promise, it may also pose risks such as increased competition and potential job losses in vulnerable industries (Ijaiya, 2024). The literature indicates that policymakers need to establish safety nets to protect those adversely affected (Abimbola & Kasali, 2024), Majune, Kaaria and Kihui (2023). The work also inferred that most "hard" indicators of trade facilitation improve trade in services within Africa compared to "soft" factors whose effect is mixed. Based on the findings, policy recommendations were proposed for improving intra-Africa trade in services by adopting and implementing key protocols on trade in goods under the AfCFTA and developing digital,

information and communication infrastructure to expand internet coverage, mobile and broadband subscriptions.

Africa Kiiza (2025) inferred that by moving beyond liberalization as its *raison d'être* and prioritizing the scaling up of State Parties' productive capacities, the AfCFTA can evolve from a mere trade liberalization agreement into a transformative driver of Africa's economic renaissance. Some studies have shown that while short-term effects of benefits of AfCFTA on the Nigerian economy may be modest, long-term impacts on Nigeria's GDP are significantly positive. Nigeria's economy stands to benefit from increased exports in agriculture (+6.3%) and food/beverages (+1.3%). However, challenges such as infrastructure deficits, competition from imports, and informal trade remain significant (Brookings, 2022b).

Kiereboh-Coleman et al. (2024) found that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows have a positive effect on intra-African trade and that intra-African trade has a direct positive effect on economic growth, while FDI has a significantly negative effect on economic growth. The study provides evidence to support the assertion that intra-African trade increases overall economic growth with an increasing flow of FDI into an economy while also establishes increasing complementarity between FDI and intra-African trade, and their joint impact on economic growth. Bertelsmann (2017) suggested that Informal cross-border trade accounts for 60% of Africa's regional trade but deprives governments of revenue. Formalizing this sector could enhance Nigeria's trade potential Ngwu and Ojah (2024) recommended pathways to reversing the current dismal intra-continental trade through the cooperatives production model, strategic procurement mandates, and effectuation of continental transportation infrastructure network.

Olney (2021) in his work concluded that intra-African exports are found to disproportionately increase with road infrastructure, trade agreements, and declining trade costs; and that diversifying the domestic economy away from natural resources and towards services is also associated with more

intra-African trade, thus can guide efforts to promote African economic integration.

The intra-African trade has however been growing especially with the push from the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) operationalized in January 2021. Prior to implementation total formal trade within the continent totaled between 12-18% but since enactment, intra-continental trade has noticeably increased. The activity upswing presents a unique opportunity to further leverage the potential of regional markets to drive sustainable development and economic prosperity (Mene, 2025)

METHODOLOGY

The impact of intra-African trade mechanisms and AfCFTA on Nigerian market materializes in several dimensions, certain barriers exist to Nigeria's effective participation in intra-African trade but leveraging on AfCFTA is shown to influence Nigeria's trade volume and economic growth. Certain policies and

mechanisms can enhance Nigeria's competitiveness under the AfCFTA. The table above shows certain factors that influence trade mechanisms within the continent (Socrates, Kaaria and Kihui, 2023)

Estimation Technique:

Data for this study will be estimated and graphically simulated with use of the Microsoft Excel 2021

Sources of Data and Measurement

Data for this study will be retrieved from the World Bank Development Indicators. Our data is annual and covers a 10-year period, ranging from 2015 to 2024 (there seem not to exist data for 2024 by WDI). The control variables have been selected based on previous economic literature regarding the main determinants of trade diversification.

Table 1: Trade Services Data in Western & Central Africa

Country Name	Time Code	Country Code	Time	Trade in services (% of GDP) [BG.GSR.NFSV.GD.ZS]
Africa Western and Central	YR2015	AFW	2015	8.499738649
Africa Western and Central	YR2016	AFW	2016	8.117462277
Africa Western and Central	YR2017	AFW	2017	9.787397707
Africa Western and Central	YR2018	AFW	2018	11.00880977
Africa Western and Central	YR2019	AFW	2019	12.10614051
Africa Western and Central	YR2020	AFW	2020	9.187288394
Africa Western and Central	YR2021	AFW	2021	8.730813614
Africa Western and Central	YR2022	AFW	2022	8.797013622
Africa Western and Central	YR2023	AFW	2023	10.57558165
Africa Western and Central	YR2024	AFW	2024	..

Table 2: Trade Services Data in Eastern & Southern Africa

Country Name	Time Code	Country Code	Time	Trade in services (% of GDP) [BG.GSR.NFSV.GD.ZS]
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2015	AFE	2015	11.96016404
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2016	AFE	2016	11.89370074
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2017	AFE	2017	10.88197079
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2018	AFE	2018	11.14381951

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Country Name	Time Code	Country Code	Time	Trade in services (% of GDP) [BG.GSR.NFSV.GD.ZS]
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2019	AFE	2019	10.68700495
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2020	AFE	2020	8.3984132
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2021	AFE	2021	8.496555718
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2022	AFE	2022	10.20850011
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2023	AFE	2023	10.53539894
Africa Eastern and Southern	YR2024	AFE	2024	..

Table 3: Trade Services Data in Middle East & Northern Africa

Country Name	Time Code	Country Code	Time	Trade in services (% of GDP) [BG.GSR.NFSV.GD.ZS]
Middle East & North Africa	YR2015	MEA	2015	18.5280256
Middle East & North Africa	YR2016	MEA	2016	18.05302231
Middle East & North Africa	YR2017	MEA	2017	19.04333158
Middle East & North Africa	YR2018	MEA	2018	18.9455557
Middle East & North Africa	YR2019	MEA	2019	19.06482442
Middle East & North Africa	YR2020	MEA	2020	15.73807558
Middle East & North Africa	YR2021	MEA	2021	16.22694689
Middle East & North Africa	YR2022	MEA	2022	17.49876557
Middle East & North Africa	YR2023	MEA	2023	19.99847864
Middle East & North Africa	YR2024	MEA	2024	..

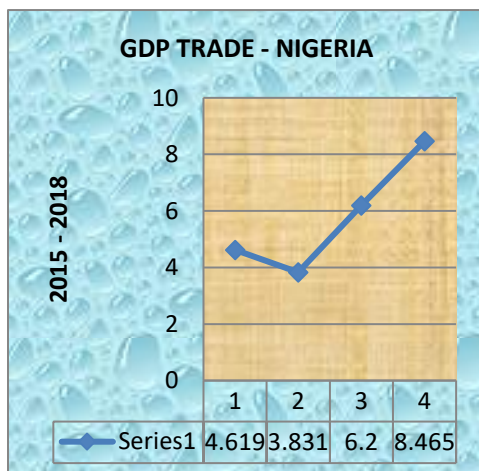


Fig 1a. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Nigeria) from 2015 - 2018

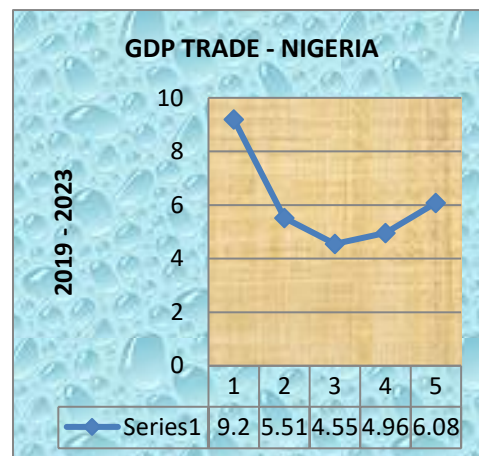


Fig 1b. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Nigeria) from 2019 - 2023

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Trade Services Data in Western & Central Africa

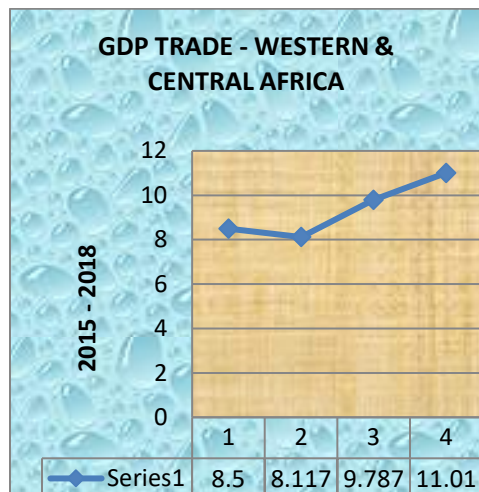


Fig 1c. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Western & Central Africa) from 2015 - 2018

Trade Services Data in Eastern & Southern Africa

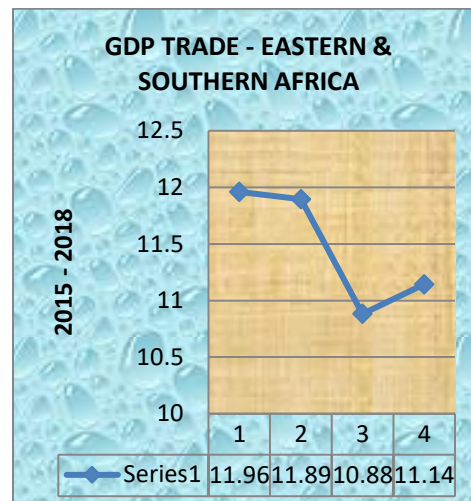


Fig1e. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Eastern & Southern Africa) from 2015 - 2018

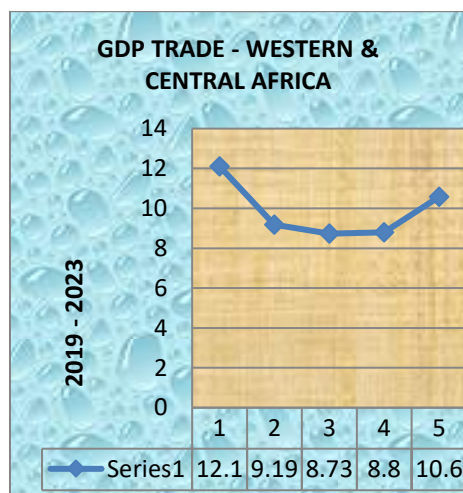


Fig 1d. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services from (Western & Central Africa) 2019 - 2023

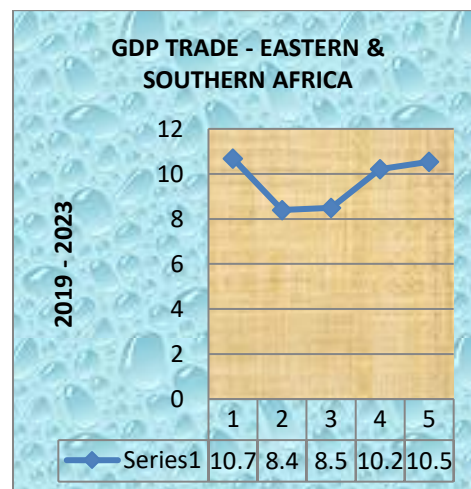


Fig1f. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Eastern & Southern Africa) from 2019 - 2023

Trade Services Data in Middle East & Northern Africa

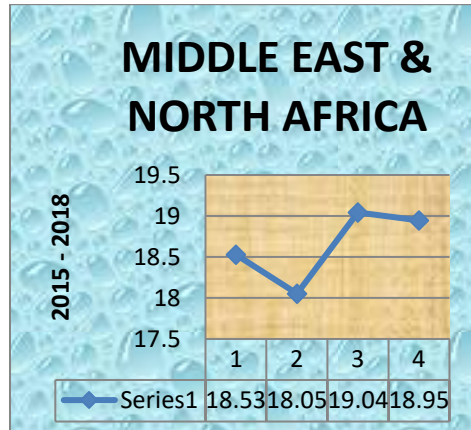


Fig1g. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services(Middle East & North Africa)from 2015-2018

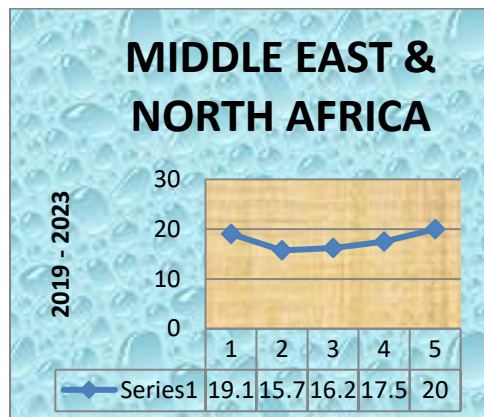


Fig1h. Growth trajectory of GDP Trade in Services (Middle East & North Africa) from 2019-2023

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores how Trades in Africa(services) and AfCFTA can reshape Nigeria's trade landscape, fostering economic growth, reducing dependency on non-African markets, and enhancing regional value chains, demonstrating significant improvement POST COVID-19 ERA (Figure 4a - 4h)

The analysis begins with an overview of the historical context of trade in Africa, highlighting the barriers that have traditionally hindered intra-African trade, such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers,

and inadequate infrastructure. By establishing a framework for tariff reduction and addressing non-tariff barriers, AfCFTA aims to create a more conducive environment for trade among African nations. This initiative is expected to boost Nigeria's exports, particularly in sectors like agriculture, textiles, and manufactured goods.

Furthermore, the research delves into the potential economic benefits for Nigeria, including increased market access and the opportunity for Nigerian businesses to expand into other African markets. The enhanced competition resulting from AfCFTA could lead to improved efficiency and innovation among Nigerian firms. However, the study also addresses potential challenges, such as the risk of increased competition from more established African economies, which could threaten local industries if not adequately supported.

The impact of AfCFTA on Nigeria's trade balance is another critical area of focus. The removal of tariffs is anticipated to lower import costs, potentially leading to a trade deficit if domestic industries are unable to compete. The need for strategic government policies and investment in local industries becomes paramount to ensure the sustainability of economic growth. Additionally, the study evaluates the role of regional infrastructure development and technological advancement in facilitating trade under the AfCFTA framework. Nigeria's investment in infrastructure, such as transportation and logistics, will be crucial in maximizing the benefits of intra-African trade. The establishment of trade facilitation measures will further enhance Nigeria's capacity to engage effectively within the AfCFTA framework.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Trades in Africa(services) and AfCFTA can reshape Nigeria's trade landscape, fostering economic growth, reducing dependency on non-African markets, and enhancing regional value chains, demonstrating significant improvement Post Covid-19 era. The findings also underscore the necessity for robust infrastructure investment and strategic policy frameworks to mitigate adverse

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effects, ensuring that the gains from AfCFTA are equitably distributed among various segments of the population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that businesses and policymakers should foster an increased participation in AfCFTA and investment in key economic sectors within African nations which will undoubtedly lead to a significant increase in intra-African trade and thus sustainable growth. The AfCFTA presents a transformative opportunity for Nigeria to enhance its trade relations within Africa. By understanding the mechanisms of intra-African trade and implementing effective policies, Nigeria can leverage AfCFTA to boost economic growth, reduce poverty, boost its economic diversification and regional influence. However, success requires addressing certain structural barriers and also implementing supportive policies as high logistics costs, weak infrastructure and informal trade practices pose significant barriers.

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