

Chapter 34

Using Human-Centered Trade Policies to End Violence in Africa: How Intracontinental Trade Can Shape Human Rights Policies and End State Violence

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ABSTRACT

International organizations have been discussing the issue of poverty and development in Africa since the end of colonialism. However, results have been inadequate, and the majority of the African population still lives in poverty and lacks access to healthcare, education, and safety. This chapter analyzes the benefits of preferential trade agreements in supporting both economic and social development. PTAs that are conditional to peace and human rights protection can be the economic tool to end violence, corruption, and bad government in Africa. Foreign economic policy in the past has left African countries indebted to the West and in competition with much older, more developed economies. This chapter discusses how the recently negotiated African Continental Free Trade Area can strengthen intracontinental trade. The agreement, if managed correctly, has the potential to grow the African economy massively and help lift people out of poverty while enforcing an end to violence from state-actors across the continent.

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was the stage of two world conflicts, countless proxy wars, growing warfare technology, developing new economies, and several fights for independence. It ended with seemingly new horizons for many former colonies, and twenty years since the start of the new century, international accords have been signed to ensure global protection of human rights, better climate control, less conflict, and more

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prosperity overall. However, the blissful global peace that many desired is still lacking. This is nowhere more evident than on the African continent, where violence is rampant, and development is stagnant.

After many decades of talks and conventions on African advancement, it seems as if the solutions proposed have done little to develop the majority of the continent and more to line the pockets of wealthy countries. Many nations have still not experienced the economic and social growth that has been experienced in Asia and South America; indeed, almost 70% of the 47 nations on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) roster are African countries. Thus, it is not surprising that Africa has become the focus of a myriad of studies on economic development and the enhancement of democratic practices. Many scholars argue that strengthening one usually grows the other (Lipset, 1959; Tan & Heo, 2016); however, Africa shows mixed results, with some countries performing poorly in both areas, and some successfully approaching one but not the other.

As both economic inequality and autocratic tendencies have been linked to social unrest and state violence (Escribà-folch, 2017; Fajnzylber, Lederman, & Loayza, 2002), this chapter aims at finding a solution to end internal violence in continental Africa by looking at the role of financial tools of foreign policy in the protection of human rights. Through an analysis of standard practices of economic development pushed by outsiders on the African continent – namely aid, sanctions, and trade agreements – the book chapter will demonstrate that, whereas the first two proved ineffective in protecting or promoting human rights, Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) can be the ideal tools to enforce peace and stability when fair. Seeing as even the most violent governments, in a globalized economy, rely on trade, PTAs can be tailored to diminish violence in such countries. Because of the intertwined nature of poverty and violence, PTAs are the measure that can promote individuals' economic growth and national stability concurrently.

It is vital that trade agreements in Africa shift their focus on African citizens, whose personal development would lead to economic growth. While global trade has begun to push for more ethical production of goods, it is still widely approached as a means to economic growth rather than a means to development. This understanding is the foundation of the argument put forth in this chapter. By strengthening continental trade, African governments can liberate themselves from the ties that have kept them at the mercy of the global North. This chapter will suggest that collaboration among African countries can allow for conscious intracontinental trade policies that will bring economic growth and political stability for all the parties involved.

The impact of trade on human rights has been discussed for decades (Dommen, 2005; Zerk, 2019). This chapter belongs to a body of work pushing for a different concept, which is the inclusion of human rights clauses in the trade agreement itself not only as a prerequisite but rather an ongoing condition. The newly adopted African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) will be analyzed as one accord with the potential of limiting violence on the continent while advancing economic development.

BACKGROUND

Any discussion revolving around state violence requires an interdisciplinary approach, as one country's success can never be attributed to one single factor, and it must be observed through a multitude of lenses. Similarly, there are many schools of thought on what constitutes a developed country, but scholars over the last two decades have widely agreed that economic prosperity cannot be the only factor at play in this determination.

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