AgriBridge

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AgriBridge Policy Note #1

African – German Agricultural Trade:
Unlocking Mutual Gains for Food Security, Nutrition, and Economic Growth

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African Agribusiness Incubators Network

African Centre for Technology Studies – Knowledge for Better Livelihoods

African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership – People.Partnerships.Productivity.Prosperity

ANAPRI – Africa Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes

ASARECA – Transforming Agriculture for Improved Livelihoods

The CAADP Non-State Actors Group – C·N·G

CORAF

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The executive summary is based on the original version, which contains a detailed analysis and specific case studies. The executive summary and the full version of this policy note are available for download at the following link:

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Executive Summary

Africa's agricultural trade offers significant opportunities for economic growth and agrifood system transformation. Yet, structural challenges such as limited intra-African trade, dependence on imported staples, weak infrastructure, and strict compliance requirements constrain its potential. Trade with Germany presents a mutually beneficial opportunity, but without careful alignment, it could deepen dependencies. Research shows that investments in value chain development, trade facilitation, and regional integration improve food security, increase incomes derived from exports, and strengthen local economies, as highlighted in case studies from Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and West Africa. Policy actions, including removing trade barriers, supporting agro-processing, aligning German trade objectives with local development strategies, and enhancing regional integration, can create win-win outcomes, build resilient agrifood systems, and strengthen Africa–Germany partnerships.

Agricultural trade is central to Africa's agrifood systems and economic development, yet persistent structural challenges limit its full potential. Africa continues to mainly export raw commodities such as cocoa, coffee, and cotton, while remaining heavily dependent on imports for staple foods, processed products, and agricultural inputs. While trade has the potential to improve the availability of (healthy) food and stabilize consumption, these benefits remain constrained by limited infrastructure, fragmented markets, high tariffs, and persistent non-tariff barriers (NTBs). Intra-African trade is still low, making the continent more vulnerable to global price changes and supply disruptions. At the same time, trade between Africa and Germany remains limited, despite opportunities in Africa's growing food markets and Germany's interest in sustainable and reliable value chains. Strengthening trade in a balanced way can support Africa's goals under the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Kampala Declaration to increase food production, reduce food losses, generate income, and expand regional trade, while also advancing Germany's aim to promote sustainable economic partnerships. This requires policy attention so that agricultural trade can contribute to the realization of the Right to Food, support local value addition, and create shared benefits for both Africa and Germany.

Africa's agricultural trade offers significant opportunities for economic growth and agrifood system transformation.

Stronger Together: Trade as a Catalyst for Resilient African Agrifood Systems

The analysis in this policy note draws on regional trade data, case studies, and policy analysis to examine how agricultural trade can support the right to healthy and nutritious food in Africa through global partnerships, such as with Germany. The note examines trends in intra-African agricultural trade and Africa's trade with Europe, thereby focusing on how trade patterns, standards, infrastructure, and value addition affect food security and agricultural growth.

The findings show that Africa continues to export mainly raw products such as cocoa, coffee, tea,

cotton, fruits, and nuts, while importing large amounts of basic food items like cereals, sugar, and cooking oils. This imbalance increases Africa's vulnerability to global price shocks and limits earnings from trade. Intra-African trade has grown, but it still accounts for less than one-fifth of the continent's total trade, partly due to weak transport systems, onerous and often opaque border rules, and limited processing capacities. Currently, Africa's imports from Germany concentrate on higher-value processed agricultural goods and machinery, which may reinforce existing dependency unless investments to grow local processing capacities are incentivised.

This policy note concludes that expanding regional trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is critical for strengthening Africa's food security and economic resilience and for bolstering its role as a key trading partner for Europe, including Germany. By eliminating tariffs and reducing NTBs, harmonising standards, and increasing investments in agro-processing as well as in infrastructure and digital trade, AfCFTA can accelerate the development of regional value chains and ensure that SMEs, women, youth, and smallholders benefit more equitably from integration efforts. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) can further unlock investment in sustainable infrastructure and processing, while targeted support can enhance the capacity of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the AfCFTA Secretariat to coordinate and monitor implementation effectively.

Germany can play a strategic role by supporting local value addition to promote agro-industry, skills development, and fair market access. Aligning German cooperation and investment with African priorities —such as sustainable agro-industrialisation, renewable energy, and climate-smart technologies— would open space for blended-finance solutions that use development finance— including Official Development Assistance (ODA) and PPPs— to mobilise additional commercial capital in line with shared interests, human rights, and environmental responsibility.

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Agricultural trade between Africa and Germany presents a significant opportunity to strengthen sustainable agrifood systems, create employment opportunities, and promote economic growth.

Key policy recommendations

1. Strengthen Africa–Germany partnership-based investments

- Expand Africa–Germany cooperation and blended financing opportunities that prioritise local value addition, climate-smart innovation, technology transfer, sustainable infrastructure, and economic diversification. All trade and investment partnerships should adhere to binding environmental and social safeguards.
- Adopt a multi-stakeholder partnership model by engaging civil society, research organisations, the private sector, and African regional institutions in designing and monitoring economic cooperation.

2. Accelerate AfCFTA implementation and regional integration

- Fast-track the implementation of the AfCFTA by advancing intra-African tariff elimination and prioritizing balanced trade agreements with Germany and the EU that offer environmental, social, and economic mutual benefits. Prioritise the removal of NTBs, the harmonisation of standards and rules of origin, the expansion of digital trade systems, and strategic investments in trade-enabling infrastructure to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of cross-border trade.
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of RECs and the AfCFTA Secretariat to effectively coordinate, monitor, and support the implementation of trade reforms and deeper regional integration.

3. Support smallholders, women, youth, and SMEs

- Promote inclusive trade and growth by expanding access to affordable finance, tailored skills development, and digital tools for smallholders, women, youth, and SMEs across local, regional, and international agrifood value chains.